

**Remembering Lucretius:  
Memory and Identity in Montaigne's *Essais***

**Alex Gray**

**School of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures  
Royal Holloway, University of London**

**2017**

**Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD**

### **Declaration of Authorship**

I, Alex Gray, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Abstract**

The handwritten comments on Montaigne's copy of Lucretius's *De rerum natura* provide a unique insight into Montaigne's own thinking on memory, identity and the self. Montaigne finds in Lucretius's discussion of memory a stability that resists the perpetual flux that typifies Lucretius's atomist conception of the world. Through a close analysis of Montaigne's interaction with Lucretius, I examine how Montaigne engages with Lucretius's discussion of memory and develops his own understanding of memory as the foundation for identity in the *Essais*. The first chapter analyses Renaissance editions of *De rerum natura* and how the Lambin commentary edition provides Montaigne with a foundation on which to build his interaction with Lucretius's theories of memory and the self. The second chapter explores how Montaigne's reading notes on *De rerum natura* engage with the possibility of memory securing the thread of identity. The third chapter identifies how Montaigne's understanding of memory in the *Essais* is influenced by Lucretius's own metaphors of memory – particularly those of the storehouse and the tool, which ensure the preservation and the processing of experiences to establish a stable identity.

Whilst Montaigne generally considers memory to provide a foundation for identity, his amnesia after his riding accident challenges Montaigne's position and forces him to question the threats to memory and how to protect against them. The fourth chapter of this study analyses Montaigne's response to his accident and explores how writing allows him to process the trauma of his experience and to preserve his memories in an external form. These reflections on individual memory and forgetting provide the backdrop for my final chapter, which explores the importance of the recording and preservation of history in order to maintain and project a sense of enduring collective memory and national identity – ideas that underlie the memorial project of the *Essais* as a whole.

## **Acknowledgements**

My doctoral research and the writing of this thesis have been both incredibly challenging and rewarding, and I would like to express my gratitude to those who have helped and supported me during this time.

First, I would like to thank my supervisors, Joe Harris and Emily Butterworth for their incredible knowledge and encouragement. Their advice, support and guidance was invaluable every chapter of the way. I would also like to thank Eric Robertson for his kindness and support. To my examiners, Richard Scholar and Isabelle Moreau, thank you for your guidance and advice.

I would like to express my most sincere thanks to my family and friends. I would like to thank my mother and father who have constantly encouraged me and have supported me tirelessly every step of the way. I cannot possibly thank them enough for everything that they have done. I would also like to thank Caroline, Nate, Benjamin and Ethan for their constant support, encouragement and laughter; your family has been a light throughout this process. To Sophie, thank you for being there for me through all the highs and lows of researching, writing, editing and re-editing; you have been my rock over these years. I would also like to thank Alfie for being there for every step of this difficult journey.

Finally, I would like to thank my nan, Pamela Beasley, who supported me in so many ways and always put me first. This thesis is dedicated to you and I could never thank you enough for everything.

## Table of Contents

Remembering Lucretius: Memory and Identity in Montaigne's <i>Essais</i> .....	1
Declaration of Authorship .....	2
Abstract .....	3
Acknowledgements .....	4
Introduction .....	7
Chapter One .....	20
Lucretius's <i>De rerum natura</i> in the sixteenth century: A prism of reading .....	20
Reception of Lucretius and <i>De rerum natura</i> in the first half of the sixteenth century .....	21
Lambin's commentary: a turning point? .....	42
Conclusion .....	60
Chapter Two .....	64
Montaigne's notes on memory and identity in his copy of <i>De rerum natura</i> .....	64
Introduction.....	64
Montaigne's annotations on <i>De rerum natura</i> .....	65
Reading 'Repetentia', 'retinentia' and memory in <i>De rerum natura</i> .....	68
Conclusion.....	94
Chapter Three.....	96

Models and metaphors of memory in Montaigne's <i>Essais</i> .....	96
Interpretations of memory.....	96
Memory as a container, memory as tool.....	103
Memory and education.....	117
Conclusion.....	134
Chapter Four.....	135
Montaigne's Accident: The importance of a lost memory.....	135
Learning from a unique experience.....	135
Montaigne's accident: a site of trauma.....	141
An evolving response to the accident.....	178
Fig. 1.a The sculpture of René d'Orange by Ligier Richier .....	188
Conclusion.....	189
Chapter 5.....	191
The Preservation, Protection and Projection of Collective Memory .....	191
Introduction .....	191
Thinking collective memory through a Lucretian lens .....	194
Montaigne and memory writing .....	210
The 'Memory Clauses': 'Bracketing off' the past .....	230
Remembering the Wars of Religion in the <i>Essais</i> .....	240

Conclusion .....	256
Conclusion .....	259
Bibliography .....	266
Primary Sources .....	266
General Bibliography .....	266

## Introduction

‘Perlege totum librum, nil est elegantius | de uitæ contemptu’ (Read the entire book through. Nothing is more exquisite | on contempt for life) reads a handwritten note on after flyleaf ‘n’ of Montaigne’s own copy of Lucretius’s poem *De rerum natura*.<sup>1</sup> Montaigne wrote this note to remind himself to re-read Book III of Lucretius’s work, in which the Latin author discusses the mortality of the soul, the fear of death and the destruction of memory in death. Montaigne certainly would return to his copy of Lucretius’s poem, not only re-reading it but also adding extensive French annotations which engaged with a range of questions: from atomism to the fear of death, and from the mortality of the soul to the importance of memory in a world of constant change, flux and predictable unpredictability.

This insight into Montaigne’s engagement with Lucretius is possible due to the discovery in 1989 of Montaigne’s own copy of the classical scholar Denis (or Denys) Lambin’s 1563 edition of *De rerum natura*. Montaigne’s handwritten notes in French and Latin reveal multiple close readings of Lucretius’s poem and an engagement not only with Lucretius, but also with the critical and editorial comments made by Lambin himself. It may appear unlikely that Montaigne should find an element in Lucretius’s verses which confirms his uniqueness of being and can be considered a foundation for a stable identity, particularly as the Roman poet explains that all humans are made of constantly changing atoms and that human bodies are subject to continual blows from atoms. Through reading and re-reading *De rerum natura*, Montaigne recognises that memory can be considered a foundation for identity, and can serve as a faculty which ensures that one’s identity remains stable. In

---

<sup>1</sup> Montaigne’s annotation in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Denis Lambin (Paris: Roville, 1563/4), sig. after flyleaf n; M.A. Screech, *Montaigne’s Annotated Copy of Lucretius: A transcription and study of the manuscript, notes and pen-marks* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1998), p. 137.

Lucretius's world of atoms, there appears to be no stability. Being in a permanent state of flux, the atoms that compose all of physical existence offer no prospect of uniqueness or identity for a self whose bodily identity is constantly changing. This thesis will demonstrate that Montaigne reserves his judgement in order to immerse himself in Lucretius's poetry and philosophy, and thus he interprets verses on death, and in particular, on the destruction of memory in the moment of death, to understand that memory connects oneself to one's atoms, and that the continuity of memory is key to the stability of identity.

This thesis therefore explores how Montaigne treats memory in the *Essais*, analysing the models and metaphors for memory that he utilizes in his essay project, and the value which he ascribes to memory.

I will analyse Montaigne's approach to models of memory, and will consider memory in relation to the two terms which Lucretius uses to refer to memory: *retinentia* and *repetentia*. It is from these two Lucretian models of memory that Montaigne forms his own understanding of memory as a stable foundation for identity. He combines the two models – that is to say, of memory as a storehouse and of memory as a tool – to establish that both are interdependent and together can form a stable base for identity. Thus, it is through memory that one can establish identity. By identity, I mean the fact of being who one is and identifying with oneself. Whilst one's atoms may constantly change, one's appearance may gradually change, and indeed one's opinions and thoughts may develop or twist and turn, it is through the continuity of memory that one can establish a connection between the multiple versions of oneself.

This thesis will explore how Montaigne's his understanding of memory evolves and is influenced by his reading of *De rerum natura*. I will analyse both Montaigne's approach to personal memory - and how he is forced to reconsider this approach following the trauma of

his riding accident - and his engagement with collective memory – particularly in relation to the Wars of Religion. This thesis considers the *Essais* to be a project of memorialisation, through which Montaigne preserves, protects and projects his own identity. They are written in the shadow of the threats posed to his memory and identity, and are his attempt to overcome his fear of death and indeed, his fear of his identity being forgotten after his death. In writing the *Essais*, Montaigne forgets himself *into* his text and solicits his reader to remember him and to re-construct him through the disparate parts of him left in his text.

It must first be recognised that Montaigne's close engagement with Lucretius is made possible by Lambin's commentary, which probes the poem to engage with Lucretius's views on Epicurean philosophy. Montaigne studies his Lucretius through a prism of reading, which is to say that Montaigne reads Lucretius, then he reads Lambin's commentary, which in turn has been influenced by other sixteenth-century commentators whose editions preceded his own.

Lucretius's formative influence on the Renaissance has only recently been recognised by Stephen Greenblatt's *The Swerve: How the Renaissance Began*, which traces the history of *De rerum natura* from its discovery by Poggio Bracciolini in 1417 to sixteenth-century thinkers and philosophers studying the verses of Lucretius's heretical poem.<sup>2</sup> Greenblatt suggests that *De rerum natura* acted like the 'clinamen', or 'swerve', described in Lucretius's verses to spark the Renaissance. Before Greenblatt, Simone Fraisse's *L'influence de Lucrèce en France au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle* had discussed the proliferation of editions of *De rerum natura* in the sixteenth century and provided analysis of the various editions and their reception upon

---

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the Renaissance Began* (London: The Bodley Head, 2011).

publication.<sup>3</sup> This research by Fraisse serves as a critical guide to how Lucretius was perceived in France in the sixteenth century, and Fraisse does consider Montaigne's own interaction with Lucretius through the *Essais*. Significantly, Fraisse suspects that Montaigne owned a copy of *De rerum natura* which he would have pored over and re-read, and she was proved correct in 1989 when Paul Quarrie, the librarian at Eton College, bought a 1563 Lambin edition of *De rerum natura* at auction in London, and confirmed with the diligent research of M. A. Screech that this copy belonged to Michel de Montaigne.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, M.A. Screech's careful transcription of the annotations, marginal notes and pen-marks on Montaigne's copy and the publishing of this transcript are a key source for studying his engagement with Lucretius. Screech provides a substantial introduction, detailing the discovery of the text and the confirmation that it indeed belonged to Montaigne. Screech also briefly discusses certain issues arising from Montaigne's scribbled notes, such as his initial philological approach and his thoughts on the aspects of the text which would be considered 'Contre la religion.' Screech carefully collates the one hundred and forty-six quotations which appear in the *Essais* and also the four quotations from *De rerum natura* which were inscribed on the beams of Montaigne's library. Whilst Alain Legros's *Montaigne manuscrit* also provides a transcript of Montaigne's annotations of his Lambin edition of *De rerum natura*, Legros' study contains less engagement with Montaigne's comments than Screech's work, though Legros' work is equally as diligent in its recording of the notes and annotations.<sup>5</sup> Montaigne's copy of *De rerum natura* is now housed in Cambridge University Library, after it was received as part of the Montaigne Library of Gilbert de Botton. Furthermore, Montaigne's copy of *De rerum natura* including his flyleaf notes is available online on Les Bibliothèques Virtuelles Humanistes website provided by the Université de

---

<sup>3</sup> Simone Fraisse, *L'influence de Lucrèce en France au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Saint-Brieuc: Presses bretonnes, 1962).

<sup>4</sup> M.A. Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius: A transcription and study of the manuscript, notes and pen-marks* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Alain Legros, *Montaigne manuscrit* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2010).

Tours.<sup>6</sup> Although Montaigne's annotations on his copy are available online and Screech's work on Montaigne and Lucretius was published in 1998, there has been surprisingly little research completed on Montaigne's engagement with Lucretius since the discovery of Montaigne's own copy in 1989. This thesis will also further the discussion concerning Montaigne's engagement with Lucretius's *De rerum natura*. This thesis will analyse Montaigne's interaction with Lucretius, particularly focussing on how Montaigne considers memory and identity after reading *De rerum natura*.

Ada Palmer's *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*, published in 2014, presents a unique analysis of how Lucretius was read and interpreted in the early modern period, through the close study of the handwritten notes in manuscript editions of *De rerum natura*, and discrete annotations on privately owned copies of the poem.<sup>7</sup> Palmer's findings reveal a progression in the reading of Lucretius in the Renaissance; she traces a general shift in focus from the aesthetic appeal of the poem to a scientific engagement with Lucretius's Epicurean atomism. Palmer does discuss Montaigne's annotations on his copy, but does not discuss Montaigne's interaction with the themes of memory and oblivion in Lucretius. Equally, Gerard Passannante's *The Lucretian Renaissance: Philology and the Afterlife of Tradition* (2011) includes a brief section on Montaigne's reading of *De rerum natura* and the curiosity of a philosopher such as Montaigne studying a heretical poem.<sup>8</sup> Passannante does not probe too deeply into Montaigne's annotations, instead focussing on his use of Lucretian verses in the *Essais* to analyse Montaigne's views on Lucretius. In recent scholarship on Montaigne and Lucretius, the Roman poet tends to be the main focus of research, with Montaigne's

---

<sup>6</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura libri sex* [exemplaire annoté par Montaigne] <[http://www.bvh.univ-tours.fr/Consult/consult.asp?numtable=XULC\\_Montaigne\\_Lucrece1563&numfiche=764&mode=3&ecran=0&offset=10](http://www.bvh.univ-tours.fr/Consult/consult.asp?numtable=XULC_Montaigne_Lucrece1563&numfiche=764&mode=3&ecran=0&offset=10)> [date accessed 05 May 2017].

<sup>7</sup> Ada Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Gerard Passannante, *The Lucretian Renaissance, Philology and the afterlife of tradition* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

relationship to him a secondary or tertiary aspect of analysis. Indeed, Lucretius and his relationship with early modern readers has received increased interest in recent years, and was the focus of a conference in Oxford which resulted in *Lucretius and the Early Modern* edited by David Norbrook, Philip Hardie and Stephen Harrison.<sup>9</sup> Whilst this work analyses Lucretius's impact on thought in early modern Europe, there is little focus on the themes of memory and identity in Lucretius's poem. Alison Brown has also contributed to the advancement of Lucretius studies with her study *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence*, which interprets Lucretian philosophy in the writing of various Renaissance intellectuals in Florence.<sup>10</sup>

In terms of research on memory and identity in the early modern period, Francis Yates' seminal work *The Art of Memory* is a key source for the study of memory, and various memory techniques which pervaded the centuries from early philosophers from antiquity who employed the *loci* method for storing memory to more modern conceptions of memory.<sup>11</sup> Yates' study on memory provides an essential base for research on memory in the early modern period. It must be recognised that Yates does not engage with Montaigne's memory methods, but her research provides an important insight into models of memory. This thesis will analyse Montaigne's approach to certain models of memory, particularly focussing on the two terms which Lucretius uses to refer to memory: *retinentia* and *repetentia*. Montaigne forms his own understanding of memory from these Lucretian models, which closely resemble a storehouse of memory and a tool of memory. He considers these two models and establishes that both are interdependent and together can form a stable base for identity.

---

<sup>9</sup> *Lucretius and the Early Modern*, ed. by David Norbrook, Philip Hardie and Stephen Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015)

<sup>10</sup> Alison Brown, *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Francis Yates, *The Art of Memory* (New York: Random House, 2011).

Whilst there has been research on Montaigne's understanding of memory, notably by Andrea Frisch<sup>12</sup>, there has not been extensive research into Lucretius's influence on Montaigne in relation to memory. Frisch's studies both discuss the topic of personal memory in Montaigne's *Essais* and consider the difficulty of thinking about memory during the Wars of Religion. Frisch also weighs the importance of Montaigne's riding accident, and designates this as a significant site of memory in the *Essais*. Frisch's research is also valuable when considering collective memory in the early modern period. I am also indebted to Nicolas Russell, who provides an unique interpretation of early modern collective memory and challenges Halbwachs' perception of collective memory in his paper 'Collective Memory Before and After Halbwachs'.<sup>13</sup> Russell proposes that early modern collective memory valued the aesthetic and the ethical lessons rather than agreeing with the meaning offered by Halbwachs' that collective memory is the remembering of shared, lived experience. This thesis will explore Montaigne's approach to collective memory whilst considering the views of both Halbwachs and Russell.

I will now outline the trajectory of my study as a whole and justify the underlying methodology. The first chapter of this thesis analyses the early sixteenth-century editions of *De rerum natura* to show the prism of reading through which Lambin read and studied his Lucretius, and through which Montaigne, in turn, analysed, annotated and used Lucretius's philosophies expressed in the poem. This chapter examines how Lucretius was presented by early sixteenth-century editors and how the paratexts of their editions created an image of

---

<sup>12</sup> Andrea Frisch, 'Montaigne and the Ethics of Memory', *L'Esprit Créateur*, Vol. 46, Number 1, Spring 2006, pp. 23-31.; Andrea Frisch, 'Montaigne and Memory' in *The Oxford Handbook of Montaigne*, ed. Philip Desan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), Online publication date: February 2016 [accessed 12 March 2016]

<sup>13</sup> Nicolas Russell, 'Collective Memory Before and After Halbwachs', *The French Review*, 79, 4 (2006), pp. 792-804. See also Nicolas Russell, *Transformations of Memory and Forgetting in Sixteenth-Century France: Marguerite de Navarre, Pierre de Ronsard and Michel de Montaigne* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011).

Lucretius which obscured his philosophical message, emphasising instead his poetic talent and prescribing a Christian, moral approach to reading the text, thus preventing the reader from engaging with Lucretius's philosophy. The philological approach I adopt in Chapter One helps to clarify the intertextual network linking Epicurus, Lucretius, Lucretius's Renaissance editors and Montaigne. The paratexts and disclaimers attached by sixteenth-century editors before 1563 reveal the complex prism of reading which influenced Lambin's commentary edition, which in turn influenced Montaigne's reading of Lucretius. This chapter also examines what Valentina Prosperi calls a 'dissimulatory code' employed by sixteenth-century humanists in their commentaries on *De rerum natura*. As Prosperi argues, certain editors emphasise the aesthetic and poetic ability of Lucretius in order to overpower the philosophical message, obscuring it from even the most erudite readers.<sup>14</sup> Lambin's commentary does contribute to changing the encouraged, received perception of Lucretius, and this chapter analyses to what extent Lambin engaged with Lucretius's and Epicurus's philosophies, and in doing so gave Montaigne the encouragement and the platform to interpret Lucretius in relation to the soul, memory and identity.

It is significant that early-sixteenth-century editors of *De rerum natura* moulded the collective memory of Lucretius and shaped how Lucretius was perceived in the collective consciousness. Lambin's edition, which begins to challenge the perception of Lucretius as a heretical poet, provides Montaigne with the opportunity to engage with Lucretius in a way which contrasts with earlier reception of the Roman poet. The first chapter of my study provides a foundation for the examination of Montaigne's interactions with Lambin in his copy and his engagement with Lucretius in both his annotated notes and in the *Essais*.

---

<sup>14</sup> Valentina Prosperi, 'Lucretius in the Italian Renaissance', in *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius*, ed. by Stuart Gillespie and Phillip Hardie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) pp. 214-226, (p. 214); Lucretius, *De rerum natura* (Cambridge, MA; London, Harvard University Press, 2006) I, 936-950.

The second chapter analyses Montaigne's notes on his copy of *De rerum natura* and explores how Montaigne reads his Lucretius. The first section of Chapter Two introduces Montaigne's notes, and attempts to date Montaigne's second, vernacular reading of *De rerum natura*. I then analyse the notes made by Montaigne on his copy which develop his Lucretian-inflected understanding of memory. This includes a close analysis of Montaigne's interpretation of Lucretian neologisms for memory – *retinentia* and *repetentia* – which provide Montaigne with a model for understanding memory as the foundation for identity which he develops in the *Essais*.<sup>15</sup> This chapter shows how Montaigne transforms from a private reader of Lucretius into the writer who would include one hundred and forty-six quotations from *De rerum natura* in his *Essais*.

The third chapter considers how Montaigne builds on the Lucretian models for memory and develops his own understanding of memory as a container and as a tool. Whilst this thesis does explore how Montaigne treats memory, in particular the models and metaphors utilized by Montaigne, this thesis does not analyse Montaigne's *Journal de voyage*, instead focussing on the *Essais* as the primary source for his assays at memory and identity. Whilst Montaigne's 'travel writing' would provide an interesting source for how he preserves present memories and the role of the journal in memory writing, this thesis has centred its focus on Montaigne's writing on memory in the *Essais*, and the ways in which he interacts with Lucretius through his writing. The third chapter analyses Montaigne's image of his own supposedly poor memory as a leaking container, exploring the ideas which are embedded in this image. The role of memory in education is also a recurrent theme in the *Essais* which is studied in this chapter, with a particular focus on the type of education that

---

<sup>15</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, trans. by W.H.D. Rouse, Loeb Classical Library edition (Cambridge, MA; London, Harvard University Press, 2006) III, 674-6, p. 240-1; III, 847-85, p. 254-257.

Montaigne hopes will be given to children in ‘De l’institution des enfans’ (I, 26), and on the models for memory which he employs in relation to education, learning and experience.<sup>16</sup>

The fourth chapter analyses how Montaigne’s riding accident forced him to reconsider the models of memory which he establishes throughout the *Essais*. I treat the riding accident as a traumatic event and as a near-death experience for Montaigne, who lost consciousness for two hours and was considered to be dead by his servants (II, 6, 372-374). In this chapter, I will consider modern trauma theory in order to further understand Montaigne’s experience. Cathy Caruth’s seminal works *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* and *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, provide a comprehensive and groundbreaking understanding of trauma theory.<sup>17</sup> For Caruth, traumatic events are in some key sense not fully experienced or assimilated by the subject, and hence Caruth argues that this leads to the traumatic memory being ‘unclaimed’ by the trauma survivor. I have chosen to use Caruth’s approach to trauma as in her work, she deals with trauma in literature and she applies modern theory to certain early-modern texts. Furthermore, in Freud’s view, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, that there is always ‘latency’ in trauma, with the trauma survivor experiencing traumatic neurosis a distinct period time after the event. Following Caruth’s and Freud’s theory, this chapter seeks to explore Montaigne’s accident as a site of trauma, and to consider the return of his memory as a flashback as a traumatic re-living.<sup>18</sup> The decision to apply trauma theory to an early-modern text such as the *Essais* was made as the application of Caruth’s approach to trauma opens new possibilities for an engagement with Montaigne’s thoughts on memory and forgetting. This chapter analyses Montaigne’s

---

<sup>16</sup> Montaigne, Michel de, *Les Essais*, d’après l’Exemplaire de Bordeaux, ed. by P. Villey & V. Saulnier (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1965). References to this edition of Montaigne’s *Essais* will appear in the text of this thesis unless otherwise stated in the following format (Book: Essay Number, Page Number).

<sup>17</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) and Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. by John Reddick (London: Penguin, 2003).

response to his traumatic experience, which leads him to turn to writing as a defence against the threats to memory posed by death, trauma and indeed, general forgetting. This understanding of Montaigne's need to write in order to preserve, protect and project his memory reveals his response to his riding accident to be an originary moment for his *Essais* as a project of memorialisation.

The final chapter of this thesis evaluates how Montaigne's models of memory and understanding as memory as the foundation for identity influence his relationship to collective memory and the preservation of collective experience through history-writing and memory-writing during the Wars of Religion. This chapter considers collective memory through the prism of Maurice Halbwachs's concept of 'collective memory', in which even individuals' personal memories of historical events gain significance only in relation to the collective remembrance of those events.<sup>19</sup> As a counterpoint to Halbwachs's concept of collective memory, this thesis will engage with Nicolas Russell's interpretation of early modern collective memory as detailed in his paper 'Collective Memory Before and After Halbwachs'. Russell argues that early modern collective memory is more concerned with the preservation of ethically useful or aesthetically pleasing semantic memory, rather than the preservation of episodic, lived experience.<sup>20</sup>

Chapter Five also assesses how Montaigne draws an understanding of collective memory from his reading of *De rerum natura*, and how this influences his own approach to collective memory and the importance of the preservation of collective memory as well as personal memory. Montaigne's perspective on collective memory is influenced by his era, with the simultaneous tension between remembering and preserving memory as a humanist,

---

<sup>19</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective* (Paris: Les presses universitaires de France, 1950); Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>20</sup> Nicolas Russell, 'Collective Memory Before and After Halbwachs', *The French Review*, 79, 4 (2006), pp. 792-804.

and the need to forget or ‘bracket off’ the past which was required by the memory clauses included in the Edicts of Pacification. This tension between remembering and forgetting is only complicated further by history-writing in sixteenth-century France, which tended to rewrite history to suit particular politico-religious agendas, or to record false histories entirely. This chapter evaluates Montaigne’s response to this tension and shows how Montaigne succeeds in preserving his personal memory and the collective memory of the wars without writing a history, but instead by writing memory.

## Chapter One

### **Lucretius's *De rerum natura* in the sixteenth century: A Prism of Reading**

sed veluti pueris absinthia taetra medentes

cum dare conantur, prius oras pocula circum

contingunt mellis dulci flavoque liquore,

ut puerorum aetas improvida ludificetur

labrorum tenus, interea perpotet amarum

absinthi laticem deceptaque non capiatur,

sed potius tali pacto recreata valescat,

sic ego nunc [...]

[...] volui tibi suaviloquenti

carmine Pierio rationem exponere nostram

et quasi musaeo dulci contingere melle,

si tibi forte animum tali ratione tenere

versibus in nostris possem, dum perspicis omnem

naturam rerum qua constet compta figura.

Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, I, 936-950.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, trans. by W.H.D. Rouse, Loeb Classical Library edition (Cambridge, MA; London, Harvard University Press, 2006) I, 936-950. p. 78-9.

‘But as with children, when physicians try to administer rank wormwood, they first touch the rims about the cups with the sweet yellow fluid of honey, that unthinking childhood be deluded as far as the lips, and meanwhile may drink up the bitter juice of wormwood, and though beguiled be not betrayed, but rather by such means be restored and regain health, so now do I; [...] I have chosen to set forth my doctrine to you in sweet speaking Pierian song, and as it were to touch it with the Muses’ delicious honey, if by chance in such a way I might engage your mind in my verses, while you are learning to see in what shape is framed the whole nature of things’.

### **Reception of Lucretius and *De rerum natura* in the first half of the sixteenth century**

Lucretius’s epic poem *De rerum natura* was re-discovered in 1417 by the Renaissance book hunter Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459), but it was the early sixteenth-century printing houses and careful editors who delivered the poem into the libraries of Renaissance humanists, rather than Poggio himself. These editors were a long way away from Poggio’s religious position as the once apostolic secretary to the deposed Pope John XXIII, but they were as aware of the importance of religious views to their profession as Poggio was to his own.<sup>22</sup> This awareness is due to the dangerous religious nature of *De rerum natura* and the potential consequences faced by those seen to be publishing a poem which contravenes Christian doctrine to such an extent. By the mere connection of Lucretius’s work to Epicurus, *De rerum natura* was associated with heresy, not even as a consequence of his own ideas but as a result of his identity as an Epicurean, which, Ada Palmer asserts, was a by-

---

<sup>22</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the Renaissance Began* (London: The Bodley Head, 2011) p. 155, Poggio was the apostolic secretary to Baldassare Cossa, or Pope John XXIII, as he called himself.

word for heresy in the sixteenth century.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, Lucretius's doctrines, based as they were on Epicurean philosophy, challenge three key aspects of Christian belief. First, Lucretian atomism ruled out the divine governance of nature in relation to natural phenomena. Second, Lucretius fervently undermines the idea of the creation *ex nihilo* and eliminates the necessity of Divine Providence in the story of creation by explaining his theory of the *clinamen*. The clinamen is the unpredictable and most minimal swerve of atoms, which occurs at a random moment and causes a slight deviation from the straight lines in which atoms fall, thus making the atoms collide and combine in order to create the universe.

Finally, Lucretius's denial of the immortality of the soul, and therefore the afterlife, challenges these key Christian doctrines. Palmer states that the Lucretian alternative to the afterlife 'was associated in the Renaissance with a long-standing European paranoia'<sup>24</sup>; this is the paranoia that those who did not believe in the immortal soul or the afterlife would have no reason to repent for their sins nor any reason not to commit sins in the first instance, as they would have no fear of divine punishment after death. Sixteenth-century editors of Lucretius were particularly sensitive to these conflicts with Christianity and this section will consider the ways in which these editors presented their editions of *De rerum natura* and its author in relation to the religious tension surrounding the text in the Renaissance. This section will also examine how certain techniques employed by these editors obscure the philosophical aspects of Lucretius and thus, prevent the possibility of a Lucretian philosophical identity coming from the reading of *De rerum natura* in the first half of the sixteenth century. The first section of this chapter will analyse the key editions produced before Lambin's 1563 critical edition of *De rerum natura* to show how these editors may

---

<sup>23</sup> Ada Palmer, 'Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 73, 3 (2012), pp. 395-416 (p. 398).

<sup>24</sup> Ada Palmer, 'Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance', p. 398.

have influenced Lambin and how they contribute to the prism of reading through which Montaigne read his Lucretius.

Following Poggio's discovery, eighteen editions of Lucretius's *De rerum natura* were printed before Denis Lambin's edition was published in 1563.<sup>25</sup> Though the 1500 Aldine edition published by Avancius served as the base text for both Andrea Navagero and Sebastian Gryphius's editions, the first significant text for my study is Pietro Candido's edition, printed by Giunti in 1512 in Florence.<sup>26</sup>

This text is the first significant edition of *De rerum natura* in the sixteenth-century as it is the first edition with noteworthy paratexts which must be analysed to reveal how Lucretius was presented in this period.<sup>27</sup> Cosmo Gordon describes Candido's edition as 'the most romantic' due to the role of Michèle Marullo Tarcaniota, with whom Candido shared a close relationship.<sup>28</sup> Marullo edited and amended the text on which Candido's edition is based, and thus the primary focus of Candido's dedication to Tomaso Soderini is to mourn the tragic death of their mutual friend, Marullo. The dedication also includes praise for Lucretius, who is deemed worthy of Marullo's close study and favour. The poetic charms of Lucretius are praised as Candido writes:

Marullus sane amicus olim noster iucundissimus, cuius in hoc oper censuram  
potissimum secuti sumus, *Lucretianae adeo veneris* per omnem aetatem studiosus

---

<sup>25</sup> Cosmo Gordon, *A Bibliography of Lucretius* (London, Rupert-Hart-Davis, 1962) p. 29.

<sup>26</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Pietro Candido (Florence: Giunti, 1512).

<sup>27</sup> Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: The Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) As Genette explains in his study, paratexts are a zone of transaction in that they are 'a privileged place of pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public'. p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Gordon, *A Bibliography of Lucretius*, p. 47.

fuit, ut nuspia fere non eo comite itaret, nunque cubitum [...] nisi perlectis aliquot,  
exploratisque Cari carminibus sese reciperet.<sup>29</sup> [My italics]

(Marullo, once our most delightful friend, whose judgement we have followed above all in this work, was throughout his life so enthusiastic for *the charms of Lucretius* that he went almost nowhere without him as a companion, he never went to bed without having read through and explored some verses of Lucretius; [my translation]).

In this way Candido flavours his dedication with praise for Lucretius's poetic ability, but it is significant that he does not mention Lucretius's philosophies nor whether Marullo was interested in the philosophical aspects of Lucretius. From the dedication, the reader can see that Marullo's aim was the restoration of the text, and Candido plays his part in realising this objective by publishing Marullo's emendations. Marullo did not publish his own edition of *De rerum natura*, though 'supposedly' he had intended to, according to Gerard Passannante, and thus it cannot be said whether Marullo was interested in Lucretian doctrine as well as enthralled by his poetry.<sup>30</sup> With the negative view of Lucretius at the time, Candido is not willing to discuss whether his friend was interested in Lucretian philosophy so he emphasises that it was the poetic charms of Lucretius ('Lucretianae [...] veneris') which attracted Marullo's attention. There is no mention of Epicurus in the dedication, with Candido preferring to present Lucretius as an elegant poet whose verse alone captured the imagination of Marullo. Thus, Candido's primary paratext, the dedication, draws attention to the poetic

---

<sup>29</sup> Pietro Candido in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Candido, sig. a2v.

<sup>30</sup> Gerard Passannante, *The Lucretian Renaissance, Philology and the afterlife of tradition* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 229.

For a further discussion of Marullo's engagement with Lucretius see Mayotte Bollack 'Marulle ou la correction latine' in *Penser entre les lignes: philologie et philosophie au Quattrocento*, ed. by Fosca Mariani-Zini (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2001).

prowess of Lucretius, or the honey as Lucretius himself labels it, without mentioning the wormwood of Lucretius's philosophical ideas.<sup>31</sup>

The absence of Lucretius's link to Epicurus does not continue in the *Lucretii vita* which is a very close imitation of Petrus Crinitus's brief biography of the poet from his *De poetis latinis*.<sup>32</sup> Candido edits every sentence slightly and however hopeful he was of avoiding claims of plagiarism, it is very plainly Crinitus's biography. Epicurus is mentioned briefly in connection to Lucretius in this biography, as Candido, or in reality, Crinitus writes:

Libros conscripsit de rerum natura sex, in quis Epicuri doctrinam, ipsumque Empedoclem,  
cuius carmen in primis, ingeniumque admiratur, secutus est.<sup>33</sup>

(He wrote the six books of *De rerum natura*, in which he follows the doctrines of Epicurus and of Empedocles, whose poetry he admired first, and whose genius he also admired; [my translation])

Thus Lucretius is connected to Epicurus in the biography, but the dangerous ideas of Epicurus which Lucretius follows are still not mentioned. The admission that Lucretius followed Epicurean doctrine is swiftly followed by a quotation from Macrobius which states that 'Nemo debet antiquiores poetas ea ratione uiliores putare, quo eorum versus nobis scabri videantur' ('No one should think any less of the ancient poets, when their verses seem to us to be indecent'; [my translation]).<sup>34</sup> Through Macrobius, sixteenth century readers are told not look upon Lucretius's verse with scorn if they appear contrary to their contemporary views. This is a defence of Lucretius's poetry, pushing the poetry to the forefront of the

---

<sup>31</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, I, 936-950. The full passage in which Lucretius describes the wormwood and honey metaphor appears in the Epigraph to this chapter.

<sup>32</sup> Petrus Crinitus, *De poetis latinis* (Florence: Philipum Juntam, 1505); Gordon, *A Bibliography of Lucretius*, p. 53.

<sup>33</sup> Pietro Candido in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Candido, sig. a4v.

<sup>34</sup> Pietro Candido in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Candido, sig. a5.

reader's thoughts, rather than the philosophical ideas. The mention of Epicurus warrants this defence of Lucretius from the biographer, which gives Lucretius the identity of poet rather than philosopher, burying his philosophical views which could be dismissed or ignored, as Candido does in the dedication, and highlighting the elegant poetry.

Furthermore, the *Lucretii vita* assimilates Lucretius to Ovid, which one can see as an attempt to normalize Lucretius by associating him with a classical writer who was accepted and respected by humanists. Candido cites Ovid who describes the author of *De rerum natura* as 'sublimis [...] Lucreti' ('the sublime Lucretius').<sup>35</sup> This attempt at assimilation further separates Lucretius from the dangerous philosophical ideas expressed in the poem, and presents him as a poet worthy of praise from a classical poet at the centre of humanist study. Finally, Crinitus's biography explains that Lucretius was driven mad after taking a love potion and eventually took his own life. It is important to consider that biographies of writers were often the starting point of a reader's engagement with an author and these biographies, despite their faults, play an important part in the prism of reading.<sup>36</sup> Thus, this biography would have shaped the reader's opinion of Lucretius and by explaining the myth that Lucretius went mad and committed suicide, the biographer influences the reader such that Lucretius's work is undermined by his personal life. The idea that Lucretius went mad is almost offered as an excuse which is utilised by later editors to undermine Lucretius's questionable philosophies as his mad ravings.<sup>37</sup> These editors manipulate the idea of the

---

<sup>35</sup> Pietro Candido in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Candido, sig. A2v 'De cuius poesi illud est a P. Ovidio non sine ingenti praeconio literarum monumentis mandatum. Carmina sublimis tum sunt peritura Lucreti'. 'Of whose poetry, Ovid says that only along with the fall of the monuments of literature will the poetry of sublime Lucretius also perish'; [[my translation]].

<sup>36</sup> In Petrus Crinitus' biography of Lucretius in *De poetis latinis*, Crinitus confuses Lucretius with a different *Lucretius comicus*.

<sup>37</sup> Denis Lambin in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin (Paris: Roville, 1563) p. 99 Lambin refers to Lucretius's poetry as 'delira' (delirious) in his dedication to Pierre de Ronsard, drawing on this aspect of Lucretius's biography which describes him as mad.

‘furor’, that which drives and inspires great poets and transform this raving into something negative in relation to Lucretius.

Candido’s edition does contain a reasonably detailed index of the themes covered in each book, which shows that the editor is aware that he cannot completely hide the content of the poem. By providing these two paratexts, however, the first with the subtle message praising Lucretius’s poetry, and the biography, which faintly links Lucretius to Epicurus, Candido defends Lucretius’s poetic ability and builds a reputation for Lucretius as a mad poet, drawing the reader’s attention away from the philosophical content. In this way, Candido’s approach places the emphasis on the poetic honey and dismisses the philosophical wormwood.

It is the focus by Candido on Lucretius’s poetry and his praise for the verse that stands out as an example of a humanist interest in form independent of content. Candido encourages this interest in form, leading humanists to expect to learn beautiful language and ways of expressing themselves, and thus he emphasises the importance of his edition being a restored text which reveals the elegance of the poetry. Lucretius wanted his reader to enjoy the honey of his poetry whilst digesting the wormwood of his philosophy, as he writes:

[...] volui tibi suaviloquenti  
Carmine Pierio rationem exponere nostram  
et quasi musaeo dulci contingere melle,  
si tibi forte animum tali ratione tenere,  
versibus in nostris possem, dum perspicis omnem  
naturam rerum, qua constet compta figura<sup>38</sup> (*De rerum natura*, I, 945-50)

---

<sup>38</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, Loeb edition, I, 945-950.

(I have chosen to set forth my doctrine to you in sweet-speaking Pierian song, and as it were to touch it with the Muses' delicious honey, if by chance in such a way I might engage your mind in my verses, while you are learning to see in what shape is framed the whole nature of things.)

Early sixteenth-century editors however, like Candido in this first instance, emphasise the honey of the verse to the point that the wormwood of the philosophical content is obscured and screened off by the appreciation of form.<sup>39</sup>

The fact that these early sixteenth-century editors are so assured in their separation of honey (form) and wormwood (content) is interesting in itself. Let us consider whether form can be separated from content. Lucretius's original analogy works on two levels. First, the honey is to make the wormwood more palatable, that is to say that the form is to make the difficult content something which is more easily read and understood than in the form of a treatise. Second, Lucretius can be seen as the doctor who understands the medicine or the philosopher who understands how the universe works. He is administering the wormwood to a child, who signifies the reader who does not understand the nature of things, but he tricks the child into taking the wormwood. There is an unavoidable sense of reluctance on the part of the child which signifies Lucretius's understanding that his contemporary readership would be reluctant to read a lengthy treatise detailing his philosophical views with which they may feel uncomfortable. It is for this reason that Lucretius manipulates the reader to engage with his philosophy by putting it in a poetic form. The early sixteenth-century editors attempt to emphasise the poetry of *De rerum natura*, but not with the same intention as Lucretius, who did want the reader to learn about Epicurean philosophy; rather, these editors wanted to screen off Lucretius's potentially dangerous ideas from their readership. The separation of

---

<sup>39</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, I, 936-950, p. 78.

the form from the content is not a simple task, as Lambin later shows that the content cannot be avoided, and regardless of how much these editors attempt to make Lucretius more palatable and add their own honey to the mixture, they cannot hide the content completely from view. As one knows from taking medicine, despite the best intentions of flavouring medicine to mask the taste, one can always detect a hint of its flavour. Furthermore, in Book II, Lucretius continues the connection of honey and wormwood as he describes the types of atoms of which they are composed. This continued association by Lucretius confirms the view that honey and wormwood are a pairing which cannot be separated, and to return to Lucretius's original analogy, the form cannot be separated from the content, as the content will always be the driving force behind the form.

This preference for the philological study of form over the philosophical engagement with the content does however continue in Johannes Baptista Pius's 1514 critical commentary of *De rerum natura*.<sup>40</sup> I refer to the 1514 edition of Pius's commentary as this was the first French printed edition of Lucretius's poem and unlike the 1511 edition, printed in Bologna, this commentary also contains a significant letter by the French scholar, Nicholas Bérald.

Pius's edition, printed by Jean Petit and Josse Bade (also known as Ascencius), was the authoritative edition of *De rerum natura* in France until Lambin's critical commentary was published in 1563. Indeed, Lambin used this commentary in his research for his own edition, thus this text does have an intricate link in Montaigne's prism of reading, as this text features directly in the chain. The way in which Lucretius is presented in Pius's edition centres around three main aspects of the text: first, Pius's own paratexts, that is to say the *Epistula nuncupatoria* and the *Expositio in Lucretium auctore Pio*; second, Nicholas Bérald's prefatory letter about the text; and of course, Pius's commentary itself.

---

<sup>40</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Johannes Baptista Pius (Paris, Parvus; Ascencius, 1514).

First, the *Expositio in Lucretium auctore Pio* does mention the link between Lucretius and Epicurus, and there is even a brief discussion of Epicurus's atoms. But the discussion is of *Epicurus*'s atoms, not Lucretius's atomism or even his view on Epicurus's atoms.<sup>41</sup> Pius separates Lucretius from Epicurus, giving Epicurus ownership of atomism and of the dangerous philosophies which contravened Christian doctrine. Pius writes 'Sed quoniam ad poema Lucretianum pertinent Epicuri dogma scire quoniam Auctore Lactantio libro de Opificio Epicuri sunt omnia, quae delirat' This is one of many references to Lactantius, the so-called 'Christian Cicero', whom Pius draws upon as a valuable resource to criticise Epicurean doctrine. The expression 'quae delirat Lucretius' goes some way to absolve Lucretius of the blame for his Epicurean beliefs, as both editors draw the connection between Epicurus's ideas and Lucretius's recognised madness. By this separation of Lucretius and Epicurus, Pius establishes Lucretius's identity as a poet, not as the philosopher who Lambin and Montaigne contemplate later in the century. As for the philosophical beliefs expressed by Lucretius which contravene Christian doctrine, Pius establishes that these were Epicurus's ideas:

quae dicit Epicurus: deos nihil curare, non ira, non gratia tangi: inferorum poenas non esse metuendas que animae post morte occident: nec ulli omnino sunt interi: voluptatem esse summam bonum: nullam esse humanam societatem.<sup>42</sup>

([this is] what Epicurus says: the gods do not care for us, nor does their fury or their grace touch us, the punishment of hell is not to be feared as the soul is destroyed after death, no part of man survives, pleasure is the greatest good and there is no human society; [my translation])

---

<sup>41</sup> Pius in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Pius, sig. a9v.

<sup>42</sup> Pius in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Pius, sig. a10v.

This list of all that is wrong with Epicurean doctrine in Pius's eyes is part of his invective against Epicurus alone, separated from Lucretius who is not even mentioned towards the end of Pius's *Expositio*. Pius roots these dangerous, heretical ideas in Epicurus, removing the blame from Lucretius. Thus, when Pius asks 'Est plane ut quisque putet hanc vocem vici esse sapientis que potest latronibus aptissime commodari?' ('Surely it is clear that this voice which everyone thinks is the voice of wisdom sounds more like the voice of a criminal?'; [my translation]), it is Epicurus whom he is leading the reader to question, not Lucretius.<sup>43</sup> In this way, Pius directs Lactantius and his own criticism at Epicurus, diverting attention away from Lucretius. One may ask why it is that Pius appears to defend Lucretius here and it is likely that Pius wanted to protect his own edition from criticism or worse, prohibition by the censors, that is to say the listing of the book on the Index Librorum Prohibitorum, and thus he employs this approach to portray Lucretius as a poet, whose poetry is worthy of study.

Pius succeeds in detaching Lucretius from the Epicurean doctrines and it is Epicurus who is referred to as a philosopher, whereas Lucretius is only referred to as a poet. This attribution of identity by Pius ensures that Lucretius avoids the label of 'Epicurean philosopher' in Pius's work, and although it is recognised that Lucretius did follow Epicurus, he is defined as a poet first, with the Epicurean aspects of his identity being brushed aside. Once again, the poetic form is raised above the content, pushing Lucretius's philosophical views from sight, and preventing any philosophical appreciation or even interaction with Lucretian materialism and identity. Lucretian philosophy is rejected as Epicurean error by Pius, and thus the editor leads the reader away from any engagement with Lucretius in terms of the soul or identity in his *Expositio*.

---

<sup>43</sup> Pius, sig. a10v.

Bérault's letter continues to obscure the philosophical Lucretius, as he also focuses on Lucretius's poetry whilst discounting Lucretius's Epicurean influences. Bérault does briefly mention Lucretius in relation to Epicurus's doctrines before dismissing them: 'de atomis, inani, nihiloque quaedam cum Epicuro suo somniaverit' ('of atoms, the void and nothing, he imagined certain things along with Epicurus').<sup>44</sup> By labelling Epicurus's doctrines as something that he imagined or dreamed up, Bérault undermines Lucretius's atoms as he considers them to be unfeasible or inapplicable in reality, and thus he undermines the philosophy on which Lucretius's poem is built. Furthermore, Bérault confirms that these are ideas that Epicurus concocted, thus absolving Lucretius of the blame here. Following this dismissal of Epicurus and his philosophy, Bérault moves away from the philosophical content. It is Lucretius the poet to whom Bérault dedicates his attention first of all, further asserting this identity for Lucretius and further separating him from philosophy. Bérault is attracted by the honey of the poetry with which Lucretius flavoured his poem, rather than the wormwood of the philosophy and it is the honey to which Bérault wants to direct the reader's attention. He eulogizes about Lucretius's poetic ability as he writes:

non mediocrite (scio) voluptate Lucretiana lectio adficiet, propter floruenti carminis  
inexplicabilem quondam iucunditatem inimitabilemque vetusti illius seuti, quo primum  
latina poenis nata est, suavitatem amoenitatemque ac plane delicias quasdam adorandae  
vetustatis [...]<sup>45</sup>

(not just a little (I know) the pleasure of reading Lucretius's work, because the flourishing and inimitable pleasure radiating from his poem, which gave rise to the first Latin poetry, and

---

<sup>44</sup> Nicholas Bérault in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Pius, sig. a1v.

<sup>45</sup> Nicholas Bérault in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Pius, sig. a1v.

the truly delicious sweetness adoration of antiquity which Lucretius flatter and admires. [my translation]).

This praise for Lucretius's poetry shapes the reading experience such that the poetry is central to the reader's focus, rather than the philosophical content. The combination of Pius's *Expositio* and Bérault's letter, which both emphasise the poetic honey, can be considered to be a type of encoding, which dissuades the reader from a philosophical engagement with Lucretius. These paratexts obscure the possibility of any potential for learning from Lucretius's philosophy in relation to memory and identity, which are the aspects of Lucretius's text which Montaigne later uses to develop his own models for understanding memory and the self.

Moreover, Bérault contributes his own angle to Lucretius by creating an identity for Lucretius as a moralist. Since it was the early aim of the humanist movement to produce virtuous, moral men through the reading of classical texts, this must be seen as a move by Bérault to assimilate Lucretius to the humanist cause and to normalize Lucretius to other writers respected by humanists. Furthermore, by establishing this identity for Lucretius, Bérault also makes him appear acceptable in the eyes of the Church, and the censors. Surely a classical writer who taught ethical behaviour could only be a positive influence on his readers? Bérault develops this idea as he writes: 'adeo meliorem hominis partem perficientem et ad activas, morales que virtutes sensim perducentem' ('to this it is even better than man perfecting himself to active morals and virtues, to which he [Lucretius] gradually leads us'. [my translation]).<sup>46</sup> Bérault and Pius did not want the Church, the censors or the reader to see Lucretius as a dangerous philosopher, and hence, they attempt to assimilate Lucretius to moral philosophy, to override the Lucretian philosophy of atomism and the mortal soul. In

---

<sup>46</sup> Bérault in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Pius, sig. a1v.

the same way that Lucretius uses poetry to soften his theories and to trick the reader into reading them almost unknowingly, in these paratexts, Béault and Pius emphasise the poetic honey, and add their own honey to the mixture, altering reception of Lucretius and his intended message to make him more palatable to a Christian humanist reader, and obscuring the wormwood of his philosophies from view entirely. In fact, by separating him from these ideas they create new, more acceptable identities for Lucretius, focussing the reader's attention on the form and moral message to divert attention away from the philosophical message which ought to be ignored or dismissed by the Renaissance reader.

Pius evidently found it harder to cover the philosophical aspects of Lucretius in his commentary but succeeds in avoiding full explanations of Lucretian doctrine by focussing on the philological rather than the philosophical. This is most evident as Pius deals with Lucretius's view on memory and the soul in Book III, as Lucretius writes:

Nam, si tantopere est animi mutare potestas

Omnis ut actarum exciderit retinentia rerum

Non, ut opinor, ea ab leto iam longior errat.<sup>47</sup> (*De rerum natura*, III, 674-6)

(For if the power of the mind has been so greatly changed that it has lost all recollection of things done, that, I think, is not far removed from death.)

Montaigne uses this quotation in his *Essais* so it is pertinent to examine how Pius comments on these verses.<sup>48</sup> The Bolognese editor defines the words used by Lucretius according to the role of a humanist commentator, but he uses this screen of philology to avoid a discussion of the meaning that the loss of memory is akin to death. One may consider the possibility that Pius defines the words for the reader to interpret the Lucretian philosophy on their own, but

---

<sup>47</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, Loeb edition, III, 674-6, p. 240.

<sup>48</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*, ed. by Villey et Saulnier (II, 12, 549).

Pius delivers a strong argument in favour of the immortality of the soul at the end of Book III which is intended to leave the reader in no doubt once again about the heresy of Lucretius's doctrines on the soul. In this section, Pius writes what Simone Fraisse has described as 'un véritable traité' and Pius uses St Jerome to counteract Lucretius's views.<sup>49</sup> The combination of this strong argument against Lucretius's views and Pius's paratexts close the discussion on the immortality of the soul, preventing the reader from considering the alternative to the Christian view by undermining this alternative and by showing it to be incorrect. Pius did not want the reader to stray from Bérault's or his own prescribed reading of Lucretius so he undermines and corrects Lucretius's arguments to ensure that they pale in comparison with Christian doctrine. Fraisse explains, 'averti des controverses de son temps, le pieux commentateur ne permet pas à son lecteur de s'égarer'.<sup>50</sup> The example at the end of Book III, in which Pius uses Saint Jerome, emphasises views expressed in the paratexts that Lucretius should be used as a tool for learning how to appreciate poetry, but religious teaching should not be brought into question by Lucretius's philosophical views on the soul and divine providence. In this way, Pius prescribes a reading of Lucretius which keeps the philological value of Lucretius's poetry separate from the anti-religious meaning, allowing no possibility for the reader to explore memory and identity through Lucretius's philosophy, as Montaigne later does.

Pius's edition does mark a point of progress for the circulation of Lucretius in that a critical edition meant further understanding of Lucretius, but only the understanding of the Lucretius that Pius and Bérault wanted to portray. However, Pius and Bérault ensure that it is very unlikely that a Lucretian understanding of identity may emerge from the reading of their edition; and in particular, there is no discussion of memory or identity in the work. Recent

---

<sup>49</sup> Simone Fraisse, *L'influence de Lucrèce en France au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Saint-Brieuc: Presses bretonnes, 1962) p. 34.

<sup>50</sup> Fraisse, *L'influence de Lucrèce en France au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, p. 34.

research on the reception of Lucretius in the early sixteenth century is characterised by ‘le silence des écrivains’ in relation to Lucretius in philosophical discourse and with the first significant critical commentary of this period leading the reader away from any philosophical engagement, it is not surprising that the focus was on Lucretius’s poetry.<sup>51</sup> Valentina Prosperi suggests that editors of *De rerum natura* employ a ‘dissimulatory code’ in order to ‘head off the [...] censorship of the Church’.<sup>52</sup> Prosperi suggest that this code often covers over the editor’s own interest in the philosophical aspects of the text. There is evidence of this code in place in the paratexts and in Pius’s commentary but there is no engagement with Lucretius’s philosophies in the commentary which suggest for one moment that the editor entertained any interest in atomism. Pius does not invite the reader to participate in any discussion of Lucretian concepts and ensures that there is no reason to consider Lucretian philosophy after reading his commentary and Christian arguments by which atomism and ideas on the mortality of the soul are undermined.

The Bolognese editor and the French scholar warp reception of Lucretius from the Lucretius that Montaigne later read in private. Pius and Bérault emphasise Lucretius’s poetic ability and the philological importance of his verses to the point that his philosophy is not just in the shadow of his poetry but it is completely overpowered by it.

Pius’s edition does come at the start of a series of different editions of Lucretius as interest in Lucretius the poet increased in the early sixteenth century. Andrea Navagero’s edition of *De rerum natura* was published in 1515 by the Aldine press and is the third significant edition in my study. This edition contains neither a biography of Lucretius nor a commentary, but it does include a letter from Aldus which introduces Navagero’s version of the text. In this letter, Aldus severely criticises Lucretius and *his* doctrines, since there is no

---

<sup>51</sup> Fraisse, *L'influence de Lucrèce en France au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, p. 42.

<sup>52</sup> Prosperi, ‘Lucretius in the Italian Renaissance’, p. 214.

separation of Lucretius and Epicurus in Aldus's remarks as there had been in previous editions.

If this is a form of self-censorship, or if it is Aldus employing the 'dissimulatory code'<sup>53</sup>, then it is an extremely strong criticism of Lucretius, whose doctrines Aldus describes as being full of lies ('plenus mendaciorum').<sup>54</sup> To see whether Aldus was employing the 'dissimulatory code' described by Prosperi, one can look at Aldus's previous publications. For example, Aldus's comments in his dedication of *Poetae Christiani veteres* are particularly elucidating regarding his religious position. He writes to Daniele Clario:

I have decided to publish the Christian poets in the hope that the tender years of our children may be nurtured on them instead of the lying books of the heathen poets. Then as young men, knowing how to distinguish the truth from the false, they will be upright and truly Christian rather than wicked and faithless as many men are today.<sup>55</sup>

It is true that this was also published and it is possible that Aldus was taking the censors into account when writing this but surely one can consider this passage as evidence that there was no wider Aldine employment of a 'dissimulatory code' as Aldus hopes to replace the reading of pagan authors with Christian texts. Aldus's introduction to *De rerum natura* echoes the sentiment that he expressed in 1501, in that he holds up Lucretius as an example from which the reader can strengthen his Christian faith. In fact, Aldus's argument regarding being able to distinguish the true from the false is mirrored in the dedication of Lucretius, as he encourages the reading of Lucretius because the more the truth is investigated, the more wonderful and venerable it becomes ('veritas, quanto magis inquiritur, tanto apparente illustrior

---

<sup>53</sup> Prosperi, 'Lucretius in the Italian Renaissance', p. 214.

<sup>54</sup> Aldus in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Andreas Navagero (Venice: Aldine Press, 1515) sig. A1v.

<sup>55</sup> Aldus in *Poetae christiani veteres* (in Cora E. Lutz, 'Aldus Manutius, Teacher' in *The Yale University Library Gazette*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (April 1975) pp. 356-363, (p. 361), translation by Cora E. Lutz.

et venerabilior').<sup>56</sup> This is Aldus's response to the Renaissance concern that the study of the eloquent language of the pagan classics can spread heresy. Aldus places trust in his Christian reader, a common response to this debate, and establishes an implicit pact with the reader which assures them that the study of this text could only strengthen their faith. He follows the humanist understanding that words can only be powerful if they are true and virtuous, and that Christian readers can read pagan classics, like *De rerum natura*, without fear of being persuaded by the dangerous philosophical ideas, because these ideas will not be powerful or persuasive when held under the light of Christian teaching and faith.<sup>57</sup> Thus Aldus explains that the Christian truth will be even clearer after reading Lucretius, rather than Lucretian philosophy corrupting Christian belief. Hence Aldus's letter appears almost as a call to arms, encouraging readers to study Lucretius to criticize his beliefs and bolster their own against them. He creates a prism of Christian faith, only allowing them to consider Lucretian doctrine through this prism, thus showing Lucretian philosophy as heretical and against their beliefs. Through this Christian prism, there is no potential for the reader to engage with Lucretian atomism in a way that might change their world view on their identity.

Furthermore, Aldus defends Christian readers from any potential criticism for reading Lucretius by explaining that reading *De rerum natura* does not make one any less religious, an argument which was later used by Lambin. Aldus writes: 'quamobrem sunt qui ne legendum quidem illum consent Christianis hominibus: qui verum Deum adorant, colunt, venerantur' ('For what reason are those Christians who read him not consenting Christian men, for they do truly worship and revere God' [my translation]).<sup>58</sup> When combined with Aldus's reasons for reading Lucretius, the reader is presented with a very clear path for reading Lucretius, from which they are aware that they should not stray. Aldus is wary of

---

<sup>56</sup> Aldus in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Navagero, sig. A1v-A2.

<sup>57</sup> Ada Palmer, 'Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance', p. 408.

<sup>58</sup> Aldus in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Navagero, sig. A1v..

highlighting the Christian doctrines that Lucretius's work contravenes, not mentioning the arguments against Divine Providence or against the immortality of the soul. Instead Aldus trusts that his Christian humanist reader will be aware when Lucretius is straying from prescribed interpretation of these dogmas.

Navagero's edition offers no forum for the discussion of the philosophical content of the poem, apart from as a way of strengthening one's Christian faith. For Aldus, these ideas are not to be toyed with; they are only to be dismissed in favour of correct, Christian beliefs. Furthermore, Aldus, like Candido, Pius and Béault, is determined to keep Lucretius in the safety of the humanist world where language and form are studied whilst dismissing the dangerous content which apparently cannot harm Christian belief since it is false. Unlike previous editors, there is certainly no separation of Lucretius from Epicurus nor is there any protection offered to Lucretius the poet; Aldus' intentions are to protect Christian faith rather than 'heathen poets'. For Aldus, Lucretius is a philosopher as well as a poet, whose poem is worthy of careful restoration for its form, but whose meaning should only be interpreted in terms of Christian doctrine.

In the sense that Lucretius offered poetic honey to encourage the reading of his philosophy, Aldus offers no such positives and does not honey the cup. Rather than obscuring the wormwood with distractions such as praise for the poetry, like Candido, Pius and Béault, or the potential for moral learning, as Béault does, Aldus recognises the wormwood and encourages the reader of Navagero's edition to neutralize it with the antidote of Christian belief. Aldus tells the reader what to read and how to interpret it, leaving no space for thought or interaction with Lucretius, and certainly no possibility of a Lucretian philosophical reading coming from his Navagero's edition.

It is interesting to consider that Navagero's edition was later published in France by Sebastian Gryphius who included Aldus' letter in his 1534 and 1540 editions.<sup>59</sup> These editions also include Crinitus's biography of Lucretius, which further colours the reader's perception of Lucretius. The frame provided by the paratexts of the 1534 and 1540 editions is the same as the religious frame provided by Aldus in 1515. Thus Gryphius's editions continue to portray Lucretius as a poet whom one can use to strengthen one's religious faith, and these editions cannot be considered to have made any progress in relation to the attitudes towards Lucretian philosophy, nor towards a discussion of Lucretius's views on the soul or memory.

Gryphius's press went on to publish pocket editions of Lucretius in 1546, 1548 and 1558, which justifies Fraisse's suggestion that the slow spread of Lucretius in the early sixteenth century began to reach French students of the humanities in the *collèges universitaires*.<sup>60</sup> As Fraisse explains, these *collèges* were separate from the control of the Faculty of Theology and the study of Lucretius was therefore a less dangerous topic. Gryphius's pocket editions simply contain the text of the poem, with Aldus' letter and Crinitus's biography omitted. Whilst it is possible that these paratexts were omitted in order to reduce the text to a pocket edition, it is likely that the need to preface Lucretius's poem with a critical, religious slant was passing. By this point, Lucretius is firmly established as a poet rather than a dangerous philosopher by the work of the previous editors, and he is no longer considered a threat by the Church due to this identity established for him by the early sixteenth-century editors.

The editors of *De rerum natura* before 1563 present Lucretius as a poet rather than a philosopher, and encourage the humanist preference for the study of form independent of

---

<sup>59</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Andreas Navagero (Lyon: Gryphius, 1534).

<sup>60</sup> Cosmo Gordon, *A Bibliography of Lucretius*, p. 131; Simone Fraisse, *L'influence de Lucrèce en France au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, p. 36.

content. Palmer's manuscript study does suggest that humanists in the early sixteenth century were more concerned with the form and the philological analysis of the poem, rather than the philosophical content.<sup>61</sup> The early sixteenth-century editors do not reverse this interest and supply humanists with editions which promote *De rerum natura* for its poetry or even for its moral teaching, appealing to the humanist interest in these areas. Since Lucretian atomism and ideas which questioned Divine Providence and the immortal soul were considered dangerous by the Church, editors did not want to cross the Church or the censors, so in some cases they attempted to assimilate Lucretius to more acceptable humanist areas of study, such as poetry and morality, both of which are inherently tied to the humanist aim of virtue. Prosperi suggests that humanist editors observed a 'dissimulatory code' but this implies that the editors were attempting to conceal their own Lucretian views and to apply the honey in the same way as Lucretius did, in order that the ideas that they share may be transmitted to the readership.<sup>62</sup> I argue that editors and publishers, in particular Aldus, did not want the reader to be inspired by Lucretian philosophy, preferring that the reader is turned further towards Christianity. The editors before 1563 show little engagement with Lucretius's philosophy regarding the soul and memory, and even in Pius's commentary, there is scarce interaction with these ideas other than to dismiss them as foolish or to undermine them with arguments founded in Christian belief. These editors emphasise the 'honey' of the poetry to obscure the 'wormwood' of the philosophy, not so that the reader will absorb Lucretian ideas, but so that the reader will ignore them completely. Thus, they create a complex prism of reading through which Lucretius is interpreted which is composed of a poetic prism, a philological prism, a moral prism, and importantly, a Christian prism. Through these prisms Candido, Pius and Bérault establish an appreciation for Lucretius that

---

<sup>61</sup> Ada Palmer, 'Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance', p. 416.

<sup>62</sup> Prosperi, 'Lucretius in the Italian Renaissance', p. 214.

was more palatable to humanist readers. It must be commented that it is through the aesthetic appreciation for Lucretius's poem that it survives through such a tumultuous period of religious history and *De rerum natura* is not placed on the Index Librorum Prohibitorum.

The possibility of a Lucretian philosophical study or a Lucretian identity coming from the reading *De rerum natura* through these highly prescriptive prisms of reading is challenging to consider, since not only is Lucretius actually separated from Epicurean philosophy in some editions, but the reader is also warned against straying from the prescribed reading of Lucretius. The reception of Lucretius is tarnished in the contemporary view through his association with Epicurus and his own dangerous philosophies, so these editors manipulate the image of Lucretius to repair his reputation and to make him compatible with humanist study. This is not the idea of Lucretius that Montaigne has, and thus, the following sub-chapter will analyse how Lambin presents his critical commentary of *De rerum natura*, how Lambin may be influenced by these early sixteenth-century editors of Lucretius and how he strays from the prescribed path in his edition.

### **Lambin's commentary: A Turning Point?**

The most significant event in the reception history of *De rerum natura* in the sixteenth century is the publication of Lambin's critical commentary in 1563, and it was this edition which Montaigne owned.<sup>63</sup> When the work was published, Denis Lambin (1519-1572) was a respected humanist who was a Professor of Latin and Greek at the Collège Royal. He was educated at the same college as Nicholas Bérault, the Collège du Cardinal Lemoine, which

---

<sup>63</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Denis Lambin (Paris: Roville, 1563/4).

prepared him for his first position as Professor of Latin and Greek at the University of Toulouse in 1545. He took time away from academia to travel Italy with Cardinal de Tournon, who was an ardent humanist but was very critical of heretics.<sup>64</sup> It is likely that his relationship with Cardinal de Tournon contributed to Lambin's strong understanding of the balance between the study of pagan classical works and Christian faith. It was during his travels that Lambin began his research on Lucretius's poem and on his return to France he continued his extensive study of manuscripts of *De rerum natura* and began restoring the poem. Lambin's primary aim was the restoration of the poem, and he secured access to the Quadratus text, which is the key edition upon which all modern versions of the text are based.<sup>65</sup> In terms of the restoration of the text, Lambin's work is the most extensive and the purest rendering of the poem in the sixteenth century. Following Candido, Pius and Navagero, Lambin establishes in his dedication that his primary aim is to produce a restored version of the poem, valuing the form of the poem as important for humanist study. By highlighting the primary aim as restoration of the text, Lambin attempts to subtly assure his reader that it is not at all his aim to circulate the dangerous ideas contained in the poem.

As for whether Lambin is influenced by or follows the techniques of previous editors in his presentation of Lambin, I would first like to examine whether Lambin attempts any separation of Lucretius from Epicurus.

Fraisse argues that Lambin's approach to defending Lucretius 'consiste à désolidariser Lucrèce d'Épicure'.<sup>66</sup> Lambin's method of separating Lucretius and Epicurus is unique in that he does not detach Lucretius from Epicurus in the same way as previous editors. Lambin

---

<sup>64</sup> Linton C. Stevens, 'Denis Lambin: Humanist, Courtier, Philologist and Lecteur Royal', *Studies in the Renaissance*, Vol. 9, 1962, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2857118>> [date accessed: 22 March 2013].

<sup>65</sup> It must be recognised that Lambin accessed the Quadratus through a manuscript copy made by Adrien Turnèbe, who was granted access to the Quadratus edition, which at the time was in the library of the Convent of St. Bertin, near to St. Omer. See Simone Fraisse, *L'influence de Lucrèce en France au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, p. 55.

<sup>66</sup> Fraisse, *L'influence de Lucrèce au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, p. 56.

recognises that it is impossible to completely separate the two, as Pius attempts, but he does try to pass any criticism of Lucretius's doctrines on to Epicurus. Lambin writes in his Dedication to Charles IX:

At Lucretius animorum immortalitatem oppugnat, deorum providentiam negat,  
religiones omnes tollit, summum bonum in voluptate ponit. Sed haec Epicuri, quem  
sequitur Lucretius, non Lucretii culpa est.<sup>67</sup>

(But Lucretius attacks the immortality of the soul, he denies Divine Providence, he removes all religions, he claims that pleasure is the highest good. But these ideas are from Epicurus, whom Lucretius follows; it is not the fault of Lucretius.; [my translation])

Thus, Lambin does include Lucretius in his criticism of Epicurean philosophy. Where Pius attaches the dangerous doctrines to Epicurus only, Lambin acknowledges that Lucretius also opposes Christian teaching ('Lucretius [...] oppugnat [...]']). Lambin does however shift the blame away from Lucretius to some extent as he writes 'non Lucretii culpa est' ('it is not the fault of Lucretius'). In this way, Lambin proposes his first defence of Lucretius, presenting him as innocent in the corrupt ideas that he expresses in his poetry and portraying him as a helpless follower of Epicurean ideas. Lambin uses this defence of Lucretius to enter into the debate whether the study of Lucretius's poetic form could corrupt the faith of a Christian reader by its pagan content. Lambin deals with this debate by defending the elegant form of the poem, which he argues is worthy of both humanist study and admiration. He centres the reader's attention on the aesthetic value of the poetry:

---

<sup>67</sup> Lambin in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin, sig. f. a3.

Poema quidem ipsum propter sententias a religione nostra alienas, nihilominus poema est. tantumne? immo vero poema venustum, poema praeclarum, poema omnibus ingenii luminibus distinctum, insignitum, atque illustratum.<sup>68</sup>

(Even though the poem itself is alien to our religion because of its beliefs, it is no less a poem. Just a poem? Rather it is an elegant poem, a wonderful poem, a poem highlighted, recognized and praised by all wise men'; [my translation]).

Lambin does distract the reader's attention away from the content here and eulogizes over Lucretius's poetic ability. Indeed, his rhetorical question appropriates the reader's voice, encouraging the reader to focus on Lucretius's verses rather than his philosophies. In 1563, the humanist study of classical pagan texts was portrayed as contributing to the religious tensions and the dire state of France. Lambin himself recognises this negative slant in his dedication to Charles IX, as he writes:

Iam vero quod nos malevoli quidam homines insimulant, quasi omnia reip. Mala,  
quae his perditissimis temporibus vidimus, a litteris, et litteratis orta sint, ut tibi  
persuadeant litteras ex tota Gallia esse eiiciendas.<sup>69</sup>

(Now certain malicious men truly accuse us [humanists], as if all the ills of the Republic, all these bankrupt times that we have seen are born out of letters and the study of letters; they are convincing you that letters should be cast out of the whole of France; [my translation]).

In an era in which France was divided by religious tensions and the Wars of Religion which began in 1563, the same year as the publication of Lambin's commentary, Lambin needs to defend his commentary and the study of Lucretius. Lambin's dedication is therefore a plea to

---

<sup>68</sup> Lambin in Lucretius *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin sig. f. a3.

<sup>69</sup> Lambin in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin, sig. f. e3.

Charles IX that humanist study is focussed on the form independent of the content, and thus it is a defence not only of Lucretius's poem but also of its study as a humanist text, and indeed, a defence of this style of Christian humanism. Lambin argues that Christian humanists are no less Christian for reading Lucretius, using a rhetorical question to highlight the improbability of the suggestion:

At Epicurus et Lucretius impii fuerunt. Quid tum postea? num iccirco nos quoque, qui eos legimus, impii sumus?<sup>70</sup>

(But Epicurus and Lucretius were impious. What of this then? Are we who read them also, for that reason, impious? [my translation]).

This echoes the sentiment expressed by Pius and Aldus, of placing trust in the Christian reader to see that the Christian truth is more persuasive than the false theories of Lucretius. In this sense, Lambin follows the approach taken by the cautious editors before 1563. Hence, Lambin establishes a Christian prism of reading for Lucretius, which inherently undermines the philosophical content of *De rerum natura*. Moreover, Lambin adds to this defence of the reading of Lucretius by stating that if there are concerns about the study of Lucretius as a pagan text, then there ought to be concerns regarding other classical writers, for example, the immoral characters in Homer, Aristotle's ideas on the immortal soul and the pederasty in Plato.<sup>71</sup> Whereas previous editors attempted to assimilate Lucretius with other respected humanist poets by highlighting positive aspects of Lucretius, such as the morals which could be taken from his poetry, Lambin adopts a more counter-attacking approach here and assimilates other authors to Lucretius. Lambin finds fault in these other highly respected classical writers who were at the centre of humanist study and comments that humanists have

---

<sup>70</sup> Lambin in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin, sig. f. a3.

<sup>71</sup> Lambin, in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin, sig. f. a4.

been able to enjoy their texts for their form without being corrupted by their content, and questions why it should be any different for Lucretius. It is impossible for humanists to consider classical study without the texts of Aristotle, Homer and Plato, and thus, Lambin convinces the reader that Lucretius must be treated in the same way. Hence, Lambin's 'negative' attribution approach succeeds in assimilating Lucretius more than the 'positive' attribution approach of previous authors. When Lambin combines this approach with praise for Lucretius that extends to explaining that Virgil and Horace were influenced by and borrowed from him, Lambin successfully assimilates Lucretius to acceptable humanist study, and makes him a more palatable classical writer who can be more freely discussed.<sup>72</sup>

As Lambin ensures that Christian readers can safely study and discuss Lucretius, he also assures the reader of his own Christian identity, thus identifying himself with the reader and showing that he has trust in himself as well as in the reader that they will not allow their faith or morals to be harmed by the study of the text.<sup>73</sup> In this sense, Lambin follows earlier editors of *De rerum natura*, assuring the reader that his edition will be a Christian analysis of the poem, in the same way that Pius writes 'Omnia ortodoxe fidei subjicio' ('I submit everything to orthodox faith') at the end of his dedication.<sup>74</sup> This confirms that Lambin's commentary of *De rerum natura* does come from a Christian reading, and thus, Lambin contributes to the Christian prism of reading of *De rerum natura* which can be seen in Montaigne's annotations and in the flyleaves of his edition.

---

<sup>72</sup> Lambin in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin, sig. f. e1v, Lambin writes: 'ex quo Virgilius & Horatius non solum dimidiatos, sed integros saepe versus mutuari solent'; ('from which Virgil and Horace not only borrowed some lines, but they often borrowed whole lines'; [my translation]).

<sup>73</sup> Lambin in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin, sig. f. e3, Lambin writes: 'religionem autem nullam aliam neque colo neque amplector, nisi quam à Domino nostro Jesu Christo Dei immortalis filio, generis humani servatore, ac liberatore edocitus sum'; ('I embrace no other creed nor religion than what I have learned from our Lord Jesus Christ, the immortal son of God, the saviour of the human race and the liberator'; [my translation]).

<sup>74</sup> Pius in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Pius, sig. a3v.

Lambin is also influenced by Bérault's approach to assimilating Lucretius to humanist interests as he praises Lucretius for his moral teachings. Fraisse argues that Lambin 'suit la voie indiquée par Bérault'.<sup>75</sup> Lambin does celebrate the moral lessons in Lucretius's poem regarding tranquillity of the soul and resisting the passions of our desires. Of course, both of these aspects of supposed Lucretian moral teaching are rooted in Epicureanism, but Lambin separates them from Epicurean moralism and harmonizes them with Christian moral teaching. Thus, Lambin attempts to harmonize Lucretius's "lessons" with Christianity. In this way, Lucretius's philosophical ideas are again pushed aside and the positive moral teachings are brought into focus as Lambin adds another aspect to the honey which obscures the wormwood.

Lambin uses all of the techniques that were used by editors in the sixteenth century to make Lucretius a more acceptable source of learning to a humanist reader. Although Lambin does propose a Christian reading of Lucretius in his dedications, he does engage with the philosophical content of *De rerum natura* in his commentary, particularly in relation to the soul and memory.

Greenblatt argues that Lambin's dedication comes with a warning to 'sing the praises of the poem but remain silent about its ideas'.<sup>76</sup> While Lambin does encourage the reader to appreciate the poetry, he does not remain silent about its ideas. Lambin writes this in his dedication to the King as it is the correct approach to take regarding these dangerous ideas. He did not want people to actively discuss these ideas in order to bring about a change in belief or a different world view, but it is likely that he was open to the discussion of the ideas, albeit in a safe, humanist context and among like-minded, educated readers who read from a Christian humanist perspective. In his commentary, Lambin does tackle the Lucretian verses

---

<sup>75</sup> Fraisse, *L'influence de Lucrèce en France au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, p.58.

<sup>76</sup> Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the Renaissance Began*, p. 256.

on the soul and memory, and he does speculate about the meanings of Lucretius's philosophical views and atomism. Lambin interacts with ideas on Lucretian identity as he writes:

NAM CUM RESPICIAS] [...] poterat enim quispiam ita dicere: quâ fieri potest, ut alius ego vel multis antè seculis fuerit, vel multis pòst seculis nascatur ex eadem materi? Huic igitur respondet non esse incredibile, si retro spectemus praeteritio temporis spatium immensum, et si consideremus materiae motus varios, et multiplices, primordial rerum, ex quibus constat hodie homo aliquis singularis, eodem ordine et olim posita fuisse, quo nunc sunt ordine collocate: et posthac eodem collocatum iri. Negabit tamen infrà etiam si hoc detur, eundem, qui nunc sit, aut olim fuisse, aut posthac futurum: quia scilicet vitæ interruption facta sit per mortem.<sup>77</sup>

(‘For when you look back] Anyone might ask, ‘Can it be that another me, made from the same matter, existed many centuries ago, or may be born many centuries later?’ Lucretius therefore replies that if we look back over the vast expanse of time past, and if we consider the many and various movements of matter, it is not unbelievable that the basic elements of which one man is made today were, centuries ago, placed in the same order as that in which they now are, and will be hereafter. However, even if you grant that, below he denies that the man who now is, the one that was and the one that will come to be are the same, because there has been a rupture of life by death.; [my translation]).

---

<sup>77</sup> Lambin in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin, p. 252 Lambin is referring to III, l 854-8 ‘nam cum respicias immensi temporis omne praeteritum spatium, tum motus materiai multimodi quam sint, favile hoc adcredere possis, | semina saepe in eodem, ut nunc sunt, ordine posta | haec eadem, quibus e nunc nos sumus, ante fuisse’; (‘For when you look back upon all the past expanse of measureless time, and think how various are the motions of matter, you may easily come to believe that these same seeds of which now we consist have been often before placed in the same arrangement they now are in’), p. 254-5.

This is the deepest engagement with Lucretius in relation to memory and identity up until this point in the sixteenth century. Lambin explains the Lucretian idea that atoms which form our body and soul separate after our death and can re-form, by chance, into the same combination of atoms. This shows that Lambin is willing to develop and discuss Lucretian atomistic theories on the soul and the construction and destruction of identity. Fraisse argues that Lambin is not touched by the philosophical content at all in his commentary, as she states ‘*De la philosophie de Lucrèce, Lambin ne retient rien*’, but here, he certainly does engage in the more challenging content, asking himself and the reader the question which Lucretius’s philosophy poses.<sup>78</sup> To some extent, Lambin’s use of a rhetorical question enters his reader into dialogue with Lucretius, and encourages them to participate in a philosophical discussion and ponder the possibility for themselves, but equally, one can argue that Lambin co-opts the reader’s voice here, in order to pose the question for them.<sup>79</sup>

In Pius’s approach to this section, he merely provides the synonyms for the expressions used by Lucretius. Lambin does not employ this philological screen in his commentary and by engaging with Lucretius here, he opens the door a crack for others to discuss these issues and places a foundation on which Montaigne may build his discussion.<sup>80</sup>

Whilst some scholars believe that Lambin’s only service to Lucretian study was the restoration of the text,<sup>81</sup> he must also be credited with this “opening up” of Lucretius’s poem to philosophical questioning without fear of reproach. John O’Brien discusses Lambin’s approach to Lucretius’s poem in ‘*Le Lucrèce de Denys Lambin: entre revindication et prudence*’ in which he establishes that Lambin’s cautiously but determinedly unlocked the

---

<sup>78</sup> Fraisse, *L'influence de Lucrèce en France au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, p. 58.

<sup>79</sup> Indeed, it is on this section of Lambin’s edition that Montaigne makes some of his most revealing notes regarding memory and identity, as this thesis will discuss in the following chapter.

<sup>80</sup> Pius in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Pius, 1515, p. 121. Pius simply explains the definitions of the words without developing the meaning of the theory.

<sup>81</sup> Fraisse, *L'influence de Lucrèce en France au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, p. 58.

philosophical aspects of *De rerum natura*.<sup>82</sup> Élodie Argaud also suggests that it is Lambin's edition of *De rerum natura* and in particular, Lambin's commentary, which allows the reader to engage with the philosophical content of the poem, in particular Lucretius's arguments concerning the soul.<sup>83</sup> I concede that Lambin's engagement is not consistent and there are opportunities for philosophical discussion which Lambin glosses over, giving only the philological explanation and the definition. A key example of this appears in Lambin's commentary to Lucretius's verses later in Book III, in which Lucretius explains that after death, the present becomes the past and is forgotten; Lucretius writes: 'brevis hic est fructus homullis; | iam fuerit neque post umquam recovare licebit' ('Short enjoyment is given to mankind; soon it will be gone and none will ever be able to recall it'; *De rerum natura*, III, 914-5). Lambin gives only a philological explanation, using the shield of the study of language to protect his and the Christian reader's faith from the blows from Lucretius's atoms and philosophy.

Lambin does explain in his dedications to each book that his research is philological rather than philosophical, which attempts to justify his lack of engagement with aspects of the text. Moreover, Lambin establishes in these dedications that he is critical of Lucretius's theories, for example in his dedication to his old student, Ronsard, he reaffirms that Lucretian philosophy is 'delira, et in multis impia' ('delirious and in many places, impious').<sup>84</sup> The reader is reminded that Lambin is ultimately against the philosophy of the text and that they should follow Lambin by reading from a Christian perspective. This is evident as Lambin discusses the creation of identity in Lucretius but applies an interpretation from Lactantius

---

<sup>82</sup> John O'Brien, 'Le Lucrèce de Denys Lambin: entre revendication et prudence,' in *La Renaissance de Lucrèce*, ed. Emmanuel Naya (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2010), pp. 35-46.

<sup>83</sup> Élodie Argaud, 'L'autre moitié du projet : enjeux philosophiques de l'édition du De rerum natura : Lombin et la dissensio sur le corps de l'âme', in *La Renaissance de Lucrèce*, ed. Emmanuel Naya (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2010), pp. 47-58.

<sup>84</sup> Lambin in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin, p. 99.

Firmianus from *De vero cultu*. Pius also uses Lactantius to undermine Lucretian arguments in his commentary; in this sense, there remain strong signs of a Christian reading in Lambin's commentary. Lambin uses Lactantius to explain that the creation of beings comes from heaven rather than from the collisions of atoms that clash when they fall from the sky, as Lucretius intends to express. Lambin addresses Germain Vaillant in his dedicatory letter to Book III, and gives a non-Epicurean gloss to the following passage from Book II: ‘cedit item retro, de terra quod fuit ante, | in terras, et quod missumst ex aetheris oris, | id rursum caeli fellatum templa receptant’ ('That which also came from earth, to earth returns back again, and what fell from the borders of ether, that is again brought back, and the regions of heaven receive it; *De rerum natura*, II, 999-1001). The term ‘caeli’ is manipulated by Lactantius and Lambin, Christianizing Lucretius's theory and attempting to portray a harmonization of Lucretius and Christian teaching.<sup>85</sup> The difference between Pius using Lactantius and Lambin using him here is that the reader after 1563 is more prepared to challenge and question the Christianization of Lucretius, as Montaigne does, albeit in private, as he points out that Lambin and Lactantius elicit a meaning that is un-Epicurean ('sensum aliquem non epicureum').<sup>86</sup> Montaigne is aware of this unfaithful rendering of Lucretius in relation to the creation of beings here, and he clearly recognises the ways in which editors may manipulate Lucretius to alternative ends, which in turn shows that Montaigne is conscious of his own prism of reading *De rerum natura*.

---

<sup>85</sup> Lambin in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin, p. 191. Lambin's commentary on this passage reads ‘Quid quod tanta vis est veritas, ut Lucretius ipse libro superior animos esse immortaleis, iisque in caelum, unde profecti sunt, redditum patere imprudens atque adeo invitus fateatur? Quid enim illa sibi aliud volunt?’ ‘Why! What force there is in truth that Lucretius himself, inadvertently and most unwillingly says in the previous Book that souls are immortal, and that the way is open to them back to the heaven from which they came. For what else can these lines mean?’ (trans. by M.A. Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 115).

<sup>86</sup> Montaigne's annotation in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin, 1563, sig. after flyleaf k (the recto of the second After flyleaf); M.A. Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius: A transcription and study of the manuscript, notes and pen-marks* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1998), p. 114. (II, 2, 500).

There is a tension between Lambin fully analysing the aspects of the text which discuss identity and the soul in a heretical way, and Lambin's Christian faith and duty to provide a Christian perspective. Lambin is struggling with the concept of a two-truth world and cannot find the correct balance, with his scales tipping towards the Christian side more often than settling in the centre. Lambin's edition does come at a time when philosophical and theological concerns often overlapped and it is this tension between philosophy and religion with which Lambin wrestles in his commentary. Montaigne's prism of reading *De rerum natura* is affected by this tension and it affects Montaigne's views on identity and memory as the following chapter will examine.

The religious tension experienced by Lambin also explains his use of philological screens to avoid the analysis of Lucretian doctrines. Let us consider a key example from Book III concerning memory, as Lucretius suggests that even if our matter was brought together again after death and we are re-formed, it will not concern us, since our memory has been snapped by the rupture of death. Lambin does provide a clear explanation of the terms used by Lucretius but does not discuss the possibility of the truth of this philosophy. Lambin writes:

NEC SI MATERIAM] hoc dicit. Nec si post obitum nostrum ex eadem materia, ex qua constamus, alias homo nascatur, ita ut videamur quodammodo revixisse: non (inquam) hoc factum quicquam ad nos pertineat, cum semel repetétia nostri fuerit interrupta.<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>87</sup> Lambin in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin, p. 250.

This concerns a passage from Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, Book III, 847-851 'Nec si materiam nostrum collegerit aetas | post obitum, rursumque redegerit, ut sita nunc est, | atque iterum nobis fuerint data lumina vitae, | pertineat quidquam tamen ad nos id quoque factum, | interrupta semel cum sit repetentia nostra'; ('Even if time should gather together our matter after death and bring it back again as it is now placed, and if once more the light of life should be given to us, yet it would not matter one bit to us that even this had been done, when the recollection of ourselves has once been broken asunder'), p. 254-55.

(Even if matter] he says this. Nor if after our death, from the same material of which we consist, another man is born, so that we seem to be alive again; once this is done (I say) nothing of this being belongs to us, since there has been a breach in our memory; [my translation]).

His commentary here is not accompanied by a Christian argument to prove Lucretius wrong. Earlier in Book III, however, in the introduction to Lucretius's section on his philosophy about the mortal soul, Lambin does attack Lucretian doctrine on the creation and destruction of identity as he writes:

NUNC AGE NATIVOS, &c] Nunc aggreditur ad probandum animos, seu animas (iam enim alterutrum pro eodem usurpatur) esse nativos: & ita, mortaleis. Quicquid enim ortum est, necessariò aliquando interibit. ex quo illud Xenophanis, æquè impios esse, qui deos natos esse dicerent, & levia: neque tamen possunt vlla afferri firmiora. Quòd si essent firmissima: nihil apud nos valerent tamen religione Christiana imbutos. Vetat enim pietas cùm in plerisque aliis, tūm in hoc maximè, audire Epicurum.<sup>88</sup>

(Listen now, ... are born etc.] Now he acts to prove that minds or souls (either of the two alternatives for this word have already been used with the same meaning) are born and thus they are mortal. For whatever is risen in birth will be necessarily lost at one time in the future. This is from Xenophanes, as well as being impious, they say that we are born of the Gods: not however so that they can be made more firm. Even if they are very firm arguments, none among them would be worthy of our Christian religion. It forbids many things for being impious, especially in this case, the teachings of Epicurus [my translation])

---

<sup>88</sup> Lambin in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin, p. 220.

This concerns a passage from Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, Book III, 417-8, 'Nunc age, nativos animantibus et mortalis esse animos animasque levis ut noscere possis [...]'] ('Listen now: that you may be able to recognize that the minds and light spirits of living creatures are born and are mortal'), p. 220-21.

Thus, Lambin reminds the reader that their piety forbids them from listening to Lucretius's philosophy on the soul and identity, and shows, in a manner similar to previous editors, that Lucretius's arguments are weak in comparison with the Christian truth. The Christian perspective is established at the beginning of the section, putting Lucretius's ideas which follow the introduction in the context of a Christian reading, which allows Lambin to explain Lucretius's philosophy on memory in the commentary here. Furthermore, Lambin gives a thorough explanation of his use of the word 'repetentia' rather than 'retinentia' in relation to the lines beginning 'Nec si materiam [...]' *(De rerum natura, III, 847-851)*. Montaigne follows Lambin's use of 'repetentia' as he cites this section of Lucretius in the *Apologie de Raimond Sebond* and importantly, Montaigne follows Lambin's explanation of the term as memory, rather than 'retinentia' which Lambin explains as he writes 'Omnino *repetentia* mihi magis placet quam *repentia*' ('I prefer *repetentia*, which to me fits better than *repentia*'); [my translation]).<sup>89</sup>

The lack of consistency in Lambin's approach suggests a tension between a discovery of a new appreciation for Lucretian philosophy and the possibilities which it enables and the prescribed, Christian identity which Lambin knows is correct in the eyes of the Church. There are however significant occasions in Lambin's commentary when he does escape the religious restraints which had prevented engagement with Lucretius before his edition. One of these instances is Lambin's closest engagement with Lucretius in relation to the creation and destruction of identity and the idea of memory which comes in Book III as Lambin includes himself in the discussion, personally entering into dialogue with Lucretius and adopting the role of the man that Lucretius describes.

---

<sup>89</sup> Lambin in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin, p. 250.

NEC VIDET IN VERA] nec videt, exempli gratia, Dionysius Lambinus, qui indignatur se mortalem esse natum, suamque conditionem deplorar, non videt (inquam) in vera morte nullum alium fore Dionysium Lambinum, qui vivus & stans possit se mortuum, & iacentem lugere, &c<sup>90</sup>

(He does not see] for example, Denys Lambin, who resents that he was born mortal and does not see does not (I say) see, that in real death there will be no other Denys Lambin who can stand there alive and lament that he is lying there dead; and so on; [my translation]).

This interaction between Lambin and Lucretius is similar to the way in which Montaigne plays with the ideas of Lucretius in his annotations, and it is Lambin who inspires this type of engagement with Lucretius from Montaigne. This is not the first mention of ‘alius Lambinus’ as Lambin does toy with this Lucretian concept in his commentary a few pages previously, but this interaction with the philosophical content of Lucretius paves the way for future discussion. Lambin has opened the discussion with an introduction proclaiming his Christian perspective and by ensuring the reader that his own faith will not be shaken by Lucretius’s verse which allows Lambin to discuss the philosophical content of the poem here.<sup>91</sup>

Although Lambin does disagree with Lucretius’s philosophy that there will not be another version of ourselves which could remember our previous lives or mourn our death, it is interesting that Lambin enters into this discussion in such a direct way, which is not seen in previous commentaries or editions. In this way, Lambin shows that it is acceptable to discuss and interpret the philosophical content of *De rerum natura* in relation to our own lives, and this approach facilitates later discussion of Lucretius’s philosophy by Montaigne.

---

<sup>90</sup> Lambin in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin, p. 254. Lambin comments here refers to III, 885-6 ‘nec videt in vera nullum fore morte alium se qui possit vivus sibi se lugere peremptum’ (he does not see that in real death that there will be no other self that could live to bewail his perished self).

<sup>91</sup> Lambin in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin, p. 251.

## Obert van Giffen

Lambin's 1563 commentary prompted the publication of another annotated edition in 1565/6 by Obert van Giffen (Gifanius).<sup>92</sup> Giffen was a Dutch lawyer, rather than a scholar like Lambin, and the text of *De rerum natura* in his edition is a very close copy of Lambin's text. Although Giffen claimed that his work was a collaboration with a certain 'homo anglus' who had shared his notes with him, this English gentleman, named Anthony Goldingamus by Giffen, did not exist, and the work is a clear plagiarism of Lambin's commentary.<sup>93</sup> Giffen's text does not include a commentary, but does include some notes on Lucretius's poem which are worthy of analysis. Gordon explains that Giffen was an opportunist who provided brief notes on the poem, appealing to this aspect of public demand, and who also ensured that his octavo edition was more portable and more attractive than Lambin's quarto.<sup>94</sup> Thus, Giffen does increase the circulation of the poem, but as to whether he contributed to the philosophical study of the poem, I do not believe that he did.

Let us consider the contents of Giffen's edition: the dedication to Janos Zsambok (Johannes Sambucus), a Hungarian humanist scholar, an 'Idem candido et erudito lectore' and a *Lucretii vita* written by Giffen but closely following previous biographies by Crinitus and Lambin. First, it is important to recognise that in Giffen's 'Idem ad lectorem', there is praise for previous editors of Lucretius, with Giffen recognising the work of Pius and Lambin's commentary. This praise is tinged with criticism as Giffen highlights that despite Pius's copious notes, the edition remains incomplete. Equally, Giffen does praise Lambin's

---

<sup>92</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Obert van Giffen (Antwerp: Plantin, 1565/6).

<sup>93</sup> Obert van Giffen in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Giffen, sig. \*\*1.

Lambin responded to Giffen's plagiarism in the preface of his 1570 edition of *De rerum natura*, accusing Giffen of copying from his edition without restraint. Cosmo Gordon discusses this in more detail in his *Bibliography of Lucretius*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>94</sup> Cosmo Gordon, *A Bibliography of Lucretius*, p. 79.

collaboration with Adrien Turnèbe and Jean Daurat, but writes that Lambin himself would concede that he does not give as pure a reading of Lucretius's poem as he should have.<sup>95</sup> Giffen promises a purer rendering of the text, despite the fact that he has copied Lambin.<sup>96</sup> Thus, Giffen emphasises the importance of the restoration of the text to the reader. It is a text which Giffen apparently values for humanist study due to the language of the poet, but one must be cynical in recognising that Giffen was seeking to make a profit from his publication, and although he portrays himself as a humanist, it is fair to say that he most probably did not appreciate the text in the same way as the contributors to the editions before him, such as Lambin and Béault. Giffen does, however, highlight the restoration of the text as his primary aim, and in this sense, he is similar to editors before him, who value the restoration of texts written in elegant form. Giffen's other reason for publishing the text is explained in his dedication and in his letter to the reader, as he presents *De rerum natura* as a text which can be used to strengthen one's Christian faith. In this way, Giffen follows Aldus' example by preaching that the reader can attain a clearer understanding of the Christian truth by challenging this truth with inferior arguments, such as Lucretian atomism. Giffen also follows Lambin here as he suggests that there is no possibility that reading pagan philosophical views could harm a Christian reader's morals since Lucretian philosophy is so easily proved wrong by Christian doctrine. The Dutch lawyer writes: 'Quid habet quaeso periculi, cum nullo negotio refelli posset'<sup>97</sup> echoing Lambin's view that Lucretius's arguments pale in comparison to the Christian truth, thus there is no threat to the foundations of Christian faith. In creating a Christian element to the prism of reading of Lucretius, Giffen prevents a discussion on Lucretian philosophy, allowing the reader to only consider atomism and Lucretian theories on memory and identity in terms of Christian teaching. Furthermore,

---

<sup>95</sup> Giffen in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Giffen, sig. \*9v-\*\*1.

<sup>96</sup> Giffen, in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Giffen, sig. \*\*1.

<sup>97</sup> Giffen, in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Giffen, sig. \*4 'What has happened to the danger, I ask, when he would be able to be refuted without any difficulty' [my translation].

Giffen, like Aldus, manipulates the didactic meaning of *De rerum natura* from Lucretius's original idea of encouraging the reader to swallow the wormwood of his philosophy, to a Christian reading of the poem which undermines the wormwood to re-assert the truth of Christian doctrine. Giffen establishes that Lucretius's denial of the immortality of the soul and of Divine Providence are 'absurdissimam' ('most absurd') in his Preface and he encourages the reader to recognise that they are unfounded and illogical, and moreover, that they cannot possibly be seen as a threat to Christian belief.<sup>98</sup> In Giffen, we can see the mixing of the honey and the wormwood in a single sentence as he criticises Lucretius's impious verses but combines this critique with praise as he writes 'Neque vero que in hoc scriptore sunt omnia vel impia sunt vel inepta quin praecclara in eo continentur multa, multa lectione et observatione dignissima' ('But in truth, in this writer there are all things which are impious or absurd, yet also in this work there are many readings and many observations which are very noteworthy'; [my translation]).<sup>99</sup> Giffen shapes the reading experience by telling the reader to appreciate the honey of the poetry and the intelligent observations but to dismiss the wormwood of Lucretius's philosophy which is impious. He does not overemphasise the aesthetic value of Lucretius's verses in order to obfuscate or even 'bracket off' the philosophy contained in *De rerum natura*, but he corrupts the understanding of Lucretius by turning him into a poet who can be used to teach the Christian truth by the weakness of his own atomic theories. There is no forum for the discussion of Lucretius's philosophical content other than in relation to religion and Christianity. As much as Giffen plagiarised Lambin's edition, he does not follow Lambin's long notes which do enter into discussion about Lucretius's philosophy in relation to creation and destruction of identity and the immortality of the soul. Giffen blocks the possibility of an open, safe forum for a

---

<sup>98</sup> Giffen in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Giffen, sig. \*3v.

<sup>99</sup> Giffen, in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Giffen, sig. \*4v.

philosophical discussion of Lucretius's atomism in relation to memory and identity by encasing Lucretius's philosophy in a Christian frame. Although Giffen does increase the transmission of *De rerum natura* in the second half of the sixteenth century, I agree with Munro that Giffen 'brought nothing new' and I would go further and state that his edition is in fact, a step back for the development of the philosophy of Lucretius in the sixteenth century.<sup>100</sup> Giffen should not be credited with the development of attitudes towards Lucretius's philosophy; this was progress made by Lambin.

## Conclusion

In modern scholarship, the poetry of *De rerum natura* takes a secondary place in study, with Lucretius's philosophy being the primary topic of interest in the poem. In the first half of the sixteenth century however, the elegant poetry of Lucretius's poem was closely studied whilst his philosophy was passed over in silence by the editors who presented the text. Contrary to Lucretius's own intentions, the honey did not encourage the swallowing of the wormwood of the ideas; rather it was emphasised and added to by the editors in order to completely obscure the wormwood. Editors established a poetic prism, a philological prism, a moral prism and a Christian prism for reading *De rerum natura*, each of which shaped the reading experience to divert attention away from the dangerous philosophical content of the poem. These early editors moulded a particular representation of Lucretius in the collective consciousness, and established a collective memory of Lucretius as a heretical poet.

---

<sup>100</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura libri sex*, trans. by H. A. J. Munro (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell &co., 1886).

Denis Lambin's commentary marks a turning point in the editing and publication of *De rerum natura*, as he transformed the previous approach by engaging with Lucretius's philosophy in relation to the soul, atoms, identity and memory. It is true that Lambin employed the techniques used by the early sixteenth-century editors, notably following Béralt's letter and Pius prefaces, and he did read his Lucretius through the prisms of reading established by earlier editors. Lambin's use of the techniques employed by previous editors, such as highlighting the aesthetic appeal of Lucretius verses, allowed him the freedom to discuss Lucretian philosophy in a safe, humanist context. Lambin also used these techniques since the socio-religious climate had not changed significantly, and certain codes needed to be observed to ensure the publication of his commentary. It is through the use of these dissimulatory techniques that Lambin ensured the reputation of *De rerum natura* as a text which humanists could safely study, as one can see in his commentary.

The French commentator does emphasise the honey of the poetry and he does add to the mixture to obscure the wormwood. I do not suggest that Lambin followed Lucretius's idea of encouraging the reader to swallow the wormwood via drinking the honey, but in comparison with other sixteenth-century editors of *De rerum natura* Lambin stands out for engaging with the philosophy of the soul and of memory and identity in a way which opens the door for his reader, Montaigne, to see that it is possible and interesting to engage with Lucretius on a philosophical level. Although Lambin attempted to dissimulate the philosophy and overpowered it with Christian doctrine and emphasised the honey to divert attention from it, by shining a light on atoms and memory in certain cases, Lambin let this discussion out into a public forum and uncovered it where it had previously been hidden.

Thus, the taste of the wormwood seeps through in Lambin's work due to his engagement, and from Montaigne's notes on his copy, we can see that Montaigne does taste the wormwood, and does not disregard it as previous readers were encouraged to do by

previous editors, nor does he apply a Christian ‘antidote’. Instead, Montaigne is inspired by Lambin’s commentary to interact with Lucretius.

Although the dedicatory letters and the warning to the reader appear to bolster the barriers built by previous editors and applies a poetic prism and a Christian prism to the reading of *De rerum natura*, Lambin’s edition opens the door just a crack for Lucretius’s philosophy through his engagement and importantly, his clear explanations and definitions of Lucretius’s terms which are not consistently challenged by Christian doctrine. As this door is opened and the restraints of the poetic prism and Christian prism are loosened, the reader is struck by Lucretius’s atoms which sneak through and a philosophical reading of Lucretius is made possible.

Lambin shows his reader how to engage with the philosophy of the poem by asking himself and the reader hypothetical Lucretian questions and by playing out the consequences of Lucretian philosophy. This is most clear as Lambin’s personal engagement inspires Montaigne, who follows Lambin’s comment regarding an ‘alius Lambinus’ by contemplating his own ‘alius montanus’.<sup>101</sup> Lambin creates this forum for discussion of Lucretius’s philosophy which was discouraged by previous and later editors, significantly Giffen warns against philosophical engagement with the text. As Lambin opens the discussion in his commentary and establishes that it is safe to do so, he builds a new foundation for reading, studying and thinking Lucretius. This reading which Lambin’s text enables also allows the development of Montaigne’s own Lucretian-inflected philosophical identity and it is Lambin’s discussion of the content as well as the form which is mirrored by Montaigne as he

---

<sup>101</sup> Montaigne in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin, sig. After flyleaf n (the verso of the third after flyleaf); M. A. Screech, *Montaigne’s Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 134.

describes Lucretius's work: 'Je ne dicts pas que c'est bien dire, je dicts que c'est bien penser' (III, 5, 873).

Lambin alters the scene of reading and provides a new prism of reading: a philosophical prism. Giffen's edition takes a step back in relation to the development of a Lucretian philosophical identity but by this stage, Lambin has opened the door and established a new prism of reading, which offers an alternative to the more conservative prisms of reading to which Giffen returns.

Lambin's engagement therefore establishes a new philosophical prism of reading and thus enables the creation of a Lucretian philosophical identity. It is at this scene of reading where Montaigne engages with Lucretius to develop his own understanding of the relationship between memory and identity.

## Chapter Two

### Montaigne's notes on memory and identity in his copy of *De rerum natura*

#### Introduction

This chapter analyses Montaigne's notes on the flyleaves of his copy of *De rerum natura* and his annotations throughout Lucretius's poem. I acknowledge the research and diligent transcriptions of Montaigne's copy by M.A. Screech and Alain Legros.<sup>102</sup> Whilst both scholars have reproduced Montaigne's annotations and flyleaves, I will engage with several key instances of Montaigne's interactions with the text, particularly concerning the topic of memory. The first section of this chapter will introduce Montaigne's notes, examining the Latin hand and French hand evident in Montaigne's copy. The second section will analyse important notes and annotations made by Montaigne on passages which are relevant to identity and memory, and which inform Montaigne's Lucretian-inflected approach to memory as a foundation for identity. I will examine in particular Montaigne's understanding of the words that Lucretius uses for memory: *retinentia* and *repetentia*. I will analyse Montaigne's notes on Book III of *De rerum natura*, in which Lucretius discusses the mind and the soul, and attempts to prove the mortality of the soul and the folly of the fear of death. These are three key themes which Montaigne discusses in the *Essais*, and he draws significantly from this section of Lucretius's poem; thus his annotations and notes on the flyleaves on these particular verses not only illustrate how Montaigne read his Lucretius, but how Montaigne's response to Lucretius forms in his reading and is later developed in the

---

<sup>102</sup> M.A. Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1998); Alain Legros, *Montaigne manuscrit* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2010).

writing of the *Essais*. Montaigne's process of reading and engaging with his Lucretius provides an insight into the process of this transformation from reader to writer.

### **Montaigne's annotations on *De rerum natura***

perlegi <sup>16 · octob ·</sup> 1564 / 31 / <sup>103</sup>

The *perlegi* above, which notes the date when Montaigne finished reading *De rerum natura*, appears on the final printed page of Montaigne's copy and is a vital piece of evidence confirming that the copy did indeed belong to Montaigne, who would indeed have been aged 31 on the 16<sup>th</sup> October 1564. After a diligent dating process of the publication of Lambin's edition, Screech explains that Montaigne would have received his copy 'hot off the press'.<sup>104</sup> Montaigne's copy contains a letter to King Charles IX dated 1<sup>st</sup> November 1563 and, moreover, it contains a list of *Errata sic emendanda*, which Screech suggests would have taken months to produce, thus proving C.A. Gordon's judgement that Lambin's edition was published early in 1564. Therefore, Montaigne took around ten months to obtain, read and annotate his copy in Latin.<sup>105</sup> The flyleaves of Montaigne's copy are covered with Latin comments and the text of Lucretius's poem and Lambin's commentary is annotated in Latin and French, and is also marked with pen-strokes.

There is a calculated structure to Montaigne's Latin notes. The first two front flyleaves contain Montaigne's philological notes; Montaigne first wrote on Front Flyleaf b,

---

<sup>103</sup> Montaigne's copy of Lucretius *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin 1563, p. 559; M.A. Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 409. '16 octob' is superscript because Montaigne writes the date just above the *perlegi*.

<sup>104</sup> M.A. Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p.9.

<sup>105</sup> M.A. Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 9-10. Montaigne's copy shows that the Royal Privilege was granted to Lambin's edition on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1563. His copy also contains a dedicatory letter from Lambin to Henri de Mesmes dated August 1563, and the letter to King Charles IX is dated 1<sup>st</sup> November 1563. The *Errata sic emendanda* are not dated but Screech suggests that this would have taken 'months to compile and print', thus pushing the date of publication to early 1564.

and then moved back to Front Flyleaf a, perhaps not expecting to have to make so many significant notes.<sup>106</sup> The rest of the flyleaves, that is to say Front Flyleaves c to g and After Flyleaves h to o, contain Montaigne's comments on the content of the poem and lists of *loci*. Legros notes that the difference is stark, with the first two front flyleaves organising the vocabulary of Lucretius and the rest being full of 'notes de contenu, le plus souvent philosophiques'.<sup>107</sup> Lucretius's poem and the commentary provided by Lambin are also accompanied by Latin comments by Montaigne, in the margins of the printed text. Montaigne's Latin hand, and therefore his first reading, is easy to date due to the *perlegi* on the final page, but Montaigne provides no date for his French annotations in the margins. I agree with Screech that the French hand is from a second reading of Lucretius, especially since the French annotations so frequently appear in sections which Montaigne's Latin *loci* instructed him to read again; that is to say that where there is a Latin reference on the flyleaves, there is frequently a corresponding French annotation in the margins of the text. I believe that the French annotations were all made at the same time, along with the majority of the pen-strokes and markings alongside Lucretius's verses. The French hand appears to be written in the same ink throughout and it is logical that Montaigne read his copy a second time whilst referring to his Latin notes from his first reading and then translated some of these comments or re-formulated them in French. No French note covers or obscures a Latin note, suggesting a careful and meticulous noting process by Montaigne. Legros suggests that the French hand was added 'peut-être après 1585',<sup>108</sup> but this cannot be correct, since there are notes in French which not only raise points of discussion made in the first edition of the *Essais*, which were first published in 1580, but also the wording of these discussions in the *Essais* echoes Montaigne's French notes in his copy. Furthermore, the 1580 edition of the

---

<sup>106</sup> Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 49-50.

<sup>107</sup> Legros, Alain, *Montaigne manuscrit* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2010), p. 25.

<sup>108</sup> Legros, *Montaigne manuscrit*, p. 25.

*Essais* already contains 53 quotations from *De rerum natura*, and 22 of these quotations are accompanied by French comments in Montaigne's copy. I am therefore inclined to suggest that Montaigne's French comments were written on his *De rerum natura* during the early stages of writing the essays. Villey dates Montaigne starting to write his essays between the end of 1571 and the beginning of 1572, just after Montaigne's retirement from public life.<sup>109</sup>

The dating of the French notes will continue to be a matter for speculation, but to approximately date them as 1571 seems justifiable when one considers the clear reflections of Montaigne's French notes in the early *Essais*; hence his French reading of *De rerum natura* certainly takes place before the essays are published. Screech comments that it is 'tempting' to date the French annotations to 1571 but points out that 'nothing is proven'.<sup>110</sup> To some extent Screech's view that Montaigne's French marginal notes were 'more personal, even more private, more *engagé*' is justified, since the Latin notes may appear as Montaigne simply summarising and attempting to understand Lucretius's philosophy.<sup>111</sup> A series of three of the most revealing and personal annotations in all of Montaigne's copy are made in Latin, however, showing that Montaigne does engage with the text in Latin as well as in French. The French and Latin notes combined reveal Montaigne's passion for Lucretius, showing his return to a poem and commentary which he enjoyed on philological, humanist and philosophical levels. To see Montaigne returning to passages to read them again and make new notes is surely to witness the reader preparing to become the writer, studying a text that will feature in the writing of the *Essais*.

---

<sup>109</sup> Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 28.

<sup>110</sup> Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 36.

It is potentially possible that Montaigne may have been echoing the *Essais* of 1580 in his French hand in *De rerum natura* rather than anticipating them. It does however seem unlikely that Montaigne would return to *De rerum natura* in order to annotate the poem with the corresponding quotations from the *Essais* after having written the *Essais*.

<sup>111</sup> Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 36.

This chapter will now examine how Montaigne read his copy of *De rerum natura* on a philosophical level, engaging with Lucretius's philosophies to develop a Lucretian-inflected understanding of memory and identity.

### **Reading ‘Retinentia’, ‘repetentia’ and memory**

The first instance of Montaigne engaging with Lucretian ideas on memory and identity in his copy appears on the first page of the philological section of Montaigne's Latin notes as he defines two words which Lucretius used to mean memory. Montaigne's note refers to the lines:

Nam si tanto operest animi mutate potestas,

Omnis ut actarum exciderit retinentia rerum,

Non ut opinor, id ab leto iam longiter errat (*De rerum natura*, III, 674-6).<sup>112</sup>

(For if the power of the mind has been so greatly changed that it has lost all recollection of things done, that, I think, is not far removed from death.)

Lucretius is arguing that the power of the soul is so radically changed by the rupture which is death before it enters our body that it loses any recollection of a previous existence, if indeed there was one, thus proving that the soul is mortal. Montaigne's note on this section reads:

rerum retinentia /i/ memoria 235/ ('the memory of things' i.e. memory)<sup>113</sup>

---

<sup>112</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, Loeb edition, trans. by W.H.D Rouse (London: Harvard University Press, 1993) p. 240-1.

<sup>113</sup> Montaigne's copy of Lucretius *De rerum natura*, Front Flyleaf b; M.A. Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 68. /i/ is Montaigne's abbreviation for *id est*. The number '235' refers to the page number of Lambin's copy which this note addresses.

Thus, Montaigne defines *retinentia* as *memoria*, or memory. This is in keeping with Lambin's comment to some extent, as Lambin explains that *retinentia* '[...] est recordationem, seu memoriam rerum præteritarum' ('[...] is recollection, or the memory of things from the past').<sup>114</sup> In this sense, Montaigne does engage with Lambin's commentary, borrowing from the commentator to inform his definition of this exclusively Lucretian word, which he certainly would not have encountered before. *Recordatio* is often coupled with *memoria* in Latin, but there is a subtle difference between *recordatio* and *memoria*. *Recordatio*, meaning recollection or remembrance, refers more to the process of recalling a memory of the past, whereas *memoria* is more closely related to memories themselves and the faculty of memory. To assess the etymology of *retinentia* shows that in Lucretius's text *retinentia* is complemented by 'tenemus', earlier in the passage, implying a sense of holding and containing memories; *retinentia* is therefore certainly linked to retention and a continuous retaining of a memory of the past. Bailey's commentary on *De rerum natura* defines *retinentia* as 'grasp' or 'recollection' but claims that this word was used by Lucretius to replace the 'metrically impossible' *memoria*.<sup>115</sup> *Retinentia* in Lucretius's text is complemented by 'tenemus', implying a sense of holding or containing which, as I will argue in Chapter Three, appears in Montaigne's *Essais* in relation to memory.<sup>116</sup>

Another word which is used by Lucretius in relation to memory is *repetentia*, which appears in the following section in Book III of *De rerum natura*:

Nec, si materiem nostram collegerit aetas  
post obitum rursumque redegerit ut sita nunc est,

---

<sup>114</sup> Lambin in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin, p. 236.

<sup>115</sup> Bailey, Cyril, *Titi Lucreti Cari De rerum natura libri sex, Volume II, Commentary Books I-III* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 1106.

<sup>116</sup> Montaigne uses a quotation which refers to the memory as a leaky container in 'De la praesumption' 'Plenus rimarum sum, hac atque illac effluo' ('I am full of cracks and leaking everywhere'; II, 17, 651).

atque iterum nobis fuerint data lumina vitae,  
pertineat quicquam tamen ad nos id quoque factum,  
interrupta semel cum sit repetentia nostri.<sup>117</sup> (*De rerum natura*, III, 847-851)

(Even if time should gather together our matter after death and bring it back again as it is now placed, and if once more the light of life should be given to us, yet it would not matter one bit to us that even this had been done, when the recollection of ourselves has once been broken asunder.)

Lucretius uses *repetentia* to signify the recollection of ourselves, explaining that this is lost in death and the chain of psychological consciousness concerning one's self is broken in death. Montaigne's philological note concerning this passage reads:

repetentia nostra /i/ reminiscentia 248/ (our memory i.e. recollections)<sup>118</sup>

Montaigne's definition of *repetentia* as *reminiscentia* or recollections differs from Lambin's commentary on the term. Firstly, Lambin was cautious about using *repetentia* as other editors had re-used *retinentia* in this passage, expecting a scribe's error to have created the term.<sup>119</sup> Lambin does use *repetentia*, as it appears in the Quadratus edition to which Lambin had access in his preparation for his edition. Lambin defines *repetentia* as 'recordatio', the same word that he uses to interpret *retinentia*, yet he goes on to explain that he considers *repetentia* to be a type of *retinentia*. Montaigne's definition does follow this to some extent, since recollections are a part of memory, although Montaigne seems to draw a line between individual recollections and the faculty of memory. Contrary to Lambin, Montaigne defines *retinentia* as *memoria* implying the faculty of memory, rather than individual reminiscences

---

<sup>117</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, Loeb edition, trans. by W.H.D Rouse, p.254-5.

<sup>118</sup> Montaigne's copy of Lucretius's *De rerum natura*, Front Flyleaf b; M.A. Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 69. Montaigne writes 'nosta' instead of 'nostra' here.

<sup>119</sup> Lambin in Lucretius *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin, p. 250.

or memories which he attaches to *repetentia*, thus simultaneously defining the terms more specifically than Lambin and differentiating between the terms.

Recent interpretations of both these Lucretian words elucidate alternate readings.

Rouse gives ‘a recollection of things done’ for *retinentia rerum*, and uses ‘recollection’ again for *repetentia*, echoing Lambin in translation.<sup>120</sup> More interesting still are the translations of Latham who translates *repetentia nostri* as ‘our identity’, in his 1951 translation, and Munro, who goes as far as translating this expression as ‘our self-consciousness’ in his 1886 edition of Lucretius’s poem.<sup>121</sup> Latham’s use of ‘our identity’ shows how tightly interwoven the ideas of memory and identity are in *De rerum natura*, with the translations apparently interchangeable. There is, in fact, no Latin term for identity at the time of Lucretius’s writing, just as there was no word for identity or the self (‘le soi’) at the time when Montaigne was writing the essays.

The use of *retinentia* and of *repetentia nostri* is described as a basis for what we would call the concept of identity through memory and the recollection of experiences, which is juxtaposed with the idea in Book II of *De rerum natura* that all humans pass on the light of life in death<sup>122</sup> and the materialist idea expressed at the end of Book III that all humans are only matter, atoms and particles:

materies opus est ut crescent postera saecla,  
quae tamen omnia te vita perfuncta sequentur;  
nec minus ergo ante haec quam tu cecidere, cadentque.

---

<sup>120</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, Loeb edition, trans. by W.H.D Rouse, III, 675.

<sup>121</sup> Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*, trans. by Ronald Latham (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1951) III, 675; Lucretius, *De rerum natura libri sex*, edited and trans. by H. A. J. Munro, fourth edition (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell & Co., 1886) p.77, III, 675.

<sup>122</sup> Montaigne uses this passage in ‘Que philosophe c’est apprendre à mourir’. He combines two lines from Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, lines 76 and 79 to form the expression: ‘inter se mortales mutua vivunt ... quasi cursores vitai lampada tradunt’ (‘Mortals live lives dependent on each other ...like runners in a relay, they pass on the torch of life’), *Essais*, I, 20, 92.

Sic alid ex alio numquam desistet oriri  
vitaque mancipio nulli datur, ómnibus usu (*De rerum natura*, III, 967-971).<sup>123</sup>

(matter is wanted, that coming generations may grow; and yet they all, when their life is done, will follow you, and so, no less than you, these generations have passed away before now, and will continue to pass away. So one thing will never cease to arise from another, and no man possesses life in freehold – all as tenants).

In this passage, Lucretius proposes that all humans are only material selves, comprised of atoms, following Epicurus's view that humans are only agglomerations of atoms and that our atoms leave us in death and give life to other generations. The idea that humans cannot claim life as a permanent possession is expressed in Roman legal language, with 'mancipium' the right of possession in Roman law.<sup>124</sup> The capacity of *repetentia* in Lucretius must not be separate from a material sense of self, or else the atoms of a future self would retain memory and be able to reproduce memories and thus a future self would be no different to a present self. Shearin suggests that Lucretius's use of *repetentia* shows that humans 'are something more than [...] material selves', which contrasts with the passage above.<sup>125</sup> *Retinentia* and *repetentia*, both relating to memory, are sources of uniqueness in the matter and atoms of which humans are comprised, and it is memories and experiences which ensure personal identity in Lucretius.

---

<sup>123</sup> Montaigne uses the verse 'quae tamen omnia te vita perfuncta sequentur' (*De rerum natura*, III, 968) in I, 20, 95.

<sup>124</sup> Bailey, p. 1156.

<sup>125</sup> W.H. Shearin, *The Language of Atoms: Performativity and Politics in Lucretius' De rerum natura* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). p. 149.

## The effects of death on the mind and memory

Memory is described as a faculty of the soul in Book III, lines 670-676, but in Lucretian philosophy the soul is mortal, with Book III largely dedicated to giving proofs of this view. The idea of a mortal soul impacts on the idea of memory as a foundation for identity, as memory can only provide that foundation whilst one is living, that is to say that memory is destroyed in death. Montaigne's annotations reveal an interest in the mortality of the soul and how this affects the idea of memory as a basis for identity. Montaigne makes a philosophical note on a section of Book III, which discusses the soul and dying. The passage on which Montaigne comments reads:

Nec sibi enim quisquam moriens sentire videtur  
ire foras animam incolumem de corpora toto,  
nec prius ad iugulum et supera succedere fauces,  
verum deficere in certa regione locatam,  
ut sensus alias in pati quemque sua scit  
dissolui. quod si inmortalis nostra foret mens,  
non tam se moriens dissolvi conquereretur,  
sed magis ire foras vestemque relinquere, ut anguis (*De rerum natura*, III, 607-614).<sup>126</sup>

(It is evident that no one in dying feels his soul go forth from the whole body intact, nor rise first to the throat and then pass up to the gullet; rather he feels it fail in the particular region where it is located, as he knows his other senses to be dispersing abroad each in its own part.

---

<sup>126</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, Loeb edition, trans. by W.H.D Rouse, p. 234-5.

But if our intelligence were immortal, in dying it would not so much complain of dispersing abroad, but rather of passing out and quitting its vesture like a snake.)

Lucretius explains that the soul does not die as a whole, but gradually, as various parts of the body fail successively. This argument suggests that if our mind were immortal, it would not complain about the soul being dispersed in death, but would rejoice upon leaving its bodily vessel. Montaigne's note concerning this passage reads:

Nemo moriens animam sentit a corpora euadere neque quā euaderet. Quod [si euderet non doloreret aut conquereretur mens sed gauderet 229] <sup>127</sup>

(Nobody when dying feels the *anima* escaping from his body, nor how it escapes. If the *mens* did escape, it would not grieve or lament but rejoice).

Montaigne also annotates the section to which this note refers with the heading 'De l'évanouissement', a clear aide-mémoire to summarise this section of Lucretius.<sup>128</sup> Montaigne's Latin note does not offer an opinion on Lucretius's verses; rather it explains Lucretius's meaning here, glossing the poet's verses. The first sentence of the note echoes the idea that the soul does not escape from the body in death. The second part of the note acknowledges Lucretius's discussion which follows the Platonic idea of the divine soul in death, that is the mind and soul joined in death to attain pure intellect without the hindrance of a body. Perhaps this idea allows Montaigne to consider that if the mind survives death, memory would also survive death and thus one's identity would survive, which would also be worthy of joy rather than worry or fear. Lucretius, of course, dismisses the possibility of the mind's survival in death as the mind is inherently connected to the mortal soul. Montaigne's

---

<sup>127</sup> Montaigne's copy of Lucretius *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin 1563, After Flyleaf m; M.A. Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 130. The number '229' refers to the page number of Lambin's copy which this note addresses.

<sup>128</sup> Montaigne's copy of Lucretius *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin 1563, p. 229.

note is also significant as it marks a section of Book III to which Montaigne returns: firstly, to write the particularly atheist comment ‘Si l’ame se croioit immortelle elle desireroit la mort’, and secondly to borrow these verses from Lucretius, which he uses in the ‘Apologie’ in the [B] interpolations.<sup>129</sup> Though Montaigne’s French note also paraphrases Lucretius, it is what is not said that is extremely interesting here, since Montaigne does not pass judgement on such a heretical idea. In Screech’s comments on Montaigne’s notes on his copy, he makes a point of highlighting how often Montaigne uses the phrase ‘contre la religion’ in his French annotations.<sup>130</sup> Screech is correct that it is the most repeated expression in Montaigne’s notes, but it actually only appears nine times in his notes, and Screech fails to point out that not once does Montaigne write ‘contre la religion’ referring to passages concerning the mortality of the soul. In fact, the only occurrence of ‘contre la religion’ in Book III comes on the first page and refers to Lucretius stating that he can see Gods before him.<sup>131</sup> Furthermore, Montaigne’s French annotation shows an interaction with the text, as Montaigne’s ‘si’ suggests that Montaigne is playing with the idea rather than rejecting it based on religious beliefs. As much as this part of Book III might warrant the label ‘contre la religion’, Montaigne reserves judgement, indicated by his use of the conditional tense, regarding the mortality of the soul in order to fully engage with Lucretius’s philosophy. Such an engagement and understanding would be impossible if one were to dismiss this key aspect of Lucretian philosophy simply because it goes against Christian teaching. Montaigne is interacting with Lucretius on a philosophical level, and is thinking independently of Lambin’s commentary at this point. Lambin’s comment here refers the reader to Lactantius, whom previous editors, such as Pius, had used to criticize and undermine Lucretius’s

---

<sup>129</sup> Montaigne’s copy of Lucretius *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin 1563, p. 229; II, 12, 445.

<sup>130</sup> M.A. Screech, *Montaigne’s Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 35-39.

<sup>131</sup> Montaigne’s copy of Lucretius, p. 192; M.A. Screech, *Montaigne’s Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 37. To show the scarcity of the note ‘contre la religion’, the next occurrence of this annotation comes in Book V, on page 380.

philosophy.<sup>132</sup> Where Lambin's printed commentary avoids a discussion of Lucretius's mortal soul, Montaigne is able to suspend judgement in order to address the idea in his own notes.

It is significant that in the *Essais*, that is to say, in published form, Montaigne does insert this dangerous discussion of the mortal soul and mind into a passage discussing the fear of death and the *immortality* of the soul. Montaigne's French annotation in his copy 'Si l'ame se crooit immortelle[...]' becomes the more carefully, respectfully worded 'Ces promesses de la beatitude eternelle, si nous les recevions de pareille autorité qu'un discours philosophique, nous n'aurions pas la mort en telle horreur que nous avons' (II, 12, 445). Moreover, immediately after Montaigne's use of these lines, he writes 'Je veuil estre dissout, dirions nous, et estres avecques Jesus-Christ' echoing Saint Paul's famous exclamation.<sup>133</sup> Montaigne presents this quotation in his writing in a Christian context in order to protect the discussion from accusations of atheism or heresy. The use of this quotation in the 'Apologie' (II, 12) illustrates Montaigne's progression from reader to writer very clearly, as his original Latin note marks his interest in the passage, his second reading returns to the passage, undoubtedly directed there by his Latin note, and his French annotation foreshadows his discussion of the topic in the *Essais*. This preparation for using the quotation in the 'Apologie' is visible as Montaigne uses a conditional clause again, comparing the belief in the promise of the immortal soul to one's belief in a philosophical argument, offsetting the philosophical argument of Lucretius with the religious belief in the immortal soul, and thus warping the meaning of the quotation. In this way, Montaigne suggests that the reader and

---

<sup>132</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin, 1563. Lambin writes 'QVOD SI IMMORTALIS] hanc huius versus partem, cum duobus deinceps sequentibus, et principio quarti profert Luctatius lib. 7. De divino praemio. UT ANGUIS GAUDERET] Virgil. Georgics. 3. Cum positis novus exuuiis, nitidusque inventa voluitur'. Lambin also refers the reader to Virgil's Georgics to explain the final verse, avoiding the discussion of the mortal soul.

<sup>133</sup> See M.A. Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 438, regarding Montaigne's play on the word 'dissolvi'.

himself ('nous') accept and respect the authority of philosophical arguments more than religious beliefs and teaching where the soul is concerned. One may speculate that since Montaigne uses this quotation, which is part of a proof of the mortal soul in Lucretius, Montaigne is very much toying with the idea of a mortal soul here.

Montaigne's note on his copy shows that he understands that, for Lucretius, the mind does not survive in death and therefore it should not rejoice in death. This answers the question concerning the limits of the mind and of memory in that both only last for the duration of one's life.

Just below this comment on After Flyleaf m, Montaigne writes another note concerning the immortality of the soul and consciousness in death. It concerns a proof of the mortality of the soul in which Lucretius explains that the soul can be split up and divided with the limbs of the body, when they are cut off, and is therefore not immortal. Lucretius gives the example of a snake, again, which this time is cut into pieces and whose separate parts continue to move, raising the question of how the *anima*, or the soul, is divided:

Quin etiam tibi si lingua vibrante minanti  
serpenti cauda procero corpora utrumque  
sit libitum in multas partis discidere ferro,  
omnia iam sorsum cernes ancisa recent

...

omnibus esse igitur totas dicemus in illis  
particulis animas? At ea ratione sequetur  
unam animantem animas habuisse in corpore multas.  
ergo divisast ea quae fuit una simul cum  
corpore; quapropter mortale uturmque putandumst (*De rerum natura*, III, 657-668)

(Shall we say then that there is a whole spirit in each of these fractions? But in that way it will follow that one living creature had many spirits in its body. Therefore, that spirit which was one has been divided apart with the body; and so each must be considered mortal, since each alike is cut asunder into many parts.)<sup>134</sup>

Montaigne summarises Lucretius's argument and applies it to humans with the following note:

Ut in serpentibus sic in nobis fit ut <sup>in</sup> corporis partibus subito excisis sit adhuc [aliquis] motus ergo in singulis est una anima ergo infinitae in corpora aut dissecatur [una in diuersas partes <sup>illud falsum</sup> ex hoc mortalitas concluditur 233/ <sup>135</sup>

(As in snakes so too in us: when parts of the body are suddenly sliced off, they continue to move somewhat, therefore there is one *anima* for each part; so there is either an infinite number of *animae* in the body or else one is cut up for the various parts. Which is false. From that is inferred mortality.)

Montaigne's addition 'illud falsum' explains Lucretius's point succinctly: that the soul cannot be divided into various parts if one considers the soul to be immortal. Montaigne's matter-of-fact 'ex hoc mortalitas concluditur' confirms his understanding of Lucretius's proof, showing that if something can be divided it cannot be considered immortal or eternal. Montaigne surely remembers Lucretius's argument in Book I that atoms are eternal since they are indivisible; in fact Montaigne noted this himself on After Flyleaf i, where he describes atoms as 'æterna' (eternal) and 'indivisibiles' (indivisible).<sup>136</sup> 'Ex hoc mortalitas concluditur' does

---

<sup>134</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, Loeb edition, trans. by W.H.D Rouse, p. 234-5, III, 657-668.

<sup>135</sup> Montaigne's copy of Lucretius *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin 1563, After Flyleaf m; M.A. Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 130. The number '233' refers to the page of Lambin's copy which this note addresses.

'illud falsum' is written slightly above Montaigne's comment which suggests that Montaigne added these two words just after finishing the note.

<sup>136</sup> Montaigne's copy of Lucretius *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin 1563, After Flyleaf i; M.A. Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 95; p. 96.

not express a damning condemnation of Lucretius's atheist belief, showing a scientific, factual understanding on Montaigne's part, again revealing that Montaigne withholds judgement, and shows that Montaigne's note is written with the sole intention of understanding Proof 15 of the mortality of the soul. There is also no 'contre la religion' in the margin of the text here. Screech comments that in the majority of the flyleaf notes Montaigne 'sought to understand Lucretius and his philosophy not to overturn them', which is the case with Montaigne's note here.<sup>137</sup> In Lucretius's example with the snake, consciousness, mental awareness and memory of the individual parts of the snake are not discussed directly, but Lucretius does go on to discuss the idea of memory and consciousness in death in a slightly different context, concerning whether the soul would have any memory of a previous existence. Lucretius writes:

Praeterea si inmortalis natura animai  
constat et in corpus nascentibus insinuatur,  
cur super anteactam aetatem meminisse nequimus  
nec vestigial gestarum rerum ulla tenemus?  
nam si tanto operest animi mutate potestas,  
omnis ut actarum exciderit retinentia rerum,  
non, ut opinor, id ab leto iam longiter errat (*De rerum natura*, III, 670-6)

(Besides, if the nature of the spirit is immortal and creeps into the body as we are born, why can we not remember also the time that has passed before, and why do we keep no traces of things done? For if the power of the mind has been so greatly changed that it has lost all recollection of things done, that, I think, is not far removed from death.)

---

<sup>137</sup> Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 33.

The aim of Lucretius's argument in these verses is to counter the Pythagorean concept of metempsychosis and Plato's belief that the soul retained some memory of its previous existence. Montaigne comments on this passage and summarises Lucretius's argument as:

Si ab aeterno anima est debuimus cum corpora insinuatur praeteritorum [meminisse  
Sin adeo est oppressa ut uim suam omnem perdiderit non procul abest ab [interitu 235.<sup>138</sup>

(If the *anima* exists from eternity, we ought to remember things past when it insinuates itself into the body. If it is so overwhelmed as to lose all of its power, that is not far from death.)

Montaigne does not mention 'retinentia rerum' in this flyleaf comment, replacing the term with 'vim', that is to say power. Memory therefore is equated to 'vim suam omnem' ('all the soul's power'). Montaigne's note therefore establishes that memory and the ability to remember is the key power and faculty of the soul in his understanding of Lucretius.

Lucretius uses the importance of memory to explain that if one cannot remember a past life or lives then it must be proof that the soul is mortal, since an immortal soul would retain some memory. This follows the understanding that memory is located in the soul, so therefore the destruction of memory equals the destruction of the soul. Montaigne therefore understands that in Lucretian philosophy, memory is located in the soul. Furthermore, Montaigne's note also underlines Montaigne's understanding that memory is limited by birth and death, with birth being the creation of a soul and of the faculty of memory, and death being the destruction of the soul and of all memory. From this idea that our memory is annihilated in death, Montaigne understands that our self and our personal identity are lost in death and that no continuation of our 'selves' is possible after death since no psychological continuation is possible. Montaigne does not comment on the word 'retinentia' in his

---

<sup>138</sup> Montaigne's copy of Lucretius *De rerum natura*, After flyleaf m; Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 131. The number '235' refers to the page of Lambin's copy which this note addresses.

philosophical notes in relation to an idea of continuity after death, but Lambin's commentary does discuss the idea that *retinentia* is something continuous within human beings, as he attempts to define it, albeit cautiously:

vel (ut quidam malunt) continuationem quondam partium, ex quibus constamus,  
permanentem.<sup>139</sup>

(or (as some people prefer) a certain permanent, continuous part, from which we are made.)

The description of memory as something permanent and continuous, that is to say that it continues from one life to the next, certainly does not fit with Montaigne's understanding of Lucretius, as Montaigne recognises memory to be something destructible, as it is a part of the soul. Lambin's comment '(ut quidam malunt)' suggests that this is an alternative view to his previous definition of *retinentia* as *recordatio*. This alternative definition attempts to capture the idea of a continuous retention of memories across lives. In Lucretian philosophy, such a psychological continuity is not possible as it is ruptured and destroyed by death. In Lucretius therefore, with *retinentia* destroyed in death, an identity across lives is not possible. For Lucretius, one's memory is erased in death and one's personal identity, which was previously assured by one's memory, is destroyed 'nec memori tamen id quimus reprehendere mente; inter enim iectast vitai pauca' ('And yet we cannot call that back by memory; for in between has been cast a stoppage of life'; *De rerum natura*, III, 859-60).<sup>140</sup>

Montaigne uses the passage concerning the memory of a past life in the 'Apologie', dividing Lucretius's verse into two sections with the question separated from the response.<sup>141</sup>

---

<sup>139</sup> Lambin in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin, p. 236.

<sup>140</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, Loeb, p. 254-5.

<sup>141</sup> II, 12, 548-9; Montaigne inserts this quotation into the *Apologie* in the [B] interpolation. Lines 670-3 are compacted into 3 lines 'si in corpus nascentibus insinuator, | cur superante aetatem meminissemus, | nec vestigial gestarum rerum ulla tenemus?' ('If souls are only introduced into the bodies at birth, why can we not fully remember what happened before nor retain any trace of the things which we did?') Lines 674-6 are quoted in response to this question after Montaigne discusses the topic. 'Nam, si tantopere est animi mutata potestas, | omnis ut actarum exiderit retinentia rerum, | non ut opinor, ea ab leto jam longior errat' ('For if all the

It is significant that Montaigne discusses this topic in the [A] edition of the essays, and it is only in the [B] interpolation that he inserts the quotations from Lucretius from this passage. Montaigne's treatment of the topic in the [A] edition already closely mirrors his French annotation on the section in his copy which reads: 'Si elle [l'ame] estoit immortelle elle se souviendroit de sa vie passee'.<sup>142</sup> In the 'Apologie', he does alter the 'si' clause slightly, preferring not to throw the immortality of the soul into any doubt in public sight in his book, whereas in his private annotation, his comment is almost an admission that the soul cannot be immortal, since Montaigne does not believe in any memory of a past life. The second half of Montaigne's clause echoes his annotation as he writes 'elles [les ames] auroyent recordation de leur estre premier' (II, 12, 548). Furthermore, Montaigne appears to have had his Latin note in mind as he wrote this section of the 'Apologie' as he notes that memory is a key faculty of the soul ('les naturelles facultez, qui lui sont propres, de discourir, raissonner et se souvenir'; II, 12, 548). Montaigne's use of the adjective 'propres' to describe the natural faculties of the soul suggests that these faculties are both characteristics of the soul and inherently connected to the soul.

As Montaigne continues his discussion of the idea of metempsychosis and the memory of past life in this section of the 'Apologie', he is insistent on the immortality of the soul, even though in the [B] interpolation he cites these lines from Lucretius which contradict this argument. Montaigne does not however use the final two lines of this verse of Lucretius which could be summarised by Montaigne's own expression 'ex hoc mortalitas concluditur'.<sup>143</sup> Montaigne adds the second part of these verses from Lucretius, which were

---

powers of the soul are so greatly changed that no memory of the past remains, that seems to me to be no different from death').

<sup>142</sup> Montaigne's copy of Lucretius *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin, p. 235; Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 313.

<sup>143</sup> The two lines which Montaigne does not include are 'quapropter fateare necesset quae fuit ante interiisse et quae nunc est nunc esse creatam' ('Therefore you must confess that the spirit that was before has perished, and that which now is has now been made') *De rerum natura*, III, 677-8.

originally used by the poet to prove the mortality of the soul, just after he explains that it is difficult to believe in anything other than an eternal and immortal soul. This approach reveals the tension regarding the mortality of the soul in Montaigne's work when he is discussing Lucretius. Montaigne is not at liberty to develop the topic and one can even see that Montaigne takes care over this particular passage of this essay as he edits it again in the *Exemplaire de Bordeaux* to remove the word 'philosophique' from the final paragraph, changing the belief in an immortal soul from a philosophical belief to simply a belief.<sup>144</sup> This strengthens the conviction of the belief in the immortality of the soul in this particular paragraph and further highlights the juxtaposition of Lucretius's quotation here. In this section of the 'Apologie', Montaigne's use of Lucretius is visible, with nine quotations from *De rerum natura*, all of which stem from Montaigne's readings and interpretations in his copy.<sup>145</sup> Both Montaigne's notes on his copy regarding this section of Book III show his engagement with Lucretius on a philosophical level in his private notes, then, in the *Apologie*, this discussion is expressed publicly, but with some caution. This is not to say that Montaigne believed Lucretius's model, rather that he was willing to suspend judgement on topics such as the immortality of the soul, and was willing to engage with Lucretian teaching.

Montaigne's notes on this section show that he understands that for Lucretius memory is located in the soul; that memory is the key power of the soul and that memory is limited to our life in Lucretian philosophy, in that it is created at birth and destroyed in death.

---

<sup>144</sup> II, 12, 548.

<sup>145</sup> Lucretius is firmly in Montaigne's mind even in the first stage of writing this section of the 'Apologie', as not only are the ideas reflected but Montaigne even refers to drugs clouding the mind.

## Contemplating death and the possibility of another Montaigne

This idea concerning not remembering past lives can also be applied to Montaigne remembering his own life after his death, which equally would not be possible in Lucretian philosophy. Montaigne deals with Lucretius's discussion of this idea in three key notes on After Flyleaf n. The passage to which Montaigne's notes refer is a discussion of the 'folly of the fear of death'<sup>146</sup>, a topic which provides comfort to the reader and can be read as a form of bibliotherapy, helping the reader to deal with the inescapable fear of death. Lucretius expresses the Epicurean idea that 'death is nothing to us', since if we know that events before we were born did not affect us, then it is logical to believe that events after we are dead will not affect us either. Lucretius writes:

Nil igitur mors est ad nos neque pertinet hilum,

Quandoquidem natura animi mortalis habetur ;

Et, velut anteacto nil tempore sensimus aegri,

Ad configendum venientibus undique Poenis

[...]

Sic, ubi non erimus, cum corporis atque animai

Discidium fuerit, quibus e sumus uniter apti,

Scilicet haud nobis quicquam, qui non erimus tum,

Accidere omnino poterit sensumque movere <sup>147</sup>

---

<sup>146</sup> Bailey, *Titi Lucreti Cari De rerum natura libri sex, Volume II, Commentary Books I-III*, p. 985.

<sup>147</sup> Lucretius, III, 830-41. 'Therefore, death is nothing to us, it matters not one jot, since the nature of the mind is understood to be mortal; and as in time past we felt no distress, while from all quarters the Carthaginians were coming to the conflict ... so when we shall no longer be, when the parting shall have come about between body

(Therefore, death is nothing to us, it matters not one jot, since the nature of the mind is understood to be mortal; and as in time past we felt no distress, while from all quarters the Carthaginians were coming to the conflict [...] so when we shall no longer be, when the parting shall have come about between body and spirit from which we are compacted into one whole, then sure enough nothing at all will be able to happen to us, who will then no longer be, or to make us feel)

Lucretius's verses follow Epicurus's doctrine that 'Death is nothing to us, for that which is dissolved without sensation, and that which lacks sensation is nothing to us'.<sup>148</sup> Segal recognises that Lucretius 'extends the point by analogy to the time after our death' since our consciousness has departed and these future events cannot affect us'.<sup>149</sup> There is a precedent for Lucretius extending the analogy as Epicurus also discusses the effects of future events on our future selves as he writes 'Just as you suffered no ill under the constitution of Draco or of Cleisthenes (for you, to whom it might have happened did not exist at all), so you will not suffer after your death, for you will not exist for it to happen to you'.<sup>150</sup> This argument is taken by Lucretius and formed into a clear symmetrical argument that our posthumous non-existence is symmetrical with our pre-natal non-existence. In Lucretian philosophy, there is no belief of any memory of a past existence nor of any future existence for one's self and, as this chapter has shown, the limit of one's memory is the duration of one's life.

---

and spirit from which we are compacted into one whole, then sure enough nothing at all will be able to happen to us, who will then no longer be, or to make us feel [...]', p. 252-3.

<sup>148</sup> Epicurus develops this argument further in his letter to Menoeceus. He writes 'So death, the most terrifying of ills, is nothing to us since, so long as we exist, death is not with us, but when death comes, then we do not exist. It does not concern either the living or the dead, since for the former it is not, and the latter are no more'.

<sup>149</sup> Segal, Charles, *Lucretius on Death and Anxiety: Poetry and Philosophy in 'De rerum natura'* (Oxford; New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990).

<sup>150</sup> Bailey, p. 1133-4.

Montaigne uses the Epicurean idea that death is nothing to us in ‘Que Philosopher c’est apprendre à mourir’ (I, 20), and so it is unsurprising to find a comment concerning this passage on Montaigne’s copy of *De rerum natura*.

Quod cum ita sit mors nil ad nos attinet nihilo enim magis quae post uitam subsequentur quam quae antefuerunt nos tangent. 247<sup>151</sup>

(Thus death does not matter to us: what happens after this life no more touches us than what went on before.)

Montaigne recognises that Lucretius links our pre-natal unconsciousness with our posthumous unconsciousness, suggesting that without a soul that survives death, there is no faculty of memory which survives to process experiences, memories or sensations.

Montaigne’s understanding of Lucretius follows the Epicurean doctrine that death means ceasing to exist in any form, with no possibility of a future self. This position also suggests that one’s present life is reduced to nothing, with all memories, experiences and identity destroyed and forgotten. Montaigne’s French annotation in the margins of the passage reads: ‘Les choses à venir ne nous touche non plus que les passées’ effectively translating Lucretius’s symmetrical argument.<sup>152</sup>

The Roman poet’s argument does offer some comfort concerning the moment of death, and Montaigne borrows this theory in I, 20 as he writes: ‘Elle [la mort] ne vous concerne ny mort ny vif: vif parce que vous estes: mort parce que vous n’êtes plus’ (I, 20, 94). It is the faculty of memory which allows us to process experiences, and if this faculty is destroyed in the death of the soul, then it will not be able to process the experience of death.

---

<sup>151</sup>Montaigne copy of Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin, After flyleaf n; Screech, *Montaigne’s Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 134.

<sup>152</sup>Montaigne’s copy of Lucretius *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin, p. 247; Screech, *Montaigne’s Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 318.

This belief in memory's destruction in death is key to Montaigne following Lucretius's advice that one should not fear the moment of death. If Montaigne will have no memory of the experience of death, he will not be able to connect this moment to his 'self' and therefore it will not be "him" to whom death is happening. Lucretius teaches that there will be no future self to mourn the death of our current self, since the memory which would connect the two (*retinentia*) is destroyed in death:

nec videt in vera nullum fore morte alium se  
qui possit vivus sibi se lugere peremptum  
stansque iacentem se laceraru urive dolere. (*De rerum natura*, III, 885-7)<sup>153</sup>

(he does not see that in real death there will be no other self that could live to bewail his perished self, or stand by to feel pain that he lay there lacerated or burning.)

Montaigne is interested in this idea of a future self and engages closely with both Lucretius's and Lambin's discussion of this theme. In lines 847-851 of Book III, Lucretius explains that even if the atoms were to reform in the future in the same structure as they have done to form a particular self, this self will not be the same self as other "versions" formed of the same atoms, since life has been interrupted by death, and the soul which joined the previous body to form the unity of its identity has been destroyed. Lucretius also takes the discussion in the opposite direction, referring back to the past, and whether any past "versions" or agglomerations of atoms in that particular arrangement may have existed. Lucretius writes:

Nam cum respicias inmensi temporis omne  
Praeteritarum spatium, tum motus materiai  
Multimodi quam sint, facile hoc adcredere possis,

---

<sup>153</sup>Montaigne uses this quotation in I, 20, 94. He alters the quotation slightly to better suit his meaning 'In vera nescis nullum fore morte alium te, qui possit vivus tibi te lugere peremptum, stansque jacentem' ('Do you not know that in real death there will be no other you, living to grieve your death and standing by your corpse').

Semina saepe in eodem, ut nunc sunt, ordine posta

Haec eadem, quibus e nunc nos sumus, ante fuisse (*De rerum natura*, III, 854-8)

(For when you look back upon all the past expanse of measureless time, and think how various are the motions of matter, you may easily come to believe that these same seeds of which now we consist have been often before placed in the same arrangement they are now in.)

Montaigne's note engages personally with this idea of another version of one's self in the past or in the future:

Ut sunt diversi atomorum motus non incredibile est sic convenisse olim atomos aut conventuras ut alius nascatur montanus. 251/

(Since the movements of the atoms are varied, it is not unbelievable that atoms once came together – or will come together again in the future - so that another Montaigne be born.)<sup>154</sup>

Screech comments that this note is 'the most exciting of all the items, especially when placed in the context of Montaigne's preoccupation with death and with his own unique identity'.<sup>155</sup> I think that Montaigne's engagement with atomism here is all the more interesting when one considers that in his marginal notes on the movement of atoms, he describes the idea as ridiculous: 'Mouvemant a coutier [sic] fort legier et ridicule que les atomes font'.<sup>156</sup> It appears that Montaigne employs a Pyrrhonist suspension of judgement here, putting his misgivings over the physics of Lucretius's atoms to one side, in order to fully interact with such an interesting philosophical proposal. For Montaigne to ponder the idea that there could

---

<sup>154</sup> Montaigne's copy of Lucretius *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin, After Flyleaf m; Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 134.

<sup>155</sup> Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 134.

<sup>156</sup> Montaigne's copy of Lucretius *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin, p. 120 and Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 259.

have been another version of himself at some point in the past or that there could be another version of himself at some point in the future would have lead Montaigne to key questions concerning one's identity such as whether those other versions of himself would be him, or whether they would have his identity, and what makes his current version unique from these other constructions of atoms which resemble him in the past or in the future.

It must be noted that Montaigne's note does appear to be prompted by Lambin's commentary, as Lambin writes:

quî fieri potest, ut alius ego vel multis antè seculis fuerit, vel multis pòst seculis nascatur ex eadem materi? Huic igitur respondet non esse incredibile, si retro spectemus praeteritio temporis spatium immensum, et si consideremus materiæ motus varios, et multiplices, primordial rerum, ex quibus constat hodie homo aliquis singularis, eodem ordine et olim posita fuisse, quo nunc sunt ordine collocate: et posthac eodem collocatum iri.<sup>157</sup>

(Can it be that another me, made from the same matter, existed many centuries ago, or may be born many centuries later?' Lucretius therefore replies that if we look back over the vast expanse of time past, and if we consider the many and various movements of matter, it is not unbelievable that the basic elements of which one man is made today were, centuries ago, placed in the same order as that in which they now are, and will be hereafter. [my translation]).

Montaigne borrows Lambin's 'non incredibile est' and Montaigne's 'alius montanus' reflects an earlier use of 'alius Lambinus'<sup>158</sup> where Lambin interacts with Lucretius and imagines a future version of himself. It is Lambin's engagement with Lucretius that enables Montaigne to question Lucretius on this philosophical level. It is clearly against Christian religious

---

<sup>157</sup> Lambin in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin, p. 252.

<sup>158</sup> Lambin in Lucretius *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin, p. 251.

beliefs to even hypothesise about ideas like this one, but Montaigne suspends his judgement in order to explore this interesting aspect of atomism.

The caveat of Lucretius's discussion of resurrection in the future is that a future self would not be able to recollect or remember any previous life, therefore it would not actually be another future version of one's self. It is here that Lucretius employs the expression *repetentia nostri* for the recollection of ourselves. Lucretius expresses the idea of a break in the thread of memory in two ways: firstly on line 851, he writes 'interrupta semel cum sit repetentia nostri' ('when the recollection of ourselves has once been broken asunder; *De rerum natura*, III, 851), and secondly, on lines 859-60, 'nec memori tamen id quimus reprehendere mente; inter enim iectast vitai paua' ('And yet we cannot call that back by memory, for in between has been cast a stoppage of life'; *De rerum natura*, III, 859).<sup>159</sup> Both these interruptions refer to death, which destroys memory and thus, any psychological continuity between lives. Lambin's commentary shows that the future self would not be the same person as the previous self from whose atoms it was made, interpreting Lucretius's explanation that 'vitæ interruptio facta sit per mortem' ('there has been a rupture of life by death').<sup>160</sup> Montaigne also references Lucretius's term 'vitæ pausam' in his note on After Flyleaf n, but Montaigne goes further than both Lucretius and Lambin regarding memory, as he refers to *oblivionem*. Montaigne writes:

Id ipsum me non tangit propter oblivionem & vitæ pausam 251/ <sup>161</sup>

(That does not touch me personally, because of oblivion and the interruption of life.)

---

<sup>159</sup> Montaigne cites both these lines in II, 12, 519.

<sup>160</sup> Lambin in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin, p. 252; Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 135.

<sup>161</sup> Montaigne's copy of Lucretius *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin, After Flyleaf m; Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 136.

Neither Lucretius nor Lambin refer to the loss of memory as *oblivionem*, thus Montaigne uses this term independently to express the opposite of *retinentia* and *repetentia* which is the forgetfulness, unconsciousness and unawareness captured in oblivion.<sup>162</sup> Montaigne's use of *oblivionem* underlines his understanding that the most important aspect of the 'interruption of life', that is to say 'death' is the destruction of *retinentia* or the faculty of memory and this is why Montaigne emphasises this here. Montaigne holds death and the loss of memory, or oblivion, as equal in his note, with both inextricable from each other as the causes for the loss of our identity. Memory is fundamental to identity in that if you have no memory, you cannot know who you are, let alone be sure that you are you. It is the destruction of memory rather than the interruption of life (i.e. death) which ensures that any future mass of atoms in the same formation as one's current self will not be a future version of one's self. Screech does not recognise the significance of Montaigne's independent use of *oblivionem*, and whilst Passannante does approach the topic of Montaigne's 'alius montanus', he does not tackle the issue directly, instead using it as an opener to the topic, but not fully exploring the intricacies of Montaigne's comments.<sup>163</sup>

His note 'id ipsum *me* non tangit [...]' shows a very personal aspect which follows on from inserting himself into Lucretius's poem as 'alius montanus'. Montaigne is playing with Lucretius's symmetrical argument, deciding that there is, in fact, neither a previous nor a future version of his 'self' with his full identity waiting to be born from his atoms once he dies. For Montaigne, the one factor which would confirm it to be another Montaigne in either the past or the future is memory and the psychological continuation which memory provides. Thus, for Montaigne the atoms in a particular form cannot be considered a self or to be a

---

<sup>162</sup>The term 'oblivion' occurs once in Montaigne's *Essais*, II, 12, 494, in a quotation from Cicero. The quotation is used in a section regarding being able to forget something; the idea of confining something to oblivion is discussed with oblivion representing a complete forgetting of the chosen object or idea.

<sup>163</sup> Passannante, Gerard, *The Lucretian Renaissance* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2011) p. 107-109.

basis for identity; rather identity is confirmed by the memory of one's life and the psychological connection to the experiences of one's life. Lucretius teaches and Montaigne notes that a functioning faculty of memory allows Montaigne to remember that he is this unique version of himself with his particular memories and experiences, and this faculty of memory will ensure his identity until his death, when his memory is destroyed. For both Lucretius and Montaigne, memory is the glue which holds our identity together, and if memory is destroyed, then our identity is destroyed too. Montaigne uses this section in the *Apologie*, borrowing the first section of Lucretius's discussion of a possible future version of the self (which Montaigne did not annotate in his copy):

Nec si materiam nostram collegerit aetas  
Post obitum, rursumque redegerit, ut sita nunc est,  
Atque iterum nobis fuerint data lumina vitae,  
Pertineat quidquam tamen ad nos id quoque factum,  
Interrupta semel cum si repetentia nostra (*De rerum natura*, III, 847-851)<sup>164</sup>

(Even if time should gather together our matter after death and bring it back again as it is now placed, and if once more the light of life should be given to us, yet it would not matter one bit to us that even this had been done, when the recollection of ourselves has once been broken asunder.)

Montaigne uses this quotation in his discussion of the next life ('l'autre vie'; II, 12, 518) where he argues against both Plato's and Pythagoras's theory of metempsychosis. Montaigne describes the process of a phoenix dying and another phoenix being re-born from the ashes and asks 'qui peut imaginer qu'il [le second phoenix] ne soit autre que le premier?' (II, 12, 519). The process of Montaigne's moving from reader to writer is also clear as he introduces

---

<sup>164</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, Loeb edition, trans. by W.H.D Rouse, p.254-5.

the quotation from Lucretius with the expression ‘Ce qui a cessé une fois d’estre n’est plus’ (II, 12, 519) which echoes his annotation on his copy which reads ‘Puisque nous auons cesse vne fois d’estre rien ne nous touche’ (II, 12, 519).<sup>165</sup> At this point, Montaigne’s Lucretian-inflected view on identity after death is evident, as he explains that ‘ce ne sera plus l’homme, ny nous [...]’ (II, 12, 519) who would experience the next life. Montaigne does not express the philosophical idea of another Montaigne here since he knows such a scenario to be impossible due to the destruction of the soul and of memory. He also edits a second quotation from Lucretius regarding the pause in life (‘vitae pausa’) so that the Lucretian expression ‘nec memori tamen id quimus reprehendere mente’ (‘And yet we cannot call that back by memory’; *De rerum nature*, III, 859) is not present in the Apologie, but at this point in the essay he is discussing the next life, rather than past lives, to which the removed line of this quotation refers.

It is significant that Montaigne concludes this discussion by mentioning Epicurus, who, he thinks, could have challenged Plato with these arguments if it were not for the Epicurean doctrine: ‘qu’il n’est impossible d’establier quelque chose de certain de l’immortelle nature par la mortelle’ (II, 12, 520). Montaigne recognises Epicurus’s role in the Lucretian belief that there is no future self, and although he underlines that Epicurus did not object to Plato’s teaching on the next life, Montaigne himself evokes Lucretius, Epicurus’s pupil, to challenge Plato. In this way, Montaigne’s notes in his copy and his writing in the Apologie on a future self reveal a heavily Lucretian-inflected view, with Montaigne adopting Lucretius’s voice on this topic to express his view that there is no future self and even if there were a future version of our matter, it would be different to the present self due to the destruction of

---

<sup>165</sup> Montaigne’s copy of Lucretius *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin, p. 251; Screech, *Montaigne’s Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 318.

memory and therefore, any possibility of a shared identity between the present and future self.

## Conclusion

Through the analysis of Montaigne's reading notes, it can be seen that Montaigne was interested in the idea of memory in Lucretius's poem, even in passages where Lucretius, and the commentator of Montaigne's edition, Denis Lambin, did not detect the significance of memory. It is difficult to establish a stable foundation for identity in Lucretian philosophy, since a bodily identity is shown to simply be an agglomeration of atoms which formed others previously and will form others in the future. The idea of a uniqueness or identity is a problem to which Montaigne only finds one solution in Lucretius's poem: memory.

Montaigne's flyleaves and marginal annotations on his copy of Lucretius reveal an understanding that it is memory which alone is particular to one's structure of atoms and survives throughout one's life. The Lucretian *retinentia* and *repetentia* imply a psychological connection to the experiences of one's life through memory which assures Montaigne that his life is his own and that he is a unique version of himself, rather than a set of atoms.

Montaigne's understanding of memory's role in identity is most clear in the two discussions regarding a past and a future self. Firstly, in response to Lucretius's argument that the soul is mortal since it has no recollection of a previous life, Montaigne recognises the importance of memory to the soul, and notes that memory is a key power of the soul which only lasts for the duration of one's life. Secondly, in his discussion of another Montaigne in the future ('alius montanus'), Montaigne's notes show that atoms alone cannot retain identity and if memory is destroyed in death, then whichever atoms previously constituted one's being are no longer a

part of one's self. It is memory that establishes identity and if memory is destroyed, then so too is one's identity.

Montaigne's withholding of judgement concerning Lucretius's atoms and the mortality of the soul plays an important role in Montaigne's engagement with Lucretian philosophy, and Montaigne's notes show that, for the most part, he sought to understand Lucretius rather than challenge him. Whether Montaigne's understanding of Lucretius does serve as a comfort to his fear of death is less certain. It is true that Montaigne reads Lucretius as a form of bibliotherapy, to handle and think over death, but the fact that death for Lucretius means oblivion and the loss of memory is not a comfort for Montaigne, whose essays are an attempt to discover and express his identity. Whilst Lucretius accepts the posthumous unconsciousness after death as something which is not to be feared, Montaigne recognises that the destruction of memory and consciousness in death is equal to the loss of identity, and therefore seeks a means for preserving his memories, to ensure the continuity of his identity during his life and the survival of his legacy after his death.

## Chapter Three

### Models and metaphors of memory in Montaigne's *Essais*

#### Interpretations of memory

Memory is a recurrent theme in the *Essais*, with Montaigne frequently bemoaning his poor powers of recollection. As well as discussing what memory is by exploring what it does and what it means, Montaigne's lamentations over his own so-called lack of memory reveal what he believes memory should be and what it should be capable of doing. His understanding of memory builds on the Lucretian concept of memory, and follows two models: firstly, as a storehouse and, secondly, as a tool. Beforehand, however, it will be useful to return to 'memory tradition' from antiquity in order to elucidate theories of memory and to better understand the two main interpretations of memory which Montaigne espouses in the *Essais*.

Philosophers have long attempted to understand the faculty of memory, its processes, operations and its values and failings. Philosophers and writers of antiquity considered and taught methods which enabled them to employ memory to the best of its ability, as Frances Yates analyses in *The Art of Memory*.<sup>166</sup> The most prominent of these was the *loci* method, which can be closely linked to the concept of a storehouse of memory. The *loci* method was primarily learnt for rhetorical purposes, such as the recollection of a speech or a poem, and involved constructing of a building in one's mind, with rooms and spaces for storing key images of memories, which one can later revisit in order to re-visualise the image in order to

---

<sup>166</sup> Francis Yates, *The Art of Memory* (New York: Random House, 2011).

recollect the necessary memory. In the sense that it is a mental building where one can store one's memories, it is clearly linked to the idea of memory as a storehouse. The *loci* approach to memory originates from the story of the Simonides of Ceos, whose experience is told by Cicero in his *De oratore* (II, lxxxvi, 350-4) and in Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*; significantly, both are works with which Montaigne is familiar and from which Montaigne draws quotations or references in the *Essais*.<sup>167</sup> Simonides is said to have invented this method when he happened to have left a banquet just before the ceiling of the building in which the banquet was held collapsed. All the other guests at the banquet were killed and Simonides was able to identify the remains of the victims by remembering who was in certain positions in the building before he left. Cicero and Quintilian both discuss the method of *loci* as a tool for rhetoricians, as a means for memorizing speeches whereby one could walk through one's mental construction recalling each aspect of one's speech. The *Ad Herennium*, a Latin treatise on rhetoric, explains this art of memory:

Constat igitur artificiosa memoria ex locis et imaginibus. Locos appellamus eos qui breviter, perfecte, insignite aut natura aut manu sunt absoluti. Ut eos facile naturali memoria comprehendere et amplecti queamus: ut aedes [...] Imagines sunt formae quaedam et notae et simulacra eius rei quam meminisse volumus; quod genus equi [...] memoriam si volemus habere, imagines eorum locis certis conlocare oportebit.<sup>168</sup>

(The artificial memory includes backgrounds and images. By backgrounds I mean such scenes as are naturally or artificially set off on a small scale, complete and conspicuous, so that we can grasp and embrace them easily by the natural memory – for example, a house [...] An image is, as it were, a figure, a mark, or portrait of the

---

<sup>167</sup> I, 9, 35, Quintilian *Institutio oratoria* (XI, ii, 17-22); I, 2, 12, Cicero *De oratore* (II, lxxxvi, 350-4).

<sup>168</sup> Anonymous, *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, published as *Ad C. Herennium de ratione dicendi*, trans. by H. Caplan, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 208.

object we wish to remember; for example, if we wish to recall a horse [...] we must place its image in a definite background.)

It was thought that as well as being an important aid for rhetoricians, this mnemonic technique had a secondary possibility of preserving one's memory and preventing memory loss. Whilst Cicero describes the technique above in terms of Simonides' achievement, he also compares the method to imprinting the images on a wax tablet. This idea can be traced to Plato's *Theaetetus*, in which Socrates proposes that there is a block of wax in our soul upon which memories are imprinted and states that this wax tablet is the gift of memory.<sup>169</sup> It must be said that both Socrates' and Plato's understanding of memory also included the theory of anamnesis, that is to say that the soul already contains some memory of a past life – a theory that Lucretius and Montaigne both strongly disagree with, as we have seen in Chapter Two. The idea of a wax tablet of memory is also present in Aristotle's thinking on memory, as he describes an implement imprinting information on wax tablet as a metaphor for the imprinting of knowledge on memory. Aristotle uses an image of the seal failing to make an imprint on flowing water, but successfully stamping an image or memory on wax. Aristotle's analysis of memory moves from the genesis of memory to recollection, explaining that recollection is 'an activity' which takes place after an experience has been committed to memory and that remembering – that is committing something to memory for the first time – is the *sine qua non* of recollecting. Aristotle's theory of memory also establishes that memory belongs in the soul and to the faculty of sense-perception.

Lucretius includes sense-perception in his thoughts on memory, but before considering Lucretius here, one must first analyse Epicurus's approach. Epicurus does not

---

<sup>169</sup> Plato, *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 12, trans. by Harold N. Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1921) p. 191, Socrates says to Theaetetus: 'Please assume, then [...] that there is in our souls a block of wax'.

discuss the genesis of memory, where memory is stored, or how the process of memory or recollecting functions in his surviving works. Epicurus did however recognise the value of memory. For example, in Epicurus's letter to Herodotus, he says that he has prepared an epitome of his whole doctrine in order that his followers can easily preserve the principal tenets in their memory. He is insistent in his letter to his disciple that he should memorize and fix his Epicurean teaching in his mind in order to be able to apply it to his life seamlessly: 'these truths being stored in his memory will be a constant assistance to him'. Here, Epicurus uses the language of storage, implying that memory is a storehouse, but in another letter to Pythocles, he encourages his pupil to 'engrave them [his doctrines] in your memory' and to 'imprint all these precepts in your memory', suggesting an understanding of memory as a wax tablet.<sup>170</sup> Despite this uncertainty, it is clear that Epicurus was determined that his students committed his theories to memory, as Diogenes Laertius recalls through Diocles that 'he [Epicurus] used to accustom his pupils to preserve his writings in their memory'.<sup>171</sup> Epicurus saw the importance of memory as a means of calling to mind pleasant experiences from one's past to allow one to escape pain in the present, in order to achieve *ataraxia*, the aim of Epicureanism. Montaigne himself recognises this faith in memory as he writes in the 'Apologie' that one is taught 'de nous servir, pour consolation des maux presens, de la souvenance des biens passez, et d'appeler à nostre secours un contentement esvanouy pour l'opposer à ce qui nous presse' (II, 12, 494). The importance that Epicurus attaches to memory as a way of dealing with present afflictions suggests a dependence on memory of the past for living in the present. Michael Frede interprets Epicurus's insistence on the importance of remembering to suggest that Epicurus believes that 'our whole way of thinking

---

<sup>170</sup> Cassius Amicus, 'Ante Oculos – Epicurus and the evidence-based life', *Letter to Pythocles*.

<sup>171</sup> Cassius Amicus, 'A life worthy of the Gods – The Life and Work of Epicurus', 'The life of Epicurus by Diogenes Laertius'.

is determined by our memory, by what we remember having experienced and what we have committed to memory'.<sup>172</sup>

Lucretius's writing, particularly his use of repetition, reflects Epicurus's insistence on the memorization of the key aspects of their philosophy. Lucretius approaches the topic of memory more directly than Epicurus, as he discusses the mind and its functions extensively in *De rerum natura*. In Book IV, Lucretius himself concedes that memory and the workings of the mind in this area are difficult topics to grasp:

Multaque in his rebus quaeruntur multaque nobis  
clarandumst, plane si res exponere avemus (*De rerum natura*, IV, 777-8)

(There are many questions to be asked on this topic, many explanations to be given, if we wish to make the matter clear.)

This explains, to some extent, Lucretius's approach of examining multiple ideas, accruing example after example, developing certain views whilst discounting others. In Lucretius's attempt at explaining the mind and memory, he suggests that there is a vast store of images, which are carried on atoms, available in the universe and these atoms are ready at any time to enter into one's mind. Modern commentators have rarely cited Lucretius's model of thought and memory here, but in *De rerum natura*, Lucretius is insistent that 'tanta est mobilitas, et rerum copia tanta' (*De rerum natura*, IV, 774 and 799, 'so great is their [the atoms carrying the images] velocity, so great the store of things'), repeating the expression twice concerning this topic. When Lucretius attempts to explain how the mind comes to think of something, he follows an Epicurean understanding of sensory perception, whereby the images carried by atoms penetrate the mind, almost by osmosis, and come into our thought. Lucretius suggests

---

<sup>172</sup> Michael Frede, 'An Empiricist View of Knowledge: Memorism', in *Companions to Ancient Thought: Vol. 1, Epistemology*, ed. by Stephen Everson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

that these images stay in the memory and are stored there, until something prompts the mind to think of a certain image, and then that image comes from the store and presents itself.

quia tempore in uno,  
Cum sentimus, id est, cum vox emittitur una,  
Tempora multa latent, ratio quae comperit esse,  
Propterea fit uti quovis in tempore quaeque  
Praesto sint simulacra locis in quisque parata

(*De rerum natura*, IV, 794-9).

(because in one moment of time perceived by us, that is, while one word is being uttered, many times are lurking which reason understands to be there, that is why in any given moment all these various images are present ready in every place).

For Lucretius then, all images are omnipresent; here he does not specify that they are present in a locatable storehouse, rather, he explains that they are simply present somewhere from whence they can be called forth. In this way, Lucretius proposes that one can be made to suddenly remember something due to a sensory prompt such as a word, image or sound which stirs the memory into recalling the desired piece of information. Lucretius does not explain how one can voluntarily choose to recollect something particular. Is it the case that one need only wish to think of that memories and it will present itself from the vast store of memories? Lucretius's idea of memory in this sense is far more random and uncontrollable than the memory explained by Epicurus. Whilst both appear to be speaking about memory, each proposes his own angle: Epicurus, in the letter to Pythocles, describes the way in which individuals can consciously set down memories, and explains that memory is something which one can train, whereas Lucretius describes a memory which is more automatic. For Lucretius, the recording motions of one's mind are constantly, instinctively and unthinkingly

storing information, which is later accessed automatically, as if triggered by a particular stimulus which strikes a chord with the relevant piece of information.

Whilst Lucretius does not clarify whether memory is controllable to some extent or completely uncontrollable, it is certainly significant that he coins two words for memory – *retinentia* and *repetentia*.<sup>173</sup> As the previous chapter has shown, *retinentia* suggests a retaining or holding of information, because the verb *teneo* which means ‘to hold’ or ‘keep’. *Repetentia*, on the other hand, is more closely linked with recollecting in that the verb *peto* at the centre of Lucretius’s neologism means ‘to strive for’ or ‘to seek’, which reveal *repetentia* to be a far more active form of memory than *retinentia*. Both terms appear in Lucretius’s discussion of death in Book III and the expression in which *repetentia* appears implies that *repetentia* is an activity which is interrupted by death, unlike *retinentia*, which is something broken and emptied by death.<sup>174</sup> This shows that *retinentia* is more closely linked to the idea of memory as a container which retains and stores all memories and experiences but which is broken and destroyed in death, whilst *repetentia* is the activity of recollecting and remembering, which appears to be happening continuously throughout one’s life in order to hold one’s sense of identity together. Indeed, Lucretius’s use of *repetentia* is the closest that he comes to analysing the process of remembering as he explains in the same passage that one cannot call back the experiences and memories of a previous self by using memory: ‘nec

---

<sup>173</sup> Screech, *Montaigne’s Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 68. ‘Creech and then Munro consider the word [retinentia] exclusive to Lucretius’.

<sup>174</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, Loeb edition, trans. by W.H.D Rouse, III, 674-6, ‘nam si tanto operest animi mutare potestas, omnis ut actarum exciderit retinentia rerum, non, ut opinor, id ab leto iam longiter errat’ (‘For if the power of the mind has been so greatly changed that it has lost all recollection of things done, that, I think is not far removed from death’).

III, 847-851 ‘Nec, si materiam nostram collegerit aetas post obitum rursumque redegerit ut sita nunc est, atque iterum nobis fuerint data lumina vitae, pertineat quicquam tamen ad nos id quoque factum, interrupta semel cum sit repetentia nostri’ (‘Even if time should gather together our matter after death and bring it back again as it is now placed, and if once more the light of life should be given to us, yet it would not matter one bit to us that even this had been done, when the recollection of ourselves has once been broken asunder’).

memori tamen id quimus reprehendere mente'. ('And yet we cannot call that back by memory'; *De rerum natura*, III, 859).<sup>175</sup>

As we have seen, Montaigne inherits from Antiquity two distinct and perhaps irreconcilable models of memory. While both feature in his own writings, we will find that Montaigne reworks elements of both the storehouse and the tool in order to produce a more dynamic model of memory that goes beyond both.

### **Memory as a container, memory as a tool**

'C'est un outil de merveilleux service que la mémoire, et sans lequel le jugement faict bien à peine son office : elle me manque du tout'.

'De la praesumption', (II, 17, 649)

'C'est le receptacle et l'estuy de la science que la memoire: l'ayant si deffaillante, je n'ay pas fort à me plaindre, si je ne scay guiere'.

'De la praesumption', (II, 17, 651)

The two quotations above appear in the essay 'De la praesumption', in which Montaigne discusses presumption as a trait which ought to be avoided. The essay directly follows 'De la gloire' in which Montaigne insists that conscience is more important than honour and that one should seek to act honourably but not with the aim of being honoured. Montaigne continues this discussion in 'De la praesumption', where he moves on to criticise vainglory and self-promotion as vices which one must attempt to avoid. Whilst the overarching theme of the essay is shunning presumption and following a course of honesty, Montaigne develops his essay by analysing his own physical and mental defects in order to show his honest nature

---

<sup>175</sup> 'id' here refers to any past self that may have existed from the same atoms of which we are now formed.

in his writing and to prove that he is not presumptuous. Montaigne begins the essay with a recollection from his childhood when people commented that he carried himself in a way which suggested ‘quelque vaine et sotte fierté’ (II, 17, 633). Montaigne attempts to unburden himself of this accusation, stating that such a physical trait is likely to have occurred without his knowledge or will. Keen to distance himself further from vainglory, he promises that, although he cannot comment on his physical or bodily appearances, ‘quant aux bransles de l’ame, je veux icy confesser ce que j’en sens’ (II, 17, 633). This introduces the essay in which Montaigne shows his self-awareness, drawing on his experiences of his self to show his personal failings and weaknesses regarding the activities of his soul. The list of Montaigne’s flaws brings him back to the recurrent theme of the weakness of his memory, as one can see in both quotations above. Montaigne discusses his weak memory in ‘Des menteurs’, in which he claims to be completely out of place in offering a treatise on memory as he writes that ‘Il n’est homme à qui il siese si mal de se mesler de parler de la memoire’ (I, 9, 34). Elisabeth Hodges recognises that Montaigne only discusses his memory in ‘Des menteurs’ in terms of ‘an unnatural and monstrous deficiency’.<sup>176</sup> He is very critical of his memory in ‘Des menteurs’, explaining that he believes himself to be remarkable in that his memory is worse than that of anyone he knows. ‘De la praesumption’ offers an opportunity to discuss his memory again, not as something remarkable but as something about which Montaigne is seriously concerned in his day-to-day life. It is through this discussion of his lack of memory that he makes clear what he believes the faculty of memory is and what its capabilities and processes should be.

---

<sup>176</sup> Hodges, Elizabeth, ‘The Will Not To Forget’, in *Memory and Community in Sixteenth-Century France*, ed. by David LaGuardia and Cathy Yandell (Oxford: Routledge, 2016). p. 163.

The first definition of memory that Montaigne presents in ‘De la praesumption’ is as an instrument which provides a remarkable service:

C'est un outil de merveilleux service que la mémoire, et sans lequel le jugement faict bien à peine son office : elle me manque du tout (II, 17, 649).

This description makes clear the relationship between memory and judgement, and in Montaigne admitting that he lacks this memory as a tool, he is as a consequence suggesting that his judgement is also not able to do its job properly. As John Holyoake argues, Montaigne picks and chooses when he wants to criticise judgement and when he wants to criticise his memory. Both Holyoake and Richard Regosin acknowledge the context of this quotation as contributing to Montaigne’s self-criticism – Regosin, for example, notes the ‘modesty and lack of presumption called for’ in this particular essay – but neither delves into what Montaigne means by describing memory as ‘un outil’ here.<sup>177</sup> Montaigne follows this expression with an explanation of what he expects the tool of memory to be able to do, examining the process of memory at each stage where he falters. The first use of the tool of memory is the first step in the process: committing information to memory on the first occasion that one learns it. He does not yet specify where this information goes once it is remembered except in the instance when he explains that he sometimes needs to note something down in order to recall it later, creating a substitute for memory. Montaigne writes ‘Je ne scaurois recevoir une charge sans tablettes’ (II, 17, 649). Montaigne is referring to a note-book here, a physical memory tool, rather than the metaphorical wax tablet referred to by antiquity. He is discussing the memory of practical or trivial things here, such as people’s names or a speech. He claims to find memorizing difficult and explains that when

---

<sup>177</sup> John S. Holyoake, ‘The Idea of ‘Jugement’ in Montaigne’, *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (April, 1968), pp. 340-51, p. 345-47; Richard Regosin, ‘The Text of Memory: Experience as Narration in Montaigne’s *Essais*’ in Dikka Berven, *Montaigne: Montaigne’s Message and Method* (New York: Garland, 1995).

he needs to retain something of importance, he resorts to the method of learning it exactly and by heart ('par coeur mot à mot') in order to commit it to his memory because he is so concerned that his memory will deceive him ('ma memoire vint à me faire un mauvais tour'; II, 17, 649). Even using this traditional method, of which he is so critical in 'De l'institution des enfans', he has great difficulty: 'Pour apprendre trois vers, il me faut trois heures' (II, 17, 649).<sup>178</sup> Furthermore, he still does not explain the middle part of the process which concerns where the memory is stored once it is memorized. Instead, Montaigne moves on to the final stage of the process of memory, which is the recalling of that remembered piece of information when one so desires. Montaigne develops the theme of not trusting his memory by explaining that when he attempts to recall information from his memory, it is not willing to help him and the information does not come immediately to the fore. Montaigne explains his own difficult process of recollection as he writes 'il faut que je la sollicite nonchalamment: car, si je la presse, elle s'estonne' (II, 17, 649). Montaigne personifies memory by characterising it as something that he can address and which is capable of being 'stunned' or 'paralyzed'. A memory which is paralyzed would be of no use, for either recording, or recalling information. Montaigne emphasises the problems he has with his memory, capturing the image of something paralyzed and unable to function as one wishes as he goes on to describe his memory as 'stumbling' ('ell'a commencé à chanceler'; II, 17, 649) when it attempts to recall something to him. Thus, Montaigne describes the final use of the tool of memory which is the recollection of information.

It is at this point that Montaigne makes a slight move to explain from where the information is recalled, and therefore, where information and memories are retained and stored. Montaigne writes 'plus je la sonde, plus elle s'empestre et embarrassé; elle me sert à

---

<sup>178</sup> One might see this in the context of numerous comments in the *Essais* which serve as disclaimers for Montaigne, allowing him to excuse himself for his lack of citation and the inaccuracy of his quotations.

son heure, non pas à la mienne' (II, 17, 649-50). This image of Montaigne 'probing' ('je [...] sonde') for information implies that when one first remembers something it is stored and retained somewhere in order for it to be recalled at a later date. As Montaigne writes that 'elle me sert à son heure, non pas à la mienne' (II, 17, 650), his guiding metaphor moves away from the wax tablet and the container images towards a personification of memory. Memory now becomes an agent within Montaigne, guarding and withholding knowledge and past experiences. The personification suggests that Montaigne must approach this guard and request permission to access the memories that he requires. At this point, it is almost as if memory is another self inside Montaigne and is not necessarily his own. It could well be that Montaigne is simply using this image of an overly vigilant guard to exaggerate the lack of control that he feels that he has over his memory, as this personification of memory is also present in the 'Apologie' where Montaigne explains the problems in his memory.<sup>179</sup> Montaigne reveals therefore that his memory is flawed at several key stages in the memorial process: he cannot easily memorize or commit information to memory; he cannot manipulate his store of memory to access the necessary information; and he cannot use the tool of memory to recall information when he desires. It is significant that Montaigne's understanding of memory as a tool here is conflated with this idea of memory as a storehouse which retains information. This conflation of memory as a container and as a tool is similar to Lucretius's own interpretation of memory as both *retinentia*, being linked to storage, and *repetentia*, being linked to the process of recollection and remembering. Whilst Lucretius does not explain how the process of recollecting works, Montaigne does, creating an image of himself actively searching his memory container for the desired piece of information.

Before Montaigne goes on to discuss the storehouse of memory in more detail in 'De la praesumption', he deals with the subject of forgetting – another important aspect of

---

<sup>179</sup> II, 12, 494, 'la mémoire nous represente non pas ce que nous choisissons mais ce qui lui plaist'.

memory of which Montaigne believes he is certainly capable. Montaigne's concern swiftly moves from forgetting trivial details, such as the names of one of his man-servants, to a far more serious concern that if his memory continues to deteriorate as he grows older, he will even forget his own name. It is not the forgetting of information and identity of others that most troubles Montaigne, it is the fear of forgetting his own identity. Montaigne writes 'Si je durois à vivre long temps, je ne croy pas que je n'oubliasse mon nom propre, comme ont faict d'autres' (II, 17, 651). In the first edition, [A], Montaigne immediately followed this concern with a quotation from Terence, but this passage was edited in both the [B] and [C] interpolations and these additions give far greater depth to Montaigne's interpretation of memory here. Firstly, Montaigne adds detail to show two examples of men who forgot who they were: Messala Corvinus and George of Trebizond. It is perhaps an ironic move by Montaigne in a passage about his faulty memory that he recalls two relatively obscure examples so pertinent to his argument, although it might suggest that they made a particular impression on him for personal reasons. Secondly, Montaigne reveals his concern about living an existence similar to these unfortunate men:

pour mon interest, je rumine souvent quelle vie c'estoit que la leur, et si sans cette piece [la mémoire] il me restera assez pour me soustenir avec quelque aisance; et, y regardant de pres, je crains que ce defaut, s'il est parfaict, perde toutes les functions de l'ame (II, 17, 651).

Memory is described as an element of Montaigne's composition that is vital in sustaining him. The expression 'soustenir' primarily means to sustain oneself in the sense of keeping oneself alive. Here, Montaigne uses the phrase 'me soustenir' to mean to maintain and support his self or identity. Montaigne creates a spatial and temporal metaphor here, as he considers whether he could uphold and sustain his self without a memory, and whether any aspect of his self would endure in time, without memory. Montaigne does suggest that

there are other factors that sustain his being, such as the other cognitive faculties, but he insists that without a memory, these factors would not be able to function and would not be enough alone, to be able to maintain his identity. This is perhaps because these other factors are the functions of the soul which, as Montaigne explains, are interlinked with the faculty of memory.

Montaigne's concern that all the functions of his soul would be lost if he no longer had memory is reminiscent of his note in his copy of *De rerum natura*:

Si ab aeterno anima est debuimus cum corpora insinuatur praeteritorum [meminisse  
Sin adeo est oppressa ut uim suam omnem perdiderit non procul abest ab [interitu 235.<sup>180</sup>  
(If the *anima* exists from eternity, we ought to remember things past when it insinuates itself into the body. If it is so overwhelmed as to lose all of its power, that is not far from death.)

As I have discussed in Chapter Two, in this note memory is equated to all the power of the soul, and here in II, 17 Montaigne is concerned that if there is complete memory loss or no memory at all then all the functions of the soul will be lost. The passage in Lucretius to which Montaigne's note refers is discussing the loss of identity in death and memory as a means of maintaining identity, whilst here Montaigne is discussing the loss of identity in life due to a loss of memory. Memory is fundamental to the preservation of identity because it is interlinked with the functions of the soul that form a self. Furthermore, one might interpret Montaigne's comment in 'De la praesumption' to mean that Montaigne's memory contains and supplies the functions of the soul and provides the means to live; as Montaigne states that complete memory loss would result in a total loss of all the functions of the soul, he is implying that the soul could not function without memory, and therefore memory loss is akin

---

<sup>180</sup> Montaigne's copy of Lucretius's *De rerum natura*, p. 324; Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 131.

to death and the destruction of one's being, which echoes his note in his copy of *De rerum natura*. ‘Toutes les fonctions de l'ame’ represent Montaigne’s claim to being human and existing as his self, and these functions are supported by his memory, which provides the basis for knowing and understanding who Montaigne is and how to function as a human being. Without memory, Montaigne imagines that he would have no way of knowing who he is nor any way of knowing how to function. Therefore it can be understood that Montaigne believes memory to be vital for knowing and understanding that one is a being, one is a self, one has an identity.

Montaigne does not mention Lucretius in the text here, but his thoughts on Lucretian memory certainly influence his writing. Montaigne follows this comment on the loss of the functions of the soul with a quotation from Cicero’s *Academica*: ‘Memoria certe non modo philosophiam, sed omnis vitae usum omnesque artes una maxime continet’ (It is certain that memory alone is what retains not only our philosophy but also the whole of life’s practices and all the arts and sciences.;II, 17, 651).<sup>181</sup> This quotation explains that all of the arts and sciences, and indeed, all of the functions of the soul, are contained in the memory, encapsulating Montaigne’s idea here. Cicero writes this as Lucullus is explaining what he considers to be knowledge and how man comes to learn. Lucullus mentions Epicurus and his understanding of sensory perception and agrees that the senses contain the highest truth. Lucullus goes on to explain different types of perceptions and his belief that the senses and the mind cannot be deceived by false notions. His argument on memory culminates with the point that if the senses and mind could receive false notions, there would be no room for memory to exist since memory could not hold false notions, only the truth. It is significant that Cicero is considering what it would be like if memory did not exist in this context, and

---

<sup>181</sup> Cicero, *Academica*, II (Lucullus), trans. by H. Rackham, Loeb Classical edition (London: Harvard University Press, 1933) p. 496.

Montaigne too is discussing the destruction of memory. Furthermore, Cicero's discussion of memory in the *Academica* goes on to ask '[...] quid quisquam meminit quod non animo comprehendit et tenet?' ('or what can anyone remember that he does not grasp and hold in his mind?').<sup>182</sup> The 'tenet' echoes the 'continet' in the above quotation, underlining the concept of containing and retaining in memory.

Montaigne follows this quotation with a line from Terence's *Eunuch*, which he uses to accentuate this idea that there is a container of memory and all the functions of the soul, but the quotation does throw some doubt onto whether the person or memory is the container. Terence's quotation reads: 'plenus rimarum sum, hac atque illac effluo' ('I am full of cracks and leaking everywhere'; II, 17, 651).<sup>183</sup> It is significant that Montaigne leaves the quotation as 'plenus rimarum sum' as spoken by Parmeno, when he might have changed the expression to fit a description of memory ('plena rimarum est'). By leaving the quotation to read that 'I am full of cracks and leaking everywhere', Montaigne describes himself rather than memory as the container. This image of memory directly contrasts with the earlier example in which memory was portrayed as another self (or a guard), since here memory is described as being Montaigne himself. To consider the context of Parmeno's comment briefly, it is spoken as the topic of keeping a secret is discussed; Parmeno is able to retain the truth and keep the truth a secret; but he cannot keep a secret that is a lie or false; that is to say that it is false propositions that are leaking from Parmeno. Interestingly, Montaigne discusses a similar trait of not being able to keep a secret in 'Sur des vers de Virgile', where he admits that 'Je souffre peine à me feindre, si que j'évite de prendre les secrets d'autrui en garde, n'ayant pas bien le coeur de desadvouer ma science. Je puis la taire, mais la nyer je ne puis sans effort et desplaisir' (III, 5, 846). This propensity to tell the truth is a virtue dressed up as a fault, and a

---

<sup>182</sup> Cicero, *Academica*, II (Lucullus), p. 496-97.

<sup>183</sup> Terence, *Eunuch*, I, ii, 25.

virtue that Montaigne uses to present his essays as personal and honest. The brief discussion of this in III, 5 echoes Montaigne's insistence on his honesty as Montaigne writes:

Je suis affamé de me faire connoistre; et ne me chaut à combien, pourveu que ce soit véritablement; ou, pour dire mieux, je n'ay faim de rien, mais je crains mortellement d'estre pris en eschange par ceux à qui il arrive de connoistre mon nom (III, 5, 847).

Conversely, Montaigne's identity is dependent on his honesty, and his weak memory in this instance serves to ensure that Montaigne's identity in his book is truthful to his real identity.

In the quotation above from 'Sur des vers de Virgile', Montaigne appears to reveal a motivation for his book, that is to make himself known to people, but by presenting a true likeness of himself, revealing his faults and avoiding presumption, rather than painting a polished portrait.

The context of the quotation from the *Eunuch* combined with Montaigne's own comments on truthfulness and memory supports the quotation from Cicero that there is no memory or container for false notions. Indeed, Montaigne insists in 'Des menteurs' that truthful or real facts are more firmly imprinted in the memory, whereas invented false facts are not retained as securely:

Lors qu'ils déguisent et changent, à les remettre souvent en ce mesme conte, il est malaisé qu'ils ne se desferrent, par ce que la chose, comme elle est, s'estant logée la premiere dans la memoire, et s'y estant empreincte, par la voye de la connoissance, et de la science, il est malaisé qu'elle ne se représente à l'imagination, délogeant la fauceté, qui n'y peut avoir le pied si ferme, ny si rassis [...] (I, 9,36)

Montaigne therefore suggests that truthful memories almost force out ('déloger') false ones.

It seems that in his understanding of memory, false notions can be stored there, but they are more likely to 'eschappe[r] volontiers à la memoire' (I, 9, 36) than the truth.

Yet it is worthwhile considering Montaigne's choice of imagery further here. In the sixteenth century, a leaking vessel was an emblem which often represented the Danaids. These daughters of Danaus were due to marry the sons of their uncle Aegyptus. On the wedding night, the daughters murdered their husbands and as a punishment were condemned to eternally fill a vessel with water with which to wash the blood from their hands. The vessel was filled with holes and therefore it constantly leaked meaning that they were never able to complete their task. Claude Paradin explains the image of the leaking container in his emblem book, *Devises heroïques*, that:

Le tonneau des Danaïdes (selon les Poëtes) est tant trouë et percé de tous cotez, que tant que lon y peut verser, il coule et gette dehors. A tel Tonneau donques ou semblable, Plutarque, Terence, et autres Auteurs accomperent les Langars, les Ingrats, et les Avares. Pour autant que le langard et causeur, ne peut rien tenir secret, mais gette tout dehors, l'Ingrat et mesconnoissant, ne scet gré du bien qu'on lui fait, et l'Avare jamais n'est rempli ny saoul.<sup>184</sup>

The emblem traditionally refers to secrecy or ingratitude, but Montaigne seems to reappropriate the image to the realm of memory and forgetting. It is significant that the Danaids are also mentioned by Lucretius in Book III of *De rerum natura*. He does not mention the Danaids by name, but the context clearly suggests that is those sisters to whom he refers:

---

<sup>184</sup> Paradin, Claude, *Devises heroïques* (1557), p. 146.

Deinde animi ingratam naturam pascere simper  
atque explere bonis rebús satiareque numquam –  
quod faciunt nobis annorum tempora, circum  
cum redeunt fetusque ferunt variosque lepores,  
nec tamen explemur vitai fructibus umquam –  
hoc, ut opinor, id est, aevo florente paellas  
quod memorant laticem pertusum congerere in vas,  
quod tamen expleri nulla ratione potestur.<sup>185</sup>

(*De rerum natura*, III, 1003-1010)

(Then to be always feeding an ungrateful mind, yet never able to fill and satisfy it with good things – as the seasons of the year do for us when they come round bringing their fruits and manifold charms, yet we are never filled with the fruits of life – this, I think, is meant by the tale of the damsels in the flower of their age pouring water into a riddled urn, which, for all their trying, can never be filled.)

This quotation follows from Lucretius describing Tantalus and Sisyphus as emblems of real-life experiences, and so it is with the Danaïdes for Lucretius. It is significant that Lucretius compares the mind to the Danaids' leaking container, stating that they are never able to fill it with good things ('bonis rebus'). When one considers Epicurus's teaching that the memory is a store of good experiences to which one can turn in order to deal with present woes, it is all the more significant that these sisters will never successfully store 'good things' and will therefore never be content. Montaigne marks this passage in his copy of *De rerum natura*

---

<sup>185</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, III, 1003-1010, p. 266-9. The damsels to which Lucretius refers are almost certainly the Danaïdes.

with a firm pen-stroke against lines 1005-10. Furthermore, Montaigne comments on this section of Lucretius's poem on a flyleaf of his copy:

Quae finguntur pænæ sisipho & Tantalo sunt hæ quas uiuentes ferimus 262/

(The torments feigned for Sisyphus and Tantalus are those we bear when alive  
262.).)<sup>186</sup>

The Danaids' suffering is surely implied by Montaigne's understanding of those torments which are described and interpreted by Lucretius. There is an unmistakeable correlation between Lucretius's description of the human mind as a leaking container here and Montaigne's description of his own mind using the same image in 'De la praesumption' with the quotation from Terence.

As Montaigne describes himself as a leaking container ('plenus rimarum sum'), perhaps his self and memory are one here, as when Montaigne's memory leaks, so do the elements of his self. In fact, in 'De la physionomie', Montaigne again describes himself as a leaky container as he explains that his mind is uncontrollable when it comes to learning from experience. He writes 'Or à un esprit si indocile il faut des bastonnades; et faut rebattre et resserrer à bons coups de mail ce vaisseau qui se desprenst, se descouet, qui s'eschappe et desrobe de soy' (III, 12, 1045). This image is found in the context of Montaigne attempting to hold firm to himself ('me tenir à moy'; III, 12, 1045-6), again recognising this fault in himself that prevents him from holding and containing the vital parts of his self together. Indeed, the *vaisseau* here is a barrel which needs to be firmly hooped to be able to securely retain the contents.

---

<sup>186</sup> Montaigne's copy of Lucretius *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin 1563, After flyleaf n; M.A. Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 137. '262/' is the page number to which Montaigne's note refers.

These descriptions of Montaigne or his memory as a leaky container are more significant when one considers that after this quotation from Terence in ‘De la praesumption’ Montaigne defines memory as a container of knowledge: ‘C'est le receptacle et l'estuy de la science que la memoire: l'ayant si deffaillante, je n'ay pas fort à me plaindre, si je ne scay guiere’ (II, 17, 651). Just as he does with the description of memory as an instrument, Montaigne follows the definition with a criticism of his own memory. This quotation is fundamental to Montaigne’s understanding of the classical tradition of memory and supports Cicero’s quotation from earlier in the essay. With Montaigne so heavily focussed on the theme of his poor memory throughout the essays, one can almost imagine Montaigne responding to his philosophical sceptical question ‘Que scay-je?’ in the most practical way with the response ‘Ayant une memoire si deffaillante, je ne scay guiere’. As Montaigne describes his memory container as faulty in this way, it is clear that the retention of knowledge is as central to memory as the ability to remember and recall. This comment in tandem with the quotation describing himself as a leaking container confirms that Montaigne believes his memory is flawed in the middle step of the process of memory, that of retention and storage of memories and information.

Following the same structure as his definition of memory as an instrument, he goes on to list examples of his leaking memory container, in particular in relation to the way that he reads and studies books. In fact, Montaigne claims that he does not study books at all:

Je feuillette les livres, je ne les estudie pas: ce qui m'en demeure, c'est chose que je ne reconnois plus estre d'autrui; c'est cela seulement dequoy mon jugement a faict son profict, les discours et les imaginations dequoy il s'est imbu; l'autheur, le lieu, les mots et autres circonstances, je les oublie incontinent (II, 17, 651).

Montaigne's annotated copy of *De rerum natura* betrays his comment here as he clearly did study Lucretius's verse and his meticulous notes on the copy reveal an avid student of Lucretian philosophy. Furthermore, Montaigne himself explains that he writes his *Essais* in a study surrounded by books and beams inscribed with his favourite quotations. Whilst this claim does play on Montaigne's apparent forgetfulness of more trivial details, it must also be seen as a disclaimer for Montaigne, distancing him from the pedant and styling him as a casual reader. This quotation therefore certainly shows some artistic licence on Montaigne's part regarding forgetting the author and the book but it does continue the theme of memories as a liquid spilling or leaking from Montaigne, with his description of arguments and ideas being drunk and swallowed ('imbu'). Furthermore, the expression 'ce qui m'en demeure' again suggests that certain ideas do stay and take up a place in his memory, whilst others leak out. Montaigne also raises the topic of 'jugement' again in this quotation, suggesting that the only information that he retains is not stored with a reference to the author or the book from whence it came, rather it is stored as an adjunct to Montaigne's own judgement. The idea of memory as a storehouse is blurred again as this suggestion that memories are almost absorbed into Montaigne's judgement and self, and further, the particular identity of the idea is absorbed into Montaigne's identity, not allowing the idea of an 'other' to dilute the self, rather incorporating ideas from others into one's own identity in order to strengthen it. This idea appears again in 'De l'institution des enfants' when Montaigne discusses the role of memory in education.

## **Memory and education**

The primary source for Montaigne's attitude to the importance of memory in education and learning is his essay 'De l'institution des enfans', which advises his addressee Diane de Foix

to whom this essay is dedicated, about selecting a tutor for her son. This essay provides an insight into Montaigne's understanding of the values of Renaissance humanism and his opinions about contemporary teaching and learning techniques, whilst also revealing that Montaigne is opposed to the memory-based learning and teaching styles which were practiced in sixteenth-century France. Montaigne's critique of pedantry and the heavy emphasis on rote learning is discussed in 'Du pedantisme', which precedes 'De l'institution des enfans', but it is in this essay that Montaigne is able to put forward the idea of assimilating knowledge in a way which is useful, rather than studying books and philosophies to the point of recital but lacking any real understanding of what one has studied. This idea of the assimilation of learned information echoes Montaigne's idea that the names and exact words of the writers do not matter so much as the meaning and the real information that one gleans from one's reading and which can then be assimilated to one's knowledge and become part of one's self. Montaigne expects that a pupil should be allowed to choose for himself what he believes and what information he takes from his reading, rather than being prescribed information which the pupil is expected to follow. Montaigne writes:

Car s'il embrasse les opinions de Xenophon et de Platon par son propre discours, ce ne seront plus les leurs, ce seront les siennes. [...] Il faut qu'il emboive leurs humeurs, non qu'il apprenne leurs preceptes. Et qu'il oublie hardiment, s'il veut, d'où il les tient, mais qu'il se les sçache approprier. (I, 26, 151-2).

The learned information is not recorded in the memory as belonging to someone else, and filed in a specific section allotted to that particular writer or thinker; rather the overall message that the pupil takes should be absorbed into his own memory and is appropriated to the pupil's own self. It is significant again in this quotation that Montaigne mentions the idea of forgetting the origin of the ideas, and for Montaigne the origin itself is trivial in comparison with the understanding. Furthermore, the origin of that piece of information will

change as the information will have a fresh starting point in one's own understanding, as it becomes one's own, rather than being borrowed or shared. The opposition is firmly established between remembering 'd'où il [the pupil] les tient', following the pedant's approach to learning, and actually understanding and appropriating that learning, which Montaigne propounds. Indeed, in Marc Foglia's analysis of Montaigne's approach to education, he considers Montaigne to prefer 'un homme de bon jugement' to 'un homme savant'.<sup>187</sup> This also applies to the student discussed in 'De l'institution des enfants' who must be able to apply their learning rather than just storing or holding abstract knowledge.

Furthermore, Montaigne differentiates between the self and memory here, moving towards an understanding where the appropriation of learning contributes to the substance of the self rather than being stored in the memory. The image of learning and taking information on as liquid ('il emboive') continues here, with Montaigne's liquid information then being appropriated and absorbed into the substance of the self which appears to be able to constantly absorb information, with no apparent limit, as the self and identity are not limited. This act of drinking the information can be considered to be an active appropriation and assimilation, rather than simply taking on information which is presented by a tutor.

Montaigne continues to use the metaphor of information as liquid but uses it to criticise the 'rote-learning' style of teaching: 'On ne cesse de crier à nos oreilles, comme qui verseroit dans un antonnoir, et nostre charge ce n'est que redire ce qu'on nous a dict' (I, 26, 150). This does follow the approach of filling a container with information and memories, but Montaigne disapproves of this method of teaching in which the student has no freedom, nor control or choice over the information with which he is provided. It is this indiscriminate and impersonal learning of information which is anathema to Montaigne. There is no opportunity for appropriation of the information, nor for any learning of the proper application of what

---

<sup>187</sup> Marc Foglia, *Montaigne, pedagogue du jugement* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2011), p. 233.

one learns. Moreover, a pupil who simply repeats and regurgitates what he is told expresses no personal control over his mind or memory, and does not form a personal identity through his learning, only otherness. The image of pouring through a funnel as opposed to drinking not only shows the lack of control for the pupil, but one might also suggest that liquid information which is drunk by the learner goes into his soul to be appropriated by all the faculties, whereas information which is poured into the head has no means of getting to his soul to assimilate with the knowledge and learning which is already there and already part of the self.

Montaigne much prefers experiential learning to teacher-led learning, because it is through experiential learning that the pupil can form his own views, and moreover, it is far more personal and rooted in one's own life experiences. It can be said then that Montaigne's favour lies with autobiographical memory, which combines semantic memory and episodic memory to form a stronger, more personal memory. Montaigne appears to consider autobiographical memory far more powerful in terms of learning and in terms of appropriating semantic memory in a way which it becomes particular to one's self, rather than general knowledge. Montaigne continues his campaign against rote-learning and the type of teaching which he does not believe works well by suggesting that it is more important to have a tutor 'qui eust plutost la teste bien faicte que bien pleine' (I, 26, 150). This idea of having a well-formed rather than well-filled brain fits with Montaigne's expectations for the pupil, and also describes his own brain, which he suggests is only poorly filled in terms of trivial information. The idea of forming a mind rather than of loading a brain with facts and learning suggests the idea that a container which is filled with information is of no use if the user is not able to manipulate and apply that information critically. This is where the tool of memory is of use, as Montaigne understands that there is a tool for appropriating and

assimilating information and memories at the learning stage, and which is also able to access and extract relevant memories.

Montaigne is even critical of the use of memory as a storehouse alone without a tool. It is when the topic of pedantry arises that Montaigne is most negative towards memory, but it is not the faculty of memory to which Montaigne directs his criticisms, rather it is the particular memory for which a pedant strives that stores facts and useless information for the sake of being able to store such information and boast of one's mnemonic abilities. As Holyoake acknowledges 'Great learning was, by some, virtually equated with having a retentive memory. The ability to retain, rather than use, information was often admired to a degree which incensed the essentially practical Montaigne'.<sup>188</sup> Perhaps Montaigne's pejorative attitude to pedantry is influenced by the fact that his own memory was suited neither to pedantry nor to that style of learning or teaching, but it is clear that Montaigne values memory not as a storehouse alone, but also as a tool with which one can apply learning and memories to one's present situation.

Montaigne's criticism of the pedant's approach to learning and the storehouse of memory is most critical in 'Du pedantisme':

Nous ne travaillons qu'à remplir la memoire, et laissons l'entendement et la conscience vuide. Tout ainsi que les oyseaux vont quelquefois à la queste du grein, et le portent au bec sans le taster, pour en faire bechée à leurs petits, ainsi nos pedantes vont pillotant la science dans les livres, et ne la logent qu'au bout de leurs lèvres, pour la dégorger seulement et mettre au vent (I, 25, 136).

---

<sup>188</sup> Holyoake, 'The Idea of 'Jugement' in Montaigne', p. 346.

Montaigne uses the image of filling the container of memory in a negative way, because understanding and conscience are neglected and remain empty. It is unclear whether Montaigne considers understanding or conscience to be containers themselves, but here Montaigne's primary purpose with this image is to oppose their neglect to the emphasis on the needless filling up of memory for memory's sake. It is the pedant's memory which Montaigne is criticising here, and the memory container filled regardless of the quality or pertinence of the content. In fact, he is so eager to distance himself from pedantry that he goes as far as to say that he does not even have any storehouses ('gardoires') in which to retain the quotations which he selects for his *Essais*.

C'est merveille combien proprement la sottise se loge sur mon exemple. Est-ce pas faire de mesme, ce que je fay en la plus part de cette composition? Je m'en vay, escorniflant par cy par là des livres les sentences qui me plaisent, non pour les garder, car je n'ay point de gardoires, mais pour les transporter en cettuy-cy, où, à vray dire, elles ne sont non plus miennes qu'en leur premiere place.

Of course, this is an exaggeration on Montaigne's part, but it serves to show the disdain which he feels for pedantry. Moreover, although Montaigne supposedly cannot store these quotations due to his poor memory, he takes those which he assembles, and places them in his book; thus he transforms his essays into a storehouse for these memories, replacing memory to some extent. In fact, he even states that he is not interested in storing the quotations ('non pour les garder'); his intention is always to incorporate these quotations in his book, just as he thinks that true knowledge and learning can only come from assimilating learnt knowledge to one's own self. Therefore, the book also represents Montaigne's self, into which he absorbs these quotations. Montaigne then uses an alimentary metaphor for knowledge and learning, and a bodily approach to absorbing learning. He is critical when the student is indiscriminately fed information, and of when men gorge themselves on

information without properly digesting it. It is the proper digestion of learning that makes it possible to assimilate that information into one's self and it is the use of memory as a tool, supporting the other faculties, which allows this digestion of information and for it to be appropriated to one's own memory and self.

[...] Nous prenons en garde les opinions et le sçavoir d'autrui, et puis c'est tout. Il les faut faire nostres. [...] Que nous sert-il d'avoir la panse pleine de viande, si elle ne se digere? si elle ne se transforme en nous? si elle ne nous augmente et fortifie? [...]  
Quand bien nous pourrions estre sçavans du sçavoir d'autrui, au moins sages ne pouvons-nous estre que de nostre propre sagesse (I, 25, 136-8).

Montaigne also links *sagesse* to learning and memory here, setting it in opposition to *sçavoir*. He links wisdom to active learning through processing one's own experiences and memories, whilst knowledge is linked to alterity, is not applied to one's own life and is therefore less relevant to one's own development.

Similarly in 'De l'institution des enfans' Montaigne highlights the importance of applying one's learning to one's own life and even insists that intelligence and knowledge of a subject should not be measured by a test of memory but through how one applies that learning to one's own life. He suggests: 'Qu'il ne luy demande pas seulement compte des mots de sa leçon, mais du sens et de la substance, et qu'il juge du profit qu'il aura fait, non par le tesmoignage de sa memoire, mais de sa vie' (I, 26, 151). Montaigne again appears to value life experience and application over storing something in the memory, and in this instance, Montaigne presents one's life as distinct from one's memory. This approach may be due to Montaigne's focus on experiential learning which therefore requires experiential testing rather than an actual separation of memory and life. It is the case that Montaigne thinks that one's learning and memories should be interwoven with one's identity, as he

insists on the concept of absorbing one's learning and memories into one's identity and making one's learned memories one's own, as he repeatedly suggests that what a pupil learns and commits to memory should be 'bien fait sien' (I, 26, 151). Clearly for Montaigne understanding and application of a concept to one's own life is one of the key aims of learning, but of course whilst the application of learning is not possible without the tool of memory, the storage of that learning is also vital in that the learned information must be stored somewhere, in order that it might be called upon when it is required. Montaigne approaches a definition of what he thinks real knowledge is in 'De l'institution des enfans', and it is clear that it involves both the storehouse and the tool of memory. Montaigne writes:

Qui demanda jamais à son disciple ce qu'il luy semble de la Rhethorique et de la Grammaire, de telle ou telle sentence de Ciceron? On nous les plaque en la memoire toutes empennées, comme des oracles où les lettres et les syllabes sont de la substance de la chose. Sçavoir par coeur n'est pas sçavoir: c'est tenir ce qu'on a donné en garde à sa memoire. Ce qu'on sçait droittement, on en dispose, sans regarder au patron, sans tourner les yeux vers son livre (I, 26, 152).

*Sçavoir* in the contemporary understanding was linked with the retention of information in one's memory, but Montaigne argues that this is hollow knowledge in that it is lacking the application. He thus separates memory from real knowledge, judgement and practical use here, but again it is that particular pedant's memory which Montaigne is criticising - the memory which is based on knowing something by heart and storing it away for no practical use in the future. Montaigne is suggesting that real knowledge is not engaged with the memory container, but rather that it involves using the memory as a tool to recollect what has been learnt and utilizing it in a relevant situation. It is significant again that he criticises the rote-learning of ancient material here, stating that what one truly knows is not stored in a book nor is it known by one's teacher; it is known only by the pupil who has assimilated that

learning to their own life and self.<sup>189</sup> As for the learning of philosophical doctrines in this way, Montaigne's emphasis on being able to employ or apply our learning without referring to a book or to teacher intersects with Epicurus's teaching on memory. Epicurus teaches that one can learn the doctrines of his philosophy in order to live; equally Lucretius also insists on remembering the basic tenets of Epicurean philosophy in one's everyday understanding of the universe. Neither focuses on the storage of that information; Epicurus suggests that one might commit the precepts of Epicureanism to memory in order to live, but he is more insistent on the application of that understanding, and the constant application of what one has memorized. Lucretius, too, considers the tool of applying what one remembers of his doctrine to be more important than the storage. It is an active and constant application, a continuous recalling of the precepts of Epicureanism that allows one to follow their philosophy; one might even say that it is similar to *repetentia*, an activity of recollecting that information and applying it, to a point that it is almost subconscious. Montaigne considers the tool, which is closely linked to *repetentia*, to be the vital part of knowledge, even though the storehouse or container of memory, which is linked to *retinentia*, must always already contain the necessary information for that tool to extract and apply.

Regosin suggests that Montaigne considers memory to be an 'inert storehouse', that is to say, a storehouse alone and not at all linked to the other faculties.<sup>190</sup> This approach is debatable in that Montaigne does not see memory as an 'inert storehouse', only considering memory to be useless and inactive when it is not used, for example in the case of pedantry. I agree with Regosin that Montaigne rejects the model of memory as 'an inert storehouse' as

---

<sup>189</sup> This passage calls to mind Montaigne's criticism of learning by heart in 'De la praesumption', where he also struggles with the constraints of learning by heart and not being able to exercise his own personal freedom or to imprint his own current identity on something which is learnt by heart.

<sup>190</sup> Richard Regosin, 'Recent Trends in Montaigne Scholarship: A Post-Structuralist Perspective' in *Montaigne: A Collection of Essays: Sources of Montaigne's Thought (Volume II)*, ed. by Dikka Berven (Garland Publishers: New York, 1995) p. 348.

he considers it to be worthless as a storehouse alone, but as I have demonstrated, for Montaigne, memory is something active and working, which is tied in with recall as much as with storage. In statements such as: ‘Ce qu’on sait droittement, on en dispose, sans regarder au patron, sans tourner les yeux vers son livre’ (I, 26, 152), it is clear that for Montaigne, knowing something is related to information stored in memory, but knowledge is brought about not by looking backwards at past memories, nor at one’s tutor, nor at a book, but is brought about by looking forward, implied by Montaigne’s use of ‘droittement’, and applying learning without memory aids or any assistance other than the self.

Memory for Montaigne is a tool as well as a storehouse and is active at both ends of the cognitive process of memory, that is to say memorization and recollection. Regosin’s understanding implies that Montaigne conceives of memory to be a ‘receptacle’ but not ‘un outil’, as Montaigne himself defines it in ‘De la praesumption’.<sup>191</sup> In fact, memory is both of these, a storehouse and a tool, just as for Lucretius memory was not just the storage of our memories defined as *retinentia*, but it was also the active recollecting of *repetentia*. Lucretius’s terms for memory and his basic memory system described in *De rerum natura* lay the foundations for Montaigne’s own interpretation of memory, establishing an unlimited storehouse of memory attached to one’s identity and a tool which constantly collects memories, experiences and learning whilst also being always ready to recollect the relevant information when required.

Regosin’s argument that Montaigne opposes the idea of memory as ‘an inert storehouse’ recognises that such a concept causes tension concerning personal identity and the self. An inactive storehouse would be nothing more than a library filled with indiscriminate, impersonal memories, facts, quotations and information and would be an

---

<sup>191</sup> II, 17, 651; II, 17, 649.

embodiment of otherness rather than something which can assert personal identity. Regosin comments that ‘as inert storehouse, memory substitutes other for self’.<sup>192</sup> I argue that Montaigne does not see memory as always being something ‘other’, since for Montaigne, memories are absorbed into the self and contribute to the development of the self and strengthen one’s own personal identity rather than weakening or diluting it. As Montaigne explains that his use of other philosophers or writers in his *Essais* neither subtracts nor detracts from his own identity, it can be argued that Montaigne’s interpretation of memory is not at all similar to an inert library of impersonal quotations and information; for him, memory is, rather, a mixture of his self and of various pieces of learning which Montaigne has appropriated. In ‘De l’institution des enfans’ Montaigne writes ‘Je ne dis les autres sinon pour d’autant plus me dire’ (I, 26, 148) and states that once he has written a certain quotation or idea from Plato that ‘Ce n’est non plus selon Platon que selon moy, puis que luy et moi l’entendons et voyons de mesme’ (I, 26, 152). He does not allow his personal identity to be diluted by the use of quotations; rather this learning is absorbed into his self and becomes a part of his readerly, writerly and personal identity. This returns us to the image of Montaigne rummaging through other works, searching for passages which he likes (‘Je m’en vay, escorniflant par cy par là des livres les sentences qui me plaisent’) to place in his own book where ‘elles ne sont non plus miennes qu’en leur premiere place’ (I, 25, 136), but in this instance, Montaigne suggests that he appropriates quotations into his self, whereas earlier he describes them as not being his own.

Book learning alone is considered to be something decorative (‘Je m’attens qu’elle serve d’ornement, non de fondement’; I, 26, 152) and he insists that it does not directly form a foundation for knowledge or identity. Montaigne goes as far as defining knowledge (‘la science’) as an ornament too, as he writes: ‘Madame, c’est un grand ornement que la science,

---

<sup>192</sup> Richard Regosin, ‘Recent Trends in Montaigne Scholarship: A Post-Structuralist Perspective’, p. 348.

et un util de merveilleux service' (I, 26, 149). Of course, Montaigne defines memory as an 'util de merveilleux service' in 'De la praesumption', as well as criticising other types of memory; so it is the case here that Montaigne is critical of that particular type of knowledge which is of no use, but recognises that when the right type of knowledge is used properly, as a tool, it can be of great service. The repetition of the phrase 'util de merveilleux service' serves to highlight Montaigne's heavily interconnected patterns of thought which scarcely permit him to discuss the topic of knowledge and education without immediately thinking of the role of memory. If bookish learning and trivial knowledge are not the foundations of identity and knowledge, then what does Montaigne believe are? His arguments in this essay suggest that experiential learning and judgement are sounder foundations, and since these activities are only possible through the use of memory as a tool, then memory serves as the foundation to identity and knowledge for Montaigne.

This explains why Montaigne criticises the greed for knowledge and the mere filling up of containers of memory with information. He does want a pupil to have a thirst and passion for knowledge on their own terms, which is more conducive to experiential learning:

il n'y a tel que d'allécher l'appétit et l'affection, autrement on ne faict que des asnes chargez de livres. On leur donne à coups de fouet en garde leur pochette pleine de science, laquelle, pour bien faire, il ne faut pas seulement loger chez soy, il la faut espouser (I, 26, 177).

The image of the container of memory is again recognised by Montaigne, here as a 'pochette' but is criticised if it is not used in tandem with the tool of memory. Montaigne wants the student to actively engage with knowledge through one's memory ('il la faut espouser'). The verb 'espouser' captures this sense of marriage and unity, that is to say the unity of learned

memory with the self, and the mixing in of learned experiences and information with one's own self and identity.

The image of learning and information being stored in the memory but 'blended' into the self is most beautifully described by Montaigne with a metaphor of bees ransacking flowers to make their own honey. Montaigne writes:

Les abeilles pillotent deçà delà les fleurs, mais elles en font après le miel, qui est tout leur; ce n'est plus thin ny marjolaine: ainsi les pieces empruntées d'autrui, il les transformera et confondera, pour en faire un ouvrage tout sien: à savoir son jugement. Son institution, son travail et estude ne vise qu'à le former (I, 26, 152).

Learning and knowledge become 'tout leur' and whilst they might be taken from reading or experiences, they are transformed and re-appropriated to be personal to one's own identity and self. Montaigne's pattern of thought regarding memory, education and judgement comes into play here as he explains that judgement is the aim of education and learning. As he considers memory to be central as both a storehouse and a tool to the development of education and the process of learning, memory is thus the foundation for judgement, that other key faculty on which Montaigne bases so much of personal identity.

As I have suggested, memory is also deeply interconnected with judgement for Montaigne. Holyoake and Frame both discuss judgement in the *Essais* in relation to memory, and acknowledges judgement as a vital faculty for Montaigne, and describes it as 'the part of man that teaches him how to live'.<sup>193</sup> Montaigne certainly values judgement in the *Essais* and considers it to be a key tool which is involved with everything to do with living and

---

<sup>193</sup> John S. Holyoake, 'The Idea of 'Jugement' in Montaigne, *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (April, 1968), pp. 340-351.

Donald M Frame, *Montaigne's Discovery of Man: The Humanization of a Humanist* (Greenwood Publishing: New York, 1955), p. 80.

thinking. He writes: ‘Le jugement est un util à tous les subjects, et se mesle par tout’ (I, 50, 301). This noun ‘util’ has now been used by Montaigne to describe memory, knowledge (or education) and judgement, thus establishing the very close links between the three. It can be argued that both memory and knowledge are also involved in everything as well, because judgement is based on learned information and knowledge, and that knowledge is stored and accessed by memory.

Holyoake recognises that memory and judgement have a very particular relationship in Montaigne’s writing, as the essayist is sometimes favourable to the one and sometimes favourable to the other when he discusses them together. As this chapter has shown, in ‘De la praesumption’, Montaigne describes memory as the faculty without which judgement would struggle to function (‘sans lequel le jugement faict bien à peine son office’; II, 17, 649). It would be logical, therefore, to suggest that a strong memory would therefore be beneficial to the functioning of judgement, as it would offer a stable and unfailing foundation on which judgement could work most effectively. In ‘Des menteurs’, however, Montaigne insists on the contrary: ‘les memoires excellentes se joignent volontiers aux jugemens debiles’ (I, 9, 34).

It must be noted that the context is again key here, as Montaigne wants to insinuate that his own weak memory does not signify that he has a weak judgement. Furthermore, this quotation comes in the context of Montaigne criticising the common belief of people in his region that a weak memory is equal to stupidity and lack of sense, a belief which originates from the early modern view, as described by Montaigne that intelligence is equal to a powerful, retentive memory.<sup>194</sup> Montaigne is attempting to counter this argument by stating

---

<sup>194</sup> I, 9, 34, ‘en mon païs on veut dire qu’un homme n’a point de sens, ils disent qu’il n’a point de memoire, et quand je me plains du defaut de la mienne, ils me reprennent et mescroient, comme si je m’accusois d’estre insensé’.

that there is a difference between knowledge –the kind that a pedant would appreciate – and understanding – the kind of knowing which Montaigne links more closely to *sagesse* and *entendement* than to *sçavoir*. Therefore, Montaigne’s suggestion that a strong memory leads to weak judgements is a criticism of the strong memory for information and facts, rather than a memory which is working as a tool in tandem with judgement. Montaigne also endeavours to paint a flaw as a virtue as he discusses his weak memory here, as he explains that if he had a powerful memory, the originality of his arguments and indeed, his judgement would not be as good as they are. Montaigne writes:

elle a volontiers fortifié d’autres facultés en moy, à mesure que cette-cy s’est affoiblie, et irois facilement couchant et allanguissant mon esprit et mon jugement sur les traces d’autrui, comme fait le monde, sans exercer leurs propres forces, si les inventions et opinions estrangieres m’estoient presentes par le benefice de la mémoire (I, 9, 35).

The strength of judgement here comes from Montaigne’s lack of memory for specific information and particular arguments, and as he cannot lazily depend upon the arguments of others which would be stored in his memory container, he forms his own opinions and views. A weak memory in this sense is again a source of originality as Montaigne can only rely upon his own ideas, rather than re-using the ideas of others. This passage contradicts Montaigne’s praise of the memory working as a tool, but here, Montaigne is criticising memory as an inactive, non-functioning storehouse. In fact, where Montaigne suggests that a weak faculty of memory ‘a volontiers fortifié d’autres facultés en moy’, he has actually stressed in ‘De la praesumption’ that real memory (storehouse and tool combined) is the source and foundation for the other faculties.

Montaigne's approach to memory and judgement is more positive when he is discussing the two faculties working together, with judgement both using the information that is recalled by the tool of memory and itself being stored in the memory in order to aid with future decisions. A key example of Montaigne describing memory supporting the functioning of judgement appears in 'De l'art de conferer' (III, 8):

Je leur dirois volontiers que le fruct de l'experience d'un chirurgien n'est pas l'histoire de ses pratiques, et se souvenir qu'il a guery quatre empestez et trois gouteux, s'il ne scait de cet usage tirer dequoy former son jugement, et ne nous scait faire sentir qu'il en soit devenu plus sage à l'usage de son art (III, 8, 931).

Montaigne writes this as a response to those men who consider intelligence to be based on pedantry and academic rank. Here, the negativity towards the pedant's memory is encapsulated in 'l'histoire' and simply remembering. For Montaigne, judgement is formed by an analysis of memory, which must involve the storehouse of memory by default, but must also involve the active usage of the memory tool for extracting and recollecting. Memory and judgement here combine to allow one to become wiser through both the recording and analysis of experiential learning. Montaigne adds: 'Ce n'est pas assez de compter les experiences, il les faut poiser et assortir; et les faut avoir digérées et alambiquées, pour en tirer les raisons et conclusions qu'elles portent' (III, 8, 931). The image of properly digesting information rather than just recording an experience arises again here. Montaigne's point that it is not enough to simply tell the stories of our experiences may remind the reader of his argument in 'Du pedantisme' (I, 25), where the school children educated by the pedant only learn information 'pour cette seule fin d'en faire parade, d'en entretenir autrui, et d'en faire des contes, comme une vaine monnoye, inutile à tout autre usage et emploie qu'à compter et jettter' (I, 25, 137). Montaigne emphasises the point that his essays do not just recount his experiences; instead, he weighs his experiences carefully and judges them,

employing memory as a tool rather than simply a container. Simultaneously, the idea of digesting and distilling experience intersects again with Montaigne's image of a memory container which retains all aspects of the self and all learning and experiences in one substance which has engaged and absorbed all experiences and memories. Furthermore, in this case, the memory is active in organising and structuring an examination of those experiences in order to properly glean the important information which might be useful in a future scenario. Montaigne continues his discussion of the faculties of memory, learning and judgement working in tandem by creating an image of a group of musicians playing in harmony: '*Comme, en un concert d'instruments, on n'oit pas un leut, une espinete et la flutte, on oyt une harmonie en globe, l'assemblage et le fruct de tout cet amas*' (III, 8, 931). For Montaigne, then, the faculties of learning, judgement and memory work together seamlessly when they are functioning as they should. The image of a group of instruments suggests an interdependency of the faculties on one another, and also of a common aim. The outcome of the orchestra is the music playing in harmony, that is '*le fruct de tout cet amas*'. In the example of the surgeon above, the outcome is wisdom and an application of learning, experience and judgement described as '*le fruct de l'experience*'. In the case of the faculties, the outcome is a stable identity which is the fruit of Montaigne's life experience and learning. This identity is established by continuous judgements which are formed by the constant functioning of the memory as both a recording device, filling a storehouse with memories and experiences and as a tool which appropriates and assimilates those memories, and is able to recall and extract the appropriate memories for the relevant situation.

## **Conclusion**

Montaigne takes the building blocks provided by Lucretius of a traditional storehouse of memory, *retinentia*, and the activity of remembering and recollecting, *repetentia*, that one does in order to attach one's experiences to one's life and self, and Montaigne develops a more elaborate system of memory. His understanding of memory shows how two aspects of memory – as storehouse and as tool – are interdependent and together provide the bedrock of stability on which other faculties can function. As memory stores learning, it also provides the relevant learned information when it is required. For Montaigne, memory also stores past judgements and past experiences on which judgements can be made whilst it also extracts and applies those past experiences and judgements to present situations. With education, judgement and experience being important foundations of what Montaigne considers to make up his identity and his concept of the self, memory as a storehouse and a tool is at the base of these pillars, supporting each one, and thus providing a stable base on which he can establish and maintain identity. Furthermore, as memory is a continuously functioning tool as well as a storehouse, it is constantly stitching together the different experiences throughout one's life to a continuity of being, allowing those memories to attach each particular experience, thought and judgement to one single identity which has the common thread of one unique memory.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Montaigne's accident: The importance of lost memory**

This chapter analyses Montaigne's discussion of his riding accident in 'De l'exercitation', focussing on his thoughts concerning memory, experience and identity. Montaigne's fall from his horse and temporary memory loss following the accident challenges the Lucretian-inflected models of memory that we have explored so far in the *Essais*. The accident also forced Montaigne to question his definition of identity and the role of the mind, the body and memory in identity. This chapter will also examine the significance of lost memory for Montaigne's approach to memory and identity, and will analyse the riding accident as a traumatic event, with Montaigne as the survivor of trauma, and his writing of 'De l'exercitation' as a form of treatment for the post-traumatic stress caused by the accident.

### **Learning from a unique experience**

Montaigne discusses his riding accident in 'De l'exercitation'. This essay can be read alongside I, 20 ('Que philosopher c'est apprendre à mourir') as both are treatises on Montaigne's fear of death. In keeping with the theme of its title, in 'De l'exercitation' Montaigne reflects upon the possibility of being able to practise the experience of dying in order to prepare himself for the moment of death. He begins the essay by stating the importance of learning and education:

Il est malaisé que le discours et l'instruction, encore que nostre creance s'y applique volontiers, soient assez puissantes pour nous acheminer jusques à l'action, si outre cela nous n'exerçons et formons nostre ame par experience au train auquel nous la

voulons renier: autrement, quand elle sera au propre des effets, elle s'y trouvera sans doute empêchée (II, 6, 370).

The image of training and forming one's soul correlates with Montaigne's insistence, discussed in Chapter Three, on the value of active learning through experience, which helps to develop one's understanding far more than the studies of reason which theorise about particular experiences. For Montaigne, it is through the experience and the creation of relevant memories that one can increase one's understanding and learning. The title of this essay itself, 'De l'exercitation', shows the importance that Montaigne attaches to practice, and that is to say 'active practice' in contrast to 'le discours et l'instruction'. His introduction recognises that experience has proved to be helpful for philosophers who wanted to understand hardships such as poverty, but he expresses his disappointment that the tool of experience seems to be of no use in preparation for the act of dying:

On se peut, par usage et par experience, fortifier contre les douleurs, la honte, l'indigence et tels autres accidents; mais, quant à la mort, nous ne la pouvons essayer qu'une fois; nous y sommes tous apprentifs quand nous y venons (II, 6, 371).

Stoic philosophers attempted to learn something from their own death but Montaigne explains that none have successfully returned from death to explain their findings: 'ils ne sont pas revenus nous en dire les nouvelles' (II, 6, 371). This is, however, very close to what Montaigne will go on to do in 'De l'exercitation', recalling the details of his traumatic accident in order to learn from his 'near-death experience'. It is here, then, that Montaigne inserts the first of several quotations from *De rerum natura* into this essay:

nemo expergitus extat

Frigida quem semel est vitai pauca sequuta (*Essais*, II, 6, 371; *De rerum natura*, III, 929-30)

(No one awakens and rises whom the cold stoppage of life has once overtaken.)

These lines are taken from Book III of Lucretius's poem, which explains the Epicurean stance that death is not to be feared; this is one of the lessons which Montaigne learns from his reflections on his equestrian accident. The quotation above comes immediately after Lucretius writes: 'multo igitur mortem minus ad nos esse putandumst | Si minus esse potest quam quod nil esse videmus', an expression which Montaigne himself uses in I, 20.<sup>195</sup> Indeed, in 'Que philosopher c'est apprendre à mourir', Montaigne includes Lucretius's verses as part of Nature's prosopopoeia in the essay to read: 'La mort est moins à craindre que rien, s'il y avoit quelque chose de moins' (I, 20, 95). A reader of Lucretius and Montaigne would know that these two quotations are linked, and thus Montaigne's use of this particular quotation from *De rerum natura* at the beginning of 'De l'exercitation' can be considered to foreshadow the rest of this essay, in which Montaigne attempts to allay his fear of death.

The use of the expression 'vitai pauca' is particularly significant in this context. For Lucretius, 'vitai pauca' means a stoppage in life and is used as a synonym for death in Book III of *De rerum natura*. The expression appears twice in Book III: firstly, in the quotation above, which undermines any fear that one might have of death; secondly, in the following quotation, which deals with memory loss in death:

nec memori tamen id quimus reprehendere mente  
inter enim iectast vitai [sic]pauca (*De rerum natura*, III, 859-60)

---

<sup>195</sup> I, 20, 95; Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, III, 926-7 'Death therefore must be thought of much less moment to us, if there can be anything less than what we see to be nothing'; Montaigne's Annotated Copy of *De rerum natura*, p. 256. In the margin next to this passage in Montaigne's copy of *De rerum natura* he writes 'La mort nous touche moins que rien' as I have discussed in Chapter Two.

(And yet, we cannot call that back by memory, for in between has been cast a stoppage of life.)

Lucretius thus explains that there is a break in the thread of memory which is caused by death (or ‘the stoppage in life’), and the memory of one’s life is destroyed by this break, and thus as memory is lost, one’s identity is lost after death. Shearin explains that ‘the assertion seems to be that when a break (“vitae pauca”) enters into our lives (i.e. when we are destroyed), our memories are wiped clean, thus putting an end to “our” selves’.<sup>196</sup> This passage is used by Montaigne in the ‘Apologie’ (II, 12), as he follows Lucretius’s text closely and undermines Plato’s theory of metempsychosis. Montaigne moves from Lucretius’s argument that the thread of memory is broken in the moment of death so that ‘Ce qui a cessé une fois d’être, n’est plus’, to the notion that when we are dead, the ‘pause in life’ separates us from our past selves by destroying our connection to our selves, and in this way, our beings cease to exist. Montaigne explicitly connects the separation of body and soul which is marked by a ‘vitai pauca’ with ‘la mort et ruyne de nostre estre’ (II, 12, 519).<sup>197</sup>

For both Montaigne and Lucretius, therefore, the expression ‘vitai pauca’ is closely tied to death, memory loss and the destruction of the self. In Montaigne’s description of his accident, he experiences a pause in life, but it results neither in his death nor the destruction of his self, as he is eventually able to recall the memory of his past, and ultimately repair the thread of memory which was broken by his unconsciousness. In this way, Montaigne ‘returns’ from death in a way that he says no other person has done before, and experiences death in a unique way through which he can learn about the moment of death and challenge his fears of it.

---

<sup>196</sup> W.H. Shearin, *The Language of Atoms: Performativity and Politics in Lucretius’ De rerum natura* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). p. 150.

<sup>197</sup> Montaigne uses four quotations from Book III of *De rerum natura* in his argument against metempsychosis in the ‘Apologie’: III, 847-851; III, 563-4; III, 860-1; III, 845-6.

Before Montaigne introduces his description of his accident, he makes a final comparison between death and sleep, which is a common comparison in Antiquity, and one which Lucretius also makes in Book III.<sup>198</sup> Indeed, a note on Montaigne's copy of *De rerum natura* refers to Lucretius's remarks concerning this theme as he writes: 'Mors & somnus' ('Death and sleep').<sup>199</sup> Montaigne's movement from the concept of a pause in life to the comparison of death and sleep in his introduction to 'De l'exercitation' closely follows both Lucretius's structure in Book III and his own comments on his copy. It is possible therefore that Montaigne consulted his copy of *De rerum natura* during the writing process of this essay; not only borrowing quotations from Lucretius, but even allowing Lucretius's Book III to direct the introduction and structure of this essay to some extent.

Before introducing his personal experience, Montaigne talks about the other:

[...] qui sont tombez par quelque violent accident en defaillance de coeur et qui y ont perdu tous sentimens, ceux là, à mon avis, ont esté bien pres de voir son vray et naturel visage [...] (II, 6, 372)

This sentiment echoes Montaigne's comment in 'Que philosopher c'est apprendre à mourir' (I, 20) of the need to unmask death in order to see that it need not be feared (I, 20, 96). Just as Montaigne has previously suggested that one can inure oneself to death by constantly having it in one's mind and by living with it, here he returns to the idea of experience being the best teacher, as it is only through close experience with death itself that one can truly see 'son vray et naturel visage' (I, 6, 372). Above all, it is the loss of all sensation which may be

---

<sup>198</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, III, 909-11.

<sup>199</sup> Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius, After flyleaf n. Screech, p. 137.

experienced by someone who has a heart attack or stroke, a state which Montaigne considers to be similar to death.

Montaigne follows the Epicurean and Lucretian thought on death that suggests that it would be painless since the moment of death passes in an instant that does not affect us: ‘Nos souffrances ont besoing de temps, qui est si court et si precipité en la mort qu’il faut nécessairement qu’elle soit insensible’ (II, 6, 372).

Whilst Montaigne appears to be confessing that he has overcome his fear of death itself, he still fears the unexpected approaches of death. When he discusses his poor health here, which he equates to the early approaches of death, he argues that experience has enabled him to allay his fear of illness because the memory of past illnesses shows him that it is not as bad as his imagination supposed it might be. It is the fear of the unknown that affects Montaigne in relation to illness and death, and it is only through considering his memories and experiences of illness that he is able to reconcile his fear.

J’espere qu’il m’en adviendra de mesme de la mort, et qu’elle ne vaut pas la peine que je prens à tant d’aprests que je dresse et tant de secours que j’appelle et assemble pour en soustenir l’effort (II, 6, 373).

Montaigne hopes that the moment of death will be the same as illness, in the sense that his imagination has made it into something which is far worse than it is in reality. Montaigne’s writing here perfectly echoes his comments regarding illness and death in I, 20, where he follows the same line of argument, blaming his imagination for making illnesses worse than they are before he experiences them for himself, and then using the same expression: ‘J’espere qu’il m’en adviendra ainsi de la mort’ (I, 20, 90). In ‘De l’exercitation’, Montaigne hopes that his attempts to prepare for death and the aids which he has devised will not prove to be necessary. The reader is forced to question what these aids are that Montaigne is

devising and what sorts of precautions he is taking in preparation for his death. One of Montaigne's attempts to prepare himself for death is the description and analysis of his equestrian accident which provides him with an opportunity to both learn about death and to substantiate his argument that there is a chance that we can practise dying: 'Nous en pouvons avoir experience [de la mort], sinon entiere et parfaicte, au moins telle, qu'elle ne soit pas inutile, et qui nous rende plus fortifiez et asseurez' (II, 6, 371-2). The act of writing about the accident is a watershed moment for Montaigne who assimilates the event to both his memory and to the memory of his *Essais* in order to give himself another 'avantage' over death.

### **Montaigne's accident: a site of trauma**

In 'De l'exercitation', Montaigne offers three different versions of the accident, forcing the reader to share the sense of incomprehension and confusion that he experienced during and whilst attempting to remember the accident. In his own account, Montaigne was riding his horse, not far from his home, in around 1569-70 when one of his servants, in an act of bravado, attempted to overtake the rest of the group of riders. This servant and his horse collided with Montaigne, knocking him and his horse to the ground. Montaigne experienced a transient loss of consciousness for around two hours, and when he awoke, he had lost the memory of what had happened during the accident. The day after the event, Montaigne experienced a flashback to the accident which enabled him to remember how the accident unfolded. Montaigne's description of the accident is, as Frisch acknowledges, 'one of the most densely layered sites of memory in the *Essais*', and is worthy of close analysis in terms of memory, identity and trauma.<sup>200</sup>

---

<sup>200</sup> Andrea Frisch, 'Montaigne and the Ethics of Memory', *L'Esprit Créateur*, Vol. 46, Number 1, Spring 2006, pp. 23-31, p. 23.

I will analyse Montaigne's description of his accident using modern trauma theory.<sup>201</sup> His accident can be considered a traumatic event, in the sense that it is a disturbing experience which has a significant psychological impact on his life and thought. Montaigne's description of the accident and his response to it in both the immediate aftermath and in his writing reveal him as a trauma survivor. One must acknowledge the dangers of the application of modern psychological theories to the past and basing psychological evaluation on Montaigne's written word.

There has been little discussion regarding the application of trauma theory to early-modern texts, but a special issue of *Paragraph* entitled *Theory and the Early Modern* discussed the risks and problems associated with applying modern theory to early-modern texts and authors, but contributors also recognised the possibilities and opportunities made available by the application of modern theory.<sup>202</sup> One must certainly consider the problem of anachronism, and reading a theory on to a text. Particularly in relation to trauma theory, one must be careful not to label symptoms or not to read diagnoses *on to* the author.

Michael Moriarty suggests that early-modern literature 'might seem more resistant to theoretical treatment',<sup>203</sup> citing the risks of anachronism and of simplification or even caricature, but concludes that an application of certain modern theories grants the reader an exceptional, new insight into a text. Equally, Liz Guild recognises 'when an earlier text and a later reader ... encounter each other, what follows will inevitably be an act of translation'.<sup>204</sup> Guild argues that the application of modern theory to an early-modern text can 'bring into

---

<sup>201</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. by John Reddick (London: Penguin, 2003); Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) and Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996).

<sup>202</sup> *Paragraph*, Vol. 29., No. 1 'Theory and the Early Modern' (March 2006)

<sup>203</sup> Michael Moriarty, 'Theory and the Early Modern: Some Notes on a Difficult Relationship', *Paragraph*, Vol. 29, No. 1. Theory and the Early Modern (March 2006), pp. 1-11. p. 4.

<sup>204</sup> Liz Guild 'Vous ne pouvez le savoir – car vous vous détournez', *Paragraph*, Vol. 29., No. 1 'Theory and the Early Modern' (March 2006) pp. 53-66.

focus what in the text cannot be ‘seen’ directly, or could not yet be known at the time of writing.<sup>205</sup> I consider this view to apply to Montaigne and his riding accident, because at the time of writing, Montaigne could certainly not know the terminology of trauma, but more significantly, he could only interpret his experience as a terrifying accident, rather than as a traumatic event. Moreover, to look at the incident as a traumatic event opens a new perspective on Montaigne’s writing and re-living of his experience.

In Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, he describes the ‘traumatic neurosis’ which follows the experience of trauma, and captures the repetition or reliving of the event through disturbing thoughts or flashbacks.<sup>206</sup> For Freud, there is a period of latency in the experience of trauma, in which the trauma survivor cannot properly grasp their experience until they are revisited by the traumatic memory of the event. Caruth interprets Freud’s position in her own work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, and argues that the trauma survivor does not experience a traumatic event in the same way that one might experience an everyday occurrence. Caruth claims that the event escapes one’s experience and is not recorded in our memory in an accessible way. She argues that trauma is an ‘unclaimed experience’, which the trauma survivor has not integrated into their narrative memory and which they only experience for the first time through a flashback or ‘traumatic reliving’.<sup>207</sup> Using Caruth’s terminology, Montaigne’s experience following the event is typical of a trauma survivor. Caruth states that ‘the overwhelming events of the past repeatedly possess, in intrusive images and thoughts, the one who has lived through them’.<sup>208</sup> The return of

---

<sup>205</sup> Liz Guild ‘Vous ne pouvez le savoir – car vous vous détournez’, *Paragraph*, Vol. 29., No. 1 ‘Theory and the Early Modern’ (March 2006) pp. 53-66. p. 55.

<sup>206</sup> Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 68.

<sup>207</sup> Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, p. 152.

<sup>208</sup> Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, p. 151.

Montaigne's memory in the moment which he describes as 'un éclair' is his experience of repeated trauma, which I will analyse in this chapter.

Whilst this approach may appear anachronistic, I shall draw on Freud's and Caruth's trauma theory and terminology to highlight and extract what is already present in Montaigne's account of his equestrian accident. Trauma theory provides a new, interesting perspective on Montaigne's writing concerning not only the accident, but also memory and identity. As trauma can be considered an 'unclaimed experience' until it is appropriated to one's narrative memory, it marks a rupture in both memory and identity. The 'claiming' and assimilation of this experience is a central concern of 'De l'exercitation'.

### **The experience of death**

Montaigne frames his accident with a reference to the Wars of Religion as he introduces the event: 'Pendant nos troisiesmes troubles ou deuxiesmes (il ne me souvient pas bien de cela) [...]' (II, 6, 373). His personal trauma is therefore situated within the national trauma of the civil wars, and he goes on, in the same sentence to explain that his home was 'assis dans le moiau de tout le trouble des guerres civiles de France' (II, 6, 373). Montaigne cannot be certain of the exact date of the accident but is able to give such a vivid report of the event. Montaigne may well want the reader to think that his faulty memory has caused him to forget the date of the accident. It might be the case that Montaigne genuinely could not remember during which of the troubles his accident took place. Villey explains the difficulty in attempting to date Montaigne's fall – and indeed, his writing of 'De l'exercitation' – because the Second War of Religion began in 1567 and ended in March 1568, and the peace only

lasted for five months, with the Third War beginning in 1568 and ending in 1570.<sup>209</sup> It is also likely, however, that Montaigne simply did not consider the date of his accident to be as important as the other details of the event.

It is also clear that Montaigne's recollection of this traumatic event focuses heavily on the event itself and what happened to him, rather than external, less significant details. The comprehensive description of the event itself reveals the writing of a trauma survivor piecing together their experience in order to assimilate it to his knowledge and understanding, which is more deeply rooted in personal history than national history.

Certain details of Montaigne's description are characteristic of a survivor of a 'near-death experience'. For example, there is a heavy emphasis on the language of death; indeed, Montaigne repeatedly identifies himself as dead whilst he was unconscious. The first instance of this comes as he describes himself immediately after being knocked off the horse:

si que voilà le cheval abbatu et couché tout estourdy, moy dix ou douze pas au delà,  
mort, estendu à la renverse, le visage tout meurtry et tout escorché, mon espée que  
j'avoy à la main, à plus de dix pas au delà, ... n'ayant ny mouvement ny sentiment,  
non plus qu'une souche (II, 6, 373).

Montaigne portrays himself as disarmed, lying prone and describes himself as 'mort'. It is this moment of the loss of consciousness that one must consider to be the beginning of Montaigne's 'vitai pausa'. This explains the use of the vocabulary of death, as he considers himself to be separated from life by this break in consciousness and stoppage in his life. The image of himself as an inanimate object, 'une souche', lacking movement and feeling, emphasises his closeness to death, immediately identifying himself with those men whom he

---

<sup>209</sup> Pierre Villey, *Les sources et l'évolution des Essais de Montaigne, Tome premier: Les sources et la chronologie des Essais* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1908), p. 291; see also p. 359.

had described earlier in the essay who experience the approaches of death as they lose all sensation (II, 6, 372).

Montaigne employs an unusual formulation for his description here, when he describes the scene as if he were witnessing it from a disembodied third person rather than a first person perspective. It is possible that Montaigne is attempting to describe an out-of-body experience, which, according to modern research, is considered to be characteristic of a near-death experience, but it is equally likely that he is describing the scene as he imagines it appeared, or as someone described it to him.<sup>210</sup> There is an imaginative process involved in one's attempts to comprehend forgotten memories; one must employ one's imagination as well as one's judgement in order to attempt to understand what may have occurred.<sup>211</sup> When Montaigne describes himself and his horse as 'le petit homme et petit cheval', he not only captures the separation he feels from his self, but also echoes his servants perspective as a witness to the event. Moreover, Montaigne was unconscious, and thus he surely cannot say whether his sword was at his side or not, or whether his belt was ruined. This is an early indication of the tension between Montaigne's memory, his imagination and the testimonies given to him by witnesses of the event. Indeed, the reader is compelled to experience Montaigne's 'piecing-together' of the details of the accident through his interweaving of witnesses' descriptions and his own recollections, and this also reflects Montaigne's attempt to resolve the incomprehensibility of the traumatic event.

---

<sup>210</sup> Bruce, Greyson, 'Near-Death Experience: Clinical Implications', *Archives of Clinical Psychiatry (São Paulo)*, 34 (Suppl. 1), 116-125. <[http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S0101-60832007000700015&lng=en&tlang=en.10.1590/S0101-60832007000700015.](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0101-60832007000700015&lng=en&tlang=en.10.1590/S0101-60832007000700015.)> accessed 27 May 2015.

<sup>211</sup> For further discussion of the cognitive process of remembering, see *The Mnemonic Imagination*, ed. by Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) Ebook. In this study of the cognitive processes of memory, Keightley and Pickering suggest that remembering should be understood as a creative process.

Montaigne interjects a comment into this description bringing his description back to the present to say: ‘C'est le seul esvanouissement que j'ay senty jusques à cette heure’ (II, 6, 373). This break in the narrative of the accident suggests a discomfort in Montaigne’s tone and marks the uniqueness of the event. It is Montaigne’s only experience of losing consciousness, and is a very significant moment in his life because it is the only occasion when Montaigne has not been conscious or aware of his being or of his existence. As this is an event that Montaigne has not experienced before, it does not fit into his scheme of prior knowledge nor his sphere of understanding. The riding accident therefore causes Montaigne to consider his identity in a response to the possibility of suddenly losing it again. At this point in Montaigne’s account, as he is unconscious and effectively not present, his identity and being is at the whim of his servants, and immediately following his fall, they (mis)took him for dead.

Montaigne writes: ‘Ceux qui estoient avec moy, après avoir essayé par tous les moyens qu’ils peurent, de me faire revenir, me tenans pour mort’ (II, 6, 373). He uses the expression ‘me faire revenir’, capturing the idea that his servants were trying to bring him back, not only to consciousness, but as they thought he was dead, back to life. It appears that these servants gave up in their attempts and considered Montaigne to be dead for two hours whilst he was unconscious. For a writer so concerned with his impending death, it is surely traumatic to consider, whilst writing this essay, that he was considered to be dead when he was not. It is indicative of Montaigne’s desire to understand his experience that he attempts to imagine and re-live this part of his experience through writing this essay. In the process of writing, and indeed, re-writing this essay, Montaigne attempts to write the experience and to comprehend the knowledge that he was considered to be dead and the fortunate fact that he emerged from such an incident unscathed.

Hence, Montaigne establishes a parallel between death and unconsciousness. Just as death was compared to sleep earlier in ‘De l’exercitation’, Montaigne now equates death to unconsciousness. For Montaigne, being unconscious is equal to death, in that there is no sensation, and moreover, there is no recording of experience and no memory. As shown in the previous chapter, Montaigne considers memory to be vital to the functioning of all the faculties of the soul, and thus, being in a state of unconsciousness and without memory is equal to death in Montaigne’s opinion.

### **The return to consciousness**

Montaigne’s return to consciousness after two hours begins with a bodily return, first to movement, then breathing (‘je commençay à me mouvoir et respirer’; II, 6, 373). He describes vomiting blood several times on the journey back to his house and this marking the beginning of recovery for him:

Par là, je commençay à reprendre un peu de vie, mais ce fut par les menus et par un si long traict de temps que mes premiers sentimens estoient beaucoup plus approchans de la mort que de la vie (II, 6, 373).

The language of death continues to press heavily on Montaigne’s description, he starts with saying that he ‘gets a bit of life back’ (‘je commençay à reprendre un peu de vie’), developing this parallel theme of a return from death, and second, with his explanation that his sensations (‘sentimens’) were closer to death than life. In terms of memory, it is possible that Montaigne may remember this part of the event himself, rather than basing his description on someone else’s word. Therefore, it may be that part of Montaigne’s ‘return to life’ is connected to his memory being able to process some of the events. The blurry or muted sensations which are

close to death are linked to Montaigne's memory not recording and processing all of the events thoroughly, and therefore he feels that he is closer to death than life. This detachedness from his sensations is surely linked to his concussion following his head injury as well.

In the [B] interpolation, Montaigne inserts a quotation from *Gerusalemme liberata* by Torquato Tasso. His use of Tasso here is interesting, since Freud uses Tasso's epic poem in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and considers the story of Tancred and Clorinda – which Montaigne references in his quotation – to be an example of trauma *par excellence*.<sup>212</sup>

It is likely that Tasso was called to mind for Montaigne due to his loss of his mental faculties in later life. Contemporary assessment judged the poet to have gone mad and he spent his last years in a mental hospital in Ferrara, Italy. It was there that Montaigne visited Tasso and formed his own opinion about the poet. Interestingly, Montaigne does not mention his meeting in the *Journal de Voyage*, but he does discuss seeing Tasso in the 'Apologie' (II, 12). Montaigne mentions Tasso as he discusses the small margin between madness and a soul set free due to its extraordinary wisdom and virtue: 'Quel saut vient de prendre, de sa propre agitation et allegresse, l'un des plus judicieux, ingenieux et plus formés à l'air de cette antique et pure poisie, qu'autre poete Italien aye de long temps esté?' (II, 12, 492).

Montaigne expresses his admiration for the poet before he acknowledges that the agility and ability of Tasso's own mind had brought about his madness. Michael Screech recognises that the 'traditional explanation for [the] linking of madness and genius derives from the ancient belief that both madmen and geniuses have souls and bodies more loosely knit together than

---

<sup>212</sup> Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 19; Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, pp. 7-9.

other men do'.<sup>213</sup> Montaigne clearly does consider Tasso to have been a genius, but it is his undoing which interests Montaigne in the ‘Apologie’; he writes:

N'a il pas dequoy sçavoir gré à cette sienne vivacité meurtrière? à cette clarté qui l'a aveuglé? à cette exacte et tendue apprehension de la raison qui l'a mis sans raison? à la curieuse et laborieuse queste des sciences qui l'a conduit à la bestise? à cette rare aptitude aux exercices de l'ame, qui l'a rendu sans exercice et sans ame? (II, 12, 492)

Montaigne believes that Tasso's himself caused his mind to unravel. The thought of Tasso's ‘exercices de l'ame’ are surely the significant link which led to Montaigne’s use of Tasso in ‘De l'exercitation’, as well as the fact that Tasso has lost his connection to his self through the failure of his mind and memory. Screech explains that Tasso’s *exercices de l'ame* ‘in ecstatic terminology are the same as its “practisings” when it practises dying. Tasso had practised dying in order to write inspired poetry: he ended up as a madman in chains’.<sup>214</sup> Montaigne considers Tasso’s madness to be the separation of his mind and body, which matches his own experience during his accident. Furthermore, as Montaigne judges his accident to have been his own practice for death, it is fitting that he uses another writer who has practised death but has not been able to successfully return from the practice. Indeed, in Montaigne’s analysis of Tasso’s madness in the ‘Apologie’ he describes Tasso as ‘survivant à soy-mesmes, mesconnoissant et soy et ses ouvrages, lesquels, sans son sceu, et toutesfois à sa veue, on a mis en lumiere incorrigez et informes’ (II, 12, 492).

Tasso is living but is unconscious of his self, and equally concerning for Montaigne is the fact that Tasso has lost his connection to his works; such a loss of connection to and ownership of one’s work would be disastrous for Montaigne, who considers his essays to be a

---

<sup>213</sup> M. A. Screech, *Montaigne and Melancholy: The Wisdom of the Essays* (London: Penguin, 1991).

<sup>214</sup> M.A. Screech, *Montaigne and Melancholy*, p. 38.

part of his self. Indeed, Montaigne's description of Tasso suggests that he has forgotten who he is, as Montaigne writes that Tasso is: 'mesconnoissant et soy'. Tasso's loss of memory is key to Montaigne electing to use the poet at this point in 'De l'exercitation'. As Montaigne discusses how his own memory is lost in the accident and he is separated from his self, he chooses a poet, whom he has witnessed being unable to recognise himself and has lost all awareness of his self and memories. It is therefore interesting on multiple levels concerning Montaigne's personal acquaintance with Tasso that his memory is triggered to think of the suffering poet as he discusses the loss of memory and self-consciousness in 'De l'exercitation'.

Secondly, the quotations themselves are taken from passages of *Gerusalemme liberata* that describe near-death experiences which are similar to Montaigne's own experience.<sup>215</sup> The first quotation, which is added in the [B] interpolation, comes from the story of Tancred and Clorinda. Tancred accidentally kills the love of his life, Clorinda, in a duel and loses a lot of blood in combat himself, eventually collapsing and losing consciousness. The verses describe Tancred's awakening which follows from the efforts of his squires to bring him back to consciousness, providing a perfect parallel to Montaigne's experience: 'Perche, dubbia anchor del suo ritorno, | Non s'assecura attonita la mente' ['Because the mind, struck with astonishment, still doubts it will return and remains unsure'] (II, 6, 373).<sup>216</sup> Montaigne uses this quotation to describe the 'vitai pausa' when his mind occupied the space between life and death.

It is the story of Tancred and Clorinda which Freud and Caruth analyse as a significant experience of trauma in literature.<sup>217</sup> Freud focuses on a later episode of the story

---

<sup>215</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma Narrative and History*, p. 1-3.

<sup>216</sup> Torquato Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata*, XII, 74, 'I pietosi scudier già sono intorno | con vari uffici al cavalier giacente', 'All skill and art his careful servant used to life again their dying lord to bring'.

<sup>217</sup> Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (London: Penguin, 2003).

when Tancred is haunted by his experience of killing Clorinda as he is reminded of the event when he is cutting down a tree. Tancred hears the voice of Clorinda coming from the tree, forcing him to relive his experience of her murder.<sup>218</sup> Caruth considers this to be evidence of ‘unclaimed experience’ in that Tancred had not fully experienced the event or integrated it into his memory until he re-lives the event later.

The second quotation from *Gerusalemme liberata* in ‘De l’exercitation’ emphasises his own gradual but fortuitous return to life. The verses describe Astragor’s awakening from unconsciousness after he has survived a massacre: ‘come quel ch’or apre or chiude Gli occhi, mezzo tra’l sonno è l’esser desto’ (‘as one who now opens his eyes, now shuts them, half sleeping, half awake’).<sup>219</sup>

The similarity between Montaigne and Astragor extends beyond the shared experience of finding it difficult to see after returning to consciousness, as Astragor was considered to be dead during the massacre, just as Montaigne was taken for dead by his servants. It is only through the good fortune that Astragor was wrongly perceived to be dead that he was able to survive the massacre. It is possible, therefore, that Montaigne uses this second quotation from Tasso not only to describe his impaired vision as he returned to consciousness, but also to emphasise how close he was to death and how fortunate he was to eventually return to life.

Montaigne discusses the topic of memory in relation to his gradual return to life here: ‘Cette recordation que j’en ay fort empreinte en mon ame, me representant son visage et son idée si pres du naturel, me concilie aucunement à elle’ (II, 6, 373-4). Montaigne’s move here is significant, as his memory of the event goes from being unsure of the date, to a description

---

<sup>218</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 2-3.

<sup>219</sup> Torquato Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata*, XII, 26.

with some details, to now stating that he has the memory of this firmly printed on his soul. Montaigne is attempting to use the memory of an experience that unmasked death in order to train and form his soul. Indeed, the image of death which is printed on Montaigne's soul echoes the expression 'son vray et naturel visage' which he uses at the beginning of this essay to describe man's experience of death following a serious accident. It is now Montaigne who is witnessing death's natural face, as his opinion is transformed into experience. Despite his fear of death, he claims that the experience reconciles him to his mortality. This suggests that Montaigne has come to terms with his fear and his traumatic experience: 'Cette recordation [...] me concilie aucunement à elle'. The expression 'fort empreinte en mon ame' is, however, problematic in terms of whether Montaigne has truly accepted this trauma.

The image of memory being imprinted refers to the model of memory as a wax tablet, a theory proposed by Cicero.<sup>220</sup> If a seal or ring stamps an impression in wax, that wax is permanently altered by that impression and will forever bear that mark until it is melted down and re-formed. Similarly, if a memory is heavily imprinted onto the wax tablet, that tablet is permanently altered, and indeed damaged, by that memory. Hence, the use of this expression here suggests that the accident has left an indelible mark on Montaigne's memory and his being. His soul, memory and therefore his identity are permanently changed by this trauma, which leaves a mental scar rather than a physical one. Indeed, the word 'trauma' has its etymological roots in the Ancient Greek 'τραῦμα' (traūma) which means 'wound' or 'damage'.

Furthermore, although Montaigne does later appropriate this memory in order to reconcile himself to death, in the initial 'imprinting' he is passive, with the accident imprinting itself, rather than Montaigne choosing to remember this aspect of his experience.

---

<sup>220</sup> Cicero, *De oratore*, 2.86.354, p. 456.

The image of imprinting a memory on one's soul, an expression which he uses sparsely in the *Essais*, occurs in the 'Apologie' as he describes a memory which one cannot forget.

Montaigne is discussing the Epicurean philosophy of using memories of past experiences to help us deal with present hardships at this point in the 'Apologie'. Whilst he does attempt to re-appropriate his traumatic memory in 'De l'exercitation', in the 'Apologie', he is sceptical about whether this Epicurean approach will work in practice:

[...] la memoire nous represente, non pas ce que nous choisissons, mais ce qui lui plaist. Voire il n'est rien qui imprime si vivement quelque chose en nostre souvenance que le desir de l'oublier: c'est une bonne maniere de donner en garde et d'empreindre en nostre ame quelque chose que de la solliciter de la perdre (II, 12, 494).

In his experience, Montaigne has found that the most efficient way to remember something is to attempt to forget it. The image of printing something on the memory is discussed in terms of an event that one would prefer to forget, rather than remember. Moreover, Montaigne is characterising memory as something which one cannot control as one wishes or expects. In the 'Apologie' (II, 12), Montaigne borrows the expression from Cicero which reads: 'Memini etiam quae nolo, oblivisci non possum quae volo' ('I remember things I do not wish to remember and I cannot forget things I wish to forget').<sup>221</sup> This quotation too is particularly pertinent to the theme of trauma, in that trauma survivors may attempt to forget their traumatic experiences but are unable to do so, just as Montaigne may have done in the case of his accident.

It is interesting to note that Montaigne doubts the possibility of being able to forget something at will, in spite of his persistent assurances of his weak memory. He writes with irony that the Epicurean approach of erasing 'les desplaisirs que nous avons soufferts' from

---

<sup>221</sup> II, 12, 495; Cicero, *De finibus*, xxxiii, 105.

one's memory works only if one believes that we have 'en nostre pouvoir la science de l'oubly' (II, 12, 494). Montaigne suggests that this ability to forget would be useful for people who wanted to forget bad memories, but is certain that this ability is not within our power. In terms of a traumatic event, the trauma survivor has the event embedded in their memory and is unable to forget it, despite, perhaps, the desire to forget.<sup>222</sup> In 'De l'exercitation', it does not seem that Montaigne wants to forget the detail of the accident; rather he intends to preserve his memory of it, in order to learn from the experience and to restore and protect his identity. Montaigne's language in both 'De l'exercitation' and the 'Apologie' reveals a survivor who embraces, to some extent, his traumatic experience. Indeed, in Montaigne's discussion of memory and forgetting in the 'Apologie', he concludes by posing the rhetorical question: 'De vuyder et desmunir la memoire, est-ce pas le vray et propre chemin à l'ignorance?' (II, 12, 495) which suggests that a memory storehouse stripped of its experiences, both good and bad, would be worthless for Montaigne. Equally in the model of a wax tablet of memory, an unmarked tablet would serve no purpose for Montaigne as it would bear no evidence of any memory having existed. Montaigne considers any memory, particularly a unique memory from which he can learn a valuable lesson, to be worthy of remembering for the sake of experience. Moreover, an empty memory storehouse or an unmarked wax tablet signifies a lost identity, as each individual memory contributes to the perpetual formation of one's identity. If the storehouse of memory is empty, then there are no memories from which to establish a stable and continuous identity. Montaigne supports this point with a quotation from Seneca's *Oedipus*: 'iners malorum remedium ignorantia est' ('Ignorance is an artless remedy for our ills').<sup>223</sup> To consider this quotation and Montaigne's rhetorical question above in light of his trauma serves to reveal why

---

<sup>222</sup> Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 23.

<sup>223</sup> II, 12, 495; Seneca, *Oedipus*, III, 17; this point is analysed in relation to the Wars of Religion in Chapter 5.

Montaigne strives to understand and learn from his accident, rather than to forget about it; this is the only way for Montaigne to overcome the traumatic experience of his fall and to come to terms with it. He cannot choose to forget it, so rather, he must assimilate the event to his memory in order to appropriate it to his identity. This is evident in his treatment of the accident in ‘De l’exercitation’ where he attempts to fully comprehend each aspect of his experience in order to confront his fear of death. Indeed, Montaigne’s accident might be considered a *memento mori* for the essayist, not in the sense of reminding him that death is constantly approaching, but rather that death is ever-present, in the sense that it has made an indelible imprint on his wax tablet of memory.

As Montaigne explains that his memory is beginning to process again in the immediate aftermath of his accident, he comments that the faculties of his soul (‘functions de l’ame’) also gradually return to life (II, 6, 374). The close connection of the faculties of one’s soul and memory recalls Montaigne’s comment in ‘De la praesumption’ which explains that all the functions of the soul are dependent on the faculty of memory (II, 17, 651). Therefore, as the ability of memory to process events begins to function again, it provides the basis for the return of Montaigne’s mental and physical return to life.

In traumatic recall, trauma survivors often experience dissociation in recall and have difficulty with their personal ownership of the event. John P. Wilson’s describes the depersonalization that trauma survivors frequently experience as: ‘individuals alter awareness of themselves and feel as though they are observing their actions “outside their bodies,” in a detached dream-like state of awareness’.<sup>224</sup> Montaigne’s description of himself reveals this

---

<sup>224</sup> Assessing Psychological Trauma and PTSD, ed. by John P. Wilson and Terence Martin Keane (New York: Guildford Press, 2004), p. 21. Wilson also uses the conceptualization of dissociative responses to trauma by Marmar, Weiss and Metzler: ‘One fundamental aspect of the dissociative response to trauma concerns immediate dissociation at the time the traumatic event is unfolding ... dissociation at the time of trauma may

dissociation that he experiences. He has not ‘fully’ returned to his self; he writes: ‘je me vy tout sanglant car mon pourpoint estoit taché par tout du sang que j’avo rendu’ (II, 6, 374). This suggests that he was in an altered state of consciousness, a recognised symptom of a near-death experience. Indeed, Montaigne’s perspective of seeing himself experiencing the event here is again similar to an out-of-body experience. The grammatical construction ‘je me vy’ implies a separation between ‘je’ and ‘me’ with Montaigne seeing himself as an ‘other’, not connected to his self. There is a rupture in identity then, as Montaigne is apart from his self.

His initial confusion about finding himself in this position and assuming that he was shot by a harquebus exacerbates his dislocation from reality. In this description, Montaigne also captures the incomprehensibility of trauma, a characteristic of traumatic events which survivors find difficult to convey to listeners or readers.<sup>225</sup> Montaigne explains his thought process at the time and by doing so he reveals the confusion which he felt about what happened. The reader witnesses the incomprehensibility of trauma as Montaigne cannot connect his body, which is covered in blood, to his past self before the accident as he does not know what happened. Hence, for Montaigne, the thread of memory is broken, preventing him from establishing a continuous, stable identity founded on the continuity of memory. This explains Montaigne’s attempts to re-experience the event with as many details as he can remember, in order to reconcile himself to the event and to appropriate it to his personal narrative memory as much as he can. Montaigne’s assumption, though incorrect, that his injuries were due to a harquebus shot show an early attempt to establish what had happened by trying to locate the event in his own sphere of understanding.

---

take the form of ... profound feelings of unreality that ... the individual is the victim of the event; experiences of depersonalization; out-of-body experiences; ... altered body image or feelings or disconnection from one’s body’. p. 31.

<sup>225</sup> Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, p. 10.

Montaigne continues to re-experience the aftermath of his accident, collating the details of how he felt, combining sensations and feeling with fact to create as close a likeness to the events as he can. He describes recognisable traits of a near-death experience such as calmness when faced with death, and a decision to depart from life or return to life:

Il me sembloit que ma vie ne me tenoit plus qu'au bout des lèvres: je fermois les yeux pour ayder, ce me sembloit, à la pousser hors, et prenois plaisir à m'alanduir et à me laisser aller. C'estoit une imagination qui ne faisoit que nager superficiellement en mon ame, aussi tendre et aussi foible que tout le reste, mais à la vérité non seulement exempte de desplaisir, ains meslée à cette douceur que sentent ceux qui se laissent glisser au sommeil (II, 6, 374).

This recollection is surely comforting for Montaigne, who is seeking ways to inure himself to death through his experience. The possibility that dying is similar to falling asleep and completely free from unpleasantness and pain is a consolation to the finality of death, which correlates with Montaigne's interpretation of Lucretius. Montaigne began the essay with the proposal that one cannot practise the art of dying and that there could be no experience through which one could prepare for death, yet here, in his own near-death experience, he has found a possible answer to a question which he thought was unanswerable, and moreover, the answer correlates with theories on sleep and death. The loss of consciousness which was sudden and unexpected was not able to help Montaigne in this way, as he was totally unaware of what was happening at the time, but this fading and fluctuating state between life and death serves Montaigne's aim of overcoming the fear of dying.

This leads Montaigne to return to the present, in order to use his experience to support a personal, and as yet unproven, hypothesis about those who are in the grip of death in a comatose state. It is Montaigne's opinion that those who are very close to death, either due to illness or an injury and have lost full consciousness have lost their connection to their body and soul ('l'ame et le corps enseveli et endormy'), and that they are not to be pitied as they are not experiencing any pain or discomfort ('nous les plaignons sans cause'; II, 6, 374). Montaigne uses a quotation from Lucretius in the [B] interpolation, which describes a man struck down by illness and suffering a fit in the moments before death.

[...] vi morbi saepe coactus  
ante oculos aliquis nostros, ut fulminis ictu,  
concidit, et spumas agit, ingemit, et fremit artus;  
desipit, extentat nervos, torquetur, anhelat,  
inconstanter et in jactando membra fatigat (*De rerum natura*, 487-91).

(We have often seen someone constrained on a sudden by the violence of disease, who, as if struck by a thunderbolt falls to the ground, groans and shudders, raves, grows rigid, twists, pants irregularly, out-wearies himself with contortions.)

Not only does this again suggest a Lucretian influence on the structure and writing of this essay but the context of this quotation in *De rerum natura* is also significant. The quotation comes from a passage in which Lucretius argues that the mind is mortal, by explaining that it can be affected by injury and by illness, and therefore it cannot be expected to survive beyond death. Montaigne may have seen the similarities between Lucretius's description and his own condition in the aftermath of the accident, particularly as the suffering man in

Lucretius's passage eventually regains his senses, in the same way that Montaigne awoke from his brief coma.<sup>226</sup>

Whilst Montaigne does not use Lucretius to argue for the mortality of the mind here, the context would subtly suggest this proposition to a diligent reader. Montaigne does subscribe to the Epicurean and Lucretian view that the mind can be affected by blows to the body, and in the 'Apologie' (II, 12), he develops this argument at some length. In 'De l'exercitation', Montaigne shows that he agrees with Lucretius's argument that the mind cannot survive the powerful blows of an injury which leads to unconsciousness and the brink of death, as he writes:

Et ne pouvois croire que, à un si grand estonnement de membres et si grande défaillance des sens, l'ame peut maintenir aucune force au dedans pour se reconnoistre; et que, par ainsi, ils n'avoient aucun discours qui les tourmentast et qui leur peut faire juger et sentir la misere de leur condition [...] (II, 6, 375)

Thus, before his accident, Montaigne did not believe that men who were unconscious or severely ill had any remaining ability for self-cognition or self-awareness. It is the soul which is responsible for maintaining the ability to know oneself ('[la] force au dedans pour se reconnoistre') but in unconsciousness the soul loses the power to maintain this ability. Is this 'force pour se reconnoistre' memory? It is clear that for Montaigne, the recording motions of memory must be functioning in order to have the power of self-recognition, that is to say, to be aware of one's own identity and being. When one is unconscious, the mind fails and the memory is not active; therefore, Montaigne considers those who are in this state not to be aware of their condition. He writes that the unconscious man has no way to judge and no way

---

<sup>226</sup> Lucretius III, 504-5, '...tum quasi vacillans primum consurgit et omnis | paulatim reddit in sensus animamque receptat' ('...then first, staggering as it were, the man rises, and by degrees comes back to his full senses and receives his spirit'); Montaigne uses this section of Book III of *De rerum natura* extensively in the 'Apologie' as he discusses the mortality of the mind (II, 12, 549-51).

to feel the misery of his condition, and as Montaigne has established in ‘De la praesumption’, these faculties are dependent on memory (II, 17, 649-50). Therefore, Montaigne does think that it is memory which is lost in unconsciousness and which is necessary for self-cognition and identity. For Montaigne, in unconsciousness, one is considered to be alive, but because the mind fails and memory is no longer active, one’s identity is lost and one’s past self is in an altered state between life and death. This reflects the lines of Lucretius which Montaigne uses in the ‘Apologie’ that state that if the power of the mind is so greatly changed that it has lost all recollection then it is not far removed from death.<sup>227</sup> This point is made by Lucretius to counter the argument for metempsychosis by proving that if there is no memory of a past life because the mind has changed so much due to death or the stoppage in life (‘vitai pausa’), then one must consider it to be equivalent to destruction of the self, and proof of the mortality of the soul. This logic can be applied to argue that if the mind is so changed after a stoppage in life (‘vitai pausa’) that it has no memory of its past self and being, then that too must be considered to be equivalent to death.

Montaigne develops his theory on the importance of self-recognition in being fully alive as he uses a quotation from Ovid which reads: ‘vivit, et est vitae nescius ipse sua’ [‘He lives, unconscious of his own life’] (II, 6, 374).<sup>228</sup> The mind and the self are detached from the body, and the breaking of this bond is equal to death for Montaigne. Hence, Montaigne develops Lucretius’s view that one’s self does not experience the moment of death, and that it is therefore not to be feared, into the view that one ought not pity those who are on the brink of death, as they are no longer themselves, and therefore are not suffering pain or fear. It is certainly possible that Montaigne again has Torquato Tasso in his thoughts as he writes this

---

<sup>227</sup> II, 12, 549; *De rerum natura*, III, 674-676. ‘Nam si tantopere est animi mutata potestas | omnis ut actarum exciderit retinentia rerum, | non, ut opinor, ea ab leto jam longior errat’ (‘For if the power of the mind has been so greatly changed that it has lost all recollection of things done, that, I think, is not far removed from death’.)

<sup>228</sup> Ovid, *Tristia*, I, iii, 12.

passage.<sup>229</sup> As I have explained, Montaigne did not feel pity for Tasso when he met him, but instead felt anger (II, 12, 492). It is possible then that Montaigne felt that the Tasso who he met was no longer the same man who wrote such inspiring poetry, and was therefore not deserving of his pity.

As Montaigne considers this condition where one's soul is alive but one lacks the means to express oneself or to connect with oneself, he writes: 'Je n'imagine aucun estat pour moy si insupportable et horrible' (II, 6, 375). In this section of the essay in which he discusses a soul which has lost the power of self-recognition, Montaigne attaches such importance to expression and the ability to share one's thoughts. For Montaigne, identity and self-cognition are intrinsically bound to expressing oneself, for example, in the form of his book which he describes as 'consubstantiel' to him (II, 12, 665).<sup>230</sup> It is not just the case that Montaigne is who he is because he remembers who he is, but also because he can express and explain who he is. Whilst Montaigne would consider the loss of the ability to express oneself to be worthy of pity, it is interesting to consider whether he would have expected pity for himself, when he was briefly unconscious and in the condition which he describes. His conclusion to this analysis suggests that he would not have expected pity as he was not attached to his self and he was not suffering pain or fear:

Or, à present que je l'ay essayé par effect, je ne fay nul doute que je n'en aye bien jugé jusques à cette heure (II, 6, 475).

---

<sup>229</sup> II, 6, 375. The sentence 'Les poetes ont feint quelques dieux favorables à la deliverance de ceux qui trainoient ainsin une mort languissante' in the [A] edition, immediately follows the passage above, suggesting that Montaigne may have had poets such as Tasso on his mind as he wrote this passage.

<sup>230</sup> For further discussion of cognitive approaches to Montaigne, see Kirsti Sellevold, *J'aime ces mots: Expressions linguistiques de doute dans les Essais de Montaigne* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2004).

This confirms his stance before the accident and confirms that he did think that his soul lost the power of self-cognition in his unconsciousness. Montaigne therefore explicitly connects memory loss with the loss of identity, confirming his understanding that identity is dependent on memory. Furthermore, Montaigne's comment shows that he uses his unique experience in order to substantiate his judgement, which the previous chapter has shown to be characteristic of Montaigne's approach to memory and learning. There is however a tension between memory and experience here.

In Montaigne's normal model of memory, experience and judgement, an experience is stored in one's memory and the tool of memory uses this experience to support one's judgement. In this case, if we are to follow Montaigne's own understanding of the functioning of the mind during unconsciousness, the experience is not properly embedded in Montaigne's memory because he was unconscious at the time and therefore his memory could not possibly have recorded his actions. This memory would not have been recorded or stored, and therefore could not have been used as an experience from which to learn by Montaigne. His example to support his judgement reads:

estant tout esvanouy, je me travaillois d'entr'ouvrir mon pourpoint à belles ongles  
(car j'estoy desarmé), et si sçay que je ne sentoy en l'imagination rien qui me blessat:  
car il y a plusieurs mouvemens en nous qui ne partent pas de nostre ordonnance ...  
(II, 6, 375)

As Montaigne was unconscious ('tout esvanouy'), this description of his behaviour must have been given to him by a servant who witnessed him grabbing at his doublet. Montaigne moves from this testimony from an 'other' to the certain, personal knowledge that he could not feel any injuries in his imagination. How is it possible that Montaigne could remember not feeling pain if he was unconscious? This is an assumption on Montaigne's part, based on his

understanding that his mind was not connected to his body at this time, and therefore could not have experienced any pain from his physical injuries. This assumption allows Montaigne to discuss the topic of the body functioning whilst the mind fails, a subject to which Lucretius devotes a substantial portion of Book III of *De rerum natura*.

To open this discussion, Montaigne uses a passage from *De rerum natura* which describes severed limbs moving after being cut from the body.

[B] Falciferos memorant currus abscindere membra,  
Ut tremere in terra videatur ab artibus id quod  
Decidit abscissum, cum mens tamen atque hominis vis  
Mobilitate mali non quit sentire dolorem (*De rerum natura*, III, 642-6).<sup>231</sup>

(They tell how scythed chariots often shear off a limb so suddenly that it is seen to quiver on the ground when it falls shorn from the trunk, although the man's mind and strength can feel no pain.)

This quotation is the second from Book III of *De rerum natura* to be added to this passage in the [B] manuscript and shows Lucretius's influence on Montaigne as he edited this essay and attempted to come to terms with the complicated relationship between mind and body here.

Lucretius's verses describe a battle scene, setting Montaigne's personal trauma in contrast with this description. Lucretius explains that limbs continue to move after they have been cut away from the body because the soul is spread around the body, so that when a piece of the body is removed, it may contain a part of the soul, which in turn will allow it to keep moving, until that soul ceases to exist.<sup>232</sup> Lucretius uses this example as another proof of the mortality of the soul, by arguing that something which can be split and divided into various parts

---

<sup>231</sup> Montaigne edits Lucretius's verse only slightly here, omitting line 643 'saepe ita de subito permixta caede calentis' from his quotation in II, 6.

<sup>232</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, III, 664-9.

cannot be considered immortal. This is not the aim of Montaigne's discussion here, and he certainly does not discuss Lucretius's argument related to the mortality of the soul.

Montaigne's argument is more concerned with the separate functioning of mind and body in instances like this.<sup>233</sup>

Hence, Montaigne describes his automatic reaction to his fall as coming from his body without his mind's knowledge or awareness.<sup>234</sup> He attempts to explain the phenomena of automatic or reflexive reactions as a natural impulse: 'par une naturelle impulsion que fait que nos membres se prestant des offices [B] et ont des agitations à part de nostre discours' (II, 6, 376). This explanation seems to avoid the mind-body distinction by substituting a simple, natural solution. Montaigne is however concerned with the concept of passive actions and active actions, due to the fact that he was unconscious and his mind and memory were not processing these passive actions. As Montaigne was unconscious, he was separated from himself, and therefore, it was not him who ripped at his doublet and grabbed at his pain in his stomach: 'ces passions qui ne nous touchent que par l'escorse, ne se peuvent dire nostres' (II, 6, 376). Montaigne argues that an action can only be considered 'ours' if our whole being is engaged, and any actions or movements made by one's body (even whilst one is asleep) cannot be considered 'ours' if the mind is not engaged.

Pour les faire nostres, il faut que l'homme y soit engagé tout entier; et les douleurs que le pied ou la main sentent pendant que nous dormons, ne sont pas à nous (II, 6, 376).

---

<sup>233</sup> In Montaigne's copy of his *De rerum natura*, he annotates these lines with the comment: 'Les mouvemens qui se voient es mambres separees du cors', highlighting his interest in the fact that a severed limb can still move and twitch rather than Lucretius's argument about the indivisibility of the soul. Montaigne's copy of *De rerum natura*, ed. by Lambin, p. 233; Screech, p. 313.

<sup>234</sup> II, 6, 376, 'mes mains y [à mon estomac] courroient à elles mesmes'.

Hence, bodily identity is thrown into question for Montaigne, as his body is not always connected to his self in the way that one would expect. In terms of connection to events, Montaigne did not experience clutching at his stomach, as his memory did not process this experience, and his body acted independently of his mind. Montaigne's memory cannot attach this experience to his personal narrative memory as the memory of it happening does not exist. One must ask what this means for events that the body experiences only through bodily stimuli whilst the mind is not conscious or engaged. Is it the case that for Montaigne, these experiences cannot be considered 'ours' unless one's mind plays a role and is fully engaged? The Lucretian argument that one does not experience death as it does not happen to one's self is therefore extended by Montaigne to apply to any unconscious experience, as the self is not affected. If Montaigne has no memory of an event, then he cannot consider it to have happened to *him*.<sup>235</sup> But how then does Montaigne connect the accident to himself? The only means for connecting the accident to his self is through the restoration of the memory of the accident, which is the driving force behind Montaigne's reliving of the accident in 'De l'exercitation'.

Caruth finds dissociation and lack of ownership to be symptoms of trauma, with a trauma survivor not associating the traumatic event with his or her self<sup>236</sup>. In this case, Montaigne's claims that the accident is not happening to him (as he is unconscious) is an example of dissociation. The treatment practised for dissociation is the gradual integration of that event into one's memory and the re-connection of that event to one's self. Is it possible then, that in Montaigne's writing of the event, he is integrating the event into his narrative memory, in both the metaphysical sense and the physical memory of his book in order to connect it to his self? Caruth recognises that 'trauma [...] requires integration, both for the

---

<sup>235</sup> The consequences of this will be considered in Chapter 5 concerning the 'memory clauses' and the Wars of Religion.

<sup>236</sup> Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, p. 11.

sake of testimony and for the sake of cure'.<sup>237</sup> Montaigne's testimony in this essay then is his means of assimilating the lost experience into his narrative memory, in order to integrate it into his identity, and to treat himself for his post-traumatic stress.

It must be noted that Montaigne's interjections in his description of the accident, such as his discussion of those who are on the brink of death not deserving pity and his analysis of the mind-body distinction, are normal features of his tangential writing style. In this essay, however, these lateral discussions also reveal Montaigne processing aspects of his accident and sieving through the details of the event in order to help him assimilate the accident into his sphere of understanding and his narrative memory.

### **The journey back to the Château de Montaigne**

As Montaigne nears the end of his description of the aftermath of the accident, it is clear from his language that it is still not Montaigne *tout entier* who is experiencing these events. There is a blurriness and haze laced through his description, which captures the incomprehensibility of trauma. Montaigne contrasts passive and active experiences as he describes responding to the questions of his family members during his journey back to his family home and ordering a horse for his wife who had come to meet him on his return to the house (II, 6, 376). Whilst these actions appear to be those of a thinking, conscious being, Montaigne recognises that 'c'estoyent des pensemens vains, en nue, qui estoyent esmeuz par les sens des yeux et des oreilles; ils ne venoyent pas de chez moy' (II, 6, 376). There is a discrepancy between the present Montaigne, who is writing, and this version of Montaigne who is described acting in

---

<sup>237</sup> Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, p. 11.

spite of himself. It must be said that Montaigne was still not completely conscious or aware, and was perhaps suffering from concussion during his journey back to his house. Indeed, this is not a description from Montaigne's memory, rather it appears to have been constructed from the testimonies of his other witnesses, as Montaigne inserts the expression 'ils disent que' into his description, attributing this part of the description to his servants or members of his family who observed his actions.<sup>238</sup> Thus, there is a tension in Montaigne's writing again, as he is attempting to build a memory of the situation based on his own blurry, post-concussive recollections and the testimonies of other witnesses. He attempts to explain the confusion which he felt as he writes:

Je ne scavoy pourtant ny d'où je venoy, ny où j'loy; ny ne pouvois poiser et considerer ce que on me demandoit: ce sont des legiers effects que les sens produisoyent d'eux mesmes, comme d'un usage; ce que l'ame y prestoit, c'estoit en songe, touchée bien legierement ... (II, 6, 376)

This description reveals both the dissociation of Montaigne's acts from his self, which is symptomatic of trauma, and also shows his attempts to rationalise his actions. His reactions depend on visual and aural stimuli rather than mental decisions, suggesting his actions were linked to habitual responses to similar stimuli. By passing the actions off as habit 'comme d'un usage', Montaigne implies that memory does play a role in what he was doing, in the sense that some form of memory, one might say 'bodily memory', was able to process the experience, and connect it to similar past experiences and memories in order to prompt an appropriate response. Is it then the case that memory is involved in the experience, but only certain parts of the faculty of memory were functioning? Montaigne does mention that he did not know from where he was coming or to where he was going, showing that he was not able

---

<sup>238</sup> II, 6, 376, 'ils disent que je m'advisay de commander qu'on donnast un cheval à ma femme'.

to understand this aspect of the event at the time. It appears that Montaigne's memory is functioning at this point, but that he still cannot connect his 'present' self to his self before the accident due to the loss of memory in between the two. It is significant that Montaigne introduces the soul into the discussion again here, explaining that his soul was only lightly involved ('touchée bien légèrement') in this part of the experience and was in a dream-like state.

Modern psychology recognises the experiencing of traumatic events in a 'detached dream-like state of awareness' to be a self-protection mechanism linked to dissociation. Dissociation is common in post-traumatic stress disorder sufferers for whom 'the painful recollections and affects may be so anxiety producing and profoundly distressing to the person that he or she uses dissociative process to protect him- or herself from the painful reliving of the trauma'.<sup>239</sup> It is possible that Montaigne is using this dissociative strategy to avoid the terror of reliving the incident, and this could also account for the importance he attaches to 'l'homme tout entier' experiencing the event: that is to say that the accident is not as upsetting if Montaigne can convince himself that he did not fully experience it. This dissociation could apply both during the event itself, and in Montaigne's reliving of the event. In terms of memory, Montaigne's memory of the event could well be warped by this dissociation, but it remains significant that he did not consider his whole self to be experiencing the event in relation to his approach to memory and the self.

Montaigne continues his description of his dream-like state to suggest that his condition was 'très-douce et paisible' (II, 6, 376). This fits with the Epicurean and Lucretian thoughts on death, and Montaigne's comment that 'Je n'avoy affliction ny pour autrui ny

---

<sup>239</sup> Assessing Psychological Trauma and PTSD, ed. by John P. Wilson and Terence Martin Keane, p. 21.

'pour moy' confirms his alignment with Lucretian thought here, in that he feels no concern for himself or indeed for anyone else. In *De rerum natura*, Lucretius establishes that we do not feel pain in death as it is not happening to us. In Montaigne's case, he does not feel any pain ('sans aucune douleur') or concern for himself as he does not consider his death to be happening to him; he is removed from his self by his lack of full consciousness and lack of self-cognition. Indeed, as Montaigne describes turning down medicines as he believed his condition to be fatal, he writes that:

[A] C'eust esté sans mentir une mort bien heureuse: car la foiblesse de mon discours me gardoit d'en rien juger, et celle du corps d'en rien sentir. Je me laisse couler si doucement et d'une façon si douce et si aisée que je ne sens guiere autre action [C] moins poissante [A] que celle-là estoit. Quand je vins à revivre et à reprendre mes forces (II, 6, 376).

The faculties of judgement and reason cannot connect Montaigne to his being due to both the loss of the memory which connected Montaigne to the accident and the poor functioning of the faculty of memory which should support the other faculties. Retrospectively, Montaigne is aware that his reasoning powers were weakened, or perhaps numbed, and his body could not feel pain either. These are the symptoms of shock, following a serious accident, when the mind protects the body from the mental stress and physical pain it is experiencing. It is shock and the delayed reaction to trauma which Montaigne is trying to explain in his writing here.

Montaigne makes a small but significant change to above passage in the *Exemplaire de Bordeaux*. He changes 'je ne sens guiere autre action si plaisante' to 'je ne sens guiere autre action moins poissante', which allows him to mirror Lucretius's statement that death is to be feared less than nothing, if there can be anything less than nothing ('multo mortem minus ad nos esse esse putandum | si minus esse potest quam nihil esse videmus'; 'Death

must therefore be thought of as much less of a moment to us, if there can be anything less than what we see to be nothing').<sup>240</sup> Montaigne uses this expression himself in ‘Que philosopher c’est apprendre à mourir’ (I, 20), so it is fitting that he should echo this sentiment in his description of his own experience with death. Furthermore, it is not coincidental that this key Lucretian idea concerning death, which Montaigne borrows, is found in the lines immediately before the expression ‘nemo expergitus extat | frigid quem semel est vitai pauca secuta’ ('no one awakens and rises whom the cold stoppage of life has once overtaken'; *De rerum natura*, III, 926-27), which was the first quotation from *De rerum natura* to be used in ‘De l’exercitation’ (II, 6, 371). Montaigne has therefore taken his reader full circle, bringing a diligent reader back to the concept of a pause in life ('vitai pauca') which he has described fully over the course of this essay. It is no surprise then, that Montaigne now concludes his pause in life by explaining how he finally came back to life: ‘Quand je vins à revivre et à reprendre mes forces [...] je me senty tout d’un train rengager aux douleurs’ (II, 6, 377).

This bodily return with Montaigne feeling pain is combined with a mental return of Montaigne’s senses and faculties, as his mind re-engages with his body and enables him to process and feel the pain of his physical injuries. This resolves his mind-body separation to unify his self again as ‘l’homme tout entier’ and Montaigne is close to concluding his ‘vitai pauca’.

### The return of memory

The final problem remaining to Montaigne’s identity is the loss of the memory of the exact circumstances of the accident. The precise details only came back to Montaigne on the day

---

<sup>240</sup> Montaigne, *Essais*, II, 6, 377; Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, III, 926-7.

after the accident in the form of a flashback. Montaigne introduces this return of memory, highlighting as something which he needs to remember:

Je ne veux pas oublier cecy, que la derniere chose en quoy je me peus remettre, ce fut  
la souvenance de cet accident ... (II, 6, 377)

Montaigne did not want to forget three separate aspects of this return of memory: firstly, the fact that the memory came back at last, secondly, the way in which the memory came back, as a flashback, and thirdly, the details of the accident which were revealed in the flashback. It is of course significant that Montaigne writes ‘Je ne veux pas oublier cecy’, an expression which attaches great importance to the details of this event, but is equally an expression which is so intricately connected to memory itself. Terence Cave recognises that ‘memory is at work at two levels here, [...] both within the experienced time of the accident, and in the recovery and recording of the incident four years later’.<sup>241</sup> Montaigne wants this memory to be safely guarded in his storehouse of memory and also in constant use by the tool of memory. It is the memory of what happened to provoke his ‘vitai pausa’, his experience of ‘les approches de la mort’, which restores the continuity of memory which he requires in order to ensure his stable and continuous identity. This is why it is such a key memory for Montaigne; not only is it a unique near-death experience to which Montaigne attaches great importance in terms of learning from experience, but it is also the essential, missing part of the jigsaw of Montaigne’s memory which must be used to preserve his identity.

Trauma theory suggests that ‘trauma requires integration [...] for the sake of cure’.<sup>242</sup> This recovery of the memory of the accident allows Montaigne to integrate it into his narrative

---

<sup>241</sup> Cave, Terence, ‘Montaigne’, in *Proceedings of the British Academy, Volume 131, 2004 Lectures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 183-204, p. 188.

<sup>242</sup> Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, p. 153.

memory. Montaigne identifies the need to recover his memory, which is why he is intent on establishing exactly what happened. Montaigne writes:

... me fis redire plusieurs fois où j'aloy, d'où je venoy, à quelle heure cela m'estoit advenu, avant que de le pouvoir concevoir ... (II, 6, 377)

One must consider exactly what Montaigne wanted to achieve by asking his servants to repeat the details of the accident. It is clear that he is trying to resolve the issues which he previously found in his own recollection, for example, he wants to know where he was going and where he was coming from, the same details which he was lacking when he returned to his home following the accident ('Je ne sçavoy pourtant ny d'où je venoy, ny où j'aloy'; II, 6, 376). This retracing of his footsteps as it were bears similarities to the method of *loci* discussed in Chapter Three. Could it be the case that he is hoping to trigger something in his memory which will reveal the details of his fall?

In relation to his accident, Montaigne was depending on his servants to provide him with some sort of trigger for his own tool of memory to spring into use and to uncover the memory which was deeply embedded in his memory storehouse.

When Montaigne asked his servants to give him their testimonies of the accident, was he attempting to fill the empty storehouse of memory with facts and to replace the lost memory with abstract details about the event? When one considers Montaigne's disdain for a memory filled with facts in comparison to a memory filled with experiences, it seems unlikely that Montaigne would have understood this to be a real memory of the event. The expression 'avant que de le pouvoir concevoir' in Montaigne's description suggests that he was attempting to trigger something in his own memory through the facts provided by his servants, rather than looking to plug the gap in his memory with facts alone. Furthermore,

Montaigne reveals that he could not trust the facts given to him by his servants, as they lied about the circumstances in order to protect their colleague who was at fault for the accident:

Quant à la façon de ma cheute, on me la cachoit en faveur de celuy qui en avoit esté cause, et m'en forgeoit on d'autres (II, 6, 377).

Facts alone therefore are not enough for Montaigne to re-establish his memory, as he cannot trust the facts provided by others. Moreover, the ability to forge a memory ('forger une memoire') should be reserved for the individual rather than anyone else. With memory so closely tied up with truth throughout the *Essais*, it is essential that Montaigne alone forges a memory which is truthful to the events. There is an alternative interpretation of Montaigne's questioning of his servants, in that it is possible his repeated questioning of his servants reveals that he doubted their versions of events. Montaigne explains in 'Des menteurs' (I, 9) that in order to reveal a liar, one must repeatedly question and force the liar to tell a story multiple times, so that the falsehoods are dislodged by the truth, which is more deeply imprinted in the memory than the invented version.

Lors qu'ils déguisent et changent, à les remettre souvent en ce mesme conte, il est malaisé qu'ils ne se desferrent, par ce que la chose, comme elle est, s'estant logée la premiere dans la memoire, et s'y estant empreincte, par la voye de la connoissance, et de la science, il est malaisé qu'elle ne se représente à l'imagination, délogeant la fauceté, qui n'y peut avoir le pied si ferme (I, 9, 36).

It is therefore possible that there was a doubt lodged in Montaigne's mind about the honesty of his servants' testimonies, and that doubt was based upon a memory which he could not access yet.

Montaigne questioned his servants in order to trigger his own memory with a particular detail than in order to uncover any possible lies, but this approach of attempting to activate a memory trigger did not work. Indeed, Montaigne eventually remembers the details of his accident not actively, but passively:

Mais long temps apres, et le lendemain, quand ma memoire vint à s'entr'ouvrir et me representer l'estat où je m'estoy trouvé en l'instant que j'avoy aperçeu ce cheval fondant sur moy (car je l'avoy veu à mes talons et me tins pour mort, mais ce pensement avoit esté si soudain que la peur n'eut pas loisir de s'y engendrer), il me sembla que c'estoit un esclair qui me frapoit l'ame de secousse et que je revenoy de l'autre monde (II, 6, 377).

Montaigne's memory opened up to him, suggesting both the image of a storehouse of memory and that Montaigne was passive to the memory retrieval. Similarly to Montaigne's comments in II, 17, 'De la praesumption' that he could not use his memory as he thought he should be able to, in this case too, Montaigne cannot manipulate his memory to retrieve the information which he requires. Caruth suggests that 'the ability to recover the past is [...] closely and paradoxically tied up, in trauma, with the inability to access it'.<sup>243</sup> In the case of Montaigne's trauma then, his memory of the accident is 'inaccessible to conscious recall' and is not within his control.<sup>244</sup> It is not the over-vigilant guard with whom Montaigne personifies memory in 'De la praesumption' who is preventing Montaigne's access; rather, it is symptomatic of trauma that Montaigne cannot access the recollection of his accident.

For Montaigne, then, the memory of the event was encoded in his memory and was somewhere in his storehouse of memory, but it was not locatable, accessible or retrievable

---

<sup>243</sup> Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, p. 151.

<sup>244</sup> Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, p. 151.

until it presented itself to him in his flashback. Montaigne proves incapable of active recollection, and his only access to the traumatic memory is through the passive recollection granted by a flashback.

It must be acknowledged that the delay in Montaigne's memory return correlates with Caruth's and Freud's view that the details of an event may only become accessible to a trauma survivor after a distinct period following the traumatic event.<sup>245</sup> Indeed, Caruth suggests that a trauma survivor does not experience their traumatic event during the event itself, but rather that they experience it for the first time through traumatic recall. Montaigne's writing in 'De l'exercitation' shows that he only became aware of the true events of his accident through his flashback. Caruth would argue that Montaigne's flashback then does 'not simply serve as testimony to an event, but may also [...] bear witness to a past that was never fully experienced as it occurred'.<sup>246</sup> Montaigne considered the memory of the details of the accident to be in his memory storehouse throughout his 'vitai pausa' but that they only came forth from his memory when he was not expecting it. This is consistent with his thoughts in 'De la praesumption', in which he explains that he has to approach his memory in an indifferent way: 'elle me sert mieux par rencontre, il faut que je la sollicite nonchalamment: car, si je la presse, elle s'estonne' (II, 17, 649). In the case of his traumatic recollection, his memory opens up to him and represents to Montaigne the instant when he felt his servant's horse riding towards him. In returning Montaigne into the moment of his accident, rather than letting the memory return in a more tranquil way, Montaigne's memory forces him into a re-living of the event which retains all the force and shock of the original event which Montaigne had either not fully experienced at the time, or had subconsciously repressed following the accident.

---

<sup>245</sup> Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, p. 7.

<sup>246</sup> Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, p. 7.

Freud proposes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that trauma or ‘a wound of the mind’ is ‘not like a wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event [...] [which is] experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and therefore not available to the consciousness until it imposes itself again’ in the form of a flashback or persistent thoughts in the mind of the trauma survivor.<sup>247</sup> Montaigne is aware from his flashback that he did not have time to fear his impending death as his mind could not process the events during the very short duration of the accident (‘ce pensement avoit été si soudain que la peur n’eut pas loisir de s’y engendrer’; II, 6, 377).<sup>248</sup> It is also the case, then, that Montaigne’s accident occurred too suddenly and too unexpectedly for his memory to process the event and connect it to his narrative memory.

The moment of memory returning too is described as a sudden flash which brings Montaigne back from another dimension: ‘[...] il me sembla que c’estoit un esclair qui me frapoit l’ame de secousse, et que je revenoy de l’autre monde’ (II, 6, 377). Montaigne’s traumatic re-living or re-enactment experienced through his flashback allows him to process the event in his memory and connect it to his self and his continuity of memory. Hamilton argues that the ‘second shock’, that is to say the return of Montaigne’s memory, is more significant than the accident itself, which he considers to be the ‘first shock’.<sup>249</sup> I agree, to some extent, with Ross Hamilton that for Montaigne, the moment of return of memory and the resolution of his trauma are more important than the accident itself. It is only through his memory opening up that Montaigne considers his self to have finally returned from ‘l’autre monde’, the space between life and death where his being dwelled whilst he lacked memory and identity. Hamilton does however manipulate Montaigne’s description to create a new

---

<sup>247</sup> Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, p. 4.

<sup>248</sup> Montaigne’s remark here echoes his comment in I, 20, 90: ‘Si c’est un mort courte et violente, nous n’avons pas loisir de la craindre’.

<sup>249</sup> Ross Hamilton, *Accident: A Philosophical and Literary History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 80.

meaning when he comments that ‘By willing the reunion of spirit and matter, he [Montaigne] had become the creator of his being’.<sup>250</sup> Whilst the binding of spirit and matter are essential to Montaigne’s return to life and reality, it is a return rather than a new beginning. It is Montaigne’s view that he is restoring his being rather than creating it anew. Moreover, it is his memory which is the active agent in the restoration of his being. As memory is essential to identity for Montaigne, the recovery of his lost memory and the ability to connect this experience to his life and to his self is equally essential to the restoration of his identity. Thus, the connection of his pre-accident self pre-accident to his post-accident self is the more significant reunion here, rather than the reunion of body and spirit; indeed it is the recovery of the interim memory which enables this connection to be made.

### **An evolving response to the accident**

Montaigne’s response to his traumatic event transforms to some extent between the first edition of the essays and the *Exemplaire de Bordeaux*. In the first edition of the *Essais*, Montaigne concludes ‘De l’exercitation’ by understating the importance of the accident and deemphasizing the impact which it had upon him, describing his retelling of such an unimportant event to be vain or pointless.<sup>251</sup> Hamilton comments that ‘Montaigne’s response to the accident was not to exploit or interpret it as a transforming event’.<sup>252</sup> Montaigne’s remark cannot be taken at face-value here; it may be an attempt on his part to avoid presumption and vanity by means of self-critique in order to pre-empt such criticisms from his readership.

---

<sup>250</sup> Hamilton, *Accident: A Philosophical and Literary History*, p. 80.

<sup>251</sup> II, 6, 377, ‘Ce conte d’un événement si légier est assez vain’.

<sup>252</sup> Hamilton, *Accident: A Philosophical and Literary History*, p. 80.

After all, he does profess to have learnt a personal lesson from the experience of both the accident and the writing of the accident, which he uses to justify his analysis of the event in this essay. The lesson which Montaigne learns is: ‘pour aprivoiser à la mort, je trouve qu’il n’y a que de s’en voisiner’ (II, 6, 377). Montaigne constructs his essay such that his experience and learning substantiate his argument in his introduction that one can practise death in order to make it less alien, which in turn can reduce or even remove the fear of death. Indeed, Montaigne’s lesson in ‘De l’exercitation’ reflects his account in I, 20, where he explains that he succeeded in “taming” his fear of death by living with it and keeping it constantly in his thoughts:

Et pour commencer à luy oster son plus grand advantage contre nous, prenons voye toute contraire à la commune. Ostons luy l’estrangéte, pratiquons le, accoustumons le. N’ayons rien si souvent en la teste que la mort (I, 20, 86).

It is therefore in I, 20 that Montaigne first makes clear his take on the theory that one can practise death. The parallel between Montaigne’s thoughts on death in I, 20 and II, 6 is most clear as Montaigne goes on to write:

A tous instants representons la à nostre imagination et en tous visages. Au broncher d’un cheval, à la cheute d’une tuille, à la moindre piqueure d’espleingue, remachons soudain: Et bien, quand ce seroit la mort mesme? (I, 20, 86)

It is no coincidence that Montaigne mentions ‘[le] broncher d’un cheval’ here, as Montaigne’s discussion of death’s approaches and the idea of practice triggers his memory of his equestrian accident. Montaigne’s traumatic event is therefore a key moment in his life and an experience which is vital to his identity, as it is through the recovery of the accident that he restores and secures his identity again.

Furthermore, it seems that Montaigne recognises that one of his only means of inuring himself to death and of coping with the post-traumatic stress of his accident is to hold his experience of death in his thoughts, allowing the tool of memory to continually process and teach Montaigne from his experience. It is to be noted that in this section of ‘*Que philosopher c’est apprendre à mourir*’, Montaigne describes what one might consider to be a symptom of his post-traumatic stress, or at the very least, the persistent, troublesome thoughts which reflect his fear of death. He describes an occasion when he attended a party, and rather than socialising with the other guests, he isolates himself and withdraws into himself as he remembers a story about someone who attended a similar event and suddenly fell seriously ill and died in the days following the party (I, 20, 87). Montaigne is concerned that he could just as easily fall ill in a similar way to the unsuspecting guest in the story. This reflection marks a similarity with Montaigne’s own situation, and the quick and unexpected appearance of death which he most fears. Montaigne explains that if it were not for his constant handling and contemplation of death he would be in continual terror over the fear of sudden death.<sup>253</sup> Indeed, from the perspective of Montaigne suffering a traumatic event, it is possible that the trauma demands Montaigne to constantly return to the site of trauma in order to learn from his experience. So it is that Montaigne’s analysis of his near-death experience in ‘*De l’exercitation*’ provides a means for him to overcome his fear of death, that is to say that it allows Montaigne to consider death from an unique angle and to question his fear of the moment of death.

Montaigne concludes the [A] edition of the essay with the disclaimer: ‘*Ce n’est pas ici ma doctrine, c’est mon estude. Et n’est pas la leçon d’autrui, c’est la mienne*’ (II, 6, 377). Montaigne’s self-study enables him to overcome his personal trauma and explore the models

---

<sup>253</sup> I, 20, 87, ‘Autrement de ma part je fusse en continuelle frayeur et frenesie: car jamais homme ne se défia tant de sa vie, jamais homme ne fait moins d’estat de sa durée’.

of memory and identity in this essay, but he writes that the lessons learned from his experience to be relevant to him alone and challenges any argument from a reader or critic that he is proclaiming a generally applicable understanding of the mind and consciousness. In the *Exemplaire de Bordeaux* ([C]), Montaigne makes a long addition to the end of ‘De l’exercitation’ and adapts his stance to suggest there is in fact a possibility that his reader may learn from his shared memory and example:

Et ne me doibt on sçavoir mauvais gré pour tant, si je la communique. Ce qui me sert, peut aussi par accident servir à un autre. Au demeurant, je ne gaste rien, je n’use que du mien (II, 6, 377).

Montaigne’s earlier disclaimer that his account was a frivolous recollection and his insistence that it was a lesson for him alone required further justification in order to defend himself from claims of *praesumption* and self-love. He begins his justification with the statement that he is only using his own experience and is therefore not ‘spoiling’ anything for his readers. Montaigne does of course learn from his reading, but he is aware that what he reads is not as significant as his own experiences. In this case, Montaigne expects his readers to apply this same logic to their reading of his experience.

In terms of reading and learning, it appears that Montaigne attempted to research others who experienced a near-death experience, to enlighten his own understanding. Montaigne’s reading only reveals the names of ‘deux ou trois anciens qui ayent battu ce chemin’ but no information about the manner of their experience (II, 6, 377-8). This both reinforces and justifies Montaigne’s desire to provide a testimony of his brush with death, as he will be providing a unique perspective.

Montaigne's justification of his writing moves more explicitly from the 'micro' of his accident to the 'macro' of the essays, that is to say that it moves more explicitly from the defence of his recording of the details and experience of his accident to a justification of the personal nature of the essay project as a whole:

C'est une espineuse entreprinse, et plus qu'il ne semble, de suyvre une alleure si vagabonde que celle de nostre esprit; de penetrer les profondeurs opaques de ses replis internes; de choisir et arrester tant de menus airs de ses agitations (II, 6, 378).

His approach is almost psychological, attempting to analyse his self, his thoughts and his memories. The image of Montaigne attempting to penetrate the depths of his mind calls to mind his description in 'De la praesumption' of probing his memory to retrieve important information and locate lost memories (II, 17, 649), which is precisely what Montaigne has attempted in 'De l'exercitation'.

Furthermore, this description of his process of writing the mind echoes with an earlier passage in 'De l'oisiveté' in which Montaigne explains that when he took his retirement, he devoted himself to thinking and allowing his mind to develop, but due to his mind's over-activity, he felt the need to write down the details of his thoughts to be able to process them:

faisant le cheval eschappé, il se donne cent fois plus d'affaire à soy mesmes, qu'il n'en prenoit pour autruy; et m'enfante tant de chimeres et monstres fantasques les uns sur les autres, sans ordre, et sans propos, que pour en contempler à mon aise l'ineptie et l'estrangéte, j'ay commandé de les mettre en rolle ... (I, 8, 33)

The metaphor of the mind as a runaway horse which has bolted is of course significant, even if it is a common image. Since Montaigne wrote 'De l'oisiveté' soon after his retirement,<sup>254</sup>

---

<sup>254</sup> I, 8, 33, 'Dernièrement que je me retiray chez moy'.

Pierre Villey tentatively dates the writing of this essay to 1572, which is shortly after his riding accident.<sup>255</sup> Montaigne's response to the metaphorical horse bolting in I, 8 is to write down the chimeras and monstrosities which his mind produces in order to be able to understand them later, and in 'De l'exercitation', his response to the horse bolting is again to write the testimony of his accident in order to enhance his understanding of the event.

Indeed, in 'De l'exercitation', Montaigne also makes a brief reference to his retirement, strengthening the link between these two passages:

Il y a plusieurs années que je n'ay que moy pour visée à mes pensées, que je ne contrerolle et estudie que moy; et, si j'estudie autre chose, c'est pour soudain le coucher sur moy, ou en moy, pour mieux dire (II, 6, 378).

Montaigne's position follows his approach to learning outlined in the previous chapter, culminating in the internalisation of learning ('le coucher...en moy') rather than the surface learning which Montaigne does not hold in high regard. Certainly in the case of Montaigne's response to trauma, his self-study is of great use, as it is through testimony and appropriation of his trauma that he can cure his post-traumatic anxiety. Caruth's comment that trauma 'simultaneously defies and demands our witness' correlates with Montaigne's writing here, recognising the difficulty in providing testimony of one's trauma but also the need to provide this testimony in order to achieve resolution.<sup>256</sup>

Montaigne's [C] addition also appears to return to his comment before the account of his accident in which he explains that he is taking steps to prepare for death.<sup>257</sup> He explains that 'Encore se-faut il testoner, encore se faut-il ordonner et renger pour sortir en place. Or je

---

<sup>255</sup> Villey, *Les sources et evolution des Essais*, p. 339.

<sup>256</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, History*, p. 11.

<sup>257</sup> II, 6, 372-3, J'espere qu'il m'en adviendra de mesme de la mort, et qu'elle ne vaut pas la peine que je prens à tant d'apprests que je dresse et tant de secours que j'appelle et assemble pour en soustenir l'effort'.

me pare sans cesse, car je me descris sans cesse' (II, 6, 378). It is significant that this comment about constantly describing himself comes in a section of the essays, to which Montaigne has returned to self-edit and re-write. Regosin recognises the importance of this passage as a statement of Montaigne's process of writing as he connects it to 'Au Lecteur' to argue that Montaigne's admission of rewriting and reorganising his book seems to contradict his intention in 'Au lecteur' to represent himself 'tout entier et tout nud' (I, 'Au Lecteur').<sup>258</sup> Regosin does note, however, that rather than Montaigne attempting to dress himself up with adornments and retouch his self-portrait, he instead refers to arranging and organising ('je me pare sans cesse'), which therefore moves the emphasis away from artifice to 'a change from a state where things are not arranged to one where they are, where concessions to taste or vanity are subsumed in the larger framework of the relation of disorder to order'.<sup>259</sup> Montaigne is therefore organising his writing and preparing himself for death through writing. Where his memory container will be destroyed in death, his book will endure, with all his memories ordered and displayed to preserve his identity. Equally, in relation to Montaigne's trauma, his writing brings order and understanding to a moment of disorder and incomprehension. Montaigne therefore recognises that he is guilty of presumption but is not willing to succumb to the public perception which makes presumption a vice as this would prevent him from following his 'general dessein' (II, 6, 379). This 'dessein' is the preservation of his memory and identity through writing and his essays are therefore the aid which he is preparing in advance of his death (II, 6, 372-3).

The language used by Montaigne in this passage which outlines the aims of his work echoes another addition in the *Exemplaire de Bordeaux* in 'Du desmentir'. The recurrent

---

<sup>258</sup> Richard Regosin, *The Matter of My Book: Montaigne's 'Essais' as the Book of the Self* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1997), p. 18.

<sup>259</sup> Richard Regosin, *The Matter of My Book*, p. 18.

image of Montaigne producing a self-portrait through his writing appears in both essays.

Firstly, in ‘De l’exercitation’ Montaigne writes:

Je peins principalement mes cogitations, subject informe qui ne peut tomber en production ouvragere. A tout peine, puis je coucher en ce corps aerée de la voix (II, 6, 379).

Montaigne attempts to capture his thoughts in the medium of language, to pin down a perpetually changing subject and to restrain and bridle a runaway horse. In ‘Du desmentir’, he recognises that by portraying himself for his reader, he is able to portray his ideas and self more clearly: ‘Me peignant pour autrui, je me suis peint en moy de couleurs plus nettes que n’estoyent miennes premieres’ (II, 18, 665).<sup>260</sup> As Montaigne describes the process of writing his essays, he states that: ‘Je n’ay pas plus faict mon livre que mon livre m’a faict, livre consubstantiel à son auteur, d’une occupation propre, membre de ma vie’ (II, 18, 665). In terms of Montaigne’s restoration of identity in ‘De l’exercitation’, his writing and book make Montaigne, as he preserves his memory and assures the survival of his continuous identity through his account. Montaigne’s book as a ‘membre de ma vie’ can be interpreted as a ‘limb of his life’, one might say an artificial limb which represents an artificial memory container, into which Montaigne can store his experiences and from which he can retrieve his memories. In the sense that Montaigne thinks that: ‘Je suis moy mesmes la matière de mon livre’, as he states in ‘Au lecteur’, Montaigne’s memory and testimony form the material of his book and forge both his book’s and his own identity.

---

<sup>260</sup> Regosin, *The Matter of My Book: Montaigne’s Essais as the Book of the Self*, p. 190.

The final image which Montaigne creates at the end of ‘De l’exercitation’ captures this sense of the book as the self as he describes the act of writing as putting one’s self on display, like ‘un skeletos, où, d’une veue, les veines, les muscles, les tendons paroissent, chaque piece en son siege’ (II, 6, 379). George Hoffmann recognises that there is a link between Montaigne’s self-portrait and Ligier Richier’s sepulchral sculpture of René d’Orange, which suggests ‘a disquieting allegory of resurrection, for it presents not a rebirth, but the reanimation of a body that remains very much that of a dead man’.<sup>261</sup> The sculpture reveals d’Orange’s veins, muscles and tendons just as Montaigne describes his own self-portrait. The experience of death is therefore ‘at the heart of his [Montaigne’s] self-portrayal’,<sup>262</sup> just as Montaigne’s memory is permanently imprinted with his near-death experience. Hoffmann argues that it is following Montaigne’s accident that he is suddenly compelled to publish La Boetié’s work, in order to preserve La Boetié’s memory through the legacy of his writing.<sup>263</sup> Equally, Montaigne’s accident is at the origin of the essays themselves, as Montaigne recognises that he can preserve his own identity by committing his memory to paper. This is clear when Montaigne writes ‘A faute de memoire naturel, j’en forge de papier’ (III, 13) as he describes taking note of experiences of ill health so that he will be able to remember the symptoms and reactions in the future. This approach, however, imposes itself on the essays as a whole, as Montaigne’s book becomes a substitute for memory, that is to say not only for Montaigne’s memory whilst he is alive, but also for Montaigne’s legacy after his death.

---

<sup>261</sup> George Hoffmann, ‘Montaigne, Lear and the Question of Afterlife’, *Actes des congrès de la Société française Shakespeare*, 21 (2004), pp. 155-173, p. 168-9. Hoffmann explains that Montaigne would have seen this sculpture in Bar le Duc, when he observed the presentation of the portrait of René of Sicily to Francis II in 1559.

The image of the sculpture of René d’Orange is attached on the following page.

<sup>262</sup> Hoffmann, ‘Montaigne, Lear and the Question of Afterlife’, p. 168.

<sup>263</sup> Hoffmann, ‘Montaigne, Lear and the Question of Afterlife’, p. 170.





Fig. 1.a The sculpture of René d'Orange by Ligier Richier, 1544.

## **Conclusion**

Montaigne's description of his riding accident is the key example where he discusses personal memory in the *Essais* and is also a significant site of trauma. It is through Montaigne's engagement with his trauma through writing that he seeks a response to his accident and attempts to question what happens to one's memory and identity in death. As he returns from his own 'vitai pausa', his process of memory has been interrupted, and it is only by recovering the lost memory of the accident that he restores his identity. The application of trauma theory to Montaigne's account of his accident and to his evolving response reveals him to be a trauma survivor who experiences some symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Caruth's trauma theory opens a new perspective on Montaigne's thoughts on memory, as his understanding is shaped by his traumatic experience. In a moment of trauma, the container of memory does not fill correctly and the tool of memory does not record effectively, thus forcing Montaigne to question this approach to memory. Through Montaigne's flashback and his written testimony of his trauma, he is able to re-establish the psychological continuity of memory which provides the foundation for his personal identity.

As Montaigne justifies his writing of the accident and this very particular memory in his addition to 'De l'exercitation', he is also justifying the writing of the essays as a whole, and the writing of his self. His justification explains the importance of testimony in assimilating his trauma but it also reveals a means for Montaigne to attempt to overcome his fear of death. Montaigne recognises that death marks the destruction of one's memories and one's self, and so it is through the externalisation of these memories that he can preserve his identity after death. Hence, it is not by practising the moment of death that Montaigne is able to conquer his fear, but by practising and preparing for death through writing.

Montaigne's accident and his experience of La Boetié's death are at the very origin of the essays, then, as both force him to consider the importance of preserving memory to serve and protect identity. Whilst Montaigne describes his book as his other self ('Mon livre est consubtantiel à moy'; II, 8, 665), it is because his book is laced with his personal memoires that it is able to be a substitute for his self. His book then becomes the storehouse of his memory and his memory tool. It is the storehouse, in the sense that it is the treasury of his memories and keeps his experience stored in an incorruptible and incontestable form. It is the tool, in the sense that it allows Montaigne to access and retrieve his memories, but moreover, the process of writing is similar to the tool of memory and Lucretius's *retinentia* as Montaigne is constantly remembering and recalling his experiences and thoughts, and applying them to his book of the self. Unlike Lucretius's *repetentia* and *retinentia*, Montaigne's memory in the form of his book will survive his death and will preserve his identity for his readers by allowing them to engage with his memories and re-create Montaigne from his memories, in a way that a recreation of Montaigne from his atoms alone would not allow.

## Chapter Five

### The Preservation, Protection and Projection of Collective Memory

#### Introduction

So far, this thesis has looked at how Montaigne approaches personal memory; in this chapter, however, I will analyse how Montaigne's understanding of personal memory influences his engagement with what we could call, with Maurice Halbwachs, 'collective memory'.

Halbwachs coins the term 'collective memory' in his study *Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire* to designate the memory of more than one person or group. Halbwachs also establishes a difference between collective memory and history or, as he calls it, 'historical memory'. For Halbwachs, historical memory consists of dates, facts, and records of events, whereas Halbwachs' concept of collective memory concerns lived experience, which emphasises the importance of the autobiographical, episodic memory of the individual contributing to collective memory. Halbwachs therefore makes the distinction between historical memory and collective memory as he explains that historical memory is abstract and objective, whilst collective memory is subjective.<sup>264</sup> Furthermore, Halbwachs's collective memory is more closely linked to episodic memory (the remembering of experiences), which is temporally bound as it is limited by living memory. Halbwachs's notion of collective memory extends the personal memory model to become a plural, shared memory.

Although collective memory clearly existed before Halbwachs invented the term, it may have had a quite different significance in earlier periods, as Nicholas Russell argues in

---

<sup>264</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective* (Paris: Les presses universitaires de France, 1950) ; Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 24.

his paper ‘Collective Memory Before and After Halbwachs’.<sup>265</sup> In this paper, Russell explores the similarities and differences between Halbwachs’s definition of collective memory and what Russell calls ‘early modern collective memory’.<sup>266</sup> In the early modern period, he argues, collective memory was more closely associated with the preservation and transmission of that which ‘held moral or aesthetic value’.<sup>267</sup> Russell explains that early modern collective memory ‘greatly resembles semantic memory’ – the remembering of facts.<sup>268</sup> Moreover, this type of early modern collective memory which remembers *exempla* and moral lessons is not temporally bound because it can extend far beyond one’s lived experience.

It is significant that Russell establishes early modern collective memory to be closely linked to semantic or historical memory; when Montaigne analyses certain humanist methods of teaching, he is very critical of the forced memorisation of dates and facts from the past (I, 26) and of the undeserved praise given to those people who are able to recall abstract information (I, 9 and III, 8). However, Montaigne certainly does value that which Russell describes as early modern collective memory, as the *Essais* are full of *exempla* and records of events from history which he judges and from which he draws conclusions and contemporary lessons. This was the humanist era, which privileged the restoration and preservation of ancient texts to enlighten their own contemporary understanding.

However, as I shall argue here, Montaigne explores memory in a way that is closer to Halbwachs’s more modern definition of collective memory, in that Montaigne imagines the

---

<sup>265</sup> Nicolas Russell, ‘Collective Memory Before and After Halbwachs’, *The French Review*, 79, 4 (2006), pp. 792-804.

<sup>266</sup> Russell, ‘Collective Memory Before and After Halbwachs’, p. 792.

<sup>267</sup> Russell, ‘Collective Memory Before and After Halbwachs’, p. 793.

<sup>268</sup> Russell, ‘Collective Memory Before and After Halbwachs’, p. 793.

storehouse of collective memory to contain not only semantic memories and ethical lessons from the past, but also episodic memories and collective lived experience.

Whilst humanists held the memory of the past in high regard, the memory of their own era was under threat during the Wars of Religion. Edicts of Pacification, which were issued after each of the eight wars, included a version of a so-called ‘forgetting clause’ which encouraged the French people to ‘bracket off’ their past grievances and rivalries in order to be able to live together peacefully. The Edicts, and in particular these ‘forgetting clauses’, were a factor which paradoxically brought memory and indeed collective memory into public discussion. The humanist approach to learning stood in contrast to the message of the memory clauses, creating a tension between the need to both remember and forget the Wars of Religion.

Collective memory is therefore an issue which one might expect Montaigne to address directly in the *Essais*. Yet although Montaigne does explore collective memory to some extent, he does not analyse it in the direct way that he analyses personal memory. In the same way that he builds on Lucretian models of memory to establish a unique approach to personal memory, there is evidence that he develops his own approach to collective memory.

This chapter will investigate how Montaigne’s approach to personal memory influences his conception of collective memory, detailing how he discusses the memory of collective experience in the *Essais*, ultimately preserving collective memory by recording his own personal memories.

## Thinking collective memory through a Lucretian lens

In the same way that Montaigne engages with Lucretius regarding personal memory, he also heavily annotates a section of *De rerum natura* in which Lucretius describes a form of collective memory. It must be said that Lucretius does not discuss collective memory directly, but in Book V, when he discusses the loss of history and stories from the past, Montaigne appears to interpret Lucretius's verses as a perspective on collective memory. Lucretius explains the natural threat of time and flux to the stability of the universe:

Denique non lapides quoque vinci cernas ab aevo,  
non altas turris ruere et putrescere saxa,  
non delubra deum simulacraque fessa fatisci, [...]

Denique non monimenta virum dilapsa videmus (*De rerum natura*, V, 306-11)

Again, do you not see that even stones are conquered by time, that tall turrets fall and rocks crumble, that the gods' temples and their images wear out and crack ... Again do we not see the monuments of men fall to pieces.

Lucretius means that no monuments can withstand the effects of time and Montaigne comments on these lines in the flyleaf of his copy: 'Monimenta saxa |denique omnia fathiscunt' ('Monuments, stones, finally everything crumbles away').<sup>269</sup> Montaigne also writes 'Tout subiet a corruption' in the margin beside these lines in his copy. Montaigne is thus clearly drawn to this section of Book V in both his first and second readings of *De rerum natura*. Lucretius goes on to say:

---

<sup>269</sup> Montaigne's copy of Lucretius's *De rerum natura*, Front flyleaf e; Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 165.

Praeterea si nulla fuit genitalis origo  
Terrarium et caeli semperque aeterna fuere,  
Cur supera bellum Thebanum et funera Troiae  
Non alias alii quoque res cecinere poetae?  
Quo tot facta virum totiens cecidere neque usquam  
aeternis famae monumentis insita florent?<sup>270</sup> (*De rerum natura*, V, 324-329)

(Besides, if there has been no first birth-time for earth and heaven, and they have been always everlasting, why have not other poets also sung other things beyond the Theban War and the ruin of Troy? Into what place have so many deeds of men so often fallen, and nowhere flower implanted in eternal monuments of fame?)

Montaigne also comments on these lines on a flyleaf of his copy: ‘Si non genitus est mundus cur non sunt antiquiores historiae quam belli Thebani & troiani’ (‘If the world had no birth, why are there not histories older than the Theban and Trojan wars?’).<sup>271</sup>

In the margin of his copy, Montaigne writes ‘Si le monde ètoit | aeternel il y aroit | plus vieilles histoires’.<sup>272</sup> Montaigne’s first engagement with this section of *De rerum natura* only summarises rather than interprets Lucretius’s ideas but his annotation reveals a keen interest in this passage and the poet’s comments on the loss of the past. Lucretius’s argument continues in the lines following, as he states that cities and civilisations have been annihilated by floods and that the same destruction could occur on earth again (*De rerum natura*, V, 338-344). Montaigne marks these lines in his copy with four pen-strokes and writes on a flyleaf:

---

<sup>270</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, Loeb edition, trans. by W.H.D Rouse, p. 402-5

<sup>271</sup> Montaigne’s copy of Lucretius’s *De rerum natura*, Front flyleaf e; Screech, *Montaigne’s Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 165.

<sup>272</sup> Montaigne’s copy of Lucretius’s *De rerum natura*, p. 394; Screech, *Montaigne’s Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 363.

Quod si perierunt urbes & regions diluuiis & delerent

Moemoriam rerum praeteritarum hoc ipsum docet tibi gravior vis

Ingruerit ipsam quoque hanc machinam interituram

(If cities and regions perished through floods, and were to have effaced the memory of things past, that itself teaches you that a greater force will assault the fabric of this world, which will collapse in ruins.)<sup>273</sup>

Montaigne engages with Lucretius's verses here, and the use of the expression 'moemoriam rerum praeteritarum' is particularly significant. Montaigne's focus is on the importance of the memory that could be lost in a natural disaster, in the sense that the people who can remember are killed, whereas Lucretius is discussing the loss of history over time. It is significant that Montaigne is interested in the loss of memory, rather than the loss of history. In the same way that an individual's death signifies the loss of personal memory and the destruction of personal identity, the annihilation of a civilisation would signify the loss of collective memory of that part of the past and the destruction or even forgetting of a civilisation's identity.

Montaigne engages with this passage from *De rerum natura* in the *Essais* when he discusses the discovery of the New World in 'Des coches' (III, 6). Montaigne alters the verses from Lucretius's poem so that they are now read as a statement rather than a question, changing 'cur' to 'et'.

Et supera bellum Trojanum et funera Trojae,

Multi alias alii quoque res cecinere poetae. (III, 6, 907)

---

<sup>273</sup> Montaigne's copy of Lucretius's *De rerum natura*, Front flyleaf f; Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 167.

(And before the Trojan War and the death of Troy many other poets have sung of other wars.)

Montaigne uses Lucretius here to support his own point that ‘nostre connoissance soit foible en tous sens’ (III, 6, 907). In his discussion of these lines in *The Lucretian Renaissance*, Gerard Passannante argues that Montaigne is using Lucretius to put forward the idea that ‘beyond the threshold of Homer’s poems was a potentially endless gap in our knowledge’.<sup>274</sup> Montaigne develops Lucretius’s verses to argue that our knowledge of the past, present and future is weak and writes: ‘nous ne voyons ny gueres loin, ny guere arriere; elle [la connoissance] embrasse peu et vit peu, coute et en estandue de temps et en estandue de matiere [...]’ (III, 6, 907). Montaigne believes that so much memory has been lost, and although the Trojan wars are a part of the collective memory of the past, there are so many stories that poets did not write about and that have therefore been forgotten.

Montaigne also uses a quotation from Horace’s *Odes* to further support his argument that so little is known about the past.<sup>275</sup> Montaigne then moves to praise the priests of Egypt who educated Solon about the history of their people and of other societies.<sup>276</sup> It is probable that Montaigne had his copy of Lucretius to hand as he wrote this section of ‘Des coches’, since Lambin’s commentary links Lucretius’s remarks on the loss of history to Plato’s *Timaeus* and to how Solon was educated about antiquity.<sup>277</sup>

In Plato’s *Timaeus*, Solon visits the city of Sais and meets the Egyptian priests who inform him about the lost city of Atlantis. These priests have preserved the memory of

---

<sup>274</sup> Gerard Passannante, *The Lucretian Renaissance: Philology and the Afterlife of Tradition* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 120.

<sup>275</sup> Horace, *Odes*, IV, ix, 25-8, ‘Vixere fortis ante Agamemnona | Multi, sed omnes illachrimabiles | Urgentur ignotique longa | Nocte.’ ‘Great heroes lived before Agamemnon; many they were, yet none is lamented, being swept away unknown into the long night’.

<sup>276</sup> Eric MacPhail, ‘In the Wake of Solon: Memory and Modernity in the Essays of Montaigne’, *MLN*, 113, 4 (1998) pp. 881-896.

<sup>277</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. Denis Lambin (1563), p. 397.

Atlantis in their living memory and had passed it across generations both by speaking and writing. Montaigne refers to the priests' way of teaching and preserving the histories of foreign people (III, 6, 907) before using a quotation from Cicero to express the amount of history and memory of the past that we are lacking. Montaigne states:

Quand tout ce qui est venu par rapport du passé jusques à nous seroit vray et seroit sçeu par quelqu'un, ce seroit moins que rien au pris de ce qui est ignoré. Et de cette mesme image du monde qui coule pendant que nous y sommes, combien chetive et racourcie est la cognoissance des plus curieux! (III, 6, 908)

The image of continuity between past and present is key here, because in the same way that Montaigne thinks about personal memory, the continuity of memory is essential for identity. Many identities have been forgotten or lost and many examples from history that could teach people about their collective memory have been lost to time. Montaigne uses the imagery of a world in constant flux, again calling to mind Lucretius, to emphasise how little men are able to know about the collective memory (past) of humanity. It is significant too that Montaigne argues that it is not only individual events that can be lost but also the memories of nations and polities.

Non seulement des evenemens particuliers que fortune rend souvant exemplaires et poisans, mais de l'estat des grandes polices et nations, il nous en eschappe cent fois plus qu'il n'en vient à nostre science. (III, 6, 908)

In an era when the collective memory of the nation was under threat, Montaigne's recognition of other forgotten nations and the uncertain circumstances that contributed to their downfall and slipping from collective memory is particularly pertinent.

Montaigne's concern here is for the loss of knowledge due to the loss of memory of the past. His regret is that so much memory has not been passed down across eras of history and that so much potential for learning has been lost. Montaigne's thinking on memory here is closely related to Russell's idea of early modern collective memory which values the ethical and moral lessons from history. Montaigne explains that Fortune has ensured that certain events have been preserved and passed down into collective memory as exempla, but this does not compensate for the amount of knowledge that is lost.

Montaigne uses Lucretius twice more in 'Des coches' to discuss the age of the world and although he does not acknowledge Lucretius by name, it would be clear to a 'diligent lecteur' that it is Lucretius to whom Montaigne refers. Montaigne first uses Lucretius to state that the world is old, and then turns Lucretius against himself to argue that the world is new, thereby manipulating Lucretius to show that the age of the world cannot be determined.<sup>278</sup>

Montaigne uses the following quotation from Lucretius from the same passage of *De rerum natura* with which he engaged so closely in his own copy:

Verum, ut opinor, habet novitatem summa, recénsque  
Natura est mundi, neque pridem exordia coepit:  
Quare etiam quaedam nunc artes expoliuntur,  
Nunc etiam augescunt, nunc addita navigiis sunt  
Multa. (*De rerum natura*, V, 330-334)

---

<sup>278</sup> See Eric MacPhail, 'In the Wake of Solon: Memory and Modernity in the Essays of Montaigne'. MacPhail explores Montaigne's use of Lucretius in 'Des coches' regarding the age of the world and contemporary beliefs about the age and state of the world.

(But as I think, the world is young and new, and it is not long since beginning.

Therefore even now some arts are still developing nowadays and growing sill; the art of navigation is even now progressing.)

Montaigne comments on his copy regarding these lines that there were still developments being made in society when Lucretius was writing:

Unde fit novae etiamnum sint artes aut nondum perfectae et navigationi multa adhuc adduntur.

(Hence there are new arts even now, and arts not perfected, and much is still being added to navigation.)<sup>279</sup>

It must be noted that when Montaigne uses this quotation in ‘Des coches’ he omits the two lines which follow this quotation in *De rerum natura*. In these lines, Lucretius explains that he is the first to record Epicurean philosophy in Latin (‘et hanc primus cum primis ipse repertus |nunc ego sum in patrias qui possimm vertere voces’; ‘I myself am now found the very first to be able to describe it in our own mother tongue’; *De rerum natura*, V, 336-37).

There is a sense in Lucretius’s verses that he needs to record this new system for understanding the nature of things and he needs to communicate it to his audience and to future audiences. Montaigne even recognises this in his flyleaf note where he writes: ‘et ille primus scripsit Latine philosophiam’ (‘And he was the first to treat of philosophy in Latin').<sup>280</sup>

Montaigne uses the quotation from *De rerum natura* without these lines in order to make Lucretius’s quotation compatible with the present day. In this way, Montaigne extends the developments being made in Lucretius’s era to include progress made in the early modern era

---

<sup>279</sup> Montaigne’s copy of Lucretius’s *De rerum natura*, Front Flyleaf f; Screech, *Montaigne’s Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 166.

<sup>280</sup> Montaigne’s copy of Lucretius’s *De rerum natura*, Front Flyleaf f; Screech, *Montaigne’s Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, p. 166.

such as the discovery of the New World, blurring the dividing lines of the past to show the continuity of memory over time. Eric MacPhail comments that Montaigne ‘makes Lucretius speak both for the ancients and the moderns, who thereby become contemporaries in an ageless world’.<sup>281</sup>

Montaigne then discusses the discovery of the New World and how the memory of the New World is at risk in relation to future collective memory. Montaigne asks: ‘et qui nous respond si c'est le dernier de ses freres, puis que les Daemons, les Sybillles et nous, avons ignoré cettuy-cy jusqu'asture?’(III, 6, 908). Montaigne explains that the New World had no system for writing before its discovery (‘il n'y a pas cinquante ans qu'il ne sçavoit ny lettres’; III, 6, 908), and hence questions its ability to record its memory of itself; equally, he implies that much of its past will remain unknown to us due to it not being recorded. For Montaigne’s generation, there is relatively little known about the New World and thus, Montaigne is concerned that there is so much that could potentially be lost about the past of the New World for future generations if it is not preserved. Montaigne therefore proceeds to give his views on the New World, as if preserving it in his own text.<sup>282</sup>

Montaigne is concerned about what is known about the New World and how information about these new civilisations can be so easily lost, just as it had been for other civilisations which preceded it. In the same way that the presentation of personal memory is important for providing opportunities to study oneself, collective memory provides the opportunity for learning about humanity and how civilisations function throughout history.

---

<sup>281</sup> Eric MacPhail, ‘Montaigne and the critique of novelty’, in *Esprit Généreux, Esprit Pantagruëlique: Essays by His Students in Honor of François Rigolot*, ed. by Reinier Leushuis and Zahi Zalloua (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2008). pp. 247-258, p. 254.

<sup>282</sup>See Edwin M. Duval, ‘Lessons of the New World: Design and Meaning in Montaigne’s ‘Des cannibales’ (I:31) and ‘Des coches’ (III:6)’, *Yale French Studies*, 64, ‘Montaigne: Essays in Reading’ (1983), pp. 95-112.

The preservation of collective memory also ensures collective memory in the same way that the preservation of personal memory can ensure personal legacy after death. Montaigne discusses memory in this way in ‘De la gloire’ (II, 16) when he considers the legacy of soldiers who die in battle. Montaigne opposes personal memory and collective memory here, as he moves from a discussion of his own legacy after his death to the legacy of thousands of soldiers after their deaths in battle.

Reputation is generally dependent on others, who are able to preserve the reputation of an individual from their own perspective. Montaigne writes: ‘Il semble que l'estre connue, ce soit aucunement avoir sa vie et sa durée en la garde d'autrui’ (II, 16, 626). The fact that Montaigne uses the expression ‘sa durée’ as well as ‘sa vie’ suggests that Montaigne is thinking about the construction of one’s reputation in the collective mind of others.

And yet Montaigne attempts to distance himself from the possibility that only others can ensure that he is known when he writes:

Moy, je tiens que je ne suis que chez moy; et, de cette autre mienne vie qui loge en la connoissance de mes amis, à la considerer nue et simplement en soy, je sçay bien que je n'en sens fruct ny jouissance que par la vanité d'une opinion fantastique. (II, 16, 626)

Montaigne asserts that he only exists ‘at home’ in himself, an expression which recurs in the *Essais*, particularly when Montaigne writes about his self (III, 2, 811) and when he explains how we should judge people’s character (III, 2, 810).

Montaigne’s writing presents a version of himself to his reader, and whilst he is aware that an image of him therefore exists in the minds of others, he holds that this reputation should not give him any pleasure. Montaigne makes an important alteration in [C] to this

passage, adding: ‘à la considerer nue et simplement en soy’. Whilst Montaigne was not writing about his book as another life in the original text, the language added in the [C] interpolations reflects the expression used in ‘Au lecteur’ where he states that he wants to be seen through his book in ‘[sa] façon simple, naturelle et ordinaire’ (*Au lecteur*).

Montaigne is concerned here not only with how he is known whilst he is alive, but also with how he might be remembered after his death, by his friends and family, and also by his reader and posterity. Montaigne writes: ‘Et quand je seroy mort, je m’en resentiray encores beaucoup moins’ (II, 16, 626). This expression echoes Lucretius, who thought that after death we will feel no connection to our former selves. It must be noted that Lucretius does not discuss the possibility of reputation enduring after death, instead only stating that it is the end of our memory of ourselves; he does not consider the potential that a memory of ourselves can survive in others. Whilst here, it appears that Montaigne is not concerned with posthumous reputation, it must be recognised that throughout the *Essais*, he is indeed concerned with his posthumous reputation.

Montaigne’s discussion in ‘De la gloire’ moves away from how he is remembered to how others are remembered in collective memory. Just as whole civilisations can be forgotten, the lives of many soldiers easily slip out of collective memory or, indeed do not even enter into it: ‘en toute une bataille où dix mill’hommes sont stropiez ou tuez, il n’en est pas quinze dequoy on parle’ (II, 16, 627). Montaigne sets the importance that we attribute to personal experiences in opposition to the relative lack of importance attributed by the collective to individual experiences. Where an event may be significant for an individual, it is insignificant in eyes of the many. One can expand this concept to understand that the seemingly important events of one’s life secure no place in collective memory. It is often only the facts of a battle which are recorded, with very few individuals remembered:

Car de tuer un homme, ou deux, ou dix, de se presenter courageusement à la mort, c'est à la vérité quelque chose à chacun de nous, car il y va de tout; mais pour le monde ce sont choses si ordinaires, il s'en voit tant tous les jours, et en faut tant de pareilles pour produire un effet notable, que nous n'en pouvons attendre aucune particulière recommandation (II, 16, 627).

With collective memory a part of public discussion due to the Wars of Religion in France and the Edicts of Pacification, it is unsurprising that Montaigne brings the memory of French soldiers into focus in ‘De la gloire’.

De tant de miliasses de vaillans hommes qui sont morts depuis quinze cens ans en France, les armes en la main, il n'y en a pas cent qui soyent venus à nostre connaissance. La memoire non des chefs seulement, mais des batailles et victoires, est ensevelie (II, 16, 627).

Montaigne’s comment is a general observation on the memory of battles and wars, and he does not directly mention the memory of the people who have lost their lives during the French Wars of Religion. It must be recognised, however, that Montaigne’s use of the expression ‘la memoire ... est ensevelie’ may well call to mind the ‘forgetting clauses’ of the Edicts of Pacification, which proposed that the memory of previous conflicts ‘demeureront éteintes, comme mortes, ensevelies et non advenues’.<sup>283</sup> In a sense, ‘une memoire ensevelie’ perfectly conjures an image of a memory that exists but is inaccessible, or even a buried storehouse of memory that exists but is out of reach for the living.

Montaigne recognises that it is record that can give collective memory access to stories from the past. He adds in the Exemplaire de Bordeaux:

---

<sup>283</sup> *Édit d’Amboise* (1563), in Éditions en ligne de l’École des chartres (ELEC) <[http://elec.enc.sorbonne.fr/editsdepacification/edit\\_02](http://elec.enc.sorbonne.fr/editsdepacification/edit_02)> [accessed 23 October 2015]

[C] Les fortunes de plus de la moitié du monde, à faute de registre, ne bougent de leur place et s'évanouissent sans durée. Si j'avois en ma possession les evenemens inconnus, j'en penserois tres facilement supplanter les connus en toute espece d'exemples (II, 16, 627).

There is a spatial and temporal aspect to Montaigne's comment on legacy and memory here. Memory of an individual needs to be recorded (in a 'registre') in order to survive over time. This record gives memory the ability to move, across generations and continents, as the written word transports the memory from the past to the present or future. Although the record may be fixed in print or art, it is not static. The second half of Montaigne's addition in [C] echoes his sentiment about lost memory signifying a lost opportunity for learning.

In the [A] text, Montaigne comments about so much written record being lost, continuing to connect the preservation of memory with the importance of written record, but also highlights the vulnerability of the written word: 'Quoy, que des Romains mesmes et des Grecs, parmy tant d'escrivains et de tesmoins et tant de rares et nobles exploits, il en est venu si peu jusques à nous'. (II, 16, 628)

Whilst Montaigne has been only gradually bringing the French wars more closely into focus in this discussion, he makes a direct reference to the current wars when he writes: 'Ce sera beaucoup si, d'yci à cent ans, on se souvient en gros que, de nostre temps, il y a eu des guerres civiles en France' (II, 16, 628). Montaigne is not calling the Edicts and the so-called forgetting clauses into question here; rather he is referring to general forgetting. In the same way that Montaigne's generation has naturally forgotten things about the generation that preceded them, so it is also the case that future generations will share this innate, human tendency to forget and may well forget the civil wars. One might say that Montaigne imagines the metaphorical storehouse of collective memory to be as leaky as his own

personal memory. Furthermore, Montaigne's choice to predict one hundred years into the future implies that he is considering whether the wars might be remembered after living memory has died out. It would surely be shocking to a contemporary of Montaigne to consider that the civil wars, which are so seemingly emblematic of their era and are so traumatic for their society, will slip from collective memory, but Montaigne speculates that in fact, it would actually be quite remarkable if the wars are remembered. In his study of memory practices in sixteenth-century France, Russell highlights that there is a 'general anxiety [...] about the ability of human memory to function reliably'.<sup>284</sup> This anxiety is evident in Montaigne's tone here, as he doubts that human, collective memory will adequately remember the wars which defined his era. Whilst the possibility of a French national identity is impossible because the people of France were so divided, the common denominator of a possible identity is the experience of the wars, which creates a community of experience. The possibility that the wars, which define the men of his era and play a significant role in identity-building, might be lost simply as result of general forgetting is troubling for Montaigne.

It is interesting that there is a shift here from soldiers and battles being passively forgotten, to Montaigne questioning whether a future generation might actively remember the civil wars. Montaigne continues to play on this shift between forgetting and remembering when he adds in the [B] edition, that Spartan soldiers would make sacrifices to the muses before battle in the hope that 'leurs gestes fussent bien et dignement escris, estimant que ce fut une faveur divine et non commune que les belles actions trouvassent des tesmoings qui leur sœussent donner vie et memoire' (II, 16, 628). These Spartan soldiers were aware that their own actions in battle would not secure their place in collective memory or ensure their

---

<sup>284</sup> Nicolas Russell, *Transformations of Memory and Forgetting in Sixteenth-Century France: Marguerite de Navarre, Pierre de Ronsard and Michel de Montaigne* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011), p. 114.

legacy, but that those who write or record do have the ability to prevent memory from being lost in the maelstrom of battle. Indeed, Montaigne suggests that writers know how to give the characters of their stories another life or another existence in the form of memory. If Montaigne presents the possibility that future generations would not remember the civil wars as a problem, he turns to the experience of previous generations for a solution. It is through writing that memory can be preserved, and just as Montaigne learns about the great deeds of the Spartans through written record, future generations will be able to remember the civil wars if there are written records. It is the role of the writer to preserve the memory and it is the role of the future reader to ensure that this memory endures, and indeed, to revive it.

Montaigne however recognises that written record is fallible and vulnerable to being lost. In the same way that he questioned how much is lost of ancient texts, Montaigne also questions how contemporary reports of the skirmishes of the Wars of Religion are forgotten or even ignored:

Pensons nous qu'à chaque harquebousade qui nous touche, et à chaque hazard que nous courrons, il y ayt soudain un greffier qui l'enrolle? et cent greffiers, outre cela, le pourront escrire, desquels les commentaires ne dureront que trois jours et ne viendront à la veue de personne (II, 16, 628).

There is a sense of shared experience here as Montaigne uses ‘nous’, but there is no guarantee that this collective experience of the wars will be inscribed in collective memory. Montaigne’s comment here is reminiscent of his remark in ‘De la vanité’ that there has never been so much writing as there has been since the beginning of the civil wars (‘Quand escrivisomes nous tant que depuis que nous sommes en trouble?’; III, 9, 945), but regardless of how much is written, there is no correlation between written record and a place in collective memory. Andrea Frisch analyses Montaigne’s comments on written record in ‘De la gloire’

in relation to the preservation of that which is ‘digne de mémoire’ or ‘not to be forgotten’.

Frisch interprets Montaigne’s argument to mean that:

Even if we could have a witness to every bit of history—that is, even if the members of a community could agree, in the present, what is ‘*digne de mémoire*’ and had the means to record it—this would not ensure that our accounts of the past-to-be would be considered worth consulting by future readers.<sup>285</sup>

For Montaigne, written record may provide a space for the preservation of memory, but there is ‘no way to predict what interests the future might have in the past’.<sup>286</sup> Montaigne makes the point again that Fortune has a role to play in whether written record survives and preserves memory for a short time or a long time (‘c’est la fortune qui leur donne vie, ou plus courte, ou plus longue, selon sa faveur’ (II, 16, 628)). Here it is not the writers who are able to ‘give life’ to the personages of history, but it is Fortune that destines whether the memory of a person or event endures. If written texts can be lost or found depending on Fortune, there appears to be no way of ensuring the survival of collective memory without simply hoping for Fortune to intervene in its favour. Montaigne is particularly sceptical here about the preservation of collective memory, when he insists that Fortune has a role to play in its transmission and survival.

Montaigne’s hypothetical example of every volley from harquebuses being recorded would certainly not happen, because ‘On ne faict pas des histoires de choses de si peu’ (II, 16, 628). He establishes that events are recorded if they are unique, and he gives the example of Caesar succeeding in battles against all odds. Whilst Caesar is remembered, the other participants in those battles who fought just as valiantly are not remembered by posterity.

---

<sup>285</sup> Andrea Frisch, ‘Montaigne and Memory’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Montaigne*, ed. Philip Desan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), Online publication date: February 2016 [accessed 12 March 2016]

<sup>286</sup> Frisch, ‘Montaigne and Memory’, p. 7.

Montaigne sets up a distinction here between types of collective memory: there is the general collective memory of humanity and the local, familial collective memory, that is to say the memory of an individual in the minds of their family and friends. Caesar's name will endure through generations of collective memory because his legacy has been preserved in written text, whereas the memory of the individual soldiers only lasted as long as the familial collective memory remembered them. Montaigne writes: 'les noms n'ont duré qu'autant que leurs femmes et leurs enfans vesquirent' (II, 16, 628). Without written record, familial collective memory only endures as long as living memory survives. Montaigne does not analyse collective memory in a direct way here, but he is aware of the very likely outcome that the memory of individuals who live so-called 'trivial' lives only survives as long as their familial collective memory survives.

Montaigne returns to the question of his own era being remembered when he writes:

Quiconque considerera avec juste mesure et proportion de quelles gens et de quels faits la gloire se maintient en la memoire des livres, il trouvera qu'il y a de nostre siecle fort peu d'actions et fort peu de personnes qui y puissent pretendre nul droict (II, 16, 628).

One might return to Russell's understanding of early modern collective memory here, and suggest that Montaigne is thinking about which of the deeds and men of his era would be worthy of being preserved for their ethical or moral value. Applying Russell's understanding, one can infer that Montaigne is criticising the ethical behaviour of his era here, and although he does not explicitly state which type of person is worthy of being remembered and what sorts of reputation are worthy of being preserved, he suggests that very few of the deeds and people may stake a claim on a place in the history books.

Furthermore, Montaigne's expression 'se maintient en la memoire des livres' gives books an ability to preserve memory and to also pass that memory on to future readers. It is through books that the memory of people or the collective memory of periods in time can live on, but Montaigne is concerned about how the collective memory of an era is passed on to a future generation. In Montaigne's comment about the personages of his era, there may be an underlying worry that some of these men, of whom Montaigne is critical, may have different reputations in posterity from what they truly deserve. History-writing is key to the preservation and transmission of collective memory, but throughout the *Essais*, Montaigne is concerned about how memory can be distorted or manipulated and the transfer of incorrect or fabricated memory.

### **Montaigne and memory writing**

Montaigne is concerned about how memory is recorded and how past events will be remembered in the future. In the era of the Wars of Religion, as Montaigne himself recognises, many histories of contemporary events were being produced by various historiographers with different agendas. He remarks in 'De l'art de conferer': '[B] Il ne fut jamais tant d'historiens' (III, 8, 931).<sup>287</sup> Montaigne is aware that all history and memory is useful to some extent, and admits that even all the historians of his day have their uses, '[B] car ils nous fournissent tout plain de belles instructions et louables du magasin de leur memoire' (III, 8, 931), but Montaigne insists that readers must be careful to weigh the historians' words.

---

<sup>287</sup> Montaigne's comment echoes Jean Bodin in his *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem* in which Bodin remarks: 'Now almost all Europe abounds in numerous historians, who detail all the most trifling affairs, although many centuries ago it had almost no one.' Jean Bodin, *Method for the Easy Comprehension of History*, trans. by Beatrice Reynolds (New York: Norton, 1969), p. 83.

Indeed, Montaigne's remark that their histories are drawn from their storehouses of memory shows that their histories are to some extent subjective and influenced by their own experiences. It is important to recognise that history-writing contributes to the collective storehouse of memory, and that history writers therefore hold some sway over how readers remember events and people from history. This is part of Montaigne's concern about history-writing, in particular how present and future generations learn about the present, even whilst they are living through it, and the past. Montaigne discusses history-writing in most detail in 'Des livres' where he declares that '[C] Les historiens sont ma droitte bale'. Montaigne edits this section of 'Des livres' quite extensively in the *Exemplaire de Bordeaux*, firstly, altering the expression 'Les Historiens sont le vray gibbier de mon estude' to the expression above. To describe historians as the game of his study or as coming 'right to his forehand' underlines Montaigne's passion for how history is recorded, and the study of the past. The image of Montaigne playing with historians suggests an engagement with history that is different to a study of the semantic memory of the past; instead Montaigne will engage with and interact with historians. Furthermore, the image implies that he studies history for pleasure, in the same way that he studies poetry and literature. Montaigne introduces the theme of history-writing which he will discuss for the remainder of 'Des livres':

ils [les historiens] sont plaisans et aysez; et quant et quant [C] l'homme en general, de qui je cherche la connoissance, y paroist plus vif et plus entier qu'en nul autre lieu, la diversité et verité de ses conditions internes en gros et en destail, la varieté des moyens de son assemblage et des accidents qui le menacent. (II, 10, 416).

What Montaigne intends to understand in his work is 'l'homme en general', and he believes that history-writing provides the most effective insight into this. It is thus through reading the work of historians that Montaigne believes he can see the qualities and actions of man 'plus vif et plus entier qu'en nul autre lieu'. Whilst Montaigne's comment in [C] states that it is an

understanding of man that he seeks through reading historians, in the [A] edition, Montaigne writes: ‘et quant et quant la consideration des natures et conditions de divers hommes, les coutumes des nations different, c'est le vray suiect de la science morale’.<sup>288</sup> Therefore, when Montaigne first wrote ‘Des livres’ in around 1579-80,<sup>289</sup> he considered history-writing to be the subject of moral study. This correlates with Russell’s understanding of early modern collective memory because history-writing is a means of preserving collective memory and it is in keeping with this early modern, humanist approach that Montaigne considers it to include the study and preservation of that which holds moral or ethical value for humanity. The editing of this section in the *Exemplaire de Bordeaux* provides an opportunity to witness the transformation in Montaigne’s approach to history-writing. It is through reading historians that one can learn about humanity and all aspects of human experience. This is broader than just an ethical or moral study and also brings history-writing closely into line with Montaigne’s own writing style. This link is most clear as Montaigne’s expression ‘plus vif et plus entiere qu’en nul eutre lieu’ echoes his introduction to the essay project in ‘Au lecteur’ where he writes:

Je l’ay voué à la commodité particuliere de mes parens et amis; à ce que m’ayent perdu ils y puissant retrouver aucuns traits de mes conditions et humours, et que par ce moyen ils nourrissent plus entiere et plus vifve, la connoissance qu’ils ont eu de moy (‘Au lecteur’, p. 3).

Montaigne’s introduction to his own project resonates with what he thinks history-writing is about. In the same way that the preservation of personal memory in writing can attempt to ensure that the memory of an individual endures after that individual’s death, the preservation

---

<sup>288</sup> Montaigne’s *Exemplaire de Bordeaux*, p. 174, in The Montaigne Project, <<http://artflsrv02.uchicago.edu/images/montaigne/0174.jpg>> [accessed 25 October 2015]

<sup>289</sup> Pierre Villey, *Les Sources et l’évolution des Essais*, p. 362-3.

of collective memory in history-writing can ensure that the memory of that era endures beyond the death of living memory. Montaigne's next point of discussion about historians in 'Des livres' further highlights the correlation between his own writing and history-writing as he writes: 'Or ceux qui escrivent les vies, d'autant qu'ils s'amusent plus aux conseils qu'aux evenemens, plus à ce qui part du dedans qu'à ce qui arrive au dehors, ceux là me sont plus propres' (II, 10, 416). Montaigne's language here correlates with what Halbwachs says about memory, in particular when Montaigne emphasises his interest in 'ce qui part du dedans', which is internal, personal memory, rather than 'ce qui arrive au dehors', which is external memory, and is more closely linked with historical memory.

For Montaigne, history-writing is most interesting when it deals with an individual's personal experience and memories rather than historical events; it is the way that an individual reacts to events rather than the details of the events themselves that Montaigne considers most appropriate to his study. The writers whom Montaigne praises for this type of history-writing, or perhaps memory writing, are Plutarch (whom Montaigne describes as 'mon homme'), Diogenes Laertius, Tacitus and Julius Caesar.

Montaigne's praise for Diogenes Laertius is backhanded, as he wishes Laertius could have provided further insights into the experiences that made the great teachers who they were, rather than just focussing on their teaching and opinions.<sup>290</sup> Montaigne alters his comments on Diogenes Laertius in the *Exemplaire de Bordeaux*, to show that he (Montaigne) values the study of 'la fortune et la vie' of the great philosophers equally with their lessons. An understanding of the individual gives a greater understanding of their philosophical teaching.

---

<sup>290</sup> II, 10, 416.

Montaigne does not mention Tacitus in ‘Des livres’ (II, 10) but does discuss his writing in some detail in ‘De l’art de conférer’ (III, 8). Montaigne initially describes reading Tacitus’s *Histories* in one sitting (III, 8, 940), and praises Tacitus for ‘the ethical and political lessons [which] he draws so astutely.<sup>291</sup> He is, however, conscious that Tacitus adopts a particular slant in his writing and has reservations about Tacitus’s judgement (‘J’ay principalement consideré son jugement, et n’en suis pas bien esclarcy par tout’, III, 8, 941). Furthermore, Montaigne also criticises Tacitus for justifying his magistracy in Rome (III, 8, 942). Montaigne’s comments on Tacitus are however primarily a defence for a historian who provides society with ‘un livre à estudier et apprendre’ (III, 8, 941).

In Montaigne’s opinion, Caesar was worthy of special study because he provided the opportunity to learn about personal experience and history. Montaigne explains that Caesar’s writing merits close analysis ‘non pour la science de l’Histoire seulement, mais pour luy mesme’ (II, 10, 416). Caesar’s writing blurs the lines between historical memory and autobiographical memory in a way that Montaigne appreciates. A reader of Caesar’s accounts can see the role of the individual in collective experience and how a person’s life history belongs to general history, which is an idea that is present in Halbwachs’s treatise on historical memory. This is more evident in Caesar’s case, of course, but it is still significant that Montaigne selects Caesar for special praise when he is the writer who most clearly meshes personal lived experience and autobiographical memory with collective lived experience and historical and collective memory. Studying Caesar’s history-writing allows Montaigne to learn about the human condition and also to learn about the history through the prism of personal experience, which provides a subjective, eye-witness value to Caesar’s writing. Through this disclosure of personal experience, history becomes memory shared

---

<sup>291</sup> Mack, Peter, *Reading and Rhetoric in Montaigne and Shakespeare* (London: Bloomsbury Academic Publishing, 2010), p. 113.

between the writer and the reader, rather than just a record semantic memory, that is to say facts, dates and details of events. Whilst some history-writing can be considered to be a record of semantic memory, Caesar's writing is a record of personal, episodic memory. Through this prism of personal experience, history becomes memory shared between the writer and the reader.

Furthermore, Montaigne likes Caesar's writing style because there is a lack of bias in his history-writing. Montaigne's assessment of Caesar's sincerity is tainted with criticism, as Montaigne employs antanagoge to praise and critique Caesar:

Avec tant de sincérité en ses jugemens, parlant de ses ennemis, que, sauf les fauces couleurs de quoy il veut couvrir sa mauvaise cause et l'ordure de sa pestilente ambition, je pense qu'en cela seul on y puisse trouver à redire qu'il a été trop espargnant à parler de soy (II, 10, 416-7).

Even the 'historian' whom Montaigne praises the most is flawed. Firstly, Caesar obfuscates his agenda and paints his portrait with 'les fauces couleurs' rather than painting an honest and open portrait as Montaigne intends to do with his own writing. Secondly, Montaigne *criticises* Caesar for not talking enough about himself; despite his praise for Caesar's personal perspective, Montaigne wants further introspection, so that he can learn more about the man behind the reputation. This, of course, is not criticism per se; in fact it is Montaigne's way of highlighting that he does not criticise writers for talking about themselves, rather he criticises writers for not talking enough about themselves. It seems as if Montaigne would like to read a 'memoir' rather than history-writing.

Just as Montaigne is critical of tutors who merely fill their students' heads with facts and dates in 'De l'institution des enfans' and he prefers that students learn by experience and by engaging with the material, his approach to learning from history-writing appears, at first,

to be similar. In ‘De l’institution des enfans’, Montaigne directly discusses the study of history. He states that history ‘est un vain estude, qui veut’ (I, 26, 156), referring to the practice of a taught, prescriptive study of history in terms of facts and details; but he also comments: ‘qui veut aussi, c’est un estude de fruit inestimable’, this time referring to the study of the lives of ‘ces grandes ames des meilleurs siecles’ (I, 26, 156). For Montaigne, a study of the people and an engagement with their motivations and justifications unlock far more of the past than the knowledge of the names and events of history. For Montaigne, the study of history should be an interaction with the people from the past, a sharing of their memories, or of memories of them, hence he highlights Plutarch’s *Lives* as an excellent source for learning. He wants students to engage with and relate to men ‘qui ne vivent qu’en la memoire des livres’ (I, 26, 156). Montaigne’s expression that these men who ‘only live in the memory of books’ highlights how their legacy has not faded over time, since it has been preserved in writing. Furthermore, an engaged commerce with the past can reveal a preserved memory rather than just history.

Of course, Montaigne is conscious that one must take heed that history-writing from a personal perspective, such as Caesar’s writing, can be loaded with personal opinion and motives. It is for this reason that Montaigne writes: ‘J’ayme les Historiens ou fort simples ou excellens’ (II, 10, 417). Montaigne likes ‘simple historians’ who present all the facts that they have gathered ‘sans chois et sans triage’ and do not add any of their own opinions or judgements, rather leaving it to the reader to discern the truth: ‘nous laissent le jugement entier pour la cognissance de la vérité’ (II, 10, 417). The simple historians do not attempt to influence the reader to a particular viewpoint and they do not attempt to influence the reader’s judgement; they simply gather information and chronicle the events. Montaigne singles out Jean Froissart, the fourteenth-century writer who recorded the first half of the Hundred Years War in his ‘Chroniques’, as exemplary of the simple historian. Montaigne

commends the history-writing of ‘le bon Froissard’, as he describes him in ‘Des livres’, because he is willing to admit and correct his errors, and because he includes all the contemporary rumours and the differing reports about the events he records. For Montaigne, this approach paints a more detailed picture of the context and provides the reader with further opportunity to exercise their own judgement. Montaigne writes:

C'est la matière de l'Histoire, nue et informe; chacun en peut faire son profit autant qu'il a d'entendement (II, 10, 417).<sup>292</sup>

Simple historians thus provide the very substance of history, and all the rumours, various reports and conflicting angles that contribute to the overall representation of history in its rawest form. It is the task of the reader to discern the truth from the evidence provided. Although the simple historian would be similar to a writer of chronicles, and the content would be made of semantic memory rather than episodic memory, Montaigne does appreciate this type of history-writing, as it requires the reader to engage with the past in order to learn the lessons of history. The employment of the reader's judgement forms an experiential aspect to reading the material of the simple historian, giving it more value than it might first appear. Furthermore, Montaigne also values this type of historian because they do not attempt to shape the future memory of an era, leaving it to future reader to decide. These simple historians contribute to the storehouse of collective memory, leaving their reader to employ the judgement to extract the lessons of the past.

The outstanding historians not only contribute to the storehouse of collective memory, but they extract the important information from history for their reader. John Lyons describes these historians as ‘selectors’ and recognises that they are ‘elusive’ because Montaigne does

---

<sup>292</sup> Montaigne's description of the material of history as ‘nue et informe’ correlates with the language used in ‘Au lecteur’, in which he describes himself as ‘la matière de mon livre’, and assures his reader that if he were able, he would have portrayed himself ‘tout entier et tout nud’.

not give an example of an outstanding historian in ‘Des livres’.<sup>293</sup> For Montaigne, an outstanding historian would choose what is ‘digne d’estre sçeu’, which correlates with Russell’s argument that early modern collective memory consisted of what is worthy of being remembered for its ethical or aesthetic value. Montaigne does not quite explain what he thinks would be worthy of being known, only saying that these outstanding historians are able to draw meaning from ‘la condition des Princes et de leurs humeurs’ (II, 10, 417).

Montaigne raises the problem of historians contributing to and shaping the collective memory of an era at the end of his comments on outstanding historians: ‘Ils ont raison de prendre l’autorité de regler nostre creance à la leur; mais certes cela n’appartient à guieres de gens’ (II, 10, 417). He is aware that there is a risk involved in accepting what we are told about history, particularly when historians attempt to bring our beliefs into line with their own, but in the case of outstanding historians, Montaigne maintains that they should be allowed to govern what the collective think because their opinions are often just. Montaigne does underline that the readers’, or even the future generations’, acceptance and trust of historians should not be extended in this way to the majority of historians.

Montaigne is very critical of ‘ceux d’entredeux (qui est la plus commune façon)’ (II, 10, 417) – that is to say, all those who are neither simple nor outstanding. Montaigne’s evaluation of bad historians reveals exactly what he thinks history-writing should not be, as he criticises them for presenting the information which they think is worthy of knowing, but making their selection poorly and concealing information from the reader.

Montaigne also argues that the bad historian attempts to treat history for the reader, and deprive the reader of the opportunity to exercise their own judgement. He is especially

---

<sup>293</sup> John D. Lyons, ‘Montaigne and History’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Montaigne*, ed. by Philip Desan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190215330.013. 13.

disapproving of the tendency of this type of historian to force their judgements on to their reader and ‘incliner l’histoire à leur fantaisie’ (II, 10, 417). This is particularly pertinent because of the proliferation of historians during the Wars of Religion and the production of so many histories with clear biases and agendas expressing religious partisanship, for example, La Planche’s *L’Histoire de l’estat de France sous le règne de François II* and Ronsard’s *Discours des misères de ce temps* (1562-63).<sup>294</sup> Of course this problem with writing is applicable throughout history, but Montaigne’s comment here is certainly a criticism of the history-writing of his generation. History writers who employ history to their own agenda represent a threat to collective memory, in that they are polluting the storehouse of collective memory with opinion and their own judgements. In this sense, the historical memory of the Wars of Religion was being disputed rather than shared.

As much as Montaigne holds that personal perspectives and memories provide a unique insight into the past, the reader of Caesar’s writing is at least aware of the author’s agenda and position. Montaigne argues that certain bad or common historians conceal their positions and manipulate not only their content but also their reader, by presenting their own opinions as fact. Montaigne concludes his criticism of the bad historian by suggesting that they would be better if they were to emulate the simple historians and were to pass on all the information ‘pure et entiere en toutes ses dimentions’ (II, 10, 418). The aim of studying history for Montaigne is to be able to exercise judgements and to commit these judgements to one’s own storehouse of memory, so that one will be able to draw on these lessons from the past and apply them to one’s own life in the present or future. A key part of the study of history is therefore the exercising of judgement, and historians should provide their reader or

---

<sup>294</sup> Louis Regnier de La Planche, *L’Histoire de l’estat de France tant de la republique que de la religion sous le règne de François II* (Paris: M.E. Mennechet, 1836); Pierre de Ronsard, *Discours des misères de ces temps*, ed. by Malcolm Smith (Geneva: Droz, 1979).

future generations with the opportunity to exercise their own judgement and to assimilate the past into their own memory.

After establishing this tripartite categorisation of historians, Montaigne comments:

Les seules bonnes histoires sont celles qui ont été esrites par ceux mesmes qui commandoient aux affaires, ou qui estoient participans à les conduire [C] ou, au moins, qui ont eu la fortune d'en conduire d'autres de mesme sorte. (II, 10, 418).

Montaigne establishes the criterion of experience here, implying that someone with either direct participation in the events, or at least experience of similar events, is better placed to write history than someone who was not there or who does not have an understanding of the way that such events develop. It is significant that Montaigne reserves particular praise for eye-witnesses ('les tesmoings oculaires'), perhaps because of his own judicial background. Through reading eye-witness reports, the reader benefits from a unique, personal insight into the event as the writer portrays their memory rather than the history.

Montaigne appears to value eye-witness reports throughout the *Essais*; for example, in 'Des noms' he recounts a story, based on writing by a spectator of a feast held by Henri, the Duke of Normandy, at which the guests were divided into groups by their names. Montaigne admits that the story is only trivial ('une chose legiere'), but he comments that it is 'digne de memoire pour son estrangeté et escripte par tesmoing oculaire' (II, 46, 276). A rather strange story like this one could be apocryphal, but the eye-witness gives credibility to the story. Moreover, Montaigne describes the event as being worthy of remembering because of its strangeness and the fact that it was written by an eye-witness, which, he considers, gives the account more authority. Despite Montaigne's apparent preference for histories written by those who directly experienced the historical events, he does recognise that even this approach to history study can be imperfect, as the eye-witnesses are susceptible to the human

flaw of forgetting. Moreover, he throws further doubt upon the reliability of witnesses, using the example of Asinius Pollio finding historical inaccuracies in Caesar's writing.<sup>295</sup> Caesar relied upon the reports of his commanders about what happened when he himself was not present, but these commanders sometimes misreported or misremembered events. There is a similarity here between Montaigne's method for piecing together the events of his accident in 'De l'exercitation' and Caesar's method for writing history. Both Montaigne's and Caesar's accounts depend upon the reports of others about what happened when they were not there to witness events for themselves, and in both cases, they are given incorrect details by those who are supposed to help them fill in the gaps in their own history. This illustrates the need for a careful search for truth in history because students of history are inherently dependent on the memories of others and they must therefore be mindful that others can manipulate records, can forget exact details and can falsify events.

Montaigne remarks that so many factors must be considered when attempting to find the truth of history that the best approach to studying history might be a judicial approach, whereby one questions every source as far as one can, and attempts to corroborate each witness account:

cette recherche de la vérité est délicate, qu'on ne se puisse pas fier d'un combat à la science de celuy qui y a commandé, ny aux soldats de ce qui s'est passé pres d'eux, si, à la mode d'une information judiciaire, on ne confronte les témoins et reçoit les objets sur la preuve des pontilles de chaque accident. (II, 10, 418)

---

<sup>295</sup> II, 10, 418; Suetonius, *Life of Caesar*, LVI, 4, trans. by J. C. Rolfe (London: Harvard University Press, 1913), p.78-79, 'Pollio Asinius parum diligenter parumque integra veritate compositos putat, cum Caesar pleraque et quae per alios erant gesta temere crediderit et quae per se, vel consulto vel etiam memoria lapsus perperam ediderit; existimatque rescriptum et correcturum fuisse.' ('Asinius Pollio thinks that they were put together somewhat carelessly and without strict regard for truth; since in many cases Caesar was too ready to believe the accounts which others gave of their actions, and gave a perverted account of his own, either designedly or perhaps from forgetfulness').

Montaigne wants students of history to suspend judgement when reading historical accounts and to employ a sceptical approach. He regrets that such a questioning of sources and critical engagement with his own era of history may not be possible because ‘la connaissance que nous avons de nos affaires, est bien plus lache’ (II, 10, 418).

At this point, Montaigne devolves responsibility for how to approach history to Jean Bodin, declaring that he has sufficiently treated the study of history.<sup>296</sup> Montaigne is referring to Bodin’s *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem*, and here Montaigne states that he agrees with the methods described.<sup>297</sup> As Lyons notes, Montaigne mentions Bodin by name six times in the *Essais*, and he analyses the similarities and differences between Montaigne and Bodin’s approach to historical study. Lyons argues that Montaigne’s comments on Bodin are ‘usually critical’, in particular in relation to Bodin’s preference for establishing universals rather than particulars, where Montaigne prefers the individual, peculiar cases in history. In ‘Des livres’, however, Montaigne aligns himself with Bodin, and as this passage discusses the role of the reader in studying history, it is Bodin’s comments on the reader’s responsibility with which Montaigne agrees, rather than the methodical periodization and classification of history that Bodin establishes in the *Methodus*. For example, Bodin espouses the jurist approach to history, and states that ‘each reader [must] make individual choice according to his judgement’ and must not be swayed by the historian’s judgements.<sup>298</sup> It is significant too that Bodin’s *Methodus* covers many of the same issues with history-writing and history study that Montaigne addresses in ‘Des livres’, from Bodin’s division of historians into three subsects – those able by nature, those lacking experience and those lacking education, to the

---

<sup>296</sup> Jean Bodin, *Method for the Easy Comprehension of History*, trans. by Beatrice Reynolds (New York: Norton, 1969).

<sup>297</sup> John D Lyons, ‘Montaigne and History’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Montaigne*, ed. by Philip Desan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), Online publication date: Feb 2016 [accessed 13 March 2016].

<sup>298</sup> Bodin, *Method for the Easy Comprehension of History*, p. 83.

idea that historians should attempt to ‘rid themselves of all emotion’.<sup>299</sup> Whilst Montaigne appears to agree with several of Bodin’s comments about historiography, he highlights the importance of memory rather than history and hopes for the preservation of the memories of the past, rather than the periodization and classification of history which Bodin promotes in his *Methodus*.

An issue that Bodin does not properly address in the *Methodus* is whether historians can adequately represent the experience of the collective, and this is an issue which troubles Montaigne in his engagement with history writers. In an extensive addition to the conclusion of ‘De la force de l’imagination’, Montaigne wonders how theologians and philosophers can properly write history. Montaigne asks: ‘[C] Comment peuvent ils engager leur foy sur une foy populaire? Comment respondre des pensées de personnes incognues et donner pour argent contant leurs conjectures?’ (I, 21, 106). Montaigne’s rhetorical questions underline his argument that whilst historians may present facts and opinions and they claim to represent the experience of the many, they can only attempt to imagine how other people experienced that period of history. Emily Butterworth interprets Montaigne’s comment as a rejection of ‘any dogmatic certainty that historians might exhibit about their object of study’.<sup>300</sup> An individual’s personal interpretation of an event cannot claim to represent the voices of other ordinary people, as each person experiences an event slightly differently. Montaigne writes:

[C] Des actions à divers membres, qui se passent en leur presence, ils refuseroient d’en rendre tesmoignage, assermentez par un juge: et n’ont homme si familier, des intentions duquel ils entreprennent de pleinement respondre (I, 21, 106).

---

<sup>299</sup> Bodin, *Method for the Easy Comprehension of History*, p. 43; p. 51.

<sup>300</sup> Emily Butterworth, “‘Readie Money’: Conjectural History in Montaigne’s ‘De la force de l’imagination’”, *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (2006), pp. 355-68, p. 357.

Montaigne thus argues that these historians, who present their claims in their books as if they are indisputably true, would not be willing to be held accountable for their writing in a court of law. In this way, Montaigne advocates a forensic approach to history, in that one must question and probe historical writing rather than simply accept the information presented by historians. Indeed, Montaigne underlines a discrepancy between personal and collective memory here, that these historians would not be confident enough to swear that they were telling the truth about the details of events which they witnessed, based on their own personal memory, and yet they are prepared to write history books which present collective memory and collective experience of an event, based on conjecture about the memory and experience of others, and present this information as if it were unquestionably true.

Montaigne does not present himself as a historian in ‘De la force de l’imagination’, but he does discuss his own approach to writing about the past and his use of *exempla*. After all, Montaigne’s use of *exempla* is a way of transmitting the collective memories of the past into contemporary collective memory (for Montaigne’s contemporary readers) and into future collective memory (for future generations of readers of the *Essais*). His discussion of his use of *exempla* links closely to ‘De l’exercitation’ and his remarks about sharing personal memory. In ‘De l’exercitation’, Montaigne records his personal memory of his accident and insists:

[A] Ce n’est pas ici ma doctrine, c’est mon estude; et n’est pas la leçon d’autrui, c’est la mienne. [C] Et ne me doibt on sçavoir mauvais gré pour tant, si je la communique. Ce qui me sert, peut aussi par accident servir à un autre (II, 6, 377).

In ‘De la force de l’imagination’, Montaigne discusses his writing of aspects of collective memory, and also suggests that his reader can add their own examples to his own: ‘chacun y peut joinder ses exemples’ (I, 21, 105). When Montaigne returns to edit this passage in the

*Exemplaire de Bordeaux*, he adds ‘ ‘[C] Si je ne comme bien, qu’un autre comme pour moy’ (I, 21, 105). Butterworth proposes that Montaigne encourages the testing of his own anecdotes through a ‘collective practice of comparing other similar, personal examples’.<sup>301</sup> The author encourages an active engagement from his reader, and in doing so, teaches his reader to interact with collective memories such as *exempla* and to find the connections between past experiences of others and their own experiences or even their own familial collective memories which have been passed down to them.

Montaigne also discusses his process of selecting *exempla* to use in the essays. He explains that he is willing to use *exempla* regardless of their origin or their improbability, because whether something happened or not, he still thinks that it can reveal something about humanity in general, or as he says here: ‘c’est toujours un tour de l’humaine capacité, duquel je suis utilement advise par ce récit’ (I, 21, 105).

Furthermore, Montaigne chooses to use the most memorable and unique examples: ‘[C] Et aux diverses leçons qu’ont souvent les histoires, je prens à me servir de celle qui est la plus rare et memorable’ (I, 21, 105). It is possible that Montaigne chooses the most peculiar examples because these are the ones which have endured in his own defective memory, or even because he believes that these examples are more likely to embed themselves in his reader’s memory, or alternatively because he knows that it is the rare and exceptional examples that survive through general forgetting, as he argues in ‘De la gloire’ (II, 16, 628-629).

Another interesting facet of Montaigne’s comments on his style of writing is that he sets himself in opposition to other history writers who simply record what happened, instead

---

<sup>301</sup> Emily Butterworth, “‘Readie Money’: Conjectural History in Montaigne’s ‘De la Force de l’imagination’”, p. 356.

saying that he attempts to write what can happen: ‘Il y a des autheurs, desquels la fin c'est dire les evenemens. La mienne, si j'y scavoye advenir, seroit dire sur ce qui peut advenir’ (I, 21, 106). In this way, Montaigne questions how other historians can claim to write what really happened, and states that he will attempt to represent the possibilities rather than exact details of events. Richard Regosin comments that Montaigne ‘introduces the notion of verisimilitude’ here.<sup>302</sup> For Montaigne, writing what might have happened and how humans may have behaved during historical events is ‘more useful, more informative, and one senses, more true than that which has happened’.<sup>303</sup> He insists that he is faithful to the details of his own stories and exemplum, stating that ‘[C] je me suis defendu d'oser alterer jusques aux plus legeres et inutiles circonstances’ (I, 21, 106). He retains all the trivial details of his stories, and preserves and provides an honest account in order in order to allow his reader to pass judgement using all the available information, however trivial or inconsequential it may seem.

Montaigne’s discussion of his approach to the portrayal of the past through *exempla* is in many ways similar to his approach to portraying his self. In both, he preserves an accurate and honest version of the past, or of his self, and projects that version to his reader or to future generations of readers in order that they might exercise their own judgement.

Although Montaigne appears to defend his style of borrowing *exempla* and implies that he does write a form of (conjectural) history in his *Essais*, he is insistent in his conclusion to ‘De la force de l’imagination’ that he will only write about the so-called ‘borrowed truth’ of the past, and will not write about the present. He justifies his position: ‘[C] Je tien moins hazardeux d’escrire les choses passées que presentes: d’autant que l’escrivain n’a à rendre compte que d’une vérité empruntée.’ (I, 21, 106). Writing about the

---

<sup>302</sup> Richard Regosin, *The Matter of My Book: Montaigne’s Essais as the Book of the Self*, p. 237-8.

<sup>303</sup> Regosin, *The Matter of My Book*, p. 238.

past allows Montaigne to maintain a more reserved position, only having to account for the truth of an other, as he says earlier in this essay: ‘les histoires que j’emprunte, je les renvoie sur la conscience de ceux de qui je les prens’ (I, 21, 105). One might say that writing about the past is borrowing from the storehouse of collective memory, and bringing that memory into the present, whereas writing about the present is preserving the memory of the present and contributing to the storehouse of collective memory. It is significant that Montaigne describes writing about the present as ‘hazardous’. It is risky in the sense that one is accountable for the present and it is dangerous in that writing about the Wars of Religion during the conflict is a perilous activity that could put Montaigne’s life or that of his family in danger, due to the potential for reprisals resulting from the opinions that he might publish.

This passage can be seen as a response to critics, or even pre-empting future readers, who might think that Montaigne fits the criteria for a good historian which he himself establishes, and who might question why he did not write about contemporary events. Montaigne is indeed well positioned to write about the Wars of Religion, in particular, and provide an insight into the politico-socio-religious situation: he served as Mayor of Bordeaux from 1581 to 1585; he is friends with Michel de l’Hôpital; he was an advisor to Henri III and Henri de Navarre; he hosted Henri de Navarre at the château de Montaigne in 1584; he stayed at Cognac with Catherine de Medici while he and his wife were fleeing the plague in 1586.<sup>304</sup> He explains that some of his contemporaries have asked him to write about current affairs because of his apparent impartial view and because of his privileged position:

---

<sup>304</sup> Ulrich Langer, *The Cambridge Companion to Montaigne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. XVII; Richard Cooper, ‘Montaigne dans l’entourage de Maréchal de Matignon,’ *Montaigne Studies*, 13, 1-2 (2001), p. 99-140. Cooper describes how Catherine de Medici invited Montaigne and his wife to stay at Cognac while they were travelling to escape the plague. Cooper suggests that de Medici intended to recruit Montaigne’s help in attempting to prevent further outbreaks of violence between the Catholic and Huguenot factions.

[C] Aucuns me convient d'escrire les affaires de mon temps, estimant que je les voy  
d'une veue moins blessée de passion qu'un autre, et de plus pres, pour l'accez que  
fortune m'a donné aux chefs de divers partis.

It is pertinent to mention here that Malcolm Smith in his article ‘Lost Writings of Montaigne’ asserts that Montaigne did ‘turn his hand to historical writing’, citing Jacques Auguste de Thou who states that Montaigne gave him a great deal of material which he used in his own text about their disturbances in Bordeaux in 1548.<sup>305</sup>

In the *Essais*, however, Montaigne claims not to write a history of the present, and provides a series of explanations for why he will not do so. He begins his justification by commenting that he would not do it even ‘pour la gloire de Salluste’ (I, 21, 106). Sallust is an interesting choice of historian as although his name and legacy endure, he acquired a poor reputation because he used his writing on Roman history as a means to criticise the moral and political decline of Rome. Sallust would surely fall into Montaigne’s category of the bad or more common historians who manipulate their history-writing to their own agenda. It could be that Montaigne making reference to Sallust here suggests that he too could potentially develop an unfortunate legacy if he were to write about the present decline of France.

Montaigne also insists that he is not suited for history-writing as he is ‘[C] ennemy juré d’obligation, d’assiduité, de constance’ (I, 21, 106). Felicity Green argues that ‘obligation’ here is associated with ‘the pressure of expectation and prescription’ which contrasts with the relative freedom that Montaigne enjoys in his writing of the *Essais*.<sup>306</sup> ‘Obligation’ may also mean a required loyalty to a particular faction or to a particular person that could impair Montaigne’s writing rather than elevate it to the standard of history-writing

---

<sup>305</sup> Malcolm Smith, ‘Lost Writings of Montaigne’, *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance*, XLIX, 2 (1987), pp. 309-318.

<sup>306</sup> Felicity Green, ‘Montaigne and the Life of Freedom’ (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 174.

that he would strive for. Montaigne also claims that he cannot write extended narratives ('[C] il n'est rien si contraire à mon stile qu'une narration estendue'; I, 21, 106) and that he is ignorant about the vocabulary required to record events ('[C] ignorant au-delà d'un enfant des frases et vocables qui servent aux choses plus communes'; I, 21, 106). Montaigne's defence for why he does not write about contemporary events seems particularly weak when compared with how well he fits the criteria for one who should write. However, Montaigne is employing amplification in his writing, building up to deliver his final justification for not writing about the present: '[C] ma liberté, estant si libre, j'eusse publié des jugemens, à mon gré mesme et selon raison, illegitimes et punissables' (I, 21, 106). As he states that his style could lead him to write opinions that would be unlawful and punishable, Montaigne brings the Wars of Religion into focus again. The expression 'illegitimes et punissables' calls to mind the Edicts of Pacification which were issued after each war, and in particular, the memory clauses included in each edict which treated the remembrance of the wars. The edicts did not prevent the publishing of histories of the wars, but the memory clauses insisted that the public should not renew or reignite wartime rivalries and that the memory of each war should be 'forgotten' after each war. The memory clauses are at odds with the humanist culture of preservation and remembrance of the past, and with Montaigne's own attitude to memory and the importance of preserving collective memory in order that the following generations can learn from the experience of others. How can a history writer, particularly one who strives to be an 'excellent historian', avoid remembering the wars and tread carefully around what is and is not considered 'illegitimes' by the authorities?

## **The ‘Memory Clauses’: ‘Bracketing off’ the past**

The memory clauses represent a key threat to the collective memory of the era, combined with the threats already identified by Montaigne as general forgetting and the manipulation of collective memory by historians themselves. Where general forgetting represents a perpetual slipping from the storehouse of collective memory, and historians manipulating memory can be considered a polluting of the storehouse with warped memories, the memory clauses threaten the literal inscription of memory into the storehouse of collective memory.

The authorities did not expect to be able to control collective memory through the edicts, but they hoped for a ‘bracketing off’ of the past, containing the disagreements and rivalries of previous conflicts in the past and preventing any leakage of the past into the present. It is pertinent to analyse the history and language of the Edicts and the impact which they intended to have on collective memory.

The memory clauses of the first Edicts of Pacification originally resembled a legal amnesty rather than a rhetoric of forgetting. The legal amnesty applied to all those who had committed acts of war during the previous conflict, exempting them from prosecution following the issue of the edict. Although the emphasis was on legal amnesty, one can argue that the *Édit d’Amboise* issued in March 1563, which ended the first war of religion, included what can only be considered an early version of the memory clause which addressed ‘l’oubli des querelles et des offenses’ and ‘l’interdiction des injures’. The first section of article 9 ordered that:

... toutes injures et offenses que l'iniquité du temps et les occasions qui en sont survenues ont peu faire naistre entre nos subjets, et toutes autres choses passées et causées de ces presens tumultes, demeureront éteintes, comme mortes, ensevelies et non advenues.<sup>307</sup>

The edict promulgated the view that any previous actions which had taken place during the previous troubles were to be treated as if they had not happened ('non advenues'). This article thus provides amnesty and pardons all parties for their actions during the war by effectively declaring their non-occurrence. The language used concerning the separation of the past from the present is emphatic, ordering that the past conflicts are considered dead and buried, and more significantly, *éteintes*, meaning 'extinguished' or 'erased'.

The language of death in relation to memory is striking, because for Montaigne and Lucretius the destruction of memory is a condition of death; furthermore, this article, which is a precursor of the more direct obliteration of memory clauses, suggests considering the previous events as dead in order to imply their metaphorical separation from living memory. The Edicts therefore propose a temporal rupture in the continuity of collective memory, attempting to confine the previous troubles to the past and to prevent them from corrupting the present. Indeed, article 9 continues:

[...] defendant tres estoictement sur peine de la vie à tous nosd. subjectz, de quelque estat et qualité qu'ilz soient, qu'ilz n'ayent à s'attacher, injurier ne provocquer l'ung l'autre par reproche de ce qui est passé, disputer, quereller ne contester ensemble du faict de la religion, offenser ne oultrager de faict ne de parole, mais se contenir et vivre paisiblement ensemble comme freres, amys et concitoyens [...] <sup>308</sup>

---

<sup>307</sup> *Édit d'Amboise* (1563), in Éditions en ligne de l'École des chartres (ELEC) <[http://elec.enc.sorbonne.fr/editsdepacification/edit\\_02](http://elec.enc.sorbonne.fr/editsdepacification/edit_02)> [accessed 23 October 2015]

<sup>308</sup> *Édit d'Amboise* (1563), in Éditions en ligne de l'École des chartres (ELEC) <[http://elec.enc.sorbonne.fr/editsdepacification/edit\\_02](http://elec.enc.sorbonne.fr/editsdepacification/edit_02)> [accessed 23 October 2015]

This section of the article attempted to prevent the French populace from reviving previous animosities and the past conflict from continuing through personal disputes. The intentions of this aspect of the edict are clear: one cannot deny that which has happened, but the citizens of France are expected to leave the past conflict in the past and attempt to live peacefully together without religious incitement. The final part of the article is the only apparent suggestion of reconciliation, and stands in contrast with the first part of article 9 which suggests acting as if the troubles had not taken place. Barbara Diefendorf notes that each edict ‘seemed to assume that ordering a return to the *status quo ante bellum*, along with the prohibitions against renewing or even recollecting mutual injuries, would suffice to guarantee the peace’.<sup>309</sup> Such a return to the pre-war situation was possible neither in terms of memory and forgetting nor of the two parties coexisting peacefully. Neither side could reach an agreeable compromise and therefore there was a ‘pendulum effect whereby the party that felt most aggrieved by the deficiencies of one settlement [...] initiated a new round of warfare, and hoped to gain sufficient advantage that the next peace treaty would operate in its favour’.<sup>310</sup> The level of religious tolerance varied from edict to edict, but the memory clauses appeared in each edict, increasing in importance as the wars progressed.

The language of the memory clause changed slightly in the Édit de Saint-Maur in 1568, as the expression ‘éteintes, comme mortes, ensevelies et non advenues’ was adjusted to ‘assoupies et aneantyes’.<sup>311</sup> This change is significant, as the language of separation from the past and denial is strengthened, and the events of the past troubles are now suppressed by the edict. The authorities considered the bringing the past into the present to be a potential

---

<sup>309</sup> Barbara B. Diefendorf, ‘Waging Peace: Memory, Identity and the Edict of Nantes’, in *Religious Differences in France, Past and Present*, ed. by Kathleen P. Long (Missouri: Truman State University Press, 2006), pp. 50-81, p. 56.

<sup>310</sup> Diefendorf, ‘Waging Peace’, p. 55.

<sup>311</sup> Édit de Saint-Maur (1568), in Éditions en ligne de l’École des chartres (ELEC), <[http://elec.enc.sorbonne.fr/editsdepacification/edit\\_04](http://elec.enc.sorbonne.fr/editsdepacification/edit_04)> [accessed 23 October 2015].

catalyst for another outbreak of war. Andrea Frisch comments that Charles IX's 'program of amnesty gave way to a far more diffuse rhetoric of amnesia' as the wars progressed.<sup>312</sup> It is with the *Édit de Saint-Germain en Laye* that the policy of *oubliance* becomes a primary feature of the edicts. There is still a commitment to amnesty and royal pardon in each edict, but the memory clause becomes the first article of the edict. The text of the memory clause is also changed, to read:

Premierement, que la memoire de toutes choses passées d'une part et d'autre dès et depuis les troubles advenus en nostre royaume et à l'occasion d'iceux, demeure éteinte et assoupie comme de chose non advenue ; et ne sera loisible ny permis à nos procureurs generaux ny autre personne publique ou privée quelconques, en quelque temps ny pour quelque occasion que ce soit, en faire mention, procés ou poursuite en aucune court ou jurisdiction.<sup>313</sup>

It must be noted that the term 'la memoire' had not featured in any article in any previous edict until this one. Here, however it is as if the 'bracketing off' of the past is the first step on the path to the peaceful coexistence that the edict sought to establish. The article also provides legal assurances of amnesty, guaranteeing the populace that regardless of the particularities of the case, they cannot be prosecuted for offences committed during the war.

The second article concerns the prevention of recriminatory acts and borrows much of the language from the previous edicts. The article resumes the rhetoric of reconciliation but maintains the threat of prosecution for renewing disputes related to the previous troubles. The language used in this clause changes to an all-encompassing expression for such an act:

---

<sup>312</sup> Andrea Frisch, 'Montaigne and the Ethics of Memory', p. 25.

<sup>313</sup> *Édit de Saint-Germain en Laye* (1570), in Éditions en ligne de l'École des chartes (ELEC) <[http://elec.enc.sorbonne.fr/editsdepacification/edit\\_05](http://elec.enc.sorbonne.fr/editsdepacification/edit_05)> [accessed 23 October 2015]

‘renouveler la memoire’.<sup>314</sup> Hence, this renewal of past disagreements, or even the revival of that which is considered ‘dead and buried’, is considered incendiary and dangerous, and those responsible will be legally tried as ‘infracteurs du paix’.<sup>315</sup> It is curious that the edicts protect, to some extent, those who committed criminal acts during the wars, but are willing to prosecute and punish those who ‘renew’ the memory of the wars in the present. The edicts attempt to establish a divorce from the past, separating it from the present, and yet there remains a memory of the past conflicts and rivalries, which permits the government to prosecute those who attempt to bring these past rivalries back from ‘oblivion’. Moreover, Frisch recognises that ‘the French civil wars implicated virtually every domain of human existence, whether directly, or indirectly; it is therefore no easy matter to determine [...] what did or did not constitute a reminder of the conflicts’.<sup>316</sup>

To consider the way that the Edicts treated the Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre is particularly interesting in relation to the way that the memory clauses treat such a traumatic and epoch-defining event. The Édit de Boulogne in 1573 attempted to guarantee the peace after the fourth war which followed the Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre on 24<sup>th</sup> August 1572. The memory clause of this edict specifically mentions the date of the massacre, indicating that everything that took place from that date onwards must be considered extinct and erased, as if it had not happened.

Premierement, que la memoire de toutes choses passées depuis *le vingt quatreiesme jour d'aoust dernier* passé à l'occasion des troubles et esmotions advenues en nostre

---

<sup>314</sup> Édit de Saint-Germain en Laye (1570), in Éditions en ligne de l’École des chartres (ELEC) <[http://elec.enc.sorbonne.fr/editsdepacification/edit\\_05](http://elec.enc.sorbonne.fr/editsdepacification/edit_05)> [accessed 23 October 2015]

<sup>315</sup> Édit de Saint-Germain en Laye (1570), in Éditions en ligne de l’École des chartres (ELEC), <[http://elec.enc.sorbonne.fr/editsdepacification/edit\\_05](http://elec.enc.sorbonne.fr/editsdepacification/edit_05)> [accessed 23 October 2015]

<sup>316</sup> Andrea Frisch, *Forgetting Differences: Tragedy, Historiography, and the French Wars of Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015) Ebook. p. 8.

royaume, demeurera esteincte et assoupie comme de chose non advenue [...]<sup>317</sup> (my italics)

This can first be viewed as an offer of amnesty for those who were involved in the fourth war which erupted after the massacre, and it is again a legal ‘forgetting’ in this sense. It must also be considered a significant move on behalf of the monarch that even an event as historically significant as the Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre was considered something which should be forgotten. The recognition given to the massacre by the edict is an example of preterition, as it draws attention to the importance of 24 August 1572 whilst insisting that it is not a date that should be remembered or commemorated in the future. The fact that the date was so well known that the edict could refer to it without further explanation underlines how ingrained the details of the massacre was already in the collective consciousness, but equally how difficult, or indeed impossible, it would be to prevent this collective memory from pervading the present and from enduring over time.

It is significant that Montaigne does not mention the Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre in the *Essais*, and even in the Montaigne family Beuther, the pages for both 24 August and 3 October have been torn out; these are the dates of the Paris and Bordeaux massacres. It is possible that Montaigne was observing Michel de l’Hospital’s proposal: ‘excidat illa dies’, as Nakam posits in her discussion of Montaigne’s apparent silence concerning the Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre.<sup>318</sup> It is equally possible that Montaigne employed the approach of the ‘politiques’ to the massacre, which was one of silence, as exhibited later by De Thou.<sup>319</sup> The massacre would certainly have been a dangerous topic to

---

<sup>317</sup> *Édit de Boulogne* (1573), in Éditions en ligne de l’École des chartes (ELEC) <[http://elec.enc.sorbonne.fr/editsdepacification/edit\\_06](http://elec.enc.sorbonne.fr/editsdepacification/edit_06)> [accessed 23 October 2015].

<sup>318</sup> Geralde Nakam, *Montaigne et son temps: les événements et les ‘Essais’* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1993), p. 191-2.

<sup>319</sup> Nakam, *Montaigne et son temps*, p. 192. De Thou, Montaigne’s fellow *politique*, also adopted a policy of ‘silence sur la Saint-Barthélemy’.

discuss, though this has not prevented Montaigne from challenging controversial issues before. It could be argued that by not mentioning the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre, Montaigne contributes to the erasure of that day from the collective consciousness and follows the approach of the edicts in bracketing off memory. Nakam argues, however, that this silence or void, where one might expect an engagement with the massacre, is full of meaning.<sup>320</sup> One can only speculate why Montaigne does not include the Saint-Bartholomew's Day massacre in his writing, but it could well be that he is concerned about shaping public perception and influencing the collective memory of the event through a discussion of it in the *Essais*.

The wars officially ended in 1598 when Henri IV issued the Edict of Nantes. The memory clause was once again the first article of the edict, and maintained the text of the previous edicts with one small addition which altered the date of the period which was now to be treated as if it had not happened. The edict therefore again promoted the ‘bracketing off’ of the past and encouraged the public to block the troubles from their own memories as the primary requisite for peaceful coexistence in France.

One might expect Montaigne to engage with the concept of the ‘bracketing off’ of memory that is proposed by the memory clauses, but in the *Essais*, Montaigne does not engage with or directly criticise the way in which the memory clauses treat collective memory. It is probable that Montaigne’s stance as a *politique* leads him to avoid rather than grapple with the intricacies of these forgetting clauses in the hope that they may serve to re-establish peace and order in France. However, Montaigne’s understanding that we cannot control the faculty of memory and we cannot decide what we remember or forget undermines

---

<sup>320</sup> Nakam, *Montaigne et son temps*, p. 192-3.

the proposal of the edicts that encourages the public to separate their memory of the past from the present.

Our lack of control over the faculty of memory prevents us from ‘bracketing off’ a particular event from our memory. Although memory is associated with being ‘of the past’, it is also rooted in the present, with each individual constantly recording and remembering their personal experiences. The ‘bracketing off’ of a particular memory would be impossible for individuals, and even more so as a collective, who would share common experience of the wars, and would constantly remind each other of the wars.

When Montaigne discusses the faculty of memory and the process of remembering and forgetting in the ‘Apologie’, he writes that:

il n'est rien qui imprime si vivement quelque chose en nostre souvenance que le desir de l'oublier: c'est une bonne maniere de donner en garde et d'empreindre en nostre ame quelque chose que de la solliciter de la perdre (II, 12, 494).

Montaigne is discussing personal memory here, but his thoughts on memory can be extended to apply to collective memory. Montaigne’s comment then can be considered in relation to the Edicts, in the sense that the more the government encourages the populace to forget or suppress their memory of the wars, the more the general public will remember the wars.

In this section of the ‘Apologie’, Montaigne also discusses the erasure of information from our memory: ‘De vuyder et desmunir la memoire, est-ce pas le vray et propre chemin à l’ignorance?’ (II, 12, 495). Montaigne envisages memory as a storehouse here, conjuring an image of emptying the storehouse of its memories and leaving it bare. This, too, can be applied to collective memory in light of the edicts of pacification and the memory clauses which attempted to erase and extinguish the memory of the past. Montaigne is clear that he

thinks that the erasure of memory paves the way to ignorance; he believes that memories and knowledge of the past provide opportunities for learning, hence the erasure of memories denies an individual the opportunity to learn from experience.

Furthermore, when Montaigne returns to edit this passage of the ‘Apologie’ in the *Exemplaire de Bordeaux*, he adds a quotation from Seneca’s *Oedipus*, which reads: ‘iners malorum remedium ignorantia est’ (ignorance is an artless remedy for our ills).<sup>321</sup> At first glance, one can trace Montaigne’s argument to understand that erasing or consciously forgetting personal memory leads to ignorance, and ignorance is not solution to one’s problems.

However, let us briefly consider the context of Oedipus’s remark. Oedipus speaks these lines in response to Creon, who is refusing to reveal the truth of patricide to Oedipus, and telling Oedipus that he will not like the truth once it is revealed. Oedipus continues to question Creon, asking whether he thinks that withholding the truth may be beneficial to the health of the nation of Thebes. Oedipus ultimately tells Creon that withholding the truth is more dangerous than facing the truth. (‘Saepe vel lingua magis | regi atque regno muta libertas obest’; ‘The right of silence harms King and Kingdom – often more than speech’).

One can consider Montaigne’s use of this quotation from *Oedipus* in relation to personal memory and collective memory. First, just as Oedipus needs to know the truth of his personal experience and fill in the gaps in his personal memory, Montaigne too needs to know the truth of his personal experience in order to ensure the continuity of his memory. Second, this passage can be applied to collective memory, as it is beneficial for the nation if Oedipus is aware of his past. In relation to France’s troubles, the people of France need to

---

<sup>321</sup> Seneca, *Oedipus*, III, 17.

confront the trauma of the wars and address their memory of the wars in order to be able to overcome the ills of the nation.

Since Montaigne believes that memory is the foundation for identity and that the psychological continuity of memory ensures a continuous identity, the erasure of a memory is an attack on identity. To extend this approach to collective memory, the ‘memory clauses’ of the Edicts of Pacification can be seen as an attack on collective identity. It must be said that the collective identity of France is fractured and fragmented during the wars, but there is however a ‘community of experience’ which has the experience of the wars in common; that is to say that regardless of faction or perspective, each French person experienced the trauma of the wars to some extent. The memory clauses threaten this community of experience by proposing the confinement of the wars to the past and threaten the continuity of collective memory. Memory must be continuous in order to establish stable identity; as we have seen with Montaigne’s interpretation of Lucretius, any interruption or break in the thread of memory can cause the destruction of identity.

As the memory clauses threaten memory and identity, the only way to ensure the remembrance of collective experience and collective memory is to write the wars. Just as Montaigne preserves his self in the *Essais* through the externalisation of his personal memory, writing can also offer a solution to the contemporary threats to memory posed by the Edicts, the dangerous, manipulative histories emerging during the conflicts and the ever-present problem of general forgetting. It is through writing that Montaigne can preserve, protect and project the collective memory of the Wars of Religion.

## **Remembering the Wars of Religion in the *Essais***

Whilst it is true that Montaigne insists in ‘De la force de l’imagination’ that he will not write about contemporary events, when he writes his own memories in the *Essais* in order to preserve a version of himself he also preserves the memory of the Wars of Religion.

He cannot write his self without writing about the contemporary events that impact upon his comportment; thus when he records his experiences and writes his self, he is required to use the wars to contextualise his experiences. Just as he values the type of historical writing which teaches him about how individuals behaved and reacted to the historical events which they were living through, he conveys his own motivations, thoughts and judgements in his own memory writing, often using the wars as a marker before recollecting his own experiences. Géralde Nakam explains that Montaigne employs the wars in a role that is ‘événementiel’: ‘Soit elles lui servent de points de repère, soit elles lui fournissent des occasions d’analyse, des exercices de pensée.’<sup>322</sup> As we have already seen, Montaigne uses the Wars of Religion, albeit amidst some confusion about exactly which wars, as a temporal marker for his recollection of his riding accident, setting his personal trauma in the timeline of national trauma (II, 6, 373). He makes oblique references to the wars throughout the *Essais*, often indicating that a particular story took place during a conflict (for example, ‘Pendant les débauches de nostre pauvre estat’; II, 1, 334) or reminding his reader that he is writing his judgements during war time (for example, ‘cette saison tumultuere’; II, 7, 383). The use of the wars as a marker in this way establishes Montaigne’s link with his reality, firmly rooting his self and his book in the context of the Wars of Religion. To ‘bracket off’ the wars and to record his experiences without their proper context

---

<sup>322</sup> Géralde Nakam, *Montaigne et son temps*, p. 179.

would be to misrepresent himself and to falsify his memories because the self changes and develops constantly, and in Montaigne's case, his experiences are inseparable from the context of the wars. Nakam recognises that 'La guerre civile accompagne Montaigne tout au long de sa vie d'homme. Elle est la réalité de base de son livre'.<sup>323</sup> The wars are the ever-present backdrop for Montaigne's memories and therefore must be represented as the context for his experiences.

It is worth looking at some examples of Montaigne's use of the Wars of Religion and the way in which he records his autobiographical, episodic memory of the wars. For example, in 'Que nostre desir s'accroît par la malaisance' (II, 15), Montaigne explains that he has not fortified his house during the wars, but despite the lack of defences, his house has remained safe and has not been attacked once over the course of the thirty years of war. Montaigne is recording 'the particular' here, highlighting the uniqueness of his own story which he considers to be 'remarquable' and 'enregistrable' (II, 15, 617); however, there is an implied inclusivity in his writing, as he highlights that his experience of the threat to his property is one to which his contemporaries could attest. He writes:

[C] Les moyens d'assaillir, je dy sans baterie et sans armée, et de surprendre *nos* maisons, croissent tous les jours audessus des moyens de se garder. [...] Les finances publiques n'entretiendront pas *noz* garnisons domestiques: elles s'y espuiseroient. *Nous* n'avons pas de quoy le faire sans *nostre* ruine, ou, plus incommodement et injurieusement, sans celle du peuple (II, 15, 617; my italics).

Montaigne's use of the first person plural ('nos', 'noz', 'nous') turns his experience of the threat to his home during the wars into a shared experience. In this way, his experience of

---

<sup>323</sup> Nakam, *Montaigne et son temps*, p. 198.

this aspect of the wars which impacted on his personal, home life reveals a shared, common experience of the wars.

Indeed, when Montaigne returns to the theme of the wars threatening the safety of his home in ‘De la vanité’, he explains that ‘Les guerres civiles ont cela de pire que les autres guerres, de *nous* mettre *chacun* en eschauguette en sa propre maison’ (III, 9, 971). Montaigne here witnesses his own experience of the wars, and records his own memory, but also witnesses the other who is also subject to these same threats. His autobiographical, internal memory therefore overlaps with the external, social memory of the war. Montaigne highlights in ‘Des livres’ that the trivial is not recorded in the history books, but he does record the everyday occurrences of the wars that impacted on his life, and in doing so, he captures the trivial experiences to which his contemporary reader can relate. Furthermore, in writing this aspect of the collective experience, he preserves the collective memory for future readers of the *Essais*.

Equally, in ‘De la conscience’ (II, 5), Montaigne recalls a personal memory ‘durant nos guerres civiles’ when he was riding with the Sieur de la Brousse and met a gentleman who supported the enemy. Montaigne explains to the reader that during the wars it was difficult to distinguish one’s enemies from one’s allies due to people’s propensity for dissimulation or the possibility of portraying themselves externally differently to their true views which they maintain internally. Montaigne uses the war here to introduce the essay on the theme of conscience in which he develops his belief that one’s conscience can betray one’s external appearances. Thus, the wars here provide Montaigne with the personal material for his ‘exercice de pensée’.<sup>324</sup> Furthermore, in his introduction to this essay, he confesses his personal fear that despite knowing his own allegiance and maintaining his own

---

<sup>324</sup> Nakam, *Montaigne et son temps*, p. 179.

beliefs, he could be mistaken for an enemy, even by his allies, if he were in a place where his stance was not known. Montaigne writes:

[A] Cela me faisoit craindre à moy mesme de rencontrer nos troupes en lieu où je ne fusse conneu, pour n'estre en peine de dire mon nom, et de pis à l'aventure (II, 5, 366).

One's identity, and indeed, one's safety, was therefore inherently tied up with the war and one's allegiances. In this case, 'group membership' defines personal identity. It is interesting that Montaigne uses 'nos troupes' here, which does commit Montaigne to a particular side, but Nakam acknowledges that 'son "nous" d'appartenance n'est jamais un "nous" partisan'.<sup>325</sup> When Montaigne returns to this story in 1580-88 in the [B] edition, he adds another layer of personal memory, recounting a separate incident when he did experience a confrontation with an enemy (or indeed, with an ally to whom his allegiance was not clear, Montaigne does not specify), and his group suffered casualties. Montaigne remembers in particular that his page, whom he was training and of whom he appears to be fond, was killed during the accident. He does not name the page, but his addition to the passage includes a very brief description of the page, and an expression of regret that: '[B] fut esteincte en luy une très-belle enfance et plaine de grande esperance' (II, 5, 366). To some extent, Montaigne preserves the memory of this page here, who he felt it was necessary to remember in this intercalated passage. Montaigne does not provide further details about this event, but it is very likely that this incident took place between the publishing of the [A] and [B] texts, and it seems that when Montaigne read his own text, he remembers his journey with Sieur de la Brousse, but he also recalls the more recent memory involving his page, which he then adds to this essay. The self is constantly adding to memory and constantly making associations and assembling links between what is recalled at different stages of our lives. In this case,

---

<sup>325</sup> Nakam, *Montaigne et son temps*, p. 185.

Montaigne redrafts this section, reminding us that ‘the redrafting of our past experience is always in process’.<sup>326</sup> Montaigne, therefore, creates a brief, personal memory of witnessing death and the fear for one’s own life during the wars, but despite this memory being particular to him, it is a memory to which his contemporary reader can relate, and to which they can add their own relevant memory.

Indeed, in ‘De la cruauté’ (II, 11), Montaigne expresses the sentiment that the wars are an inescapable, everyday experience and source of trauma. He writes:

Je vy en une saison en laquelle nous foisonnons en exemples incroyables de ce vice [de la cruauté], par la licence de nos guerres civiles; et ne voit on rien aux histoires anciennes de plus extreme que ce que nous en essayons tous les jours (II, 11, 432).

Montaigne’s expression may be hyperbolic in order to criticise the violence of the wars, but he certainly recognises that his own era is significant in the course of history when he compares it with the past. As Montaigne writes ‘que nous essayons’, he speaks to his contemporary reader, recognising that the daily trauma of witnessing the wars was their collective, shared experience. This expression also addresses his future reader, informing us about what his generation endured, and thus transferring this collective experience of his era to the collective memory of his era in the minds of his future readers.

Furthermore, in this passage from ‘De la cruauté’, Montaigne explains that despite his seemingly daily experience of the violence of the wars, he has not become numb or accustomed to it (‘Cela ne m’y a nullement apprivoisé’; II, 15, 432). In fact, Montaigne implies that he still cannot comprehend the violence that he has seen: ‘A peine me pouvoy-je persuader, avant que je l’eusse veu, qu’il se fut trouvé des ames si monstrueuses, qui, pour le

---

<sup>326</sup> E. Keightley and M. Pickering, *The Mnemonic Imagination: Remembering as Creative Practice* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 19.

seul plaisir du meurtre, le voulussent commettre [...]’ (II, 15, 432). It is due to his position as a witness that he, and his reader, can accept that such violence has truly taken place. Just as Montaigne favours eye-witness reports when he reads history, this is the type of report which he provides for his reader here, basing his writing on his own memory and experience of the events. Where history may teach Montaigne about the violence that took place in the Trojan wars, or the Roman civil wars, his own memory can attest to the murder and torture of his own period. In a similar way to his preference for learning through experience in ‘*De l’institution des enfans*’, Montaigne suggests here that an active experiencing of the wars can teach him and his contemporaries more about violence and cruelty than they could possibly learn by reading about violent events which took place in a distant past. Moreover, because of this need to learn from experience, Montaigne felt the need to record the violence of his era. In this case, Montaigne is particularly graphic in his description as he describes forced amputations, torture and murderers enjoying the spectacle of death. His graphic recollection serves to provide the witness that the trauma of the wars demands, processing the incomprehensible violence for himself and for his contemporary reader. The need for witnessing and recording is not just for the benefit of the contemporary reader, or indeed, only for Montaigne to process the violence which he has seen; there is also a need to record this for future readers, projecting the memory of this violence into future collective memory of the era, in the same way that the history books transmitted the historical memory of violence in the past.

Nakam argues that Montaigne’s interest in writing the Wars of Religion changes over the course of writing the *Essais*, suggesting that ‘la guerre est devenue une banalité, [...] la trame du quotidien, à la fois une banalité et une fatalité’.<sup>327</sup> This argument may be supported by the fact that Montaigne returns to discuss the threat of the wars to his home in ‘*De la*

---

<sup>327</sup> Nakam, *Montaigne et son temps*, p. 187.

vanité' (III, 9). Montaigne provides an insight into his apparent, perpetual anxiety for his safety during the wars as he describes his personal, memory of fearing for his life during the wars. Montaigne writes: '[B] Je me suis couché mille foys chez moy, imaginant qu'on me trahiroit et assommeroit cette nuict là' ; III, 9, 970). This recollection, drawn from Montaigne's personal memory store, provides his reader with an insight into Montaigne's private experience, and the way that he reacted to the threat of war. It must also be said that his memory of experiencing this fear is one with which a contemporary reader can empathise, creating a sense of shared experience here. Montaigne then moves to discuss how people in general become hardened to that which they are accustomed to:

[B] Nous nous durcissons à tout ce que nous accoustumons. Et à une miserable condition, comme est la nostre, ça esté un tres-favorable present de nature que l'accoustumance, qui endort nostre sentiment à la souffrance de plusieurs maux (III, 9, 970).

Montaigne's experience of fearing for his life each night may be particular to him, but he also suggests that he is not alone in his experience of the threat of war. It is worth commenting here that Montaigne's tone reveals both the prolonged nature of the wars and the fact that the wars are deeply embedded in the collective consciousness, to the point of becoming custom. Montaigne's comment here suggests that both he, and the collective have grown accustomed to the wars, and supports Nakam's argument that the wars became an example of daily trauma that was banal and tragic in equal measure.

Moreover, as he explains that becoming accustomed to the wars is in fact beneficial because it will numb the sense of current suffering, he warps the Epicurean teaching that one can recall past joys to supplant present sorrow to a more negative approach of using past memories of suffering to reduce present suffering.

Memory is at play here; there is no forgetting of the past conflicts, but rather there is an active remembering of them which helps to deal with the current conflicts. Where the Edicts encouraged a ‘bracketing off’ of the memory of the wars, Montaigne instead praises the assimilation of the wars to collective consciousness and an active remembering of past experience in order to deal with present problems.

Let us finally consider Montaigne’s ‘memory writing’ in ‘De la physiognomie’ (III, 12). In this essay, Montaigne shares numerous personal experiences of the Wars of Religion. His recollections include events which would not be remembered by history were it not for his own writing of them, as he preserves experiences that history writers would consider trivial, but are significant in his own life-history. Montaigne uses the wars as a temporal marker for this essay, and implies that the wars have an impact on both his experiencing self and on his writing, remembering self:

J’escrivois cecy environ le temps qu’une forte charge de nos troubles se croupit plusieurs mois, de tout son poids, droit sur moy. J’avois d’une part les ennemys à ma porte, d’autre part les picoreurs, pires ennemys (III, 12, 1041).

Montaigne does uses the wars not only as a chronological marker in his writing process here, but also as an opportunity for the exercise of his judgement. In the same way that he wants historical study to provide the student with the material on which to exert their own judgements, he uses his memory of the wars as an opportunity to exercise his judgement and to apply the tool of memory to pass judgement on his personal experiences. Hence, Montaigne criticises the wars:

Monstrueuse guerre [...] Elle vient guarir la sedition et en est pleine, veut chastier la desobeyssance et en montre l’exemple; et, employée à la deffence des loix, faict sa part de rebellion à l’encontre des siennes propres. Où en sommes nous? (II, 1041)

It is significant that Montaigne does not take a partisan view, instead criticising the wars themselves. His rhetorical question ‘Où en sommes nous?’ reveals the sense of a shared sentiment of disdain and frustration concerning the wars, in that despite the routes that the authorities have taken to quell the rivalries, and the attempts to ensure that the people may live ‘paisiblement ensemble comme frères, amys et concitoyens’, the wars continue and the state remains unstable.<sup>328</sup> Montaigne uses a bodily metaphor for the nation, describing the wars as ‘ces maladies populaires’ which have an impact on the entire populace (‘aucune partie n'est exempte de corruption’; III, 12, 1041-42). Indeed, when Montaigne comes to consider the impact of the wars on the people, he writes: ‘[B] Le peuple y souffrit bien largement lors, non les dommages presens seulement, [...] mais les futurs aussi. Les vivans y eurent à patir; si eurent ceux qui n'estoient encore nays’ (III, 12, 1044). Montaigne is referring to the destruction of homes and of crops which he foresees having a lasting impact on the affected families and successive generations. One can however consider memory here, as Montaigne comments ‘[B] On le pilla, et à moy par consequent, jusques à l'esperance’ (III, 12, 1044). By robbing the hope of the people, the wars have a significant impact on the mentality of the people. Moreover, when Montaigne explains that those who have not yet been born have to suffer the effects of the war, one can argue that their suffering does not only relate to the inheritance of the economic condition of their family, but also the inheritance of the memory of the wars from their family. This generation is born in the shadow of the wars, and will grow up with the second-hand memory of the wars passed on by their parents. It can be said therefore that this future generation is affected by the ‘postmemory’ of the wars. ‘Postmemory’ is a term which designates the collective memory of the generations which follow the survivors of significant, often traumatic, historical events;

---

<sup>328</sup> *Édit d'Amboise* (1563), in Éditions en ligne de l'École des chartres (ELEC) <[http://elec.enc.sorbonne.fr/editsdepacification/edit\\_02](http://elec.enc.sorbonne.fr/editsdepacification/edit_02)> [accessed 23 October 2015]

whilst this generation does not necessarily have their own experience of the events, the memories of their parents are transmitted to them in such a way that they constitute a memory in their own right.<sup>329</sup> Montaigne's implication that future generations will suffer due to the wars in their parents' past can be extended to the realm of memory as these future generations will have altered mentalities and attitudes due to the impact of 'postmemory' and the trans-generational transmission of collective memory.

Following Montaigne's comment on the broad impact of the wars on the collective, he returns to describe their particular impact on him personally. For example, he describes being the subject of suspicion due to the location of his estate, which was in a region dominated by the Reformed Church, and his position as an active, and known, Roman Catholic. He explains that: '[B] Mille diverses sortes de maux accoureurent à moy à la file (III, 12, 1045); but with hindsight, his remembering, writing self considers his experience of these misfortunes to be useful ('utiles'; III, 12, 1045). Indeed, Montaigne describes his experience as 'un accident [qui] me servoit d'exercitation' (III, 12, 1046). This mirrors his analysis of his riding accident, which serves him as practice for the experience of dying. In this scenario, Montaigne's brush with the danger of the war prepares him in case he is unfortunately drawn into the conflict against his wishes and intentions.

Following the model of experience that he establishes throughout the *Essais*, Montaigne sets the 'active learning experience' of living through historical events in opposition with the type of learning available through reading history books. Montaigne certainly values history books for the semantic memory which they can convey, as we have seen, but these books rarely provide Montaigne with an experience of the events which they

---

<sup>329</sup> The term 'postmemory' was first proposed by Marianne Hirsch in her essay 'Family Pictures: *Maus*, Mourning and Post-Memory', *Discourse*, 15 (1992). Hirsch explores the phenomenon of postmemory in relation to the memory of the Holocaust in *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

describe. He writes: ‘Comme je ne ly guere és [sic] histoires ces confusions des autres estats que je n’aye regret de ne les avoir peu mieux considerer présent’ (III, 12, 1046). There is almost a jealousy in Montaigne’s tone as he underlines that one can better judge events if one is there to witness them for oneself. He therefore recognises that a consolation to having to live through the Wars of Religion is that he is able to witness and personally experience the decline of France:

[...] je m’agrée aucunement de veoir de mes yeux ce notable spectacle de nostre mort publique, ses symptomes et sa forme. Et puis que je ne la puis retarder, suis content d’estre destiné à y assister et m’en instruire (III, 12, 1046).

In a way, living through historical events is the optimal way to learn about history, in Montaigne’s opinion, as one can process one’s own memory and can apply judgement in order to gain experience. Montaigne is not only living through the wars and applying judgement, he is writing his memory of the wars and preserving his judgements. He declared that he would not write about the present in ‘De la force de l’imagination’ (I, 21), but throughout the *Essais*, he writes his memory of the present.

Montaigne’s recollections of his personal experiences and judgements of the Wars of Religion in ‘De la physionomie’ culminate in two accounts of separate experiences that characterise Montaigne’s writing of the memory of the war: the first, when Montaigne’s house is invaded by his neighbour; the second when Montaigne is taken prisoner by a group of masked men. Deborah Losse describes Montaigne’s account of these two events as ‘life stories’,<sup>330</sup> which build on Montaigne’s discussion of his countenance in ‘De la physionomie’ and serve as examples which justify his claims about his self and his ‘demeanor under

---

<sup>330</sup> Deborah Losse, *Montaigne and the Brief Narrative Form: Shaping the Essay* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 92.

pressure'.<sup>331</sup> Montaigne records both personal experiences in order to show how his constancy and honesty save him from danger and how his physiognomy and comportment during potentially perilous incidents positively influence others towards peaceful outcomes. It must be acknowledged that both incidents are traumatic experiences, in which Montaigne's wellbeing was under threat. His introduction to the two accounts is pertinent to the discussion of memory and its preservation. He writes: 'Ces deux expériences valent, à l'avanture, que je les recite particulierement' (III, 12, 1060). Montaigne recognises that these two events are worthy of remembrance and written record, not only for himself, but also for his reader. He is writing his personal testimony of the events to preserve the memory in his textual storehouse of memory – the essays – and in order to judge and analyse his memory in order that he may comprehend the experience, and that his reader may gain an understanding of useful comportment during negotiations. As Montaigne's writing of his memories here transmit an ethical lesson, one can argue that in this instance, for Montaigne, memory is worth being recorded, preserved and transmitted here as it carries ethical or moral significance, in keeping with Russell's conception of early modern collective memory.

In the first incident, Montaigne invites a man into his estate, responding to his request for help. It was the man's intention to occupy Montaigne's home by deceit and force, but Montaigne's countenance resulted in the man leaving without disturbing the peace. Montaigne shares each individual aspect of the story with his reader, presenting each detail as it develops, from the man's claims that he was attacked near Montaigne's estate to the eventual arrival of around twenty-five of that man's allies arriving at Montaigne's home, all feigning the same experience of being attacked. Montaigne presents himself as being naturally unsuspicious, and despite his awareness that they were in a time of war, and that his estate would be a valuable target for his enemy, he does not question the men, instead trusting

---

<sup>331</sup> Losse, *Montaigne and the Brief Narrative Form*, p. 92.

their intentions and continuing to offer them his support and hospitality, even inviting them onto his property. Montaigne describes the surprising, peaceful outcome of the incident as he recalls that the leader later explains to him that ‘mon visage et ma franchise luy avoient arraché la trahison de ses pointcts’ (III, 12, 1061). Thus, Montaigne’s physiognomy and honest nature convince the leader to leave Montaigne’s estate in peace. It is significant that Montaigne writes that the leader discussed the incident with Montaigne after it happened, presumably during a period of peace (‘il ne craignoit pas de faire ce compte’; III, 12, 1061). The memory of the incident endures for the two men despite the peace which attempted to separate the past from the present, and the memory clauses which encouraged the “forgetting” of such incidents. This underlines that the policy of ‘oubliance’ does not work in practice. In Montaigne’s recollection of the incident, he does not name the leader, although he knew his name, perhaps due to a chivalrous respect not to implicate his neighbour, or perhaps bowing to the requests of the edicts to not stir up past rivalries or disagreements. It must be said that Montaigne’s approach to the incident is certainly not to renew the memory of the war (‘renouveler la memoire’) in a way that would concern the censors. Instead, Montaigne’s intention here is to preserve his personal memory which provides him, and indeed his reader, with the opportunity to learn from this experience, and also to preserve the way that he behaved in order to reveal his personality and manner to those who read his *Essais*. Furthermore, Montaigne is writing his memory in the style of those writers whom he enjoyed reading, as he reveals his motivations, responses and justifications to the event. Montaigne is therefore recording a memory from which his reader can ‘remember’ him and learn about how he responds to this aspect of the wars. Indeed, it is worth remembering Montaigne’s remark earlier in ‘De la physionomie’ that he sees the wars as an opportunity to learn about his self (‘suis content d’estre destiné à y assister et m’en instruire’; III, 12, 1046).

Montaigne's response to the incident shows that one can take an active role in one's own life-story; in his case, he maintains an internal honesty with himself and an external honesty with the members of society who he faces, and in doing so, he exerts his influence over events, leading to a peaceful and amicable outcome.

In his recollection of the second incident, Montaigne records his memory of being taken prisoner by a group of twenty to thirty masked men. Montaigne provides a rough, temporal context for this incident as he writes: 'me fiant à je ne sçay quelle treve qui venoit d'estre publiée en nos armées' (III, 12, 1061). Montaigne does not specify which peace treaty, but implies that his faith in any such treaty was misplaced. Nakam asserts that by Book III of the *Essais*, 'il ne plus besoin de [...] différencier [entre les guerres]'.<sup>332</sup> She argues that 'il n'y a plus aucune raison de dire: pendant nos premiers, nos seconds ou nos troisièmes troubles. Ces numéros deviennent dérisoires'.<sup>333</sup> This may explain why Montaigne does not specify which treaty was ignored by these men, and it is also likely that Montaigne does not name the specific treaty as they had become almost meaningless and held little authority, as proven by his own experience here.

In contrast to the men who are masked and concealing their identities, Montaigne chooses to be frank and open, and immediately reveals his religious and political stance: 'd'arrivée je leur confessay ouvertement le party duquel j'estois, et le chemin que je tenois' (III, 12, 1062). Montaigne is stripped of his belongings by his captors and is held hostage for two or three hours whilst the men consider his ransom or whether they will kill him. Montaigne records the specific details of this traumatic event in which his life was

---

<sup>332</sup> Nakam, *Montaigne et son temps*, p. 187.

<sup>333</sup> Nakam, *Montaigne et son temps*, p. 187.

threatened, and in writing the event, he records his experience and assimilates it to his memory.

Montaigne again emerges from the incident unscathed, as the leader of this group of brigands was influenced by Montaigne's countenance and his freedom and firmness of speech ('mon visage, liberté et fermeté de mes parolles'; III, 12, 1062). It is significant that Montaigne is an active agent in his own history, taking command of a situation in which he was in peril and from which a positive outcome seemed unlikely. Montaigne recounts that the leader of the group removed his mask and revealed his name; as such it can be said that Montaigne's honesty unmasks his enemy and reveals the true identity of his captor.

Montaigne writes his personal memory of both incidents and he preserves these personal experiences of the wars. Both incidents may be considered trivial by traditional historians and are not the types of record that would appear in traditional history books, but Montaigne is not writing a traditional history book.

For an individual, such events are certainly not trivial and as such, Montaigne considers them to be worthy of record in personal, written memory. In particular, with traumatic events, as we have seen, an almost indelible mark is left on the trauma victim's personal memory. Montaigne comments in 'De la gloire' that during a war exposing oneself bravely to death is significant for an individual but for everyone else: 'ces sont choses si ordinaires, il s'en voit tant tous les jours' (II, 16, 627). Montaigne, however, does record

these trivial details, and transforms himself into an historical object, and is worthy of being remembered because of his perceived insignificance and the triviality of his experiences.<sup>334</sup>

As Montaigne attempts to preserve and protect a version of himself in the *Essais*, he must record these memories of moments which reveal his identity. To some extent, these traumatic events reveal ‘ce qu’il y a de bon et de net dans le fond du pot’ (I, 19, 80). Montaigne writes the above comment about the moment of death in ‘Qu’il ne faut juger de nostre heur, qu’apres la mort’, adding that when the moment comes, ‘il n’y a plus que faindre’ (I, 19, 80). Montaigne also uses a quotation from Book III of *De rerum natura* in his discussion of this moment of death:

Nam verae voces tum demum pectore ab imo  
Ejiciuntur, et eripitur persona, manet res. (*De rerum natura*, III, 57-8)

(For only then are the words of truth drawn up from the very heart, the mask is torn off, the reality remains.)

In both the incidents in ‘De la physionomie’, Montaigne is honest and frank, intervening in his own life history and in fact, his honesty influences others to remove their masks, reveal their own true identities and end their deceitful acts. In his own traumatic moment, when the mask is ripped off, Montaigne is straightforward about his intentions, remaining honest internally to himself and externally to others.

It is this style of writing about the past which reveals ‘l’homme en general’, which Montaigne holds in high regard. There is a marked difference between traditional history-writing, which focuses on the preservation and transmission of semantic, historical memory,

---

<sup>334</sup> Dorotea B. Heitsch, *Practising Reform in Montaigne’s ‘Essais’* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2000). Dorotea Heitsch analyses how Montaigne transforms himself into a historical object in ‘De la praesumption’ (II, 17), pp. 175-76.

and ‘memory’ writing, which focuses on the preservation and communication of the episodic, autobiographical memory of the writer, and Montaigne certainly emulates the latter. His memory writing does contain the semantic memory of some of the battles and the treaties, but this is by consequence rather than by intention. Montaigne’s intention is to preserve his memory and in the inescapable context of the Wars of Religion; his memory provides his reader with an insight into how someone personally experienced the wars. By writing his memories of the conflicts and the everyday violence which he witnesses, he makes sense of the violence, cruelty and danger of the wars for himself and for his reader, be it a contemporary reader who shares Montaigne’s living memory of the wars, or be it for a future reader to whom Montaigne communicates his personal memory.

## **Conclusion**

Through Montaigne’s annotations and comments on *De rerum natura*, one can see that he approaches the loss of history from the past in a different way to Lucretius, focussing on the loss of memory rather than the loss of history. Montaigne recognises that collective memory is subject to the same threats as personal memory – that is to say, it is subject to general forgetting, possible destruction through a significant event, and the threat of the extinction of living memory. Moreover, Montaigne is conscious that so much of collective memory from the past has already been lost. Since collective memory is subject to the same threats as personal memory, he recognises the importance of the preservation of collective memory.

As he writes in a period which is marked by the tension between remembering and forgetting, and also by the imposed ‘bracketing off’ of memory, the writing of memory is

imperative to ensure the legacy and survival of collective memory beyond living memory. Montaigne does not address the Edicts directly in the *Essais*, but he recognises the danger of erasing memory of the past, or indeed, of not facing the truth of the past in the ‘Apologie’. A ‘bracketing off’ of the past is not possible, as living memory is not something which can be effectively controlled, and there is always a ‘leaking’ of memory of the past into the present, even in the case of trauma.

When Montaigne criticises the vainglory of the certain acts of war in ‘De l’institution des enfans’, his language is reminiscent of the language of the memory clauses:

Tant de noms, tant de victoires et conquêtes ensevelies sous l’oubliance, rendent ridicule l’espérance d’eterniser nostre nom par la prise de dix argolets et d’un pouillier qui n'est connue que de sa chute (I, 26, 158). [my italics]

Montaigne’s comment here at first glance refers to the general forgetting of anonymous soldiers, and of wars and conflicts, but he brings the troubles into focus as he criticises the vain attempts of people seeking military glory by attacking a chicken coop. By using ‘nostre nom’ here, Montaigne is not making a partisan criticism, but rather a general criticism of the conduct of all people during the wars; indeed, his comment suggests an inclusive approach to the experience of the wars. More significantly, he uses the expression ‘l’oubliance’ which directs his ‘diligent lecteur’ to the policy of *oubliance* encouraged by the authorities to cleanse the present of the conflict of the past, which is an assault on collective memory and undermines collective identity.

Through Montaigne’s position as a writer of memory, rather than a historian, he presents his autobiographical, subjective memory of the wars, providing an insight into the individual’s experience of the wars and equally representing, to some extent, the collective community of experience. Furthermore, as Montaigne writes his memories of the troubles,

he ‘reclaims’ the traumatic experience for himself, and for his community. The *Essais* serve as the witness that trauma demands, and assimilate the experience of the troubles to collective memory. Thus, Montaigne preserves, protects and projects collective experience and collective memory in his project of memorialisation, and ensures an enduring memory of the Wars of Religion for posterity.

## Conclusion

Montaigne's *Essais* are punctuated with his perpetual anxiety of forgetting his self whilst he is alive and of his identity being forgotten when he is dead. In a world of eternal change and flux, and where 'toutes choses [...] branlent sans cesse' (III, 2, 804), there is great difficulty in establishing a stable identity for the self.

Through his reading of Denis Lambin's commentary edition of Lucretius's poem *De rerum natura*, Montaigne is able to engage with the philosophical theories of atomism and analyse the impact of an atomistic understanding of the world in flux on personal and collective identity. Montaigne may have turned to Lucretius as a form of so-called 'bibliotherapy', delving into the writing of the Epicurean poet in order to quell his fear of death. Indeed, he does accept Lucretius's view that death is nothing to us, carefully annotating this passage in Book III of his edition, and assimilating this view into his essay 'Que Philosopher c'est apprendre à mourir' (I, 19). For Montaigne, his fear of the moment of death is reduced by Lucretius's tenet that:

[B] La mort est moins à craindre que rien, s'il y avoit quelque chose de moins [...] [C] Elle ne vous concerne ny mort ny vif: vif, parce que vous estes: mort, par ce que vous n'estes plus. (I, 19, 95)

Montaigne does not, however, succeed in overcoming his fear of all that is symbolised by death. In his interpretation of *De rerum natura*, death equals the obliteration of one's memory, the dispersal of one's bodily atoms, and the destruction of one's soul. Death, for both Lucretius and Montaigne, therefore signifies the break in the continuity of being oneself. As Montaigne immerses himself in Lucretius's atomistic world and withholds judgement on

Lucretius's theory of the mortality of the soul, he develops the understanding that it is memory which provides the foundation for identity and serves as the connector for all the multiple forms that a person can take during their lifetime. As Montaigne studies the way that Lucretius treats death and the faculty of memory, he recognises the significance of Lucretius's neologisms for memory: *repetentia* and *retinentia*.<sup>335</sup> Montaigne utilizes Lambin's engagement with these terms and applies his own judgement in order to establish that whilst both words can be defined as *memoria*, each term describes a particular facet of the faculty of memory. *Repetentia*, as we have seen in Chapter Two, is interpreted as the constant remembering and recording of experiences which takes place both consciously and subconsciously, whereas *retinentia* refers to the storehouse or container of memory, in which all recorded memories, judgements, thoughts and experiences are stored. *Retinentia* correlates with the model of memory common in antiquity, that is, of memory as a storehouse in which one consciously places one's memories and which one can access through the cognitive process of remembering. In Montaigne's interpretation of Lucretius, death destroys the storehouse of memory (*retinentia*) and permanently interrupts the remembering process of the faculty of memory (*repetentia*).

In the *Essais*, Montaigne builds on the Lucretian model of memory, and engages with alternative approaches to memory, such as the model of memory as a wax tablet, popularised by Plato's *Theatetus*, in order to develop his own, dynamic understanding of the faculty of memory and the role of memory in establishing personal identity. Indeed, Montaigne incorporates the Lucretian models of memory in his own model, and establishes the interdependency of the storehouse of memory and the tool of memory, which must always function in tandem.

---

<sup>335</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, III, 674-6, III, 847-851.

The models of storehouse and tool which Montaigne establishes for memory are thrown into question by his riding accident, in which his faculty of memory does not function in the same way that memory normally functions. Montaigne's memory does not seem to record the event at first, and he is not able to recall his experience from his memory store. Montaigne's riding accident is a near-death experience, which simulates the interruption to life ('vitae pausam') in Lucretian philosophy which occurs in the moment of death. Furthermore, this thesis considers Montaigne's riding accident and its consequences to be an experience of trauma. Montaigne's response to the accident is that of a trauma survivor, who experiences a gap in their memory of the traumatic event, which Caruth defines as an 'unclaimed experience.'<sup>336</sup> There is a delay in the process of remembering, because the trauma survivor cannot grasp their memory as it remains out of reach and 'unclaimed'; in this way, trauma both demands and defies witness. Montaigne's memory of the accident returns through a traumatic re-living, but it is through writing and re-recording his experience that he is able to re-situate the details of the accident in his memory. Montaigne's writing of his trauma allows his memory to re-process the accident and its aftermath, papering over the gap in his memory, and thus, allowing his judgement to treat the experience in order to assimilate it to his memory and identity.

As Montaigne justifies writing the accident in 'De l'exercitation', he equally justifies the essay project as a whole and the creation of another version of his self. Montaigne's traumatic experience is therefore an originary moment for the essay project, as he is forced to rethink memory and draws the conclusion that writing offers a defence against the threats of memory. Hence, the project has memorialisation as its aim: first, to preserve Montaigne's memory and, second, to project a memory of Montaigne beyond his death. As a result of

---

<sup>336</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 152.

Montaigne observing and recording his self, he also observes others, and as text holds the privileged ability of preserving the memory of someone or something, Montaigne is able to protect the memory of others, and of the collective, through his writing. For example, Montaigne preserves and projects the image of Etienne de La Boétie, not only as a response to the threat that La Boétie might be forgotten, but in response to threats to one's posterity or legacy. (I, 28, 194-95). Despite Montaigne's claim that the essays are intended to preserve La Boetié's memory and arguments that La Boetié's death is an originary point for Montaigne writing the *Essais*,<sup>337</sup> the primary aim of the *Essais* is to preserve his own memory, to project a version of himself which is both true to himself and will endure. Montaigne makes this aim for his project clear in 'Au lecteur', when he writes:

[A] Je l'ay voué à la commodité particuliere de mes parens et amis: à ce que m'ayant perdu (ce qu'ils ont à faire bien tôt) ils y puissent retrouver aucuns traits de mes conditions et humeurs, et que par ce moyen ils nourrissent plus entiere et plus vifve, la connoissance qu'ils ont eu de moy. (Au lecteur, 3).

The essays are written in the imposing shadow of death and the threats posed by death to memory and identity. Writing is a response to the impending destruction of one's memory and one's identity. Death in Lucretian philosophy marks the destruction of memory and the dispersal of the atoms which form one's being, but a textual self is able to withstand this destruction. In his letter to Madame de Duras which is inserted in the final essay of the first edition, 'De la Ressemblance des Enfans aux Peres', Montaigne explains his personal aims and hopes for the *Essais*:

je ne veux tirer de ces escrits sinon qu'ils me representent à vostre memoire au naturel. [...] Madame, avec beaucoup plus d'honneur et de courtoisie qu'elles ne

---

<sup>337</sup> Hoffmann, 'Montaigne, Lear and the Question of Afterlife', p. 170.

meritent, je les veux loger (mais sans alteration et changement) en un corps solide qui puisse durer quelques années ou quelques jours apres moy. (II, 37, 783)

Montaigne expresses a hope and a need that he will be remembered by his friends, indeed he even hopes that they will maintain their friendship with him after his death and continue to meet him through his book. The *Essais* are the ‘corps solide’ in which Montaigne stores the memory of his personality and his traits, and thus, the *Essais* take the form of an external, prosthetic memory. Montaigne describes the *Essais* as ‘[C] [un] livre consubstantiel à son auteur, d'une occupation propre, membre de ma vie’ (II, 18, 665). Montaigne’s book may be of the same substance as its author, but its author will eventually die, whereas the book is not subject to such temporal limitations, and the memories which it contains will endure beyond living memory, for as long as it is read. Montaigne, the writer, will die, but the Montaigne that each reader constructs from the memories in his book will endure.

Furthermore, as one reads the *Essais*, there is a double-play of remembrance and forgetting. The writer is constantly ‘remembering himself’ to his second self and to the reader, and if Montaigne’s can be said to have a ‘leaky’ memory, he also forgets himself *into* his text and *to* his reader. Moreover, as one witnesses the additions and re-writing of the self in the various intercalations, one observes Montaigne observing the changes in himself and how he remembers his experiences whilst he writes.

It is through these changes that he witnesses in himself as he writes and re-writes the *Essais* that Montaigne is also drawn to the question of identity and the sense of the self in ‘De la vanité’ (III, 9). Montaigne underlines his conviction that, despite the additions in later editions, ‘mon livre est tousjours un’ (III, 9, 964). Montaigne sets this unity or continuity in opposition to his self, which has changed over the course of the years spent writing the *Essais*:

[C] Mes premières publications furent l'an mille cinq cens quatre vingts. Depuis d'un long traict de temps je suis envieilli, mais assagi je ne le suis certes pas d'un pouce. Moy à cette heure et moy tantost sommes bien deux; mais quand meilleur, je n'en puis rien dire.

It is memory that connects the multiplicity of versions of Montaigne's self that exist throughout his life; Montaigne is who he is because he remembers who he is. Furthermore, the preservation of memories in the pages of the *Essais* binds together the Montaigne who is editing the *Exemplaire de Bordeaux* and the Montaigne who wrote the first edition before 1580.

When Montaigne writes ‘à faute de mémoire naturelle, j’en forge de papier’ (III, 13, 1092), he is writing specifically about ensuring that he is able to remember the symptoms of past illnesses in order to temper his fear of present or future symptoms, applying his concept of memory as a tool through which one can make educated judgements. This image of the essays as a “paper memory” encapsulates far more than Montaigne’s immediate meaning in ‘De l’expérience’. The essays are not just a ‘paper memory’ written to record Montaigne’s memories in case his weak memory betrays him; they are a representation of himself, prepared in response to the impending destruction of his identity in order to ensure that his legacy endures into posterity.

The psychotherapist Irvin Yalom recognises that:

Some day soon, perhaps in forty years, there will be no one alive who has ever known me. That's when I will be truly dead – when I exist in no one's memory. I thought a lot about how someone very old is the last living individual to have known some

person or cluster of people. When that person dies, the whole cluster dies, too, vanishes from the living memory. I wonder who that person will be for me. Whose death will make me truly dead? <sup>338</sup>

By creating a textual memory of himself, Montaigne ensures that the number of people who know his name and *remember* him only increases as the *Essais* are read and studied by future generations of readers, and moreover, the self memorialised in his *Essais* will always preserve his identity. Although there may not be the possibility of another Montaigne reforming through the fortuitous combination of atoms, the *Essais* ensure that Montaigne is re-born with each reading of his experiences, as the words which carry his memories into the future re-constitute his identity in the minds of his readers.

Montaigne not only inscribes his memories in his book, but he implants the memory of his self in the memory of his reader. The episodic memory of an other will always retain its otherness, but in the experience of reading and engaging with Montaigne through his recollections and judgements, his readers develop their own memory of experiencing Montaigne, and will remember reading the *Essais* and reading him.

---

<sup>338</sup> Irvin Yalom, *Love's Executioner and other Tales of Psychotherapy* (London: Penguin, 2013) Ebook, p. 192.

## Bibliography

### Primary sources

Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, trans. by W. H. D. Rouse, Loeb Classical Library edition (Cambridge, MA.; London: Harvard University Press, 2006).

Montaigne, Michel de, *Les Essais*, d'après l'Exemplaire de Bordeaux, ed. by P. Villey & V. Saulnier (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965).

Montaigne's own copy of Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. Denys Lambin (Paris: Roville, 1563/4),

<[http://www.bvh.univtours.fr/Consult/consult.asp?numtable=XULC\\_Montaigne\\_Lucrece1563&numfiche=764&mode=3&ecran=0&offset=10](http://www.bvh.univtours.fr/Consult/consult.asp?numtable=XULC_Montaigne_Lucrece1563&numfiche=764&mode=3&ecran=0&offset=10)> [accessed 2 October 2012].

Screech, M.A., *Montaigne's Annotated copy of Lucretius: a Transcription and Study of the Manuscript, Notes and Pen-Marks* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1998).

### General Bibliography

Anonymous, *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, n.d, published as *Ad C. Herennium de ratione dicendi*, trans. by H. Caplan, Loeb Classical Library edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954).

Argaud, Élodie, 'L'autre moitié du projet : enjeux philosophiques de l'édition du De rerum natura : Lombin et la dissensio sur le corps de l'âme', in *La Renaissance de Lucrèce*, ed. by Emmanuel Naya (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2010), pp. 47-58.

Assmann, Jan, 'Collective memory and cultural identity', *New German Critique*, 65 (1995), pp. 125-133.

Bailey, Cyril, *Titi Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Libri Sex*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947).

- - - -, *Titi Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Libri Sex*, Vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947).

- - - -, *Titi Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Libri Sex*, Vol. 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947).

Bakewell, Sarah, *How to Live: or a Life of Montaigne in One Question and Twenty Attempts at an Answer* (London, Vintage, 2011).

Balsamo, Jean, ‘Des *Essais* pour comprendre les guerres civiles’, *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (2010), pp. 521-540.

Benedict, Philip, ‘Shaping the Memory of the Wars of Religion: The First Centuries’, in *Memory before Modernity: Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Erika Kuijpers and others (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

Blair, Ann, ‘Reading Strategies for Coping with Information Overload ca. 1550-1700’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 64. No. 1 (January 2003), pp. 11-28.

Bodin, Jean, *Method for the Easy Comprehension of History*, trans. by Beatrice Reynolds (New York: Norton, 1969).

Bollack, Mayotte ‘Marulle ou la correction latine’ in *Penser entre les lignes: philologie et philosophie au Quattrocento*, ed. by Fosca Mariani-Zini (Villeneuve d’Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2001).

Brady, Andrea and Emily Butterworth, eds., *Uses of the Future in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Routledge, 2010).

Brown, Alison, *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2010).

Brush, Craig B., *From the Perspective of the Self: Montaigne’s Self-Portrait* (Bronx, New York: Fordham University Press, 1994)

Butterfield, David, *The Early Textual History of Lucretius’s ‘De rerum natura’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Butterworth, Emily, “‘Readie Money’: Conjectural History in Montaigne’s ‘De la Force de l’imagination’”, *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (2006), pp. 355-68.

- - - - ‘The Performance of Habit in Montaigne’s ‘De mesnager sa volonté’’, *French Studies*, Vol. 59, No. 2 (2005), pp. 145-157.

Calhoun, Alison, *Montaigne and the Lives of the Philosophers: Life writing and transversality in the ‘Essais’* (Maryland, University of Delaware Press, 2015).

Campbell, Gordon, *Lucretius on Creation and Evolution: A Commentary on De rerum natura 5. 772-1104* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Caruth, Cathy, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

- - - -, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996).

Cave, Terence, *How to Read Montaigne* (London: Granta, 2007).

- - - -, ‘Montaigne’, in *Proceedings of the British Academy, Volume 131, 2004 Lectures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 183-204.

- - - -, *Pré-histoires: textes troublés au seuil de la modernité* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1999).

- - - -, ‘Problems of Reading in the *Essais*’, in *Montaigne: Essays in the Memory of Richard Sayce*, ed. McFarlane and Maclean (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982)

- - - -, ‘Locating the Early Modern’, *Paragraph*, Vol. 29. No. 1 Theory and the Early Modern (March 2006), pp. 12-26.

Conche, Marcel, *Lettres et Maximes / Épicure* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1987).

Cooper, ‘Montaigne dans l’entourage de Maréchal de Matignon,’ *Montaigne Studies*, 13, 1-2 (2001), p. 99-140.

Crinitus, Petrus, *De poetis latinis* (Florence : Philipum Juntam, 1505).

Desan, Philippe ed., *Dictionnaire de Michel de Montaigne* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2004).

Diefendorf, Barbara B., ‘Waging Peace: Memory, Identity and the Edict of Nantes’, in *Religious Differences in France, Past and Present*, ed. by Kathleen P. Long (Missouri: Truman State University Press, 2006), pp. 50-81

Duval, Edwin M., ‘Lessons of the New World: Design and Meaning in Montaigne’s “Des cannibales” (I:31) and “Des coches” (III:6)’, *Yale French Studies*, 64, ‘Montaigne: Essays in Reading’ (1983), pp. 95-112.

- - - - ‘The Place of the Present: Ronsard, Aubigné and the “Misères de ce Temps”’, *Yale French Studies*, No. 80 (1991), pp. 13-29 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2930259>> [date accessed: 3 August 2015].

Éditions en ligne de l’École des chartres (ELEC), *Les édits de pacification*, online database <<http://elec.enc.sorbonne.fr/editsdepacification>> [accessed 23 October 2015]

Engel, William, ‘The Renaissance *Ars Memorativa* and Montaigne’s Scene of Writing’, in *The Order of Montaigne’s ‘Essays’*, ed. by Daniel Martin (Amherst: Hestia Press, 1989), pp. 33-49.

Marc Foglia, *Montaigne, pedagogue du jugement* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2011)

Ford, Philip, ‘Lucretius in Early Modern France’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius*, ed. by Stuart Gillespie and Philip Hardie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) pp. 227-241.

Ford, Philip and Kenny, Neil, eds., *La Librairie de Montaigne, Proceedings of the Tenth Cambridge French Colloquium, 2-4 September, 2008* (Cambridge: Cambridge French Colloquia, 2012).

Ford, Philip and Jondorf, Gillian, eds., *Montaigne in Cambridge – Proceedings of the Cambridge Montaigne Colloquium 7-9 April 1988* (Cambridge: Cambridge French Colloquia, 1989).

Fowler, Don, *Lucretius on Atomic motion: a Commentary on De rerum natura 2. 1-332* (New York, Oxford University Press: 2002).

Fowler, Elizabeth and Greene, Roland, *The Project of Prose in Early Modern Europe and the New World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Fraisse, Simone, *L’Epicurisme au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (published conference paper), *Actes du VIII<sup>e</sup> congrès de l’Association Guillaume Budé – Séance du lundi 8 avril 1968* – (Paris: 1969).

-- *L’influence de Lucrèce en France au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Saint-Brieuc: Presses bretonnes, 1962).

Frame, Donald M., *Montaigne's Discovery of Man: The Humanization of a Humanist* (Greenwood Publishing: New York, 1955).

- - - -, 'What Next in Montaigne Studies?', *The French Review*, Vol. 36. No. 6 (May, 1963), pp. 577-587.

Frampton, Saul, *When I Am Playing with my Cat, How do I Know She Is not Playing with Me?* (London, Faber, 2012).

Michael Frede, 'An Empiricist View of Knowledge: Memorism', in *Companions to Ancient Thought: Vol. 1, Epistemology*, ed. by Stephen Everson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

Friedrich, Hugo, *Montaigne* (California: University of California Press, 1991).

Freud, Sigmund, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. by John Reddick (London: Penguin, 2003).

Frisch, Andrea, 'Montaigne and the Ethics of Memory', *L'Esprit Créateur*, Vol. 46, Number 1 (Spring 2006), pp. 23-31.

- - - -, 'Montaigne and Memory' in *The Oxford Handbook of Montaigne*, ed. by Philip Desan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), Online publication date: Feb 2016 [accessed 12 March 2016].

- - - -, *The Invention of the Eye-witness: witnessing and testimony in Early Modern France* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004)

- - - -, *Forgetting Differences: Tragedy, Historiography, and the French Wars of Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015) Ebook.

Genette, Gérard, *Paratexts: The Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Gillespie, Stuart and Hardie, Philip, *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Gordon, Cosmo, *A Bibliography of Lucretius* (London: Rupert-Hart-Davis, 1962).

Goulbourne, Russell, ‘Conversations with the Dead in Early Modern France’, *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 108, No. 1 (January 2013), pp. 90-108.

Green, Felicity, ‘Montaigne and the Life of Freedom’ (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Greenblatt, Stephen, *The Swerve: How the Renaissance began* (London: The Bodley Head, 2011).

Greengrass, Mark, ‘Montaigne and the Wars of Religion’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Montaigne*, ed. by Philip Desan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), Online publication date: Feb 2016 [accessed 13 March 2016].

Greyson, Bruce, ‘Near-Death Experience: Clinical Implications’, *Archives of Clinical Psychiatry (São Paulo)*, 34 (Suppl. 1), 116-125.

<[http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S0101-60832007000700015&lng=en&tlang=en.10.1590/S0101-60832007000700015](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0101-60832007000700015&lng=en&tlang=en.10.1590/S0101-60832007000700015).> [accessed 27 May 2015].

Guild, Elizabeth, *Unsettling Montaigne: Poetics, Ethics and Affect in the ‘Essais’ and Other Writings* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2014).

Halbwachs, Maurice, *La mémoire collective* (Paris: Les presses universitaires de France, 1950)

- - - -, *On Collective Memory*, trans. by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

Hallie, Philip P., *The Scar of Montaigne* (Middleton, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1966).

Hamilton, Ross, *Accident: A Philosophical and Literary History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

Hartle, Ann, *Michel de Montaigne: Accidental Philosopher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Hirsch, Marianne, ‘Family Pictures: *Maus*, Mourning and Post-Memory’, *Discourse*, 15 (1992)

- - - -, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

Hayles, N. Katherine, ed., *Chaos and Order: Complex Dynamics in Literature and Science* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

Helgeson, James, ‘Early Modernity without the “Self”: notes on anachronism and the First Person’, *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*. 29, 1 (2007), pp. 29-39.

Heitsch, Dorotea B., *Practising Reform in Montaigne’s ‘Essais’* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2000).

Hodges, Elizabeth, ‘The Will Not To Forget’, in *Memory and Community in Sixteenth-Century France*, ed. by David LaGuardia and Cathy Yandell (Oxford: Routledge, 2016).

Hoffmann, George, *Montaigne’s career* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)

- - - -, ‘Montaigne, Lear and the Question of Afterlife’, *Actes des congrès de la Société française Shakespeare*, 21 (2004), pp. 155-173.

- - - - ‘The Investigation on Nature,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Montaigne*, ed. by Ulrich Langer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) pp. 163-183.

Holland, Anna and Scholar, Richard, eds., *Pre-histories and Afterlives: Studies in Critical Method for Terence Cave* (London: Legenda, 2009).

Holyoake, John, *Contextual and thematic interference in Montaigne’s ‘Essais’* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1986).

- - - -, *Montaigne, Essais* (London: Grant and Cutler, 1983).

- - - -, ‘Montaigne’s Attitude to Memory’, *French Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (July 1971) pp. 257-70.

- - - -, ‘The Idea of ‘Jugement’ in Montaigne’, *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (April, 1968), pp. 340-51.

Keightley, Emily and Pickering, Michael, *The Mnemonic Imagination: Remembering as Creative Practice* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). Ebook.

Knecht, Robert, *The French Religious Wars 1562-1598* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2014) Ebook.

La Capra, Dominic, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014). Ebook.

La Charité, Raymond C. (ed.), *O un amy! Essays on Montaigne in Honor of Donald M. Frame* (Lexington, Ky.: French Forum, c.1977).

LaGuardia, David, and Yandell, Cathy, eds., *Memory and Community in Sixteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Routledge, 2016).

Langer, Ulrich, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Montaigne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

La Planche, Louis Regnier de, *L'histoire de l'estat de France tant de la republique que de la religion sous le règne de François II* (Paris: M.E. Mennechet, 1836)

Legros, Alain, *Montaigne manuscrit* (Paris: Classiques Garnier 2010).

- - -, *Essais sur poutres: peintures et inscriptions chez Montaigne* (Paris: Klincksieck, 2001).

Lestringant, Frank, *La renaissance de Lucrèce* (Paris: Presse Universitaire Paris-Sorbonne, 2010).

Lewis, C.S., *The Discarded Image: an Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967).

Long, Kathleen P., ed., *Religious Differences in France, Past and Present* (Missouri: Truman State University Press, 2006)

Losse, Deborah, *Montaigne and the Brief Narrative Form: Shaping the Essay* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)

Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Pietro Candido (Florence: Giunti, 1512).

- - -, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Johannes Baptista Pius (Paris: Parvus; Ascencius, 1514).

- - -, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Andreas Navagero (Venice: Aldus, 1515).

- - - -, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Andreas Navagero (Lyon: Gryphius, 1534).

- - - -, *De rerum natura*, ed. by Obert van Giffen (Antwerp: Plantin, 1565/6).

- - - -, *On the Nature of the Universe*, trans. by Ronald Latham (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1951).

- - - -, *De rerum natura libri sex*, trans. by H. A. J. Munro (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell & co., 1886).

Lyons, John D., *Exemplum: The Rhetoric of Example in Early Modern France and Italy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989).

- - - ‘Montaigne and History’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Montaigne*, ed. by Philip Desan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), Online publication date: Feb 2016 [accessed 13 March 2016].

Mack, Peter, *Reading and Rhetoric in Montaigne and Shakespeare* (London: Bloomsbury Academic Publishing, 2010).

Maclean, Ian and McFarlane, I.D., eds., *Montaigne: Essays in the Memory of Richard Sayce* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

Maclean, Ian, “‘Le païs au-dèla’: Montaigne and Philosophical Speculation”, in *Montaigne: Essays in the Memory of Richard Sayce*, ed. by Ian Maclean and I. D. McFarlane (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

Maclean, Ian, *Montaigne Philosophe* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996).

MacPhail, Eric, ‘In the Wake of Solon: Memory and Modernity in the Essays of Montaigne’, *MLN*, 113, 4 (1998) pp. 881-896.

- - - -, ‘Montaigne and the critique of novelty’, *Esprit Généreux, Esprit Pantagruélique: Essays by His Students in Honor of François Rigolot*, ed. by Reinier Leushuis and Zahi Zalloua (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2008), pp. 247-258.

Martin, Daniel, *Montaigne et la Fortune: essai sur le hasard et le langage* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1977).

Matthieu-Castellani, Gisèle, *Montaigne: L'écriture de l'essai* (Paris: Presse Universitaires de France, 1988).

- - -, ‘Portrait de l’artiste en historien: Montaigne et Plutarque’, *Montaigne Studies*, 6, 1-2 (1994), pp. 7-16.

McKinley, Mary, *Words in a Corner: Studies in Montaigne’s Latin Quotations* (Lexington, Ky.: French Forum, 1981).

Menager, Daniel, ‘Les citations de Lucrèce chez Montaigne’ in *Montaigne in Cambridge – Proceedings of the Cambridge Montaigne Colloquium 7-9 April 1988*, ed. by Philip Ford and Gillian Jondorf (Cambridge: Cambridge French Colloquia, 1989).

Montaigne, Michel de, *Journal de Voyage*, ed. Garavini, Fausta (Paris: Gallimard, 1983).

Moriarty, Michael, *Disguised Vices: Theories of Virtue in Early Modern French Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

- - -, ‘Theory and the Early Modern: Some Notes on a Difficult Relationship’, *Paragraph*, Vol. 29, No. 1. Theory and the Early Modern (March 2006), pp. 1-11.

Mourgues, Odette de, *Two French Moralists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

Nakam, Geralde, *Montaigne et son temps: les événements et les ‘Essais’* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1993).

Naya, Emmanuel, ed., *La Renaissance de Lucrèce* (Paris: Presses de l’Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2010).

Norman, Buford, ed., *Religion and French Literature (The French Literature Series Volume XXV)* (Atlanta: Editions Rodopi, 1998) Ebook.

- - Rigolot, François, ‘French Renaissance Writers and the Wars of Religion: Ronsard, Montaigne and d’Aubigné’ in *Religion and French Literature* (Atlanta: Editions Rodopi, 1998) Ebook.

Nussbaum, Martha, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

O'Brien, John, 'Le Lucrèce de Denys Lambin: entre revendication et prudence,' in *La Renaissance de Lucrèce*, ed. by Emmanuel Naya (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2010), pp. 35-46.

- - - -, 'Critical Distance', *Paragraph*, Vol. 29. No. 1 Theory and the Early Modern (March 2006), pp. 108-119.

Palmer, Ada, 'Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 73, 3 (2012), pp. 395-416.

- - - -, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014)

Paradin, Claude, *Devises heroïques* (1557).

- - - -, *Devises heroïques*, online database,  
<<http://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/french/contents.php?id=FPAb>> [accessed 3 June 2014]

Passannante, Gerard, *The Lucretian Renaissance: Philology and the Afterlife of Tradition* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

Plato, *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 12, trans. by Harold N. Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1921).

Prosperi, Valentina, 'Lucretius in the Italian Renaissance', in *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius*, ed. by Stuart Gillespie & Philip Hardie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) pp. 214-226.

Regosin, Richard L., *The Matter of My Book: Montaigne's 'Essais' as the Book of the Self* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1997).

- - - -, 'The Text of Memory: Experience as Narration in Montaigne's 'Essai'', in *Montaigne: Montaigne's Message and Method*, ed. by Dikka Berven (New York: Garland, 1995).

- - - -, ‘Recent Trends in Montaigne Scholarship: A Post-Structuralist Perspective’ in *Montaigne: A Collection of Essays: Sources of Montaigne’s Thought (Volume II)*, ed. by Dikka Berven (Garland Publishers: New York, 1995).
- Rendall, Steven, *Distinguo: Reading Montaigne Differently* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).
- Ricoeur, Paul, *La mémoire, l’histoire, l’oubli* (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 2000).
- - - -, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006)
- Pierre de Ronsard, *Discours des misères de ces temps*, ed. Malcolm Smith (Geneva: Droz, 1979).
- Russell, Nicolas, *Transformations of Memory and Forgetting in Sixteenth-Century France: Marguerite de Navarre, Pierre de Ronsard and Michel de Montaigne* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011) Ebook.
- - - - ‘Collective Memory Before and After Halbwachs’, in *The French Review*, 79, 4 (2006), pp. 792-804.
- Scholar, Richard, *Montaigne and the Art of Free-thinking* (Oxford, Peter Lang, 2010).
- - - -, ‘Montaigne’s Forays into the Undiscovered Country’ in *Uses of the Future in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Andrea Brady and Emily Butterworth (Oxford: Routledge, 2010).
- - - -, ‘Two Cheers for Free-Thinking’, *Paragraph*, Vol. 29. No. 1 Theory and the Early Modern (March 2006), pp. 40-52.
- Schlossman, Beryl, ‘From La Boétie to Montaigne: The Place of the Text’, *MLN*, Vol. 98, No. 5, Comparative Literature (Dec., 1983), pp. 891-909.
- Screech, M.A. (trans.), *Michel de Montaigne: The Complete Essays* (London: Penguin, 2003).
- - - -, *Montaigne and Melancholy: the Wisdom of the Essays* (London: Penguin, 1991).

Segal, Charles, *Lucretius on Death and Anxiety: Poetry and philosophy in ‘De rerum natura’* (Oxford; New Jersey: Princeton University Press: 1990).

Sellevold, Kirsti, *J'aime ces mots: Expressions linguistiques de doute dans les ‘Essais’ de Montaigne* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2004).

Serrès, Michel, *The Birth of Physics*, trans. by Jack Hawkes (Manchester: Clinamen, 2000).

Shearin, W.H., *The Language of Atoms: Performativity and Politics in Lucretius’ ‘De rerum natura’* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Starobinski, Jean, *Montaigne en mouvement* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982).

- - - -, *Montaigne in Motion*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

Smith, Malcolm, *Montaigne and the Roman Censors* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1981).

- - - -, ‘Lost Writings of Montaigne’, *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance*, XLIX, 2 (1987), pp. 309-318.

Stevens, Linton C., ‘Denis Lambin: Humanist, Courtier, Philologist and Lecteur Royal’, *Studies in the Renaissance*, Vol. 9 (1962) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2857118>> [date accessed: 15 February 2013].

Suetonius, *The Life of Caesar*, LVI, 4, trans. by J. C. Rolfe (London: Harvard University Press, 1913).

Tasso, Torquato, *Gerusalemme liberata*, trans. by Anthony M. Esolen (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

Tournon, André, *Montaigne: la glose et l’essai* (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1983).

- - - -, ‘Routes par ailleurs’: le ‘nouveau langage’ des Essais (Paris: Champion, 2006)

Wilson, John P. and Keane, Terence M., eds., *Assessing Psychological Trauma and PTSD* (New York: Guildford Press, 2004).

Wilson, Catherine, *Epicureanism at the Origins of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Villey, Pierre, *Les sources et l'évolution des 'Essais'* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1908).

Warren, James, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

Wolfe, Michael, ed., *Changing Identities in Early Modern France* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 1997).

Irvin Yalom, *Love's Executioner and other Tales of Psychotherapy* (London: Penguin, 2013) Ebook.

Yates, Francis, *The Art of Memory* (New York: Random House, 2011).

Zalloua, Zahi, ed., *Montaigne after Theory / Theory after Montaigne* (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2009).