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ON BEING TONGUE-TIED: *FRANCHISE*, FLUENCY, AND PRECARITY IN MONTAIGNE'S 'DE LA VANITÉ'

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ABSTRACT

Drawing attention to a key but overlooked moment in Montaigne's 'De la vanité', this article interrogates the relationship between two aspects of the essayist's 'franchise': his personal freedom and his frank, direct speech. It offers a reading that runs counter to Montaigne's self-characterization as 'le plus libre et moins endebté' person he knows, underscoring the precarity of his 'franchise' and his anxieties surrounding it. In this context, 'franchise' is shown to be hemmed in by a cluster of obligations, even as the essayist seeks to escape them. In contrast to the critical interest in Montaigne's reflections on free-thinkers and courageous speakers, including Socrates, Seneca and Cato the Younger, and complementing studies that have highlighted the motif of babble and loquacity in the *Essais*, this article focuses on Montaigne seeing himself in a frightful inversion of 'franchise': the looking glass of Lyncestes and the story of his death as a consequence of his disfluency. Reading 'franchise' in this light helps us to learn what Montaigne considered one of the first lessons worth learning: the difference between 'liberté' and 'licence'.

Keywords: Montaigne; free speech; liberty; licence; speechlessness; aphasia; affect; precarity; fortune

On the last day of June, 1587, Montaigne found himself to have been caught, 'pris' [taken]. He had spent much of the winter wandering the roads of France, searching 'miserablement' [miserably] for some 'retraicte pour [sa] famille' [retreat for [his] family].[1] The siege of Castillon the previous summer, just a few kilometres from his chateau, along with the 'peste vehemente' ['plague of the utmost virulence'] that came with it meant that even 'la veue de [sa] maison estoit effroiable' (*LE*, III.12.1047–48) ['the sight of my house was frightful'] (*CE*, 801).[2] Forced to abandon his home, Montaigne led his family – 'une famille esgarée' (*LE*, III.12.1048) ['a family astray'] (*CE*, 801) – from temporary refuge to temporary refuge, relying on friends and patrons to support him through his misfortune: 'Pour se laisser tomber à plomb, et de si haut, il faut que ce soit entre les bras d'une affection solide, vigoreuse et fortunée; elles sont rares, s'il y en a' (*LE*, III.12.1045) ['To let oneself fall plumb down

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and from such a height, it must be into the arms of an affection solid, vigorous, and favoured by fortune; these are rare, if there are any'] (*CE*, 799).

By summer, he had returned home where he concluded work on the forthcoming, expanded edition of his *Essais* which would be published in Paris the following year. It was in the course of this work that Montaigne found himself 'pris' not by sickness or by a political enemy (it would be another year before he was arrested and held in the Bastille as a prisoner of the Catholic League) but by a 'bon auteur' [good author], Quintus Curtius. 'Je commençai à le lire', he notes, 'fortuitement convié par la beauté de la lettre, seulement pour entamer' [I began reading it, invited in by chance by the beauty of the typography, simply to sample it].[3] Fortune led him to his author and, immediately, 'je m'y pris par sa beauté' [I was taken by its beauty]:[4]

C'est un très bon auteur. J'en ai vu plusieurs qui ont écrit d'Alexandre, et expressément et en passant, nul à mon gré si bien, ni plus pleinement, ni vraisemblablement. [...] L'air de son éloquence retire au temps des premiers empereurs romains. L'esprit vif, pointu, gentil [...]. Le parler brusque. Le jugement mûr et juste. Après que je l'eus entamé, je le lus en trois jours, moi qui n'avais il y a dix ans lu un livre une heure de suite. Achevé de lire le 2 juillet 1587.[5]

[He is a very good author. I have seen many who have written about Alexander, both principally and in passing; none, in my opinion, so well, nor so fully and truthfully. [...] The style of his eloquence resembles [that of] the age of the first Roman emperors. A lively, sharp spirit, refined. [...] An abrupt way of speaking. A well-developed, just judgement. After I had sampled it, I read it in three days, me who in ten years has not read a book for an hour at a time. Finished reading 2 July 1587.]

Montaigne records this judgement of Quintus Curtius and his account of enraptured, uncharacteristically fluent reading on the last page of his 1545 copy of the *De rebus gestis Alexandri Magni* [*History of Alexander*].[6] He had noted some years earlier, in his chapter 'Des livres', his custom of summarizing his impressions of an author at the end of each book (*LE*, II.10.418; *CE*, 305). But the account of reading Quintus Curtius is valuable not simply as an illustration of this habit. The assessment itself is notable for highlighting the harmony of thought and expression, speech and character, that qualifies Quintus as a 'bon auteur', one who speaks 'pleinement' and 'vraisemblablement': his 'eloquence' reveals an 'esprit vif' and 'pointu'; his 'parler brusque' reflects a 'jugement mûr'. It is that harmony of style and judgement that attracts Montaigne, almost without his consent. Stumbling onto the book, 'fortuitement convié' [invited in by chance] by its elegant typography, he found himself taken up by it almost immediately: what had begun as a casual sampling had slipped imperceptibly into a full and absorbed consumption.

Montaigne's comments and pen marks in the margins of the *De rebus gestis Alexandri Magni* reflect the speed of his reading: they are, at most, cursory summaries, no more than a couple of words; more often, they are limited to vertical or horizontal strokes. But a number of stories and examples, along with seven quotations, worked their way into the text of the *Essais*.[7] This article considers one such anecdote, a short passage of just five lines in Quintus Curtius' Latin discussed by

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Montaigne in 'De la vanité', in order to reconsider some aspects of the essayist's reflections on, and anxieties about, fluency, fortune and freedom. Drawing attention to a scene overlooked by most commentators that sets up some of the most well-known pages of the *Essais*, it asks how Montaigne understands 'franchise', that strange, polymorphous concept that encapsulates, on the one hand, personal freedom, interpersonal relationships, politics and society and, on the other, a particular style of speech, one that is 'free' or 'frank'. As an indicator of the conceptual richness of this word, we might just point to Randle Cotgrave's attempt to translate it in his 1611 *Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues*: to be 'franc' is to be 'at libertie; subject unto no man' as well as 'plaine', 'open-hearted', 'sincere, honest'; it is to be 'bold, courageous' but it is also, more surprisingly, to be 'courteous, gracious'; at once 'tame, natural, kindlie' and 'valiant, hardie, forward'.[8]

Threats to free speech and the threats that emerge from speaking freely hang over the *Essais* from the very beginning: Montaigne's introductory declaration of 'bonne foy' [good faith] is followed by a number of early chapters on the dangers of ill-timed negotiation in military settings and the dangers of speaking too early or too late.[9] 'Du parler prompt ou tardif' ['Of Prompt or Slow Speech'] in particular underscores the vulnerability that comes with finding oneself 'speechless': noting that those who are adept at speaking off the cuff, who have 'le boute-hors si aisé' [a very easy, quick delivery], are suited to the legal profession while those who need rather to patiently work up a speech make better preachers, Montaigne recalls the unfortunate case of Guillaume Poyet, president of the Parlement of Paris, who, having diligently prepared a speech to deliver before the king and a host of foreign dignitaries, was told at the last minute that the argument he would have to make should be 'tout autre' [wholly different] from the one he prepared. Feeling himself 'incapable' to 'promptement refaire un autre' (*LE*, I.10.39) [draft another promptly] (*CE*, 25–26), he was forced to hand over the task to a clergyman, Cardinal du Bellay.

'Franchise' – fluent, frank, free speech – and its relationship to freedom constitutes one of Montaigne's principal concerns. Rather than attempting a holistic, totalizing answer to the question of how these forms of liberty relate to one another, this study looks rather to destabilize some recent and longer-standing approaches to freedom in (and around) the *Essais* to show that 'franchise' is itself, for Montaigne, precarious and unstable, threatening to collapse into obligation and disfluency.

'Franchise': Freedom and free speech

'De la vanité' is a chapter concerned overwhelmingly with establishing Montaigne's persona as a free man. He is free at home and abroad; a man who tries to live without obligations to others and to depend on no one but himself: 'Les princes me donent prou s'ils ne m'ostent rien, et me font assez de bien quand ils ne font point de mal. [...] J'essaye à n'avoir expres besoing de nul' (*LE*, III.9.968) ['Princes give me much if they take nothing from me and do me enough good when they do me no harm. I try to have no express need of anyone'] (*CE*, 739–40). The chapter ends with a transcription of his 'bulle authentique de bourgeoisie Romaine' (*LE*, III.9.999)

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['authentic bull of Roman citizenship'] (*CE*, 764–65), a performance, no doubt, of his titular theme, but also, as Jean Balsamo has argued, one that valorizes an honour that is 'vain' in a more specific, legal sense – it gives no material reward but asks for nothing in return either; it is a 'marque d'honneur, non pas récompense mais distinction' [mark of honour, not recompense but distinction].[10]

Here and elsewhere in the *Essais*, we find a way of thinking closely related to what Quentin Skinner, a quarter century ago, called a 'neo-Roman' concept of liberty. For Skinner's neo-Romans, what makes us free is not the absence of constraint or interference (this is not Isaiah Berlin's negative concept of liberty); rather, we are free if and only if we live under our own jurisdiction and not in servitude to, or dependant on another (a prince, a sovereign, a master). (Montaigne's forced *vagabondage* in the winter of 1586–87 is a particularly acute moment of such servitude and dependency.)[11] As Skinner shows clearly, servitude is defined not by a constraint of action – a benevolent or absent master might leave a slave to act as they like – but by living subject to the 'will' or 'goodwill' of someone else: one's actions do not need actually to be curtailed for one to be unfree; 'You will also be rendered unfree if you merely fall into a condition of political subjection or dependence'.[12]

Montaigne's engagement with this model of freedom is well established and has formed the basis for a series of recent approaches to the *Essais* as a tool of political manoeuvring as much as a reflection on and of major concepts such as freedom and servitude.[13] Scholarship has also, in recent years, paid significant attention to a very different model of freedom in the *Essais*: Montaigne's 'franc-parler', his parrhesia.[14] This article considers a key moment in which Montaigne reflects on an ancient patron and his last words in order to ask just how free his 'franc-parler' really is, to ask where that freedom comes from, and how his status as a free man relates to his characteristically free or 'frank' way of speaking. Here, he sketches out a counter-intuitive relationship between oral and moral freedom and, in the process, finds those freedoms to be precarious at best and possibly elusive. This is an image of the essayist quite unlike the familiar portrait of a free nobleman thinking and speaking freely: thinking with Quintus Curtius, Montaigne fears that he might be 'pris', caught in a bind.

What emerges from centring our analysis on this passage from 'De la vanité' is an understanding that challenges and complicates the sense of Montaigne as *parrhesiastes* such that frank or free speech in this particular corner of early modern France is characterized not by 'courage' but care and anxiety, guaranteed not by *persona* and *ethos* but fortune and circumstance and marked not by robust strength and independence but precarity and an appeal for licence.[15]

Fears of being tongue-tied

'Je ne lis jamais cette histoire', notes Montaigne, 'que je ne m'en offence, d'un ressentiment propre et naturel' (*LE*, III.9.962) [I never read the following story without being struck myself by a personal and natural sting] (*CE*, 735).[16] Anticipating the story itself, Montaigne primes his reader to reproduce his affective and embodied

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trepidation. The ancient patron that Montaigne invokes here is not Cato the Younger, Seneca or Socrates, famous for their courageous speeches and final moments, their expressions (verbal and non-verbal) of liberty in the face of violence, misfortune and death. Rather, his 'histoire' recounts the death of Alexander Lyncestes, who died babbling, tongue-tied and unable to speak 'freely'.

Lyncestes, Montaigne tells us, 'accusé de conjuration contre Alexandre' ['accused of conspiracy against Alexander'], was brought before the army 'pour estre ouy en ses deffences' (*LE*, III.9.962) ['to be heard in his own defence'] (*CE*, 735). He had been held a prisoner for three years and had spent that time preparing his defence but the moment he was asked to speak, he found himself tongue-tied: '[il] avoit en sa teste une harangue estudiée [...] de laquelle tout hesitant et begayant il prononça quelques paroles' (*LE*, III.9.962) ['[he] had in his head a studied oration [...] of which, all hesitating and stammering, he pronounced a few words'] (*CE*, 735)]:

> Comme il se troubloit de plus en plus, ce pendant qu'il luicte avec sa mémoire et qu'il la retaste, le voilà chargé et tué à coups de pique par les soldats qui luy estoient plus voisins, le tenant pour convaincu. (*LE*, III.9.962)
>
> [As he became more and more confused, fumbling and struggling with his memory, he was suddenly struck dead by blows from the pikes of the nearest soldiers who believed he had convicted himself.][17] (*CE*, 735)

His inability to speak freely was taken as a clear sign of his guilt by the soldiers (who occupied the roles of judge, jury and executioner, as well as being guards) and 'son estonnement et son silence leur servit de confession' ['his confusion and his silence was to them as good as a confession']: 'c'est la conscience', they argue, 'qui luy bride la langue et luy oste la force' (*LE*, III.9.962) ['it was his conscience that tied his tongue and took away his strength'] (*CE*, 735).

Montaigne has been reading – and compulsively re-reading, it would seem ('Je ne lis jamais cette histoire que je ne m'en offence' (*LE*, III.9.962) [I never read the following story without being struck myself by it] (*CE*, 735) – the opening of the seventh book of Quintus Curtius' history.[18] What seizes Montaigne's attention here is not, as one might expect, the matter of Lyncestes' guilt or otherwise. The fact that he is tried and executed for plotting the assassination of a king might have been worthy of comment in the febrile years of Henri III's reign (the king would in fact be assassinated in 1589, the year after this chapter was published). Indeed, Montaigne discussed a similar though much more recent example in a passage from a different chapter also first published in 1588: the assassination of François, Duc de Guise, in 1563. In both cases, Montaigne fixates on the man transfixed and tongue-tied; he notes how the modern assassin, dumbstruck, fails even to flee: 'il se transit et s'enyvra de son sens et à conduire sa fuite, et à conduire sa langue en ses responses' (*LE*, II.29.711) ['he lost his head and completely confused his wits in both managing his flight and managing his tongue when answering questions'] (*CE*, 538). Pierre de Brantôme, Montaigne's source, tells the story quite differently: the assassin, Poltrot de Méré flees and runs through the night only to find himself much closer to the Guise camp than he thought. He is promptly caught and 'confessa tout' [confessed everything] – though

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his confessions are inconsistent ('il varioit et tergiversoit fort, tant en ses interroguations qu'en ses dires de la gesne' [he changed his answers and hesitated a lot, both under interrogation and under torture]).[19] In Montaigne's version, this babbling becomes a sort of transfixed rootedness ('il se transit') in which the failure to flee is mirrored in a discursive fixity that invites comparison with the stammering, 'begayant' Lyncestes.

What is clear in the passage from 'De la vanité' is Montaigne's interest in affect or what might be called the power of passions and the imagination.[20] He scoffs at the reasoning of Lyncestes' executioners: 'Vrayment c'est bien dict!' ['That certainly was good reasoning!'] (*LE*, III.9.962–63), he says ironically of their argument that 'conscience' 'bride la langue' ['tied his tongue'] (*CE*, 735). He turns our attention instead to something we might think of as stage-fright: 'Le lieu estonne, l'assistance, l'expectation, lors mesme qu'il n'y va que de l'ambition de bien dire' (*LE*, II.9.962–63) ['The place, the audience, the anticipation, daze a man even when nothing is at stake but the ambition to speak well'] (*CE*, 735). Significantly, Lyncestes' anxiety is echoed by Montaigne's own: he implies that he reads the story, or at least stumbles across it, repeatedly and each time feels its sting: 'un ressentiment propre et naturel'. Immediately before this, and in a broader dismissal of his faulty 'mémoire' to which I will return shortly, he notes that, 'au lieu que les autres cerchent temps et occasion de penser à ce qu'ils ont à dire, je fuye à me preparer, de *peur* de m'attacher à quelque obligation de laquelle j'aye à despendre' (*LE*, III.9.962) [whereas others seek time and opportunity to think over what they have to say, I shall have to avoid any preparation, for *fear* of binding myself to some obligation on which I should be dependent] (*CE*, 735) (my emphasis).

In both Montaigne's account of Lyncestes and in his affective response to the story, the figure of the 'bound tongue' is not the antithesis of the unbridled, unruly tongue of *garrulitas*, the moral vice of prattling and the loose talk of 'plaisants causeurs' (*LE*, III.11.1026) [comical prattlers] (*CE*, 785).[21] Nor does it serve as an analogue to the judicious holding of one's tongue, the kairetic seizing of the moment to remain silent that is often just as important as grasping the chance to speak. Montaigne discusses this judicious silence explicitly in his chapter on 'l'incommodité de la grandeur' [the disadvantage of greatness], which is that princes are treated with kid gloves by their opponents, whether in the joust, in debate, or in any other combative engagement: 'Auguste escrivit des vers contre Asinius Pollio: Et moy, dict Pollio, je me tais; ce n'est pas sagesse d'escrire à l'envy de celui qui peut proscrire. Et avoyent raison' (*LE*, III.7.920) ['Augustus wrote some verses against Asinius Pollio: "And I", said Pollio, "am keeping quiet; it is not wise to be a scribe against a man who can proscribe". And they were right'] (*CE*, 702–03).

Rather, the account of Lyncestes describes a psychosomatic 'freezing up' in which one's speech and tongue become unfree not as a mark of guilt or immorality but because of the fear of 'quelque obligation' – whatever that might be ('lieu' [place], 'assistance' [audience] and 'expectation' [anticipation] being just some of the examples Montaigne offers us).[22] In short, one's speech and tongue become unfree when one is subject to 'obligation', when one feels (and fears) oneself subject to a will other

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than one's own. This is not necessarily the will of another: one becomes unfree when subject to one's own passions as much as when subject to a master or a prince.

Fluency and self-mastery?

'Que peut-on faire quand c'est une harangue qui porte en consequence?' (*LE*, III.9.962) ['What can a man do when it is a speech on which his life depends?'] (*CE*, 735) asks Montaigne, inviting his readers to put themselves in Lyncestes' shoes just as he has himself. His example of stage-fright, of a stammering disfluency caused by fear, is a particularly affecting one, given its fatal consequence. The stakes could not be higher. It nonetheless forms part of the broader topos of 'l'orateur que l'émotion rend muet' [the orator who is silenced by emotion], as Daniel Ménager puts it.[23] Montaigne would likely have been aware, if not directly then through Plutarch's account in his 'Life' of Cicero, of the orator's fear in opening his *Pro Milone* on account of the unprecedented presence of armed men in the court itself: according to Plutarch, Cicero barely managed to deliver his speech at all.[24] 'Pour moy', Montaigne continues, establishing ever more securely the link between himself and Lyncestes, 'cela mesme que je sois lié à ce que j'ay à dire sert à m'en desprendre' (*LE*, III.9.963) ['For my part, the very fact of being bound to what I have to say is enough to break my grip on it'] (*CE*, 735). Memory ought to be one's best chance of slipping the bonds and fetters of the prisoner but Montaigne finds instead that he is bound to memory itself and that his tongue is tied in the process: the only thing that is free is the prepared 'harangue' that escapes its speaker.

As Mark Greengrass has shown, the period in which Montaigne was writing was one preoccupied with the relationship between eloquence or (parliamentary) oratory and the passions. In harangues and *mercuriales*, speeches given at the opening of *parlement*, as well as in numerous treatises published by *parlementaires*, arguments were made promulgating a reformed rhetoric that would illustrate the 'perfect magistrate' tasked with governing the passions of others without being overwhelmed by their own.[25] It was in this context, in the late 1570s, that Henri III commissioned a series of harangues and accompanying texts on rhetoric to expound a 'projet d'éloquence royale' [project of royal eloquence]. At the forefront was the king's former tutor, Jacques Amyot, celebrated for his translations of Plutarch, including the essay 'How to tell a flatterer from a friend', a particularly salient text for Renaissance reflections on the dangers not only of offering free, frank counsel but of receiving it too.[26] In arguing for a reformed eloquence – one that combined rhetorical skill with virtue and was capable of controlling, rousing and mastering the passions – French Renaissance *parlementaires* invariably found their patron in *Hercule Gallique*, the god of the ancient Gauls who 'trainoit après soy les peuples enchaisnez & pendus par les oreilles, avec chaisnes, qui sortoient de sa bouche' [would draw the people after him, chained and strung up by the ears with chains that came out of his mouth].[27]

Where the tongue-ties of Gallic Hercules figure his mastery over his audience and their passions, Montaigne's 'obligations' – the fact of being tied down, 'lié à ce que j'ay à dire' (*LE*, III.9.962) ['bound to what I have to say'] (*CE*, 735) – work only,

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paradoxically, to let everything come undone. The hierarchical relations are inverted too: he depicts his relationship with that 'si foible instrument qu'est ma memoire' (*LE*, III.9.962) [so feeble an instrument as my memory] (*CE*, 735) as one of dependence and dominion: 'Quand je me suis *commis et assigné* entierement à ma memoire, je pends si fort sur elle que je l'accable' ['When I have committed and entrusted myself entirely to my memory, I lean so heavily on it that I overburden it']; 'et me suis veu quelque jour en peine de celer *la servitude* en laquelle j'estois entravé' (*LE*, III.9.963) ['and some days I have found myself hard pressed to conceal the slavery into which I was bound'] (*CE*, 735). One might be inclined to see Montaigne's comments here as part of a broader dismissal of his capacity for memory – itself part of a self-portrait as casual or natural, unaffected, unrehearsed and uncontrived.[28] But, for all of Montaigne's interest elsewhere in 'nonchalance', his disposition here is distinctly affected, characterized by fear, anxiety and care. 'Mon dessein', he writes, 'est de representer en parlant une profonde nonchalance et des mouvements fortuites et impremeditez' (*LE*, III.9.963) [my plan in speaking is to display extreme carelessness and unstudied and unpremeditated gestures] (*CE*, 735). However, this display is no more than an effort at dissimulation ('representer') and an often unsuccessful one at that; it tries ('essaier') his 'contenance' and leaves him struggling to hide ('celer') his 'servitude'.[29]

Similarly, one might read the rejection of memory's constraints and obligations as an assertion, if not of self-mastery or mastery over the passions and the memory, then of self-possession, independence and intolerance of servitude.[30] Such a perspective would frame Montaigne's comments here as a declaration of freedom, in which the essayist depicts himself as so naturally, characteristically free that he cannot bear the slightest obligation. Felicity Green has suggested that liberty, for Montaigne, 'is found alongside weakness' and that it is his 'aversion to "trouble and pains" that makes him so sensitive to slavery'.[31] But if weakness serves as a backroad to liberty, Montaigne seems rather to have lost his way. Indeed, when he does find himself in a scenario reflecting the one Lyncestes found himself in, he turns not to free and easy *sermo fortuitus* [improvised speech] but to rote learning, finding his weakness a burden: 'Et, quand j'ay un propos de consequence à tenir, s'il est de longue haleine, je suis reduit à cette vile et miserable necessité d'apprendre par cœur, mot à mot, ce que j'ay à dire' (*LE*, II.17.649) [And when I have a speech of consequence to make, if it is of some length, I am reduced to the mean and miserable necessity of learning by heart, word for word, what I have to say] (*CE*, 493). Montaigne certainly dislikes such obligation, but that dislike does not necessarily allow him to escape it.

Rereading Montaigne's well-known complaints about struggling to stick to a script in light of the (more often neglected) story of Lyncestes invites us to reconsider some of the most famous lines in the *Essais*. Montaigne's fear in imagining himself falling into the same circumstance as Lyncestes recasts this reflection on style as something other than a moment of *sprezzatura*: this is not merely an ironic, self-deprecating claim to artless *naïveté*, in which Montaigne's dispositional freedom makes him unable to manage his *dispositio*, unable to get his points in order, let alone the *memoria* and *pronuntiatio*.[32] Rather, the Lyncestes passage illuminates Montaigne's obligations

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and dependency, not only to his passions, to the power of the environment to impress itself on the imagination, to the vagaries of his memory ('Quand je me suis commis et assigné entierement à ma memoire' [When I have committed and entrusted myself entirely to my memory]) and to 'la mercy de mon invention presente' [the mercy of my improvisation], but also to his reader: 'Laisse, lecteur, courir encore ce coup d'essay et ce troisieme allongeail du reste des pieces de ma peinture' (*LE*, III.9.963) ['Reader, let this essay of myself run on, and this third extension of the other parts of my painting'] (*CE*, 736). This famous appeal to the reader's benevolence, read in this light, might be seen not (or not only) as an indicator of the *Essais* as a free-thinking sketch, a work-in-progress. Rather, we might give some credence to Montaigne's presentation of himself as subject to the reader, subject to their will. The following claim – that he adds to his book, 'mais je ne corrige pas' [but I do not correct] – is explained on the grounds that he has already 'hypothecqué au monde son ouvrage' (*LE*, III.9.963) ['mortgaged his work to the world'] (*CE*, 736) and that any freedom of action he does lay claim to is conditioned by ongoing public consent: 'La faveur publique m'a donné un peu plus de hardiesse que je n'esperois, mais ce que je crains le plus, c'est de saouler' (*LE*, III.9.964) ['The favour of the public has given me a little more boldness than I expected, but what I fear most is to surfeit my readers'] (*CE*, 736). If Montaigne is looking to portray himself as naturally too free to suffer any servitude, it is a portrait framed by a series of obligations that govern himself, his book and his character.

Fear again emerges as a prime motivation for Montaigne: fear of losing goodwill, fear of the effects of domination. 'En toutes nos fortunes', he complains, 'nous nous comparons à ce qui est au dessus de nous et regardons vers ceux qui sont mieux; mesurons nous à ce qui est au dessous' (*LE*, III.9.959–60) ['In all our fortunes we compare ourselves with what is above us and look toward those who are better off; let us measure ourselves with what is below'] (*CE*, 733). Everywhere he looks, he finds things on the brink of collapse: 'Or tournons les yeux par tout: tout crolle autour de nous' (*LE*, III.9.961) ['Now let us turn our eyes in all directions: everything is crumbling about us'] (*CE*, 734). This is the context, textually and politically, for Montaigne's moment of anxiety in which he imagines himself a new Lyncestes. His freedom of speech – his desire to say what he thinks, naturally and inartificially; his inability to learn a script; his rejection of the pedantic and burdensome mechanics of public speaking and oratorical discipline – is run through with precarity, obligation, dependency and a fear that the free-wheeling disposition that suits him so well might be stripped from him at any moment (a lesson he seems to have learned particularly well in the winter of 1586–87, the period of *vagabondage* in which he felt himself 'tomber à plomb, et de si haut' (*LE*, III.12.1045) ['fall plumb down and from such a height'] (*CE*, 799)). The case of Lyncestes is salient and, for Montaigne at least, affecting not simply as an example of memory lapse and stage-fright under pressure: his case resonates with a real political and social instability that Montaigne felt threatening his freedom.

Without wishing to make too strong a claim about a word Montaigne does not use, we might nonetheless note the early modern sense of 'précairement' (and its origin in Latin legal documents as 'precarius') to mean 'at another man's will and

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pleasure' – which is to say precisely the sort of servitude and unfreedom against which the neo-Romans defined liberty.[33] Montaigne might reject the obligations of public speaking and the strictures of ordered, 'corrigé' prose but he does so under the banner of licence rather than liberty. 'Licence', like 'franchise', has complicated and contradictory relationships with authority, hesitating between, on the one hand, 'permission, leave' (as Cotgrave has it) and 'permission de faire, ou de dire ce qu'on veult, sans en estre reprins ne puni' [permission to do or say what one wishes, without being reprimanded or punished for it] (in Robert Estienne's translation of 'licentia') and, on the other hand, signifying an excessive, unregulated, extravagant freedom which, as Antoine Fouquelin defines it, 'montre quelque audace & hardiesse de dire ce qui sembloit estre dangereux à dire' [shows some boldness and bravery in saying what would seem to be dangerous to say].[34] In saying that Montaigne's 'franchise' operates under the banner of licence, I mean to say that he speaks with permission, whether that be granted by a prince, by circumstance, by fortune or by parts of himself (his memory, his passions). His 'licence', his 'franchise', is felt to work within the limits of what is permitted and that permission, along with the 'franchise' it affords (a 'franchise' that is moral as much as oral, personal as well as discursive), might be withdrawn, rendering his 'licence' licentious and leaving him, like his ancient analogue, 'tout hesitant et begayant' (*LE*, III.9.962) [all hesitating and stammering] (*CE*, 735).

'Le parler brusque'

Quintus Curtius's 'parler brusque' [abrupt way of speaking], both truthful and 'full' (he writes 'pleinement' as well as 'vraisemblablement'), stands in stark contrast to the stammering Lyncestes Montaigne encountered in reading him. Montaigne's 'franchise' has, in recent scholarship, been read through the lens of parrhesia, the Hellenistic concept of full and frank speech characterized, as Foucault put it, by the 'libre courage par lequel on se lie à soi-même dans l'acte de dire vrai' [free courage with which one binds oneself to oneself in the act of speaking truth].[35] The *parrhesiastes*, the frank truth-teller, 'prend les risques de l'hostilité, de la guerre, de la haine, et de la mort' [runs the risk of hostility, war, hatred and death], speaking truth to power and guaranteeing that truth by saying what they mean and meaning what they say, bringing speech into harmony with *ethos*, character.[36]

Such a way of speaking is exemplified and idealized, as Olivier Guerrier has shown, in Montaigne's meditation on Socrates's 'superbe' 'voix' in Plato's *Apology*, a speech not only 'sec et sain' [sober, sane] but 'veritable, franc et juste' [truthful, frank, and just], and delivered 'en quelle necessité' [in what critical need].[37]

> Eust-on ouy de la bouche de Socrates une voix suppliante? [...] Et sa riche et puissante nature eust elle commis à l'art sa défence, et en son plus haut essay renoncé à la verité et naïveté, ornemens de son parler, pour se parer du fard des figures et feintes d'une oraison apprinse? (*LE*, III.12.1054)
>
> [Should people have heard a supplicating voice from the mouth of Socrates? [...] And should his rich and powerful nature have committed his defence to art, and, in its loftiest

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test, renounced truth and sincerity, the ornaments of his speech, to bedeck itself with the make-up of the figures and fictions of a memorized oration?] (*CE*, 807)

In the case of both Socrates and Quintus Curtius, bold, frank, courageous speech guarantees and is guaranteed by a freedom and fullness of 'esprit' or 'nature'. The history of Alexander – though not Quintus' *Historia* – offered Montaigne yet another exemplar of parrhesiastic 'franchise': Diogenes the Cynic 'roulant son tonneau et hochant du nez le grand Alexandre' (*LE*, I.50.303–04) [rolling his tub and turning up his nose at the great Alexander] (*CE*, 221).[38]

With Lyncestes, Montaigne thinks with the mirror image of these ancient patrons of bold, courageous speech that is 'naïve' and inartificial, frank but also fluent, even under pressure. Parrhesia establishes an equivalence between discursive frankness and ethical freedom, between one's speech and one's character or way of life, in spite of external political pressures (the 'necessité' that weighed on Socrates, the 'consequence' Montaigne recognizes in Lyncestes' predicament). The parrhesiastic frank speaker is free because they speak freely, whatever the cost: free speech guarantees ethical freedom as much as it illustrates it.

The portrait Montaigne paints of himself in his *Essais* is, in its broadest brushstrokes, one that aligns quite well with the persona of the *parrhesiastes*. As Warren Boutcher has argued, the *Essais* serve as a 'book-*image* whose natural, original qualities – [Montaigne's] own – of *liberté* and *franchise* will emerge as it travels free from obligations'.[39] Indeed, 'De la vanité' is particularly, unusually explicit in associating 'the authorial *persona* still more emphatically with that of the wise man'.[40] With what Boutcher rightly notes as 'self-conscious vanity', Montaigne declares himself to be a 'unique modern example of a new and uncommon style of personal liberty'.[41] 'Je ne vois personne', claims Montaigne, 'plus libre et moins endebté que je suis jusques à cette heure' (*LE*, III.9.968) ['I see no one freer and less indebted than I am up to this point'] (*CE*, 739). This personal liberty is reflected in and tested by his good faith, his fidelity to his word: 'Le neud qui me tient par la loy d'honnesteté me semble bien plus pressant et plus poisant que n'est celuy de la contrainte civile. [...] J'aimeroy bien plus cher rompre la prison d'une muraille et des loix que de ma parolle' (*LE*, III.9.966) ['The tie that binds me by the law of honesty seems to me much tighter and more oppressive than is that of legal constraint. I would much rather break the imprisonment of a wall and of the laws than that of my word'] (*CE*, 738). 'Bienheureuse franchise' he declares, 'qui m'a conduit si loing. Qu'elle acheve' (*LE*, III.9.968) ['Blessed liberty, which has guided me so far! May it continue to the end!'] (*CE*, 740).

For Boutcher, this moment in which Montaigne beseeches God, thanking him for his freedom and praying that it will last as long as he does, is a 'preemptive account of the fortunes of his *persona* and his book': full of vain hyperbole (but no less sincere for that), Montaigne adopts the 'carefully fashioned, carefully ironic' persona of the 'free, noble *sage*'.[42] He seems to be claiming for himself the role of *parrhesiastes* par excellence, the role of the free man whose free speech indicates and ensures his ethical, personal and political freedom.

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But, as I have tried to demonstrate, Montaigne is not entirely bombastic and self-assured; he is not quite so full of 'courage' as he seems to be – fear plays its part too – and, consequently, he is not quite so free. Indeed, where the *parrhesiastes* 'se lie à soi-même dans l'acte de dire vrai' [bind themselves in the act of speaking truth] by performing their 'libre courage' [free courage],[43] Montaigne – stumbling across Lyncestes more often than he would like ('Je ne lis jamais cette histoire que je ne m'en offence' ['I never read the following story without being struck myself']) and feeling a 'ressentiment' [sting] that echoes Lyncestes' fear and paralysis – finds only that he is 'lié' ['bound']: 'à ce que j'ay à dire' ['to what I have to say'], to his memory, to his 'invention presente', to his reader ('Laisse, lecteur, courir encore ce coup d'essay' ['Reader, let this essay of myself run on']). 'Autant que je m'en rapporte à [ma mémoire]', he writes, 'je me mets hors de moy' (*LE*, III.9.963) ['As long as I rely on [my memory], I place myself outside myself'] (*CE*, 735). Montaigne *would* speak freely, fluently, 'naïvely', without artifice or obligation but only as long as he is allowed to be free. With Lyncestes, Montaigne complicates and tempers the broad brushstrokes of his self-portrait depicting him wearing a noble and free persona: here, we see the mask slip and, behind the bravado, we see the anxiety, trepidation and fear. In this moment, Montaigne recognizes – and encourages us to see – that his speech is free as a *consequence* of his personal freedom: this is not the parrhesiastic equivalence or harmony of *logos* and *ethos*, whereby frank speech guarantees and is guaranteed by a free persona. Montaigne's 'franchise', then, oral as much as personal, discursive and stylistic as much as political, is precarious.

In other words, his 'franchise' (whether we mean his frank and flowing, 'naïve' speech, his personal, political freedom, or his ethical freedom, the freedom of character exemplified by Socrates) is a gift, part of the system of 'bien-faicts' [benefactions] that he tries to avoid getting himself tangled up in, and one that is not his to gift himself. As Natalie Zemon Davis has shown, 'De la vanité' attends to 'the emotional and intellectual wounds' caused by 'public social gift relations', wounds to which sixteenth-century France was especially vulnerable, with legal changes, increasing urbanism and professionalism producing a high degree of 'obligation anxiety'. Davis notes that Montaigne – magistrate, mayor, noble traveller – was 'not as free from the world of favour' as his self-portrait suggests.[44] With Lyncestes, though, it becomes clear even in this self-portrait that Montaigne is concerned not only with escaping the economy of 'bien-faicts' but with the anxieties that come with recognizing that obligations cannot be avoided and that 'franchise' is not a matter simply of withdrawing from them. La Boétie might have considered liberty a matter of the will, of saying, as Montaigne put it, 'une seule sillabe, qui est Non' (*LE*, I.26.156) ['one single syllable, which is "No"'] (*CE*, 115): 'Soyez resolus de ne servir plus, et vous voilà libres' [Resolve to serve no more and you are free].[45] But sometimes the words do not come so easily and sometimes they simply are not enough. Montaigne's seemingly self-aggrandizing, arrogant claim to be the freest of the free – 'Bienheureuse franchise [...]. Qu'elle acheve' (*LE*, III.9.968), 'blessed' or, perhaps more accurately, '*fortunate* freedom [...]. May it continue' (*CE*, 740) – underscores the precarity of this 'franchise' and its dependence on continued good fortune. After all, we need only

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look around to see how readily things fall: 'tout crolle autour de nous' (*LE*, III.9.961) [everything is crumbling about us] (*CE*, 734).

Montaigne might have declared that no one was 'plus libre et moins endebté que je suis jusques à cette heure' (*LE*, III.9.968) ['more free and less indebted than I am up to this point'] (*CE*, 739) but that temporal marker makes all the difference. Montaigne's 'franchise' – his personal freedom from 'la science du bien-faict et de recognoissance' (*LE*, III.9.968) [the science of benefaction and gratitude] (*CE*, 739), his rejection of obligation and servitude, his rejection also of flattery in favour of straight-talking ('Le parler que j'ayme, c'est un parler simple et naif' (*LE*, I.26.171) [The speech I love is a simple, natural speech] (*CE*, 127)) – depends not on his character or persona, his 'esprit' or 'nature' (as in Quintus Curtius and Socrates) but on fortune, on an arbitrary will beyond his own jurisdiction. Montaigne might not ever find himself in Lyncestes' shoes and his good luck might continue but Skinner's example of the slave with a benevolent master is a useful one: Montaigne need not be bound and tied up, literally or figuratively, to know that his 'franchise' depends on good will and good fortune.[46] If freedom were simply a matter of acting freely and without interference, he would have no reason to bristle with 'ressentiment'. This 'franchise', then, functions as 'licence', permission or leave, rather than liberty, and Montaigne's fluency and frankness will keep up only so long as he retains 'la faveur publique' (*LE*, III.9.964) [the favour of the public] (*CE*, 736). Read in this light, 'De la vanité' works not only to 'index' the persona of the free and frank nobleman; it works also to uncover the precarity and vulnerability of that freedom – a freedom at once exalted and shown to be dangling, ready to 'tomber à plomb et de si haut' [fall plumb down and from such a height].[47]

What, then, does Montaigne mean by 'franchise'? And how does he understand the relationship between those two sides of the parrhesiastic equation, personal freedom and freedom of speech? In an earlier chapter, Montaigne imagined a curriculum for a student:

> On luy dira [...] que c'est que sçavoir et ignorer, qui doit estre le but de l'estude; que c'est vaillance, temperance et justice; ce qu'il y a à dire entre l'ambition et l'avarice, la servitude et la subjection, la licence et la liberté [...]. Entre les arts liberaux, commençons par l'art qui nous faict libres. (*LE*, I.26.158)
>
> [Teach the boy this: what knowing and not knowing means (which ought to be the aim of study); and what valour is, and justice and temperance; what difference there is between ambition and avarice, servitude and submission, licence and liberty. Among the liberal arts, let us begin with the art that liberates us.][48] (*CE*, 117)

For all of Montaigne's claims to *liberté* in 'De la vanité', his encounter with Lyncestes, in whom he sees himself as though in a mirror, bears the impression not only of his fears and anxieties, but also of his obligations: in slipping one bond, that of practised, artificial eloquence, he finds himself to be caught in a whole set of fetters. What emerges here is an understanding, contrary to La Boétie's declaration that freedom is simply a matter of determining to be free, that freedom depends on the world outside of us and outside of our jurisdiction. Montaigne's 'franchise', then, is the licence

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he assumes to speak and act as he wishes – which is to say naturally and inartificially – but that freedom of speech and action is not (or not only) a marker of a free character so much as a fortunate consequence of his good luck (and his luck might, at any minute, run out).

In reading 'franchise' in the *Essais*, we should make sure we learn the lesson Montaigne sets his imagined *écolier* and distinguish liberty and licence (and, for that matter, 'licensed' speech from 'licentious' speech). 'Franchise' is itself an unstable concept in the *Essais*, inflected by the exemplars and models that illustrate it. Montaigne might idolize great men – rare men, masters of themselves, who have learned the lessons of the art that makes them free – and he does indeed meditate on their illustrious acts of speaking boldly in the face of death, but that is only part of the picture: we should listen when we are told that it is Lyncestes (and not Socrates, Seneca or Cato) who produces in Montaigne 'un ressentiment naturel et propre'. To see yourself in the sage but not the stammerer is surely one act of vanity too far and one that sets you up for a fall: 'En toutes nos fortunes, nous nous comparons à ce qui est au dessus de nous [...]; mesurons nous à ce qui est au dessous' (*LE*, III.9.959-60) [In all our fortunes we compare ourselves with what is above us; let us measure ourselves with what is below] (*CE*, 733).

Between aphasia and 'babil'

In concluding, I would like to consider one further ancient model of free and unfree speech. If we are to follow Montaigne's instruction to study the 'art qui nous faict libre' [art that liberates us], which is to say philosophy, we might begin with the Sceptics, those free-thinkers who refused to commit themselves to a dogmatic sect (unlike those who 'se treuvent hippothequez' [find themselves mortgaged]) so that they might 'maintenir leur liberté, et considerer les choses sans obligation et servitude' (*LE*, II.12.503) [maintain their liberty, and consider things without obligation and servitude] (*CE*, 373).[49] And yet it was precisely these free-thinkers who had the most trouble saying anything at all. Montaigne was (rightfully) dismissive of mischaracterizations of the Sceptical principle of *aphasia*, non-assertion, (which Montaigne parses as 'de ne rien se respondre' [*LE*, II.12.502], to 'answer' or 'vouch for nothing'[*CE*, 372]) and discredited the more ludicrous portraits of Pyrrho as, at once, a figurehead for a sect of philosophers who say nothing at all and a man so wilfully dismissive of custom and the perceptible world that, 's'il avoit commencé un propos, ne laissoit pas de l'achever, quand celuy à qui il parloit s'en fut allé' (*LE*, II.29.705) [if he had begun to say something, he never failed to finish it, even though the man he was speaking to had gone away] (*CE*, 533).[50] This man, this philosophy, of extremes – at once prolix and tongue-tied – is a caricature, 'si esloign[é] de l'usage commun, [qu']il est quasi incroyable qu'on le puisse' (*LE*, II.27.706) [so remote from common usage, it is almost unbelievable that it can be done] (*CE*, 533): Pyrrho 'n'a pas voulu se faire pierre ou souche; il a voulu se faire homme vivant, discourant et raisonnant' (*LE*, 533) ['did not want to make himself a stump or a stone; he wanted to make himself a living, arguing, thinking man'] (*CE*, 374).

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Despite their poor reputation, the free-thinkers, with 'leurs refreins' (*LE*, II.12.505) ['their refrains'] and 'façons de parler' ['expressions'] (*CE*, 373–374), seem a perfect model of free speech, speech that is neither 'farouche' ['wild'] and 'incroyable' ['unbelievable'], nor slavish in its dogmatism, nor sworn to a vow of silence in adherence to the principle of non-assertion. And yet:

> Je voy les philosophes Pyrrhoniens qui ne peuvent exprimer leur generale conception en aucune maniere de parler: car il leur faudroit un nouveau langage. [...] [Q]uand ils disent: Je doubte, on les tient incontinent à la gorge pour leur faire avouer qu'au-moins assurent et sçavent ils cela, qu'ils doubtent. (*LE*, II.12.527)
>
> [I can see why the Pyrrhonian philosophers cannot express their general conception in any manner of speaking; for they would need a new language. When they say, 'I doubt', immediately you have them by the throat to make them admit that at least they know and are sure of this fact, that they doubt.] (*CE*, 392)

It is not my aim here to go over old ground, but only to draw attention to the threat of domination in this well-known passage.[51] The roles have shifted, both grammatically and in terms of association, such that Montaigne imagines himself the aggressor rather than the victim, but the dynamic of the interaction remains the same: even those most-free philosophers, those who might teach us the 'art qui nous faict libre', are subject to constraints not unlike those Montaigne encountered in thinking with Lyncestes. Your tongue might not be tied by fear, but you might nonetheless find yourself 'pris', seized by the throat.

Babble is, as Emily Butterworth has shown, one of the key motifs of the *Essais* and a central figure in Montaigne's examination of 'the diplomacy of free, unfettered speech' and its relationship to the overflowing of 'caquet' [babble] as a 'half-willed, half-unconscious betrayal of secrets and self'.[52] For Montaigne and his contemporaries, babble is a figure of abundance and a figure exemplified everywhere one looks: 'le monde n'est que babil, et ne vis jamais homme qui ne die plustost plus que moins qu'il ne doit' (*LE*, I.26.168) ['the world is nothing but babble, and I never saw a man who did not say rather more than less than he should'] (*CE*, 124). Montaigne began 'De la vanité' by reflecting on this copious overproduction, on the 'si horrible charge de volumes' ['so horrible load of volumes'] produced by 'le babil', 'le begaiement et desnouement de la langue' (*LE*, III.9.946) ['the babble, the stammering and loosening of the tongue'] (*CE*, 721): as things were going, he himself would continue writing for as long as there remained ink and paper in the world.

This article has sought to uncover the counter-flow to this dominant motif of 'flux', to foreground the ancient exempla, lessons and scenarios that present themselves to Montaigne and make him bristle with a 'ressentiment propre et naturel', seizing his attention seemingly without his consent. Attending to Montaigne's anxieties – the affect, the fear and imagination – around 'franchise' as he reflects on the case of Lyncestes reveals a way of thinking about the precarity both of fluent or free speech and of Montaigne's persona and status as a free man. It reveals an aspect of Montaigne's 'franchise' that complicates our understanding of his characteristically 'free' loquacity and works also in counterpoint to key moments of what one might

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call 'silent' fluency. Lyncestes' stammering and Montaigne's fear in confronting it might be considered the mirror image of the anecdote relayed in 'De la phisionomie' in which Montaigne, finding his home overrun with armed men and the atmosphere turning increasingly threatening, let his face 'speak' for him ('mon visage [...] respondoit pour moy' ['my face [...] answered for me']), revealing 'la simplicité de mon intention' (*LE*, III.12.1062) ['the innocence of my intentions'] (*CE*, 814) and securing his safety. Montaigne's 'franchise' is by no means indiscriminate – he knows when to hold his tongue – and his naturally free *persona*, his 'visage', is, as the account from his own life demonstrates, capable of preserving its own liberty. But between the held and the free tongue is what Montaigne finds acutely affecting: the babbling, stammering, tied tongue of Lyncestes and the servitude and obligation it betrays.

Montaigne's 'franc-parler' is not as free, it transpires, as he might claim it is. But as long as it keeps going – whether that is until stocks of paper and ink run out or until 'tout crolle' [everything crumbles] – it will keep going and that, perhaps, is enough: 'viresque acquirit eundo' [it gathers strength as it goes on].[53] We might reread Montaigne's proclamation a few pages after his encounter with Lyncestes – 'Bienheureuse franchise [...]. Qu'elle acheve' (*LE*, III.9.968) ['Fortunate freedom [...]. May it continue'] (*CE*, 740) – as referring, then, to his free, flowing discourse as much as any personal, political freedom. In this light, 'franchise' might be best understood as precarious, as navigating the space between servitude and liberty, between stammering 'begaiement' and the 'flux de caquet' (*LE*, III.5.897) ['flow of babble'] (*CE*, 684), between aphasia and 'babil', but also – given the 'lien' that binds fluency, freedom and threat – between being tongue-tied and having a hand around one's throat.

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NOTES

[1] Michel de Montaigne, *Les Essais*, ed. by Pierre Villey and V.-L. Saulnier (Paris: PUF, 1965), III.12.1048. All further references will be to this edition and given parenthetically. The English translations that follow are taken from *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. by Donald M. Frame (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1965). Where Frame's translation has been slightly modified the reference is given but without the use of quotations marks; more significant changes are signalled in the notes. All other translations are my own unless stated otherwise.

[2] For these biographical details, see Philippe Desan, *Montaigne: A Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), pp. 491–95.

[3] See Alain Legros' edition of Montaigne's extant manuscript notes and letters, *Montaigne manuscrit* (Paris: Garnier, 2010), pp. 650–51.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

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[6] A facsimile of this copy is available online through the 'Bibliothèques virtuelles humanistes' site: <https://www.bvh.univ-tours.fr/Consult/index.asp?numfiche=1299> [accessed 15 November 2023]; Montaigne's summary is on p. 171.

[7] Catherine Séguier-Leblanc, 'Quinte-Curce', *Dictionnaire Montaigne*, ed. by Philippe Desan (Paris: Garnier, 2018), pp. 1601–02.

[8] Cotgrave defines 'franchise' as 'freenesse, libertie, freedome, exemption; also, good breeding, free birth, tamenesse, seasonablenesse, kindlinesse'. Randle Cotgrave, *Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues* (London: Islip, 1611).

[9] See book 1, chapters 5 ('Si le chef d'une place assiegée doit sortir pour parlementer') and 6 ('L'Heure des parlemens dangereuse').

[10] Jean Balsamo, *La Parole de Montaigne* (Turin: Rosenberg and Sellier, 2019), part 3, chapter 4, 'Faveurs, obligations, servitude', pp. 323–427. Montaigne himself describes the 'bulle' as 'octroyée avec toute gratieuse liberalité' (*LE*, III.9.999), 'granted with all gracious liberty' (*CE*, 765).

[11] On Montaigne's discussion of being away from home and its relationship to his style of writing, see Emma Claussen, 'Montaigne's Vagabond Styles: Political Homelessness in the Sixteenth Century', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 57.3 (2021), 273–90.

[12] Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 39–43, 69.

[13] Felicity Green draws on Montaigne to nuance and extend Skinner's reading of neo-Roman liberty, 'reconceptualising freedom as a status of persons' rather than civic constitutions (as Skinner's seventeenth-century English authors indicate). See Felicity Green, 'Freedom without Republicanism: The Case of Montaigne', in *Rethinking Liberty before Liberalism*, ed. by Hannah Dawson and Annelien de Dijn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 17–37, and Felicity Green, *Montaigne and the Life of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), especially chapter 3, 'Self-Possession, Public Engagement and Slavery'. See also a recent special issue of *Early Modern French Studies*, 44.1 (2022), dedicated to freedom and servitude, and especially the article by John O'Brien, who takes 'neo-Roman' or 'Republican' freedom as his starting point in an analysis of the relationships between liberty, the will and slavery in three sixteenth-century magistrates: 'Slavery and Freedom in a Time of Civil War: La Boétie, L'Hospital, and Montaigne', pp. 53–69. Though unlike Skinner's study in its methodological approach, Warren Boutcher's reading of the *Essais* as an 'index' of Montaigne's noble, free persona shares a similar understanding of *liberté* as a quality not only of Montaigne's actions but of his character and status. See Boutcher, *The School of Montaigne in Early Modern Europe*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), I, pp. 206–19. Philippe Desan's sociologically inflected study, *Montaigne: Penser le social* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2018), similarly makes the case for the *Essais* as a tool with which Montaigne depicts himself as a political agent, justifying and defending his actions with reference not only to 'liberté' but also 'contrainte': this sort of 'justification', suggests Desan, 'représente peut-être la fonction principale des *Essais*', p. 187.

[14] Reinier Leushuis, 'Montaigne *Parrhesiastes*: Foucault's Fearless Speech and Truth-Telling in the *Essays*', in *Montaigne after Theory/Theory after Montaigne*, ed. by Zahi Zalloua (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), pp. 100–21 (p. 115); Virginia Krause, 'Confession or *Parrhesia*? Foucault after Montaigne', in *Montaigne after Theory/Theory after Montaigne*, ed. by Zalloua, pp. 142–60; Olivier Guerrier, '*Parrêsia*, de Socrate à Montaigne', in *Rencontre et reconnaissance: Les Essais ou le jeu du hasard et de la vérité*, (Paris: Garnier, 2016), pp. 180–92. See also John O'Brien on the relationships between *libere vivere* and *libere loqui*: in concluding, O'Brien points to a contradiction in Montaigne 'between the Socratic inspired essayist-sage dialoguing vigorously but amicably in private with chosen acquaintances, and bold, public speaking and speaking-out' although he argues that this tension 'is more apparent than real': 'Slavery and Freedom in a Time of Civil War', p. 66.

[15] My understanding of parrhesia is built on Foucault's analysis in his lectures at the Collège de France in the 1980s; see, in particular, *Le Courage de la vérité* (Paris: Seuil, 2009). On the distinction between 'licence' and 'liberté', see Montaigne, *Les Essais*, I, 26,158, discussed below.

[16] I have modified Frame's translation. Frame has 'without indignation, and natural and personal resentment'.

[17] My translation here follows that of M.A. Screech, *The Complete Essays* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 1089.

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[18] Quintus Curtius, *De rebus gestis Alexandri Magni* (Basel: Froben, 1545), p. 94.

[19] *Œuvres complètes de Pierre de Bourdeille, seigneur de Brantôme*, ed. by Ludovic Lalanne, 11 vols (Paris: Renouard, 1864–82), IV, 258.

[20] A vast amount of scholarship has examined the role of the imagination in early modern thought and in the *Essais* in particular, often but not exclusively centred on Montaigne's chapter 'De la force de l'imagination'. See, in the first instance, John Lyons, *Before Imagination: Embodied Thought from Montaigne to Rousseau* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005) and Wes Williams, 'Montaigne on Imagination', *The Oxford Handbook of Montaigne*, ed. by Philippe Desan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 679–99.

[21] On babble, 'plaisants causeurs', and loose lips, see Emily Butterworth, *The Unbridled Tongue: Babble and Gossip in Renaissance France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), especially, on Montaigne, chapter 6: 'Rumour', pp. 127–47.

[22] In a brief discussion of this passage, Bénédicte Boudou notes that, more than Quintus Curtius, Montaigne 'insiste sur les circonstances qui impressionnent le prisonnier' [focuses on the circumstances that intimidate the prisoner]; see Boudou, *La Sphère privée à la Renaissance* (Paris: Garnier, 2021), p. 352.

[23] Daniel Ménager, 'Improvisation et mémoire dans les *Essais*', *Bulletin de la société des amis de Montaigne*, VII, 1–2 (1985), 101–02 [*Rhétorique de Montaigne*, ed. by Frank Lestringant] (Paris: Champion, 1985), pp. 101–10 (p. 103, n. 17).

[24] Cicero, *Pro Milone*, I, on which see Lynn Fotheringham, 'Cicero's Fear: Multiple Readings of *Pro Milone* 1–4', *Materiali et discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici*, 57 (2006), 63–83. For Plutarch's account, see *Cicero*, 35. In Amyot's translation, Cicero 'se troubla de telle manière, qu'à peine cuida il jamais commencer à parler, tant tout le corps luy trembloit fort, & ne pouvoit avoir sa voix' [was so distressed that he hardly thought he would ever start his speech, so much was his body trembling, and he could not find his voice]; see Plutarch, *Les Vies des hommes illustres*, trans. by Jacques Amyot (Paris: Vascosan, 1565), fol. 604v.

[25] Mark Greengrass, 'Comprehending Passions', *Governing Passions: Peace and Reform in the French Kingdom, 1576–85* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 35–65 (p. 37).

[26] Greengrass, 'Comprehending Passions', pp. 59–65.

[27] Bernard de La Roche Flavin, *Treze livres des parlemens de France* (Bordeaux: Millanges, 1617), p. 375, quoted in Greengrass, 'Comprehending Passions', p. 40. On La Roche Flavin and Montaigne, see John O'Brien, 'Le Magistrat comme philosophe: La Roche Flavin comme lecteur de Montaigne et de Charron', *Bulletin de la société internationale des amis de Montaigne*, 55 (2012), 221–34.

[28] On 'nonchalance' as a translation of *sprezzatura*, see Felicity Green, *Montaigne and the Life of Freedom*, pp. 141–84 (p. 147). For a recent survey of approaches to Montaigne's natural, inartificial rhetoric, see *Montaigne: une rhétorique naturalisée?* ed. by Philippe Desan, Déborah Knop, and Blandine Perona (Paris: Champion, 2019). On Montaigne's *sermo fortuitus* and his rejection of speech 'constructed on an elocutionary habit', see Glyn P. Norton, 'Strategies of Fluency in the French Renaissance Text', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 15 (1985), 85–99 (p. 97). See also Daniel Ménager, 'Improvisation et mémoire', and, on improvisation as a practised skill (*hexis*), see Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 126–56.

[29] On Montaigne's 'dessein', see Vittoria Fallanca, 'Parcourir le dessein des *Essais*', *Bulletin de la société internationale des amis de Montaigne*, 74 (2022), 207–22.

[30] On self-mastery and self-possession, see Green, *Montaigne and the Life of Freedom*. For Green, 'self-possession and carelessness are to be thought of as complementary rather than antagonistic patterns of ideas', p. 157.

[31] Green, *Montaigne and the Life of Freedom*, p. 156.

[32] Montaigne does note that, like 'l'orateur Curio', he avoids signposting his arguments in advance for fear of forgetting them (*LE*, III.9.963).

[33] The definition is from Cotgrave's *Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues*. See, for instance, Jean Imbert's discussion of offices held 'precairement' in *Paraphrase en langage françois des quatres livres des institutions forenses, ou autrement practique judiciare* (Paris: Regnaud Chaudière, 1548), p. 69: 'Et selon droict lon ne peut former complaincte contre ceulx dont lon tient precairement, pour raison de la chose

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tenue de luy precairement' [And one cannot legally submit a complaint against someone from whom one holds a thing precariously about the thing that is held precariously]. Antoine Furetière would define it in similar terms towards the end of the seventeenth century as a 'terme de Jurisprudence' describing 'un fonds dont on n'a pas la pleine propriété, dont on ne peut disposer, & qui est presque par emprunt' [a holding of which one does not have full ownership, which one cannot sell or pass on, and which is as though borrowed], *Dictionnaire universel* (The Hague and Rotterdam: Arnoud et Reinier Leers, 1690).

[34] In addition to Cotgrave, cited above, see Robert Estienne, 'Licentia', *Dictionarium latinogallicum* (Paris: Stephani, 1546), p. 734; and Antoine Fouquelin, *La Rhétorique françoise* (Paris: Wechel, 1555), p. 111.

[35] Michel Foucault, *Le Gouvernement de soi et des autres* (Paris: Seuil, 2008), p. 64.

[36] Michel Foucault, *Le Courage de la vérité* (Paris: Seuil, 2009), pp. 24, 28. My formulation is based on Seneca: 'quod sentimus loquamur, quod loquimur sentiamus: corcordet sermo cum vita' [Let us say what we feel and feel what we say: let speech harmonize with life], *Epistles*, ed. by Richard M. Gummere (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1917–25), 75.4.

[37] Olivier Guerrier, *Rencontre et reconnaissance*, pp. 180–92.

[38] On Montaigne and Diogenes the Cynic, see Michèle Clément, 'A la recherche de l'insolence perdue: la *parrêsia* à la Renaissance', *Parrêsia et processus de véridiction: de l'Antiquité aux Lumières*, ed. by Pascal Debailly, Martial Martin and Jean Vignes (Paris: Hermann, 2019), pp. 32–52, Hugh Roberts, *Dogs' Tales: Representations of Ancient Cynicism in French Renaissance Texts* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 237–72, and Alison Calhoun, *Montaigne and the Lives of the Philosophers: Life Writing and Transversality in the Essais* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2015), pp. 29–34. On Cynicism and *parrhesia*, see Foucault, *Le Courage de la vérité*, esp. pp. 152–61.

[39] Boutcher, *The School of Montaigne*, I, p. 207.

[40] Ibid., p. 211.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Foucault, *Le Gouvernement de soi et des autres*, p. 64.

[44] Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), pp. 74–75.

[45] Étienne de la Boétie, *Discours de la servitude volontaire*, ed. by André et Luc Tournon (Paris: Vrin, 2002), p. 30.

[46] See Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism*, pp. 39–40.

[47] This is not to disagree with Boutcher's argument that the *Essais* 'index' this persona but rather to uncover the implications of Montaigne's 'self-conscious' and 'carefully ironic' presentation of it. On vulnerability, see John O'Brien, 'Wounded Artefacts: Vulnerability and Montaigne's *Essais*', *MLN*, 127 (2012), 712–31.

[48] I have modified Frame's translation here, with some debt to Screech. See Screech's translation, p. 178.

[49] On this passage, see Richard Scholar, 'Two Cheers for Free-Thinking', *Montaigne and the Art of Free-Thinking* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 91–111 (pp. 99–100).

[50] On Scepticism and non-assertion, see Richard Bett, 'The Pyrrhonist's Dilemma: What to Write If You Have Nothing to Say', in *How to be a Pyrrhonist: The Practice and Significance of Pyrrhonian Skepticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 3–23; Emmanuel Naya, 'Les Mots ou les choses: le "nouveau langage" à l'essai', in *La Langue de Rabelais – La Langue de Montaigne*, ed. by Franco Giacone (Geneva: Droz, 2009), pp. 325–49. On Montaigne's thoughts about talking to oneself, see Luke O'Sullivan, 'Feuilletant ces petits brevets descousus: consolations fausses et l'écriture de la vérité', *Bulletin de la société internationale des amies et amis de Montaigne*, 74 (2022), 187–205.

[51] On Montaigne and the 'nouveau langage' that Scepticism seems to require, see André Tournon, *Route par ailleurs: le 'nouveau langage' des Essais* (Paris: Champion, 2006); *L'Ecriture du scepticisme chez Montaigne*, ed. by Alain Legros and Marie-Luce Demonet (Geneva: Droz, 2004), and Luke

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O'Sullivan, 'Double et divers: Writing Doubly in Montaigne's *Essais*', *Modern Language Review*, 112 (2017), 320–40.

[52] Butterworth, *The Unbridled Tongue*, pp. 142–43.

[53] Montaigne inserted this quotation from Virgil as an epigraph on the title page of the 'exemplaire de Bordeaux'. See Alain Legros, 'Viresque acquirit eundo. La Devise des *Essais* et ses antécédents', *Bulletin de la société internationale des amis de Montaigne*, 60–61 (2014–2015), 33–40. We might draw a parallel between this reading of Montaigne's 'franchise' and Emma Claussen's study of Montaigne and La Boétie as 'explor[ing] forms of life under regimes in which a good life is not possible'. One might conclude that, as both authors 'offer visions of emptied, deprived, or unheroic living', so too does Montaigne strip 'frank speech' of its courage, its capacity to effect political change, and at least some of its role in a broader ethical practice of veridiction. See Emma Claussen, '"Est-ce vivre?": The Politics of Living in Montaigne and La Boétie', *Early Modern French Studies*, 44, 1 (2022), 70–85 (p. 84).

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