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‘Un traict à la comparaison de ces couples’: Seneca’s Poets and Epicurean Senecanisms in Montaigne’s *Essais*

In ‘De la solitude’, Montaigne’s treatment of the *topos* about withdrawing from the crowd, the essayist composes a chapter teeming with words and voices not his own: this is a discourse on solitude densely populated with dislocated voices. There is one particular voice, however, which keeps piping up. The voice is Seneca’s. But Seneca, in this chapter, has a tendency to speak other people’s words and to speak his own words on behalf of another. Curiously, Seneca’s name is not used at any point in Montaigne’s chapter, even when the essayist turns from using Senecan sources to discussing the Latin writer himself. Seneca provides a window in this chapter onto Horace and Epicurus and his text acts as a central point around which a cluster of voices emerge, each voice introducing further networks of allusion. Montaigne does not engage with these figures as a cluster of sources to be imitated, nor as a chain of authorities. Rather, his text navigates a cluster of window allusions, moments of reading which point to further reading: Horace seen through Seneca, Epicurus seen through Seneca, but also a mirror image of this last couple, Cicero and Pliny the Younger. It is in engaging with Seneca’s text and with those that stand behind it that Montaigne thinks through his commonplace theme. This tangled network of ventriloquism and the multiple points of slippage between one *visage* (face) and another produce a doubtful text in which authorial figures are moving and unstable; a text in which words of French prose and Latin verse seem to be spoken in unison across the gulf of time, place, and perspective.

Thinking with Seneca

You can’t run away from your troubles: ‘Souvent on pense avoir quitté les affaires, on ne les a que changez’ (‘Often we think we have left business, we have only changed it’), writes Montaigne.¹ One can leave ‘la Cour’ or ‘[le] marché’, but,

¹ Montaigne (2004, p. 238) and Montaigne (1965, p. 175): henceforth, *Essais*. All translations are based on Frame’s 1965 version, with some minor changes. The first page number refers to the

even then, 'nous ne sommes pas deffaits des principaux tourmens de nostre vie' (p. 239; 'we do not get rid of the principal worries of our life', p. 175). Further down the page, he provides instruction. If we are to benefit from a change of location, we must first unburden ourselves and our soul: 'Si on ne se descharge premiere-ment et son ame, du fais qui la presse, le remuement la fera fouler davantage: comme en navire les charges empeschent moins, quand elles sont rassises. Vous faictes plus de mal que de bien au malade, de luy faire changer de place' (*ibid.*; 'If a man does not first unburden his soul of the load that weighs upon it, movement will cause it to be crushed still more, as in a ship the cargo is less cumbersome when it is settled. You do a sick man more harm than good by moving him'). Montaigne's source here is Seneca, an author whom Montaigne repeatedly highlights, usually in conjunction with Plutarch, as central to his reading and a parallel for his own literary-philosophical project:²

Vadis huc illuc, ut excutias insidens pondus, quod ipsa iactatione incommodius fit, sicut in navi onera inmoti minus urgent, inaequaliter convoluta citius eam partem in quam incubuere, demergunt. Quicquid facis, contra te facis et motu ipso nocet tibi; aegrum enim concutis.³

You wander hither and yon, to rid yourself of the burden that rests upon you, though it becomes more troublesome by reason of your very restlessness, just as in a ship the cargo when stationary makes no trouble, but when it shifts to this side or that, it causes the vessel to heel more quickly in the direction where it has settled. Anything you do tells against you, and you hurt yourself by your very unrest; for you are shaking up a sick man.

Montaigne's is a more-or-less faithful borrowing: he has reworked Seneca's text, and the clause that opens my quotation seems to be modelled on a line slightly earlier in Seneca's epistle, though the key images and ideas—the burden, the ship, the sick man—are readily identifiable.⁴

This maritime metaphor borrowed from Seneca echoes two lines of poetry, slightly higher up the page, that Montaigne has taken from Horace: 'Ratio et pru-

original, the second to the translation. Unless otherwise stated, quotations from the *Essais* are from this chapter, 1.39.

² See, for instance, *Essais* 1.26, p. 146 (p. 107), 2.10, p. 413 (p. 300). On readers not recognising his borrowings from these authors, see 2.10, p. 408 (pp. 296–7).

³ Seneca, *Epistles* 28.3. All translations of Latin texts are based on those of the Loeb editions, with occasional, minor modification.

⁴ For Montaigne's opening clause, see Seneca, *Epistles* 28.2: 'Onus animi deponendum est; non ante tibi ullus placebit locus' ('You must lay aside the burdens of the mind; until you do this, no place will satisfy you').

dentia curas, | Non locus effusi latè maris arbiter aufert' (p. 239; 'reason and wisdom take away cares, and not a site commanding a wide expanse of sea').⁵ It seems, then, that Montaigne is drawing together classical sources, Horace and Seneca, engaging with related metaphors and tropes and discussing common themes.

If we study Seneca's epistle a little more closely, however, we see that he too alludes—silently—to Horace's epistles: Seneca's second sentence, 'Animum debes mutare, non caelum' ('You need a change of soul rather than a change of climate'), is simply a translation into prose—and into the second person—of Horace's 'caelum non animum mutant qui trans mare currunt' ('they change their climate, not their mind, who rush across the sea').⁶ Noting that 'Seneca quotes Horace only four times in his entire corpus verbatim', the editors of a recent volume on this pair of classical authors have highlighted this as a key example of Seneca's 'muted indebtedness' to Horace.⁷ Seneca's allusions 'are not explicitly marked, and at times Seneca seems even to obscure the link with the source text.'⁸ Seneca's is a silent borrowing: one that draws on a shared literary culture within which an allusion can be recognised without being announced and where difference and distance from the source texts become, paradoxically, one of the features by which the reader recognises and engages with the borrowing.

Seneca's Horatian line is a paraphrase of book 1, epistle 11, line 27. Montaigne's quotation—'Ratio et prudentia curas, | Non locus effusi latè maris arbiter, aufert'—is from the same epistle, lines 25 and 26. Here, Montaigne invites the reader to partake in a shared experience of reading, built on shared literary knowledge, wherein his text can make allusions not just to detached textual snippets but to extended practices of reading: his text calls for a reader to recognise not only consonance but harmony. We might align this with what Terence Cave has called an early modern 'commonplace lexis': 'Once one knows the lexis, one becomes sensitive to all kinds of inflections and micro-variations'.⁹ Here, Montaigne—and presumably his reader—are not only 'thinking with commonplaces' but thinking with networks of texts: thinking with the textual and intertextual contexts of borrowed words.

⁵ Cf. Horace, *Epistles* 1.11.25–6.

⁶ Seneca, *Epistles* 28.1; Horace, *Epistles* 1.11.27.

⁷ Stöckinger, Winter, and Zanker (2017a, pp. 3, 5).

⁸ Stöckinger, Winter, and Zanker (2017a, p. 4).

⁹ Cave (2009b, p. 39).

As we read this passage in the *Essais*, we encounter a few lines from Horace and then, a little later, an analogy about sailing ships which seems to be responding to the poetry. It is only if we recognise the Senecan source—which is doubly silent: Montaigne's loan from Seneca is undeclared, as is Seneca's from Horace—that we can see that Montaigne's use of Horace is framed by his reading of Seneca: the essayist is thinking with the Stoic's sources, not just plundering his text or mechanically imitating it. Montaigne, recognising an unacknowledged allusion to Horace in the prose epistle, translates the source back into verse and cites not Seneca's line but its neighbour, while he in turn silently imitates the Stoic's prose, engaging in a complex practice of presentation and concealment as he thinks through this cluster of texts. This is a way of thinking and writing which establishes indirect connections between texts, connections not between quoted passages as much as the experiences of reading in which they are encountered, while expecting the reader to recognise indirect, unacknowledged borrowings just as Montaigne recognised Horace in Seneca.¹⁰

Between this Horatian quotation and the Senecan borrowing, Montaigne, in less than one hundred words, includes three further verse quotations. The full extract reads as follows:

Souvent on pense avoir quitté les affaires, on ne les a que changez. Il n'y a guiere moins de tourment au gouvernement d'une famille que d'un estat entier: où que l'ame soit empeschée, elle y est toute; et, pour estre les occupations domestiques moins importantes, elles n'en sont pas moins importunes. D'avantage, pour nous estre deffaits de la Cour et du marché, nous ne sommes pas deffaits des principaux tourmens de nostre vie,

Ratio et prudentia curas,

Non locus effusi latè maris arbiter, aufert.

L'ambition, l'avarice, l'irresolution, la peur et les concupiscences ne nous abandonnent point pour changer de contrée,

Et post equitem sedet atra cura.

Elles nous suivent souvent jusques dans les cloistres et dans les escoles de philosophie. Ny les desers, ny les rochers creusez, ny la here, ny les jeunes ne nous en démeslent:

haeret lateri letalis arundo.

On disoit à Socrates que quelqu'un ne s'estoit aucunement amendé en son voyage: Je croy bien, dit-il, il s'estoit emporté avecques soy.

Quid terras alio calentes

Sole mutamus? patria quis exul

Se quoque fugit?

10 For a recent study of early modern readers, particularly women, and expectations regarding the ability to recognise classical sources, see Herdman (2016). Herdman's study asks what happens when readers who 'were not supposed to read the Latin satirists' (p. 135) encountered Juvenal—obscene in context but not in quotation—while reading Montaigne's *Essais*.

Si on ne se descharge premierement et son ame, du fais qui la presse, le remuement la fera fouler davantage: comme en un navire les charges empeschent moins, quand elles sont rassises. Vous faictes plus de mal que de bien au malade, de luy faire changer de place. Vous ensachez le mal en le remuant, comme les pals s’enfoncent plus avant et s’affermissent en les branlant et secouant.

(Montaigne, *Essais* 1.39, pp. 238–9)

Often we think we have left business, and we have only changed it. There is scarcely less trouble in governing a family than in governing an entire state: whatever the mind is wrapped up in, it is all wrapped up in it, and domestic occupations are no less importunate for being less important. Furthermore, by getting rid of the court and the market place we do not get rid of the principal worries of our life:

*Reason and wisdom take away cares,
Not a site commanding a wide expanse of sea.*

Ambition, avarice, irresolution, fear, and lust do not leave us when we change our country.

Black anxiety sits behind the horseman.

They often follow us even into the cloisters and the schools of philosophy. Neither deserts, nor rocky caves, nor hair shirts, nor fastings will free us of them:

Fast to her side clings the deadly shaft.

Someone said to Socrates that a certain man had grown no better by his travels. ‘I should think not,’ he said, ‘he took himself along with him.’

*Why give up our own country for one that is warmed by another sun?
What expatriate has ever succeeded in escaping from himself as well?*

If a man does not first unburden his soul of the load that weighs upon it, movement will cause it to be crushed still more, as in a ship the cargo is less cumbersome when it is settled. You do a sick man more harm than good by moving him. You imbed the malady by disturbing it, as stakes penetrate deeper and grow firmer when you budge them and shake them. (pp. 175–6)

This passage stages typographically the interplay and exchange between verse and prose, Latin and French: it is a passage that exemplifies the bilingualism of this late humanist culture, reminding us that, in a text like the *Essais*, the distinction between Latin and vernacular does not amount to a distinction between ‘borrowed’ and ‘original’ material.¹¹ The first of these three quotations—‘Et post equitem sedet atra cura’ (‘Black anxiety sits behind the horseman’)—and the third,

11 On the ways that Montaigne’s Latin verse quotations ‘announce their foreign nature both linguistically and typographically’, see McKinley (1981, p. 11). For a recent study of Montaigne’s relationships with prose and verse and particularly his sensorimotor responses to these ways of writing—the ways he ‘feels’ about them—see Cave (2016) and, on Montaigne’s bilingualism, see Gray (1991). For a study of the relationships between Latin, literary French, and regional dialects in Renaissance France and the factors that influenced an author’s choice for the language of composition, see Ford (2013).

longer quotation just before the cargo-laden boat—'Quid terras alio calentes | Sole mutamus? Patria quis exul | Se quoque fugit?' ('Why give up our own country for one that is warmed by another sun? What expatriate has ever succeeded in escaping from himself as well?')—are both also from Horace.¹² I will consider the quotation in the middle, from Virgil's *Aeneid*, shortly. The quotations from the *Odes*, however, draw on those images and themes of fleeing, unsuccessfully, one's cares and duties, echoing—or perhaps pre-echoing—Montaigne's own references to far-flung 'desers' ('deserts') and 'rochers creusez' ('rocky caves').¹³

These quotations are, I suggest, further steps in Montaigne's thinking through Seneca's epistle, which has hitherto served as a window; not as a source for inert textual material, nor simply as a source of sources, but as a reading companion and interlocutor. This is an engaged reading that thinks not only with Seneca's text but with the thinking behind that text; with Seneca's own textual, cognitive practices.

It might be suggested that I have approached this literary window from the wrong side. As we read the passage, we encounter three direct quotations from Horace with what could be described as an addendum based loosely on a Senecan epistle. I propose, though, that it is Seneca's text that serves as Montaigne's starting point, conceptually if not compositionally. It might be noted, however, that the essayist's compositional practice was famously, self-consciously alinear: 'Mon livre est tousjours un' ('My book is always one'), he writes. 'De là toutefois il adviendra facilement qu'il s'y mesle quelque transposition de chronologie, mes contes prenans place selon leur opportunité, non tousjours selon leur aage' ('However, it will easily happen that some transposition of chronology will slip in, for my stories take their place according to their timeliness, not always according to their age').¹⁴ My point is not that Montaigne wrote the borrowing from Seneca before prefacing it with Horatian quotations (though he may well have done), but rather that it is through and with Seneca's epistle that Montaigne thinks in this passage and that, subsequently, it is through the lens of Seneca that the essayist reads, rewrites, and reflects on the other texts he calls upon. We have already seen Montaigne's imitation both of Seneca's words and his mode of silent borrowing and, most significantly, the cross-references and networks of reading that align the allusions made by both writers to Horace's eleventh epistle. I want

¹² Horace, *Odes* 3.1.40, 2.16.18–20.

¹³ *Essais* 1.39, p. 239 (p. 176).

¹⁴ *Essais* 3.9, p. 964 (p. 736). I have written elsewhere on Montaigne's non-linear compositional chronology as a practice of writing 'doubly'. See O'Sullivan (2017).

to turn now to two additional points of ventriloquism or rather double-ventriloquism, which once again draw us back to Seneca, further illustrating his role at the centre of Montaigne's textual and cognitive practice.

The first is Montaigne's quotation from Virgil: 'haeret lateri letalis arundo' ('fast to her side clings the deadly shaft').¹⁵ Taken from book 4, this image of the doe struck by a hunter's arrow describes Dido roaming distraught all over the city ('totaque vagatur | urbe furens'), going from one temple to another making offerings to the gods (*Aeneid* 4.68–9). A few lines later, we see her speaking distractingly to Aeneas, leaving her words, like the arrow, hanging: 'incipit effari mediae in voce resistit' (*Aeneid* 4.76; 'she begins to speak and stops with the word half-spoken'). Turning back to Seneca's epistle, we find Seneca citing one and a half lines from 'Virgilius noster': 'Bacchatur vates, magnum si pectore possit | Excussisse deum' ('the prophetess storms wildly, if so she may shake the mighty god from her breast').¹⁶ Here, Lucilius is compared to the roaming, raving Sibyl at Cumae, pacing not between temples but within one and similarly struggling with half-expressed words that seem not to be her own. This passage is separated from the Dido extract in the *Aeneid* by around 1500 lines and yet it seems clear that Montaigne, reading Seneca and his allusion to the Sibyl, was made to think of this parallel passage. It is not in the line Montaigne quotes that we see this parallel but in its context: here we see the essayist thinking not through textual snippets but through practices of reading; readings that contain within them signposts for further parallel and comparative reading.

Immediately after this Virgilian allusion, we find a further borrowed voice, this time speaking prose. As with the verse, its status as 'borrowed' is clear or at least it seems to be: 'On disoit à Socrates que quelqu'un ne s'estoit aucunement amendé en son voyage: Je croy bien, dit-il, il s'estoit emporté avecques soy' ('Someone said to Socrates that a certain man had grown no better by his travels. "I should think not," he said; "he took himself along with him"'). Montaigne ventriloquises Socrates, whose message overlaps neatly with the final Horatian quotation which follows, about the expatriate failing to escape himself, and does so by projecting yet another voice, that of an anonymous, generalised 'on'. The voice of Seneca, somewhere in this chain of nested interlocutors, is quiet but audible enough if we listen. Returning once more to Seneca's twenty-eighth epistle, we

¹⁵ *Essais* 1.39, p. 239 (p. 176). *Aeneid* 4.73.

¹⁶ Seneca, *Epistles* 28.3; *Aeneid* 6.78–9. Though the image of the pierced or penetrated heart is perhaps too common to suggest any connection, we find 'tacitum vivit sub pectore vulnus' in the passage describing Dido, 4.67.

read: 'Hoc idem querenti cuidam Socrates ait: "Quid miraris nihil tibi peregrinationes prodesse, cum te circumferas? Premit te eadem causa, quae expulit"' (28.2; 'Socrates made the same remark to one who complained; he said: "Why do you wonder that your travels do not help you, seeing you always take yourself with you? The reason that set you wandering pursues you"'). Seneca's version, uncharacteristically, seems wordy and long-winded compared with Montaigne's: in Seneca's Latin, Socrates provides both the set-up and the punchline; the pithy retort delivered by Montaigne's Socrates is, in Seneca's epistle, more akin to a stern rebuke from a despairing teacher.

In a later epistle, however, Seneca returns to the theme of fleeing one's problems before alluding again to this same Socratic anecdote: 'Nam Socraten querenti cuidam, quod nihil sibi peregrinationes profuissent, respondisse ferunt: "non inmerito hoc tibi evenit; tecum enim peregrinabaris"' (104.7; 'Socrates is reported to have replied, when a certain person complained of having received no benefit from his travels: "It serves you right! You travelled in your own company!"'). Compared not with epistle 28 but epistle 104, Montaigne's rendering of this Socratic anecdote witnesses to the relationships between his thinking, his writing, and his habit of leafing through his books. 'Je feuillette à cette heure un livre,' he writes elsewhere, 'à cette heure un autre, sans ordre et sans dessein, à pieces descousues' ('I leaf through now one book, now another, without order and without plan, by disconnected fragments'): this is a mode of reading related to but distinct from practices of commonplacing.¹⁷ Montaigne is not accumulating *sententiae*; he is engaged in a way of thinking that instinctively draws on his experiences of reading the books he endlessly picks up and puts down. This way of reading is fundamentally non-linear but that is not to say that it produces a writing practice that plucks choice lines from their context. Montaigne's clusters of borrowings exhibit the connections he identifies between and across texts, locating these snippets within their intra- and intertextual contexts and within practices of associative, parallel reading. Epistle 28 serves Montaigne as a window not only on Seneca's sources but onto other moments in the essayist's reading, of Seneca's text as well as his reading of other authors. In ventriloquising Socrates through Seneca, Montaigne looks through two Senecan windows onto one source, or rather through one Senecan window which looks onto another, both affording different perspectives on the same Socrates story. In this doubling of perspective, the text reveals a way of thinking not only through Seneca's epistles but across them.

¹⁷ *Essais* 3.3, p. 828 (p. 629). On commonplace books and the practices of reading and thinking they entail, see Moss (1996).

In this passage, Montaigne seems to be calling on a cluster of poets. If, however, we recognise the Senecan source lurking in the background, we can reveal the framework that governs and facilitates Montaigne's thinking. This is a two-tier allusion in which that first tier is all but invisible. And yet the almost invisible Senecan epistle is not functioning simply as a compendium of quotations; it is, rather, working as an interlocutor and springboard, which allows Montaigne to think through, against, and in parallel with Seneca and his sources.

Thinking by Twos: Pairs, Parallels, and Prosopopoeia

Towards the end of 'De la solitude', Montaigne turns from one pair of letter writers, Seneca and Horace, to another:

Mais oyons le conseil que donne le jeune Pline à Cornelius Rufus, son amy, sur ce propos de la solitude: Je te conseille, en cette pleine et grasse retraite, où tu es, de quitter à tes gens ce bas et abject soin du mesnage, et t'adonner à l'estude des lettres, pour en tirer quelque chose qui soit tout tienne.¹⁸

But let us hear the counsel that the younger Pliny gives his friend Cornelius Rufus on this matter of solitude: I advise you, in this full and prosperous retreat of yours, to leave to your servants the sordid and abject care of the household, and to devote yourself to the study of letters, in order to derive from it something that is all your own.

We might think that the 'quelque chose', this 'aliquid', is a book but, as Montaigne immediately asserts, 'Il entend la reputation: d'une pareille humeur à celle de Cicero, qui dict vouloir employer sa solitude et sejour des affaires publiques à s'en acquérir par ses escrits une vie immortelle' (p. 244; 'He means reputation, being of a like temper with Cicero, who says he wants to use his solitude and rest from public affairs to gain by his writings immortal life', p. 180). Pliny's injunction is echoed and glossed by Cicero, Pliny's model: the relationship between these two writers is one of resemblance rather than influence and reveals a further aspect of Montaigne's comparative, parallel reading.¹⁹ Montaigne's reading of Cicero not only informs his reading of Pliny's text, but also of his mind, his meaning, and his character or 'humeur'. Terence Cave has noted Montaigne's

¹⁸ *Essais* 1.39, p. 244 (p. 180); cf. Pliny, *Letters* 1.3.4.

¹⁹ On Cicero as Pliny's model, see Pliny, *Letters* 4.8.4.

'moral' reading in which he 'infers the moral character of an author from his works, or uses external evidence to reconstruct that character and then bring it to bear on the writings'.²⁰ Pliny's text opens a window onto that of his literary model while Cicero's explicit statements on his own intentions open a window into Pliny's mind.

What follows in Montaigne's essay is a lengthy critique of the younger Pliny's advice, expanded further by an additional passage inserted after 1588. In the first edition, Montaigne moves immediately from Pliny and Cicero to his own view: 'Ny la fin donc, ny le moyen de ce conseil ne me contente: nous retombons tous-jours de fievre en chaud mal. Cette occupation des livres est aussi penible que toute autre' (p. 245; 'Therefore I am satisfied with neither the purpose nor the means of Pliny's advice: we still would merely fall out of an ague into a burning fever. This occupation with books is as laborious as any other', p. 181). After allowing his discourse to digress slightly to consider the virtues of moderation even in pleasant activities, the essayist returns to his pair of epistolographers: 'Or, quant à la fin que Pline et Cicero nous proposent, de la gloire, c'est bien loin de mon compte. La plus contraire humeur à la retraicte, c'est l'ambition' (p. 246; 'Now, as for glory, the goal that Pliny and Cicero set up for us, it is very far from my reckoning. The humour most directly opposite to retirement is ambition', p. 182).

Montaigne's thinking with these authors is, I suggest, shaped by his reading of Plutarch, an author, frequently partnered with Seneca, to whom he turns constantly when discussing literary models.²¹ Plutarch's practice in his *Parallel Lives* of presenting two lives in sequence before bringing them together in a concluding, comparative *synkrisis* is reflected in Montaigne's tendency to think 'in twos'.²² Parallel structures are particularly present in this chapter: Montaigne pairs not only Pliny with Cicero but, as we will see, Seneca with Epicurus; he introduces the chapter as one that will 'leave aside' discussions of solitary and active life, avarice and ambition, public and private selves; the chapter that follows, uncharacteristically forming a direct link with its antecedent, announces, 'Encor' un traict à la comparaison de ces couples' ('One more note on the comparison of

²⁰ Cave (2009a, p. 22).

²¹ See, for instance, *Essais* 1.26: 'Je n'ay dressé commerce avec aucun livre solide, sinon Plutarque et Seneque, où je puyse comme les Danaïdes, remplissant et versant sans cesse' (p. 146; 'I have not had regular dealings with any solid book, except Plutarch and Seneca, from whom I draw like the Danaïds, incessantly filling up and pouring out', p. 107).

²² For a recent study of Montaigne's reading of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, see Calhoun (2015).

these pairs'), the couples in question being Pliny and Cicero, Seneca and Epicurus.²³ Drawing Montaigne's reading of the *Parallel Lives* alongside the essayist's account of his disbelief when told of geometrical proofs that parallel lines never cross, Alison Calhoun has argued that, for Montaigne, parallels were conceived 'not as an eternal separation, but as a form of togetherness'.²⁴ In 'De la solitude', we find a tangled network of such 'parallels': pairs and doubles that prompt or echo—that parallel—other pairs, interacting and connecting in diverse ways.

When Montaigne returns, after his digression, to 'la fin que Pline et Cicero nous proposent', the dynamics of opposition and assimilation are immediately apparent though not in a way that accords with Plutarch's practices: Cicero and Pliny are not compared but they are instead unified in contrast to Montaigne's 'je': 'c'est bien loin de mon compte' ('it is very far from my reckoning'); 'A ce que je voy, ceux-cy n'ont que les bras et les jambes hors de la presse; leur intention y demeure engagée plus que jamais' ('As far as I can see, these men have only their arms and legs outside the crowd; their souls, their intentions, are more than ever in the thick of it').²⁵ The essayist has broken the Plutarchan formula; his authorial voice has come in too early.

This authorial voice is swiftly replaced, however, by the voice of Seneca and Epicurus, both of whom go unnamed:

Vous plaist-il voir comme ils tirent court d'un grain? Mettons au contrepoids l'advis de deux philosophes et de deux sectes tres differentes, escrivains, l'un à Idomeneus, l'autre à Lucilius, leurs amis, pour, du maniemment des affaires et des grandeurs, les retirer à la solitude.

(*Essais* 1.39, p. 247)

Do you want to see how they shoot a grain's length too short? Let us put into the scales the advice of two philosophers of two very different sects, one writing to Idomeneus, the other to Lucilius, their friends, to persuade them to give up handling affairs and withdraw from their high positions into solitude. (p. 182)

The comparison is no longer between one ancient and another but between two couples. With the metaphor of weighing scales and counterweights, Montaigne's practice of 'essaying' these ancients makes him more Plutarchan than Plutarch himself: the act of coupling has been doubled.

²³ *Essais* 1.39, p. 237 (p. 174); 1.40, p. 249 (p. 183).

²⁴ Calhoun (2017, p. 361).

²⁵ *Essais* 1.39, pp. 246–7 (p. 182).

All four of these 'philosophes' are 'escrivains', writers of letters, though only the latter couple, Seneca and Epicurus, are described as such. Montaigne's interest lies not in the lives of these ancients, their public actions or noble deeds, but rather in their private words, put down in writing in the solitude that constitutes their subject. The identification of Seneca and Epicurus as epistolographers—an identification that is based entirely on the naming not of the authors but of their addressees—unites these two philosophers from 'deux sectes tres differentes': the Greek served as the Roman's model and as a source for the many quotations and borrowings with which Seneca closes each of his first twenty-nine epistles.²⁶ Notably, Montaigne's refusal to name Seneca and Epicurus not only further highlights their opposition to the vainglorious Pliny and Cicero, who sought solitude only as a stepping-stone to renown and immortality; it also reveals a further allusion to Seneca and to a passage that is itself looking back both to Epicurus, the fame he secured for Idomeneus, and also to Cicero and Atticus: 'Quis Idomeneae nosset, nisi Epicurus illum litteris suis incidisset? ... Nomen Attici perire Ciceronis epistulae non sinunt ... Quod Epicurus amico suo potuit promittere, hoc tibi promitto, Lucili' ('Who would have known of Idomeneus, had not Epicurus thus engraved his name in those letters of his? Cicero's letters keep the name of Atticus from perishing. That which Epicurus could promise his friend, this I promise you, Lucilius').²⁷

Having introduced—without naming—the Seneca-Epicurus pair, Montaigne lets them speak for themselves. Speaking in the second-person, they address directly their reader who is, at once, Idomeneus, Lucilius, Montaigne, and us as readers of the *Essais*. 'Vous avez (disent-ils) vescu nageant et flotant jusques à present, venez vous en mourir au port' (p. 247; "You have," they say, "lived until now swimming and floating; come away and die in port", p. 182). Then follows a long passage made up entirely of borrowed *sententiae*:²⁸

26 Seneca stops closing his epistles with an Epicurean quotation after his twenty-ninth letter. On this, see Tischer (2017, pp. 309–10). Tischer argues that, for Seneca, the quotation of philosophical teachings is only appropriate in the early stages of a student's education. On the influence of Epicurus' letters on the form and themes of Seneca's, see Inwood (2007, pp. 142–5).

27 Seneca, *Epistles* 21.4–5.

28 In addition to re-ordering Seneca's text, Montaigne makes some small changes. Notably, in reworking Seneca's advice to imagine great men from whom even 'perditi ... homines' or, in Montaigne's French, 'les fols mesmes' would hide their faults, Montaigne replaces Seneca's examples of Cato, Scipio, and Laelius with Cato, Phocion, and Aristides. This shift to individuals found in Plutarch's *Lives* further reveals the presence of Plutarch in Montaigne's thinking in this passage.

Vous avez donné le reste de vostre vie à la lumiere, donnez cecy à l'ombre. Il est impossible de quitter les occupations, si vous n'en quittez le fruit: à cette cause, défaitez vous de tout soing de nom et de gloire. Il est dangier que la lueur de vos actions passées ne vous esclaire que trop, et vous suive jusques dans vostre taniere. Quittez avecq les autres voluptez celle qui vient de l'approbation d'autrui; et, quant à vostre science et suffisance, ne vous chaille, elle ne perdra pas son effect, si vous en valez mieux vous mesme. Souvenne vous de celuy à qui, comme on demandast à quoy faire il se pénoit si fort en un art qui ne pouvoit venir à la cognoissance de guiere de gens: J'en ay assez de peu, respondit-il, j'en ay assez d'un, j'en ay assez de pas un. Il disoit vray: vous et un compagnon estes assez suffisant theatre l'un à l'autre, ou vous à vous-mesmes. Que le peuple vous soit un, et un vous soit tout le peuple. C'est une lasche ambition de vouloir tirer gloire de son oysiveté et de sa cachette. Il faut faire comme les animaux qui effacent la trace, à la porte de leur taniere. Ce n'est plus ce qu'il vous faut chercher, que le monde parle de vous, mais comme il faut que vous parliez à vous mesmes. Retirez vous en vous, mais preparez vous premierelement de vous y recevoir: ce seroit folie de vous fier à vous mesmes, si vous ne vous sçavez gouverner. Il y a moyen de faillir en la solitude comme en la compagnie. Jusques à ce que vous vous soiez rendu tel, devant qui vous n'osiez clocher, et jusques à ce que vous ayez honte et respect de vous mesmes, *obversentur species honestae animo*, presentez vous tousjours en l'imagination Caton, Phocion et Aristides, en la presence desquels les fols mesmes cacheroient leurs fautes, et établissez les contrerolleurs de toutes vos intentions: si elles se detraquent, leur reverence les remettra en train. Ils vous contiendront en cette voie de vous contenter de vous mesmes, de n'emprunter rien que de vous, d'arrester et fermir vostre ame en certaines et limitées cogitations où elle se puisse plaie; et ayant entendu les vrays biens, desquels on jouit à mesure qu'on les entend, s'en contenter, sans desir de prolongement de vie ny de nom.

(Essais 1.39, p. 247)

You have given the rest of your life to light; give this part to shade. It is impossible to abandon occupations if you do not abandon the fruits of them; therefore rid yourself of all care for reputation and glory. There is danger that the gleam of your past actions may give you only too much light and follow you right into your lair. Abandon with the other pleasures that which comes from the approbation of others; and as for your knowledge and ability, don't worry, it will not lose its effect if it makes you yourself a better man. Remember the man who, when asked why he took so much pains in an art which could come to the knowledge of so few, replied: Few are enough for me, one is enough for me, none at all is enough for me. He spoke truly: you and one companion are an adequate theatre for each other, or you for yourself. Let the people be one to you, and let one be a whole people to you. It is a base ambition to want to derive glory from our idleness and our concealment. We must do like the animals that scrub out their tracks at the entrance to their lairs. Seek no longer that the world should speak of you, but how you should speak to yourself. Retire into yourself, but first prepare to receive yourself there; it would be madness to trust in yourself if you do not know how to govern yourself. There are ways to fail in solitude as well as in company. Until you have made yourself such that you dare not trip up in your own presence, and until you feel both shame and respect for yourself, *let the ideals that a true man honours be kept constantly before his eyes*, keep ever in your mind Cato, Phocion, and Aristides, in whose presence even fools hide their faults; make them controllers of all your

intentions; if these intentions get off the track, your reverence for those men will set it right again. They will keep you in a fair way to be content with yourself, to borrow nothing except from yourself, to arrest your mind and fix it on definite and limited thoughts in which it may take pleasure; and, after understanding them, to rest content with them, without any desire to prolong life and reputation. (pp. 182–3)

This speech is, as Montaigne makes clear, one in which Seneca and Epicurus are made to speak again: these are their words, not digested and recounted by Montaigne but spoken by Seneca and Epicurus, imitator and model, themselves.

This is a passage that sits somewhere between the *cento*, a patchwork of phrases in which, as Lipsius put it, the ‘verba’ and ‘sententiae’ are borrowed while the ‘inventio tota & ordo a nobis sint’, and *prosopopoeia* or, more accurately, *eidolopoeia*, the rhetorical figure by which the dead are made to speak.²⁹ And yet it is not quite a *cento*—it would be difficult to say that Montaigne has significantly changed the meanings of these sayings in recombining them—and nor is it strictly *eidolopoeia*, given that the words spoken by Seneca and Epicurus have not been imagined or composed by the essayist. Nor still is it a digest, a work of doxography, or the product of commonplacing: Montaigne’s explicit and sustained ventriloquising reveals that something else is happening here. In this passage, then, Montaigne draws on established rhetorical practices and ways of engaging with dead texts and dead authors in novel ways, revitalising them so that he might speak with them.

But Seneca and Epicurus speak simultaneously: Montaigne introduces this passage with a parenthetical ‘(disent-ils)’ (‘they say’) and concludes: ‘Voilà le conseil de la vraye et naïve philosophie, non d’une philosophie ostentatrice et parliere, comme est celle des deux premiers’ (p. 248; ‘That is the counsel of true and natural philosophy, not of an ostentatious and talky philosophy like that of Pliny and Cicero’, p. 183). These are the last words of the chapter. With this closing link back to that other pair, Cicero and Pliny, Montaigne reinforces the unity found in his combination of Seneca and Epicurus: they speak with one voice.³⁰

²⁹ Lipsius (1604, p. 9). On the *cento*, see Tucker (2011) and Tucker (2002). On *prosopopoeia* and *eidolopoeia*, see Alexander (2007), Perona (2013), Kenny (2015, pp. 166–207), and, in an Italian context, Roush (2015).

³⁰ In placing himself, along with Seneca and Epicurus, in opposition to the ‘philosophie ... parliere’ of Pliny and Cicero, Montaigne makes plain his perspective on the sixteenth-century debates surrounding Ciceronianism (a view made plainer still in the following chapter, ‘Consideration sur Cicéron’), though Montaigne’s criticism rests on questions of ethics rather than rhetoric: in both 1.39 and 1.40, Cicero and Pliny are presented as emblems of ‘ambition’. On Montaigne’s debts to Cicero in spite of his declared anti-Ciceronianism, see Eden (2015).

Everything in this passage is taken from Seneca, stitched together from five epistles.³¹ Four of these five epistles are from the first 29 letters, each of which closes with a quotation from Epicurus, and the exception, epistle 68, makes explicit reference to this earlier intertextual practice: “Otium,” inquis, “Seneca, commendas mihi? Ad Epicureas voces delaberis?” (“Then you say: “Is it retirement, Seneca, that you are recommending me? You will soon be falling back upon the maxims of Epicurus!””).³² Throughout his early letters, the Stoic repeatedly asserts that he ‘owns’ Epicurus’ words and that Epicurus’ words are ‘common property’.³³ This pattern of appropriation is particularly clear in epistle 22: ‘Iam inprimebam epistulae signum; resolvenda est, ut cum sollemni ad te munusculo veniat et aliquam magnificam vocem ferat secum ... “Cuius?” inquis; Epicuri, adhuc enim alienas sarcinas adsero’ (‘I was just putting the seal on this letter; but it must be broken again, in order that it may go to you with its customary contribution, bearing with it some noble word ... “Spoken by whom?” you ask. By Epicurus, for I am still appropriating other men’s belongings’).³⁴

In the *Essais*, however, Seneca’s constant refrain of ownership and appropriation seems to have been flipped on its head: where, in the *Epistulae ad Lucilius*, Epicurus’ words migrate towards the Stoic, passing first into common property and then into Seneca’s stock, here in the *Essais*, Seneca’s words are spoken—at least in part—by Epicurus. Montaigne has reversed the direction of textual transmission: in making Seneca and Epicurus speak together, and in making them speak Seneca’s words, Montaigne’s window reference pushes us to consider the implications of Seneca’s model of ‘common’ literary property, of imitation, appropriation, and influence. In the *Epistles*, Seneca can appropriate or subscribe to the words of Epicurus but, in the *Essais*, Epicurus, positioned by Montaigne as Seneca’s parallel, can speak with and through the words of the Stoic.

These are, in yet another sense, Montaigne’s words, not simply because they have been put into French but because of the network of contrasts the essayist has set up: he begins by opposing his view with that of Cicero and Pliny and closes by contrasting Cicero and Pliny with Seneca and Epicurus. With these pairings and contrasts, Montaigne places himself alongside Seneca and Epicurus and

³¹ Epistles 7, 19, 22, 25, and 68.

³² Seneca, *Epistles* 68.10.

³³ On Epicurus’ words as ‘common’ or ‘public property’, see Seneca, *Epistles* 8.8 and 21.9. On early modern understandings of literary property as ‘communia’ and its relation to Roman models, see Eden (2008).

³⁴ Seneca, *Epistles* 22.13. See also 12.11: “Epicurus,” inquis, “dixit. Quid tibi cum alieno?” Quod verum est, meum est.’

makes these foreign words speak his opinion; he finds a way for these words to be spoken by three voices at once.

The place of Epicurus in this patchwork remains doubtful, however. He is at once silent—none of the words cited here are ‘his’—and vocal, speaking words written in imitation of his own long after his death. We find Epicurus speaking words he could not have known in a language at two removes from his own and yet, for Montaigne at least, this is as much Epicurus’ voice as it is Seneca’s.

It could be that this is due simply to a relative paucity of source material: only three of Epicurus’ letters survive, having been cited in the *Lives* of Diogenes Laertius. And yet Montaigne seems to work actively to guarantee that Epicurus, capable of speaking, cannot speak his own words. Further complicating the network of ventriloquism, Montaigne translates an excerpt from Seneca’s Epistle 7 in which we are asked to remember the man’s response when asked why he laboured so much for a task that would have little, if any, audience: ‘J’en ay assez de peu, respondit-il, j’en ay assez d’un, j’en ay assez de pas un’ (p. 247; “‘Few are enough for me,” he replied, “one is enough for me, none at all is enough for me”’, p. 182).

The corresponding passage in Seneca reveals this to be a close translation:

Sed ne soli mihi hodie didicerim, communicabo tecum, quae occurrerunt mihi egregie dicta circa eundem fere sensum tria ... Democritus ait: ‘Unus mihi pro populo est, et populus pro uno.’ Bene et ille, quisquis fuit, ambigitur enim de auctore, cum quaereretur ab illo, quo tanta diligentia artis spectaret ad paucissimos perventurae, ‘Satis sunt,’ inquit, ‘mihi pauci, satis est unus, satis est nullus.’ Egregie hoc tertium Epicurus, cum uni ex consortibus studiorum suorum scriberet: ‘Haec,’ inquit, ‘ego non multis, sed tibi; satis enim magnum alter alteri theatrum sumus.’

(Seneca, *Epistles* 7.11; emphasis added).

In order, however, that I may not today have learned exclusively for myself, I shall share with you three excellent sayings, of the same general purport, which have come to my attention ... Democritus says: ‘One man means as much to me as a multitude, and a multitude only as much as one man.’ *The following was also nobly spoken by someone or other, for it is doubtful who the author was; they asked him what was the object of all this study applied to an art that would reach but very few. He replied: ‘I am content with few, content with one, content with none at all.’* The third saying—and a noteworthy one, too—is by Epicurus, written to one of the partners of his studies: ‘I write this not for the many, but for you; each of us is enough of an audience for the other.’

What is significant is the text that surrounds it. Once again, Seneca is sealing his letter with a textual borrowing, though this time he is offering not one but three. The first of these sayings comes from Democritus and the last, notably, from Epicurus, and yet it is the second—the anonymous saying—which is seized upon by

Montaigne. The essayist could have taken this opportunity to bring Epicurus explicitly forward. In the *Epistles*, Epicurus, speaking Latin, says: 'Haec ego non multis, sed tibi; satis enim magnum alter alteri theatrum sumus' ('I write this not for the many, but for you; each of us is enough of an audience for the other').³⁵ These words are echoed by Montaigne and yet his rendering reworks them such that they lose this authorial association: 'Il disoit vray: vous et un compagnon estes assez suffisant theatre l'un à l'autre, ou vous à vous-mesmes' (p. 247; 'He spoke truly: you and one companion are an adequate theatre for each other, or you for yourself', p. 182). These words have become a gloss on the anonymous sentence that precedes it, in which the unnamed man claims to have enough of an audience in a few people, in one person, or in no-one. With this act of borrowing a borrowing, Montaigne at once restores the power of speech to Epicurus and deprives him of it: for one brief moment, Seneca and Epicurus, speaking together, utter a few words belonging to the latter but, in finding his voice, Epicurus finds himself marginalised and subordinated, not only to Seneca, nor even to Montaigne, but to an anonymous nobody.

There is yet one more layer in this series of nested voices, however, and one, notably, that threatens to undermine the structural and intertextual parallels upon which Montaigne's chapter is based. Returning to this passage at some point after 1588, Montaigne, in the margins of the Bordeaux Copy, squeezed one more *sententia* into this *cento* of Seneca: 'Rarum est enim ut satis se quisque vereatur' ('it is rare for anyone to be sufficiently critical of himself').³⁶ In the middle of a collection of translated borrowings, this direct quotation of the Latin stands out. It is, we might think, the voice of Seneca, untransformed and untranslated, coming to the fore. Except that it is not from Seneca; it is from Quintilian.³⁷ So, what is this voice doing here? Dutifully, Montaigne crossed out this Latin tag and decided to use it slightly earlier in the chapter.³⁸ But he then inserts another Latin quotation: 'obversentur species honestae animo' ('let the ideals that a true man honours be kept constantly before his eyes'). It seems consonant with the injunction that follows, taken from epistle 25: 'presentez vous tousjours en l'imagination Caton, Phocion et Aristides, en la presence desquels les fols mesmes cacheroient leurs fautes' (p. 247; 'keep ever in your mind Cato, Phocion, and Aristides,

³⁵ Seneca, *Epistles* 7.11.

³⁶ For an introduction to scholarship on the 'Bordeaux Copy' ('exemplaire de Bordeaux'), the 1588 edition of the *Essais* upon which Montaigne made thousands of additions, insertions, and corrections until his death in 1592, see O'Brien (2004).

³⁷ Cf. Quintilian, *Institutiones* 10.7.24.

³⁸ Cf. *Essais*, p. 242 (p. 178).

in whose presence even fools would hide their faults', p. 183). But these Latin words do not come from Seneca. Inserted into this mosaic of Senecan quotations, spoken by Seneca and Epicurus in opposition to Pliny and Cicero, this is a quotation from book 2 of the *Tusculan Disputations*.³⁹ This line is from Cicero; not Seneca's model but his mirror image.

'Voylà d'où il le print!'

In these passages from 'De la solitude', Seneca's text serves in two distinct but related ways as a gateway; as a midpoint between the essayist and a cluster of ancient voices. In the first instance, Seneca's own practices of imitation and borrowing offer Montaigne an interlocutor with whom to read. Rather than serving as a model for imitation, Seneca facilitates Montaigne's particularly textual way of thinking, which relies on associative, parallel, and comparative reading. In the second passage, Seneca's capacity to provide a mouthpiece for diverse voices takes on a different form in which authorial identity is slippery and ambiguous. With complex ventriloquism, Montaigne stages and encourages doubtful reading, a reading that interrogates the relationships of influence, authorial 'ownership', and imitation. In both cases, though, it is with this mediate character—Seneca between Montaigne and the Latin poets; between Montaigne and a cluster of epistolographers—that the essayist navigates the shifting seas of his reading, writing, and thinking.

In his 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond', Montaigne considers his relationship with the philosophical voices that came before his:

J'en laisse plus librement aller mes caprices en public: d'autant que, bien qu'ils soyent nez chez moy et sans patron, je sçay qu'ils trouveront leur relation à quelque humeur ancienne; et ne faudra quelqu'un de dire: Voylà d'où il le print!

(*Essais* 2.12, p. 546)

I let fly my caprices all the more freely in public, inasmuch as, although they are born with me and without a model, I know that they will find their relation to some ancient notion; and someone will not fail to say: 'That is where he got it.' (pp. 408–9)

As though to prove his point, Montaigne, some time after 1588, inserted a Latin quotation immediately before this assertion of independence: 'Nihil tam absurde

³⁹ Cf. Cicero, *Disputationes* 2.52.

dici potest quod non dicatur ab aliquo philosophorum' ('Nothing can be said, however absurd, that is not said by some philosopher or other').⁴⁰

My aim in this chapter has not been to play the role anticipated by Montaigne of pointing to his sources, and the sources of those sources, to say 'that is where he got it'. Rather, I have attempted to uncover part of Montaigne's practice of thinking with writing, borrowed and not-borrowed, read and composed; of thinking not with detached *sententiae* or excerpted commonplaces but with moments of reading and with the connections, overlaps, and parallels between those moments. Tracing the 'relation' between Montaigne's words and those of the ancient authors he incorporates is not to trace a genealogy. It is, rather, to trace a pattern of parallel thinking, of thinking founded on comparative and disjointed reading: a way of thinking with a cluster of textual interlocutors engaged in complex networks of related conversations.

Montaigne recognised the originality, and the difficulties, inherent in his project: it is 'une espineuse entreprinse' ('a thorny undertaking') to follow 'une al-leure si vagabonde que celle de nostre esprit' ('a movement so wandering as that of our mind'). 'Il y a plusieurs années que je n'ay que moy pour visée à mes pensées ... et si j'estudie autre chose, c'est pour soudain le coucher sur moy, ou en moy, pour mieux dire' ('It is many years now that I have had only myself as object of my thoughts, and if I study anything else, it is in order promptly to apply it to myself, or rather within myself').⁴¹ When Montaigne's allusions open a window onto anterior texts, they do not serve to establish a tradition: the focus of the reader remains fixed on Montaigne's thinking and his two-tier allusions draw us closer into his thought-processes.

It is here that a distinction might be drawn between Montaigne's (early modern) practice and the understanding of window reference developed in the study of classical texts. In the passage concerning Seneca and the Latin poets, for instance, not only is Montaigne's reference to—or rather, engagement with—Seneca not 'noticeably interrupted', it is not immediately noticeable at all. Similarly, the Seneca-Epicurus window reference does not afford a view of Seneca's imitation, allowing Montaigne to comment on or 'correct' the Latin writer's adaptation, but instead confuses the lines of influence between the intermingled and

⁴⁰ The quotation is from Cicero, *De Divinatione* 2.58.

⁴¹ *Essais* 2.6, p. 378 (p. 273).

overlapping authorial voices.⁴² Montaigne's project of self-study incorporates imitative series and clusters but not as a means of siting the author's thought, sending the reader back to consult a sequence of models or aligning the work with those which came before it, whether through patterns of similarity or difference. Rather, these series and clusters, which are complex and not immediately apparent to the reader, structure Montaigne's ways of thinking with reading and writing, his ways of thinking with the technology of print. It is with these moments of reading across, between, and within books that the essayist explores his uncertain thinking, thinking through his unresolved ideas in dialogue with the authors he encounters—interlocutors who, in 1.39 at least, are themselves seen to be in dialogue and exchange with other authors and other books. In 'De la solitude', we find Montaigne thinking not just with and through Seneca, nor simply with the sources and passages found in his epistles, but with a crowd of authors Seneca seems to have brought with him: a crowd with which to think and write solitude.

⁴² On window reference as a 'close adaptation ... noticeably interrupted' by the source of the model such that the model is 'in some fashion "corrected"', see Thomas (1986, p. 188).