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RE-DISCOVERING PSYCHOTHERAPY IN THE LIGHT OF MONTAIGNE'S *ESSAYS*

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ENTRE NOUS:

RE-DISCOVERING PSYCHOTHERAPY IN THE LIGHT OF MONTAIGNE'S *ESSAYS*

A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN PSYCHOLOGY

BY

RACHEL STARR

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To Trevor, in love and friendship

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GENERAL ABSTRACT

In this study comprised of three chapters, I bring together the *Essays* of Michel de Montaigne and novice psychotherapists, including myself, in a conversation about our discipline. Our discussion bubbles over conventional boundaries of the natural sciences into the fertile yet groundless realm of the humanities. Questions about ordinary experience, uncertainty, presence, embodiment, friendship, conversation, plain speech, tradition, and Renaissance humanism come alive for us in this dialogue.

The introductory essay is a meditation on friendship in which I lay the groundwork for a festive meeting between therapists and the *Essays*. In the second essay, I take a look at the Renaissance as an era of discovery and openness. I explore how this reality came to be expressed in two ways: through the essay and the natural sciences. The third essay is made up of sidelong glances at the elusive nature of experience, as so vividly evoked in the *Essays*. Reframing humanistic therapy within the wider humanism of Montaigne allows me to reflect on the intersubjective nature of lived experience from unexpected angles.

This study celebrates Montaigne's *Essays* as a vital companion text for psychotherapists. It is part of a larger endeavour in psychotherapy to restore the humanities as a complementary source of understanding alongside the natural sciences. I try to show fellow students how psychotherapy can be understood and enriched through engagement with the *Essays*, as well as with other conversations that take place in the humanities.

By adopting the playful yet disciplined essay form, I hope to entice therapy students into a hospitable human world, one that has been obscured by the progressive shadow of modernity. No longer alone, we can resist the temptations of theoretical expertise and come home to a conversation.

Keywords: psychotherapy, Michel de Montaigne, essay, experience, presence, embodiment, friendship, conversation, intersubjectivity, Renaissance humanism

RÉSUMÉ GÉNÉRAL

Dans cette étude composée de trois chapitres, je rassemble les *Essais* de Michel de Montaigne et les psychothérapeutes débutants, y compris moi-même, dans une conversation au sujet de notre discipline. Nos discussions débordent les limites conventionnelles des sciences naturelles pour entrer dans le domaine fertile mais incertain des humanités. Les questions concernant l'expérience ordinaire, l'incertitude, la présence, l'incarnation, l'amitié, la conversation, le discours clair, la tradition, et l'humanisme de la Renaissance prennent vie pour nous au cœur de ce dialogue.

L'essai d'introduction est une méditation sur l'amitié dans laquelle je pose les bases pour une rencontre festive entre les thérapeutes et les *Essais*. Dans le second essai, je m'intéresse à la Renaissance en tant que période de découverte et d'ouverture. J'explore comment cette réalité s'est exprimée de deux manières : à travers l'essai littéraire et les sciences naturelles. Le troisième essai est constitué de regards obliques sur la nature insaisissable de l'expérience, tel que si lucidement évoquée dans les *Essais*. Recadrer la thérapie humaniste à l'intérieur de l'humanisme plus étendu de Montaigne me permet de réfléchir sur la nature intersubjective de l'expérience vécue à partir de points de vue inattendus.

Cette étude est une célébration des *Essais* de Montaigne en tant que texte d'accompagnement vital pour les psychothérapeutes. Elle fait partie d'un effort plus vaste de revalorisation des humanités en tant que source de connaissances complémentaire aux sciences naturelles pour la psychothérapie. J'essaie de présenter à mes camarades étudiants de quelle façon la psychothérapie peut être comprise et enrichie en abordant les *Essais*, ainsi que les autres conversations ayant lieu au sein des humanités.

En adoptant la forme de l'essai, ludique mais rigoureux, je souhaite inciter les étudiants de la thérapie à entrer dans un monde humain hospitalier, un monde qui fût obscurci par l'ombre progressive de la modernité. N'étant alors plus seul, il nous est possible de résister aux tentations de l'expertise théorique et d'en revenir à une conversation.

Mots-clés : psychothérapie, Michel de Montaigne, essai, expérience, présence, incarnation, amitié, conversation, intersubjectivité, humanisme de la Renaissance

PRELUDE

Our life is composed, like the harmony of the world, of contrary things, also of different tones, sweet and harsh, sharp and flat, soft and loud. If a musician liked only one kind, what would he have to say? He must know how to use them together and blend them. [...] Our existence is impossible without this mixture, and one element is no less necessary for it than the other.
— Michel de Montaigne

But this talking of oneself, following one's own vagaries, giving the whole map, weight, colour, and circumference of the soul in its confusion, its variety, its imperfection — this art belonged to one man only: to Montaigne. As the centuries go by, there is always a crowd before that picture, gazing into its depths, seeing their own faces reflected in it, seeing more the longer they look, never being able to say quite what it is that they see.
— Virginia Woolf

Except for you, O man," said that god, "each thing studies itself first, and, according to its needs, has limits to its labors and desires. There is not a single thing as empty and needy as you, who embrace the universe: you are the investigator without knowledge, the magistrate without jurisdiction, and all in all, the fool of the farce.
— Michel de Montaigne

TO THE READER

The structure of this doctoral study is a little unorthodox. As planned, the body is composed of two published essays, which are based on my research and writing over the course of my degree. However, as I set to writing the introduction to my thesis, it struck me that I was writing an introduction to a work that is itself an introduction to the *Essays*. My aim has always been to introduce fellow novice therapists – in particular those uncomfortably confined within the depersonalized realm of medical psychology – to another starting point of inquiry into our discipline. I realized that the introduction was an integral part of my endeavour, rather than a formality. After its warm reception at the 2012 International Human Science Research Conference, I continued to essay the introduction until it grew into the first chapter of the present study. True to the vision of our companion from Bordeaux, the introduction serves as a home for my thought, from which I venture out to discover other things, ideas, and people, and to which I return, transformed.

CHAPTER I

IN GOOD COMPANY: PSYCHOTHERAPISTS AND THE
WINE-MAKER FROM BORDEAUX

Rachel Starr

ABSTRACT

The irrepressible 16th century humanist and essayist, Michel de Montaigne, wrote a self-portrait with such unprecedented candour and conversational flair, that he all but jumps from the page and shakes your hand. I propose that psychotherapists take Montaigne up on his offer of friendship. We could certainly use a friend, and I make the case that Montaigne is a worthy candidate, perhaps even more so than another contender, Socrates.

With Montaigne at our side, we gain the confidence to take a closer look at what goes on in therapy in all of its remarkable particularity. Consoled and inspired, we step out into the wider world, orienting ourselves with respect to our patients and to our discipline. This dual movement becomes possible in a lived world made coherent through friendship and hospitality.

In the light of Montaigne's "gay and sociable wisdom", we can see essaying and therapy as discrete yet closely intertwined cultural tasks. Each is a candid and honest "work between friends" (O'Neill, 1982, p. 19) in which we cultivate painful losses, tolerate our ordinary foibles, and draw closer to life. The *Essays* were born in the warm gaze of the library bequeathed to Montaigne by his late great friend, Étienne de la Boétie. I reflect on what it means for therapists to continue this humanist tradition, to receive the gift of the *Essays* and the essay form as part of our cultural heritage.

Keywords: psychotherapy, Montaigne, essay, Renaissance, humanism, humanities, friendship, presence, absence, conversation

RÉSUMÉ

L'irrépressible humaniste et essayiste du 16^e siècle, Michel de Montaigne, a écrit un autoportrait tellement avant-gardiste par sa candeur et son style conversationnel, qu'il sort presque de la page pour nous serrer la main. Je propose que les psychothérapeutes osent accepter l'offre d'amitié de Montaigne. Nous avons certainement besoin d'un ami et je suggère que Montaigne est un digne candidat, peut-être même davantage qu'un autre prétendant, Socrate.

En compagnie de Montaigne, nous sommes plus confiants d'examiner ce qui se déroule en thérapie dans toute sa singularité. Réconfortés et inspirés, nous élargissons nos horizons et adoptons une position respectueuse de nos patients et de notre discipline. Ce double mouvement devient possible dans un monde vécu, rendu cohérent grâce à l'amitié et l'hospitalité.

À la lumière de la « sagesse gaie et sociable » de Montaigne, nous pouvons envisager l'essai littéraire et la thérapie comme des tâches culturelles distinctes, mais à la fois étroitement liées. Elles sont toutes deux un honnête et candide « travail entre amis » (O'Neil, 1982, p. 19) dans lequel nous explorons des séparations pénibles, tolérons nos failles ordinaires, et nous rapprochons de la vie. Les *Essais* ont pris forme dans l'antre chaleureux de la bibliothèque qui fût léguée à Montaigne par son meilleur ami tardif, Étienne de la Boétie. Dans cet article, je réfléchis sur ce que cela signifie pour les thérapeutes de perpétuer cette tradition humaniste; de recevoir le don des *Essais* et du style littéraire de l'essai comme parts de notre héritage culturel.

Mots-clés : psychothérapie, Montaigne, essai, Renaissance, humanisme, humanités, amitié, présence, conversation

I'd like to introduce you somebody that I have come to think of as a good friend: Michel de Montaigne, the celebrated writer of the *Essays of Michel Eyquem de Montaigne*. Montaigne wrote, "I have not made my book any more than it has made me – a book of one substance with its author, proper to me and a limb of my life"ⁱ. He is "the matter of [his] book"ⁱⁱ. Thus, our visit is also a conversation with the *Essays* themselves as a body of work. In fact, Montaigne invented the essay genre: small, disarmingly intimate, and open-minded, conversational pieces of prose. He even coined the term *essai*, a French word which meant attempt, try, test, or even taste. Montaigne asked the age-old Socratic question 'What do I know?', and his *Essays* are 107 attempts at an answer. But attempt is the operative word here, because early on in the 20-year period during which he wrote, – which, by the way, was from 1572 until the day he died in 1592 – Montaigne cheerfully gave up searching for any sort of grand or fixed truths from authoritative sources. In the 16th century, the fashion was to write either systematic philosophical treatises, or commonplace books. The latter were in effect scrapbooks of information, a way of compiling and remembering facts and ideas. In stark contrast, Montaigne's innovative project was a festive medley of continually renewed attempts – essays – to draw closer to more fleeting and fallible truths. That is to say human truths, notably those of bodily experience. Here is what he says about his book in the chapter entitled "On repentance":

This is a register of varied and changing occurrences, of ideas which are unresolved and, when needs be, contradictory, either because I myself have become different or because I grasp hold of different attributes or aspects of my subjects. So I may happen to contradict myself but, as Demades said, I never contradict truth.ⁱⁱⁱ If my mind could gain a firm footing, I would not make essays, I would make decisions; but it is always in apprenticeship and on trial.^{iv}

¹ For ease of reading, I have placed all of the citations from the *Essays* in the end notes using the following format: (TRANSLATOR INITIAL, BOOK:chapter, page). I mainly refer to Donald Frame (Montaigne, 2003), M.A. Screech (Montaigne, 1991), and Charles Cotton's (Montaigne, 1877) English translations of the *Essays*. I also provide the original French text as found in the Thibaudet-Rat edition (Montaigne, 1962).

Basically, the *Essays* are tests of Montaigne's judgement. He judges or weighs his own and other people's thoughts about Socrates, opinions about cannibals, and comments on history and current events. He throws in remarks on Latin aphorisms, endless personal observations about his body, musings about his cat, snippets of gorgeous classical poetry, anecdotes about his unusual childhood, philosophical ideas- whatever comes into his head as they tumble onto the page in front of him. Instead of synthesizing these fragments into a sturdy argument or bending them into a theoretical framework, Montaigne juxtaposes; he places the unruly pieces, which he describes as "chimeras and fantastic monsters"^v, alongside each other so that they become voices in a conversation, "lead[ing] to moments of [shared] revelation though not necessarily to any final synthesis." (Hall, 1989, p. 82)

Montaigne discovered that it is the practice of writing and reading what he writes, that brings order to his experience. Essaying, like psychotherapy, is a dual thing: you let your thoughts go but you witness them. This witnessing is a kind of taming, a making sense (Jager, personal communication, April, 2011). Moreover, Montaigne found that this order is not native to the human mind, it has to be continually achieved.

The Wine-Maker from Bordeaux

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let me give you a bit of background about this Renaissance man, this wine-maker from Bordeaux. Michel de Montaigne was a Frenchman born into recent nobility near the end of the Renaissance in 1533. His grandfather, a wealthy fish merchant by the name of Raymond Eyquem, bought the Chateau Montaigne and its profitable vineyards in 1477. At the time, Bordeaux red wine, also known as claret, enjoyed great popularity across the channel and was being imported in vast quantities by the English. Along with the house, which stands on the top of a mountain (or hill, really), came the noble title, Lord of Montaigne.

As a child, in order to be fluent with the wisdom of classical texts, Montaigne was spoken to exclusively in Latin. This experimental and "natural" approach meant that he only

had his German tutor for company as nobody in his family could actually speak Latin. It wasn't until the age of six that he was permitted to learn French. And yes, this was rather odd, even at that time. Latin had not been spoken colloquially in at least a millennium. Actually, no one is quite sure about how true this story is, but what we do know, is that luckily for us, Montaigne's early Latin immersion afforded him a rare intimacy with the recently rediscovered classical texts. His colloquial rather than scholarly ease allowed him to set the table for a uniquely lively and fertile conversation with the great thinkers of antiquity. Given that contemporary writers wrote in Latin (as a second language), Montaigne was also particularly well-versed in the literature of his day. At six, he was shipped off for a rigorous humanist education at the renowned Collège de Guyenne, where beyond impressing the masters with his grasp of Latin, he seems to have been a middling student.

Later on, Montaigne worked as a magistrate in the court system- a somewhat lacklustre career by his own account – and served time both in the army and as a gentleman at court. While the incredibly bloody Wars of Religion raged on around him, he was often employed as an advisor in negotiations between Protestant and Catholic factions. It was at the parliament of Bordeaux, in 1558, that he met the great friend of his life: poet and fellow humanist, Etienne de la Boétie. Their friendship was cut short after six glorious years when la Boétie suddenly fell ill and died. Ten years later, at the ripe old age of 38, (which was considered a little long in the tooth), Montaigne retired from public life to the tower on his estate to write. Incidentally, I was 38 when I began to read and write about the *Essays* – a detail that has always made me feel slightly better about starting my PhD at such a geriatric age.

Books One and Two of his *Essays* were first published to great success in 1580. They went through five editions before Book Three was added in 1588. Three years after his death in 1592, a complete edition was published which integrated his abundant marginalia, and came to be known as the Bordeaux Copy. The volumes were not seen as free-standing works, but as pieces of an ever-growing whole. Interestingly, the *Essays* were quickly translated into English by John Florio in 1603, and had an immediate impact on English writing and thinking, even more so than in France. When you consider that the *Essays* are about a 1000

pages, this swift translation speaks to the enthusiasm of the public response. News of what Friedrich (1991) called "the most personal book that had appeared to date in world literature" (p. 208) travelled very quickly. To this day, Florio's translation is considered an important version. The influence of the *Essays* on Western thinkers and writers is extensive albeit often overlooked. But to give you an idea, consider Montaigne's young contemporary, Shakespeare. Obviously, Shakespeare did not write essays, but the themes and rhythms of many of his passages, as well as his pioneering use of metaphor², owe a deep debt to Montaigne. For example, "To be or not to be", is considered by many to be Shakespeare's response to the *Essays*. The Renaissance humanists were in the midst of a love affair with ancient philosophy, in particular with the scepticism³. Montaigne, being a man of his time, was a sceptic⁴, not in the hardnosed way that we view scepticism now, but rather with a sceptic ease, buoyed on the rolling waves of doubt. It could be, maybe so, maybe not, perhaps to be, or perhaps not to be. The *Essays* and Hamlet share this reflexivity- that of a sceptical mind thinking. Atwan (1995) points out that Hamlet, like Montaigne, juxtaposes his own judgement processes with more authoritative thinking. "Shakespeare, [...] was essaying the essay within his tragedy, and in so doing he provided one of the earliest commentaries on Montaigne's literary creation." (p. 8)

² Montaigne was the first writer to use visual metaphor so extensively. He explored the "poetic gait" (F, III:9, 925) of familiar words to "enrich their own, give more weight and depth to their meaning and use; they [good writers] teach the language unaccustomed movements, but prudently and shrewdly." (F, III:5, 807)

³ Montaigne was particularly interested in the pragmatic schools of thought, which also include Stoicism and Epicureanism.

⁴ Today, one might view a sceptic as one who doubts things, and requires proof about knowledge. In the Hellenistic era (when it was born) and during the Renaissance, scepticism, especially Pyrrhonian scepticism, was almost a form of therapy. Pyrrhonism, which comes to us from the Greek philosopher Pyrrho (ca. 360 BC - ca. 270 BC) and was later elaborated by Sextus Empiricus in the second century AD, says that we need take nothing seriously in life, including Pyrrhonism itself. Bakewell (2010a) sums up ordinary (Academic) scepticism in Socrates' remark "All I know is that I know nothing." (p. 124) The Pyrrhonian sceptic would go one step further and say that they are not even sure that they know nothing! The resultant absurdity may have the effect of making you feel better, even laugh, because you are freed from the exasperating search for fixed truths. You still judge and look for answers, but you are content with drawing closer to phenomenological truths.

Melville was known to have scribbled in the margins of his copy of Hamlet: "Here is forcibly shown the great Montaigneism of Hamlet." (p. 7)

Then, of course, there are the parts that Shakespeare simply copied directly from the *Essays*. But that's another story.

The Unity of Presence

The open-endedness of his mind's sceptical rhythms leaves room for all sorts of possibilities to spontaneously emerge in the *Essays*. At times, like a wild horse, Montaigne careens off on unexpected tangents. The beauty is that despite, or rather, by virtue of these "disciplined digression[s]" (Kauffmann, 1989, p. 238) there is a sense of unity, a powerful sense of the *Essays* as a whole. In the margins of his manuscript, Montaigne scribbled: "My book is always one." (Compagnon et Freccero, 1983, p. 48) *This unity is presence: an intimate, genuine and surprising revelation*. Through all of the wise and the humourous, the familiar and the strange, a palpable presence emerges.

[P]erhaps the greatest feat that he achieved was to reconcile these conflicting strands, crossing and rercrossing one another; to make them into an active force possessing a unity – not a unity of expression, but of life. (Sichel, 1911, p. 249)

Montaigne is a gregarious host who beckons you to his table. Like any good host or friend, he doesn't impose. His words leave room for you to weigh your own judgements, to come to new understandings, and to learn anew about your world. His questioning and wondering stance, his sidelong glances⁵, ask for a response, both from the reader and from himself. In our modern monolithic view, it's impossible to see how the evocation of presence involves leaving room for the revelation of the other, how the question of oneself is inseparable from the question of the other.

⁵ The Montaignian sidelong glance is a pertinent metaphor through which to explore psychotherapy. For a reflection on what we might learn by framing psychotherapy in this crooked view, please see "A Sidelong Glance at Psychotherapy" (Starr, in press).

I've always been struck by the sway of Montaigne's presence; even just hearing or reading about him through others is captivating. I first heard about him while jogging and listening to a podcast of a radio show featuring a writer who was speaking about him. Even through this technological palimpsest of conversations, I was hooked. When I speak about the *Essays* and Montaigne to friends and colleagues, I am continually surprised by the keenness of their interest. They want to know more: where can they find the book, which essay should they read, which edition, etc. They want to talk about him. "And so the 'Essays' find readers who find readers like friends seeking one another. By word of mouth." (O'Neill, 1982, p. 7) The astonishing gift of the *Essays* is that they are continually reborn in conversation with each reader, and it is through these infinite unique relationships, as opposed to, say, a biography, that Montaigne's presence emerges so vividly. Through essaying, Montaigne comes to evoke what Saul Frampton (2011b) calls a sense of "betweenness", "an awareness of others as integral to ourselves." (p. 273)

All relationships start by renouncing complete knowledge of the self, other and world. In light of *full* presence, we wouldn't need words. But the self and other always escape us – we only have moments of presence, and thus conversation and essaying, are infinite endeavours. The constant task of the *Essays* is an attempt to be together. Through essaying, Montaigne arrived at the profound intuition that the world becomes coherent through hospitality and friendship, rather than systematic knowledge.

"He who lives not at all unto others, hardly lives unto himself."^{vi}

As we are beginning to see, the *Essays* represent an understanding of the world in a different register, complementary to and yet ontologically different than our modern view. In our modern perspective, which is limited to that of the natural sciences, a single mute reality or truth lies before an observer, any observer; it doesn't matter whom. What he or she can't see may eventually be uncovered through the perfection of methodology or technology or

further observations.⁶ But Montaigne was seeking a different truth, an understanding that arose when *he* drew closer things and people, including himself, rather than seeking to unmask anonymous knowledge, “out there”. There are two human responses to our eternal thirst for reality: presence or facts. In presence, there is a horizon that draws you out, with the promise of seeing more. We become eager to see and hear things that we can tell our friend the next time we meet. Montaigne’s continued curiosity about himself and others is fuelled by this promise. Facts do not draw us closer to other people. You may know facts about your neighbour, but you don’t “know him” until you meet him.

The *Essays* embody what we might call a cosmological perspective. In a cosmos, we affirm ourselves by accepting the essential integrity of the other. Montaigne discovered that the fundamental unit of reality is a couple: a metaphorical unity rather than the literal unity of an individual. He came to see writing and thinking as unifying movements. Rather than an assembly of fragments, the *Essays* are “the site of a social event” (p. 275): a conversation that unifies the textual self and the thinking self, and creates the whole of a couple. In this sense, humanity, or what makes us human, points to what arises between couples: “god and man, man and woman, child and adult, neighbour and neighbour, friend and friend, soul and body, native and foreigner,” reader and writer, speaker and listener. (Jager, 1991, p. 64) Our humanity can be lost if not continually cultivated through tentative reaches, or essays, across mysterious thresholds that at once demarcate and unite lived worlds. In contrast, modern unity finds humanity already there within a self-enclosed individual; one who is subject to the same indifferent laws as everything else in the material universe.

⁶ Scientists often respond to this description by saying that natural science works by consensus and is at heart a deeply collaborative endeavour. This is true, but the point I want to make is that in the instant of the observation we are all alone. (Jager, personal communication, September, 2012). The collaboration occurs after the observation. In contrast, in a dialogical perspective, the other is always involved in the moment of observation. There is a phenomenological distinction between conversing and collaborating. In a conversation, you address each other. Even if we write alone, it’s always *to* someone. A collaboration refers more to a labouring alongside each other; each makes a contribution, but not in any intersubjective sense.

This mythical perspective is timeless, but was particularly salient during the Renaissance. The humanists' flourishing Christian civilization was founded on the idea that they were symbolically united with a stranger, the newly rediscovered Roman culture, which in turn was founded on an encounter with the Greeks. Rather than assimilating Roman culture into some sort of neat synthesis about human nature, or tossing away what they feared as too foreign or pagan, the humanists worked extremely hard to maintain a cultural conversation through translation, transcription, reading, writing, education, love and friendship. This relationship was the source of Montaigne's culture, of his understanding about himself, the world and his position in it.

It is really interesting to consider that not only are the *Essays* engaged in an intimate conversation with the world of Antiquity, they are one of the first European writings to consider the "cultural and epistemological consequences of the discovery and exploration of the New World." (Langer, 2005, p. 4) As a matter of fact, Conley (2005) says, given that the New World is no longer new, the *Essays* are both "[t]he first and last places where we encounter the New Worlds." (p. 93) Surprisingly, even though classical and biblical views of geography had only recently been thrown into question, the initial response to the New World was generally muted. People regarded it as "simply 'there'" (p. 75), as having little impact on their lives. Even in the 16th century, there were only a few travel journals and a handful of political tracts about the American Indians. Montaigne was the first writer to really grapple with the meaning of the New World to the Europeans' sense of self, most notably in the chapters, "On the cannibals" and "On coaches". Montaigne's "imaginative and reasoned" (p. 74) reflections on both the otherness and common humanity of the peoples of the New World, serve as a mirror to his non-transparent relationship with himself. Radical alterity makes his self-portrait come to life. On the very first page of the *Essays*, otherness comes into play:

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

Swept up in a spirit of discovery, Montaigne was able to see the lay of the land of both inner and outer worlds through new eyes, so to speak. He needed the other to know himself. With an élan typical of the Renaissance, Montaigne embodied the message that the world is a lot bigger than we know.⁷

The Presence Within Absence

So now you know a little bit about Montaigne's life and *Essays*. I've introduced the idea that the unity of this "[t]his bundle of so many disparate pieces"^{viii} stems from Montaigne's remarkably visceral presence. We have also seen that the *Essays*' compelling "unity of life" is best understood within the Renaissance humanists' relational perspective, as distinguished from our modern view. Perhaps, you have the feeling that that essaying and psychotherapy share some common ground. It's clearly time to get to know our friend a little better. Let me tell you a story about friendship and loss, about how Montaigne came to appreciate the dual nature of his humanity, to arrive at statements such as these:

⁷ Let me take a moment to distinguish between Renaissance humanism and secular humanism. Broadly speaking, Renaissance humanism was an educational and religious movement, which centred on the *relationship* between the human and the divine. The culture of the humanists was constantly reborn through renewed dialogue with the past, present and future. Secular humanism, which arose during the Enlightenment, partly in response to Renaissance humanism, emphasizes the dignity of the individual, and is grounded on the rationality of the natural sciences. In this paradigm, human freedom is best achieved through progress (think human potential), which means pulling further and further away from the past. Humanistic psychotherapy does not necessarily see itself as belonging to secular humanism. Yet this modern movement has influenced many of our conceptions of the self and prioritized our quest for theories that unify theory and practice. Furthermore, we are shielded from older views of humanity by the narrowing lens of progress.

Clearly, this is a very simplified description of Renaissance and secular humanism, which have each varied over time and geography. My point is to remind therapists stuck in a Cartesian or post-cartesian paradigm, that there may be something to learn from older ideas about humanity, which have been fruitfully explored for thousands of years.

Myself now and myself a while ago are indeed two; but when better, I simply cannot say.^{ix}

But we are, I know not how, double within ourselves, with the result that we do not believe what we believe, and we cannot rid ourselves of what we condemn.^x

Montaigne began his project in part as a way of dealing with the loss of his best friend, Étienne la Boétie. Theirs was a wonderful meeting of two erudite young humanists in their 20's, each probably a little bored in their jobs, each bursting with ideas and questions about books, philosophy and the meaning of a good life. They had heard of each other before they actually met. Montaigne had already read a circulating manuscript of la Boétie's well-known treatise against tyranny, *On Voluntary Servitude*.

We sought each other before we met, because of the reports we heard of each other, which had more effect on our affection than such reports would reasonably have; I think it was by some ordinance from heaven, We embraced each other by our names. And at our first meeting, which by chance came at a great feast and gathering in the city, we found ourselves so taken with each other, so well acquainted, so bound together, that from that time on nothing was so close to us as each other.^{xi}

And so it began. Of the two, la Boétie was more well-regarded, already a writer, married, and a little more advanced in his career even though he was only two years older. He gently chides Montaigne in a sonnet for wasting his energy socializing and seducing women (Bakewell, 2010a, p. 92). Together, they were inspired by the exalted and highly rational models of classical friendship, often likening themselves to Socrates and his young friend Alcibiades (p. 92). But in time, their friendship escaped the confines of idealism, and flourished into something unique and invented anew: "Our friendship has no other model than itself, and can be compared only with itself."^{xii} "For the very discourses that antiquity has left us on this subject seem to me weak compared with the feeling I have."^{xiii} Just before tragically succumbing to a brief illness, probably the plague, with Montaigne at his bedside, la Boétie bequeathed his library of about 1000 books to his great friend. In a letter to his father, Montaigne recounts the valiant death of his friend:

And then, turning his words to me, he said: My brother, whom I love so dearly and whom I chose out of so many men in order to renew with you that virtuous and sincere friendship, the practice of which has for so long been driven from among us by our vices that there remain of it only a few old traces in the memory of antiquity, I entreat you to accept as a legacy my library and my books, which I give you as a sign of my affection toward you: a very small present, but one which comes from a willing heart and which is appropriate for you because of your fondness for letters. (Montaigne, 2003, p. 1281)

Ten years later, Montaigne undertook the writing of the *Essays*, in particular, the 28th chapter, "On friendship", as a monument to his friend, as well as in an effort to continue their dialogue, to restore their connection: "In the friendship I speak of, our souls mingle and blend with each other so completely that they efface the seam that joined them, and cannot find it again."^{xiv} However, Montaigne's book, which "built itself up with diverse interruptions and intervals"^{xv}, was founded on a fundamental gap, a profound absence at its core. The "effaced seam" had come undone. Montaigne's self-portrait was not built up around a nucleus of the self, but around the painful absence of his friend. It's interesting to recall that in Montaigne's time, the French language did not even have a word for the self⁸, for that nugget of solidity. There was no *cogito*.

In keeping with humanist tradition, Montaigne committed to posthumously publishing la Boétie's writings. However, instead of simply printing them, he decided that *On Voluntary Servitude* should have the place of honour as the centrepiece of his own book, lovingly incorporated into the *Essays*' embrace. The first book of the *Essays* was made up of 57 chapters, and the treatise would constitute the middle, or 29th chapter. But just as Book I was going to print, the Huegenots claimed la Boétie's manuscript as their own revolutionary text. The outraged Catholic Parliament ordered it burned. So, early on in the writing of the *Essays*, to avoid political difficulties, and also fearing that la Boétie's ideas would be distorted, Montaigne decided to replace *On Voluntary Servitude* with 29 of his beloved friend's unpublished sonnets. He did not edit or reconfigure the text when he made the substitution. Montaigne generally avoided any corrections to his *Essays* because he wanted to paint as real

⁸ The term "le moi" only came into common usage in the 17th century. (Brush, 1994, p. 215)

a portrait as possible, one that included "the imperfections that are ordinary and constant in me"^{xvi}. In Chapter 29, we still see his introductory remarks about the treatise: "But let us listen a while to this boy of sixteen [la Boétie]."^{9 xvii}

Michael Butor (1968, as cited in Compagnon et Freccero, 1983, p. 26) provides a thought-provoking interpretation of the centrality of Montaigne's great friend to the unity of the *Essays*. Butor sees the 29 sonnets, preceded by 28 chapters, and followed by 28 chapters, as forming a triptych typical of a Renaissance painting. In Chapter 28, "On friendship", Montaigne wrote:

As I was considering the way a painter I employ went about his work, I had a mind to imitate him. He chooses the best spot, the middle of each wall, to put a picture labored over with all his skill, and the empty space all around it he fills with grotesques, which are fantastic paintings whose only charm lies in their variety and strangeness. And what are these things of mine, in truth, but grotesques and monstrous bodies, pieced together of divers members, without definite shape, having no order, sequence, or proportion other than accidental?^{xviii}

Originally, Montaigne conceived of his project as wild and unruly pièces surrounding the still beauty of la Boétie's free-standing work. His *Essays* had no body, only random limbs. He hoped that the stillness of the centre would hold both himself and his book together. But what is remarkable is that he crossed out even the 29 sonnets in his final manuscript, leaving only the dispassionate note, "These verses may be seen elsewhere"^{xix}. Bakewell (2010a) describes the double deletion in Chapter 29 as "a ragged stub or hole which Montaigne deliberately refused to disguise. He even drew attention to its frayed edges." (p. 99)

Through essaying, Montaigne transformed absence into a threshold at which he could maintain a symbolic connection with la Boétie. The absence that is death became an infinite source of renewal as the *Essays* accumulated. It is at the "frayed edges" between presence and absence that we, the readers, catch such powerful glimpses of our friend. There is no

⁹ This was the age at which La Boétie was thought to have written "On Voluntary Servitude". Montaigne had originally written 18, but changed it to 16 in a later edition. According to scholars, la Boétie was actually 22.

stable self at the centre of this book. Instead, Montaigne said, "I am over the entrance"^{xx}, at the threshold between past and present, self and other, reader and writer.

Lavoisier's terse phrase about a natural universe hating a vacuum, should thus be amplified with the additional observation that a cosmos demands as its absolute center a tolerated absence that is symbolized by a threshold. (Jager, 1999, p. 93)

With the "tolerated absence" at its heart, the *Essays* were no longer disjointed body parts; they became a metaphorically unified body, "essays in flesh and bone"^{xxi}.

If we follow this train of thought and move closer into the symbolic unity at the heart of the *Essays*, we come to the one moment in 1000 pages where our garrulous companion comes to sudden halt, at a complete loss for words. He doesn't even bother to digress. You have the sense that Montaigne pulls up short at the edge of the chasm between himself and la Boétie, stunned by grief:

If you press me to tell why I loved him, I feel that this cannot be expressed, except by answering: Because it was he, because it was I.^{xxii}

In this famous passage, Montaigne tries and fails to put their relationship into words. He comes up against the limits of language. Not only can he not translate his lived experience of their friendship into the universal language of humanism (Zalloua, 2003, p. p. iii), he cannot find the right words to reach out to la Boétie across the abyss. The sentence is yet another trace of the wound. But it is also a point where he accepts the separation and offers the work of his imagination up to the public to contemplate. In this moment of transcendence, we feel Montaigne very near.

If we look at the differences between publications, as well as at the differences in ink used in his copious marginalia, we can find out a little more about Montaigne's grappling with absence, his work of creating an ephemeral order out of the chaos of grief. He begins "On friendship" in an optimistic mood as he attempts to bring his relationship with la Boétie back to life as a classical ideal, comparing their friendship with ancient examples. However, he wearies of this effort, feeling hopeless and alienated:

I only drag on a weary life. And the very pleasures that come my way, instead of consoling me, redouble my grief for his loss. We went halves in everything; [...] I was already so formed and accustomed to being a second self everywhere that only half of me seems to be alive now.^{xxiii}

Frampton (2011b) charts Montaigne's search for consolation in the material world. For example, at one point later in the *Essays*, Montaigne tries to look at his separation from la Boétie as absolute and literal: "They are dead. So, indeed is my father, as absolutely dead as they are, and as distant from me and from life in 18 years as they are in 1600."^{xxiv} Perhaps seeking further comfort, he continues his objective investigation with a mathematician named Peletier:

Now these are things that often clash; and I have been told that in geometry (which thinks it has reached the high point of certainty among the sciences) there are irrefutable demonstrations that controvert the truth of experience. For instance, Jacques Peletier was telling me at my house that he had found two lines travelling toward each other so as to meet, which nevertheless he proved could never come to touch even at infinity.^{xxv}

But he's still lost. The objective view seems to peter out, and the life of the *Essays*, like la Boétie's verses, is found elsewhere. Montaigne returns to the abyss in Chapter 28. (Remember, Montaigne was constantly adding to all of the *Essays*.) In the first edition of the *Essays*, "On friendship" contained only the phrase:

If you press me to tell why I loved him, I feel that this cannot be expressed.

It is as though he does not have the heart to even try. Several years of essaying later, in the marginalia that became part of the posthumous Bordeaux copy, he was able to add, "except by answering: Because it was I." Essaying the abyss involves drawing close and stepping back, speaking and listening. Montaigne found that there is no "I" without a "he". With new technology, it has recently been discovered that the first part of the sentence was added later still, giving us the final phrase, "Because it was he, because it was I." (Desan, 2004) In this dance of absence and presence, Montaigne was better able to tolerate the abyss and see himself in a new light. Rather than fusing with la Boétie into an idealized union, or remaining radically separate, like geometric lines in a material universe, the possibility of a new conversation arose:

Besides this profit that I derive from writing about myself, I hope for this other advantage, that if my humors happen to please and suit some worthy man before I die, he will try to meet me. I give him a big advantage in ground covered; for all that long acquaintance and familiarity could have gained for him in several years, he can see in three days in this record, and more surely and exactly. [...] If by such good signs I knew of a man who was suited to me, truly I would go very far to find him for the sweetness of harmonious and agreeable company cannot be bought too dearly, in my opinion. Oh, a friend!^{xxvi}

There is a discontinuity at his core: a Montaigne before the death of la Boétie, and a Montaigne after. Clearly we are not in the paradigm of progress. He did not attempt to smooth over the gap to make the book more uniform, or nor did he stand paralyzed in defeat before it. Instead, Montaigne essayed. The *Essays* are a work of continual partings and returns, and this is enough. Montaigne becomes human by transforming absence into a source of culture, a vital source and resource for human life.

It is only through loss that we enter the human world. It is loss that creates the separation of one body from another, that grants these a surface that can be read and inscribed, that forms the border of our existence and that divides a pre-human from a truly human life. Crossing the gap, traversing the border that separates a pre-human paradise from a human world is therefore not a process of development, not a process of natural, biological growth that proceeds by infinite increments, but constitutes a leap across an abyss. We do not "grow" into our humanity but we reach it only after a fateful crossing, that we repeat as long as we remain human and that leads us forever over uncharted waters. It is this "crossing", this partially failed and partially succeeded work of humanization that is revisited in therapy. Everything depends on how we perceive this labor of humanization. (Jager, 2002)

By the way, the etymology of the word "heritage" sheds light on this conception of humanity and on the significance of La Boétie's bequest of his personal library to Montaigne. Jager (personal communication, August, 2012) reminds us that "heritage" stems from the Indo-European roots: "ghe" and "do". "Ghe" indicates an absence, a gap left by something that has disappeared. The next element, "do", gives rise to the word "donation", or "don" in French, which means "gift". Together, these elements create a metaphor that leads us from the crisis of losing what was once there, to the appearance of an unbearable absence, which is then transformed into a gift. In this sense, our cultural heritage allows what has disappeared

to be reborn in a new way, from one generation to another, from one mode of being to another, from utter despair to the grace of a new conversation.

The aim of psychotherapy, like essaying, is to learn to cultivate or live with absences, with the opaqueness of the other, to tolerate mystery and ambiguity. We learn to live with what escapes us, with the gaps between self and self, between self and the other, not the gap between theory and practice. In this sense, like essaying, therapy is a cultural practice. We learn to be more at home in multiple lived worlds, or, as William Cavanaugh says, “complex space”. (Cayley, 2012, May 2, 48:53) If we see psychotherapy as a way of rediscovering how to live a human life, how to break free from the constraints of one perspective, then we can see the error of thinking that it is only a form of applied psychology.

The *Essays* shed light on the inverse also. Being sick means that you can’t meet the other. You may be paralyzed by your yearning for fusion with a loved one, or running as far away as you can. In both situations, you close yourself off to dialogue. As J.H. van den Berg (1975) says, all psychological symptoms call out for the healing presence of the other (p. 182). What frees us from lonely paralysis or the alienating mechanical repetition of unsatisfying behaviour or thinking, is the presence of another, not theory. This blind circle only opens up if there is someone to talk to.

“The Initiator of Psychology”¹⁰

Montaigne’s enterprise of transforming loss into a source of creativity led to what he called his brain children.^{xxvii} He saw his love for la Boétie in the truth of their progeny, the *Essays*. Put another way, his particular conversations with his lost friend led to surprising moments of connection to the larger world of truth. All of the humanities – understood broadly to be an approach that seeks the revelations of the arts, myth, religion, history,

¹⁰ (Sichel, 1911, p. 175)

literature, and philosophy- flow out of loving conversational practices, like friendship. These relationships are our sources of understanding about the human condition, our psychology.

The *Essays* were “born in the [...] goodness of being loved and understood.” (O'Neill, 1982, p. 19) Montaigne drew on his friendship with la Boétie to have the courage to come forward with, as Spears (1988) puts it, unprecedented “candor and honesty” (p. 312). He was the first writer to speak so frankly about the most ordinary details of his life.

For Montaigne may be said to have been the initiator of psychology- of a subtle personal note in his study of life and men that was unknown before him, a study made at closer quarters with his kind than any ventured by his predecessors. (Sichel, 1911, p. 175)

Our “honnête homme”¹¹ confides that that he actually knows nothing about the fermentation of grapes, even though wine is the primary product of his estate. And he only recently found out that bread was made from yeast. We learn that the only fruit he likes are melons, and that he often eats so quickly that he bites his fingers. He's a middling runner unlike his father who was very sprightly and could run and jump well into old age. He's unfortunately on the short side. He has a round but not fat face. He has terrible singing voice, and stiff and clumsy hands:

My hand is so clumsy that I cannot even read my own writing, so that I prefer to write things over again rather than to give myself the trouble of disentangling my scribbles. [...] That apart, I am quite a good scholar! I can never fold up a letter neatly, never sharpen a pen, never carve passably at table, nor put harness on horse, nor bear a hawk properly nor release it, nor address hounds, birds or horses.^{xxviii}

This “study made at closer quarters” is not presented in the form of an autobiography nor as a “regimented self-interrogation” (Brush, 1994, p. 174). Montaigne, the psychologist, is

¹¹ In 17th century France, the ideal man was an “honnête homme”. This term literally translates as “honest man”, but is more closely associated with the idea of honour than of honesty. Such a man was a cultured amateur whose worth was measured by conversational skill and manners rather than glory, by his broad general culture rather than specific expertise. He embodied social and moral values such as charm, wit, modesty, and moderation. Freidrich considers Montaigne to have been the first “honnête homme” (Desan, 1991, p. xxiii).

“seeking acquaintance, not science.” (p. 174) The ordinary details are offered in conversation with larger questions, literally juxtaposed with questions about how to live, truth, experience, the body, friendship, love, language, death, and education. Intimate details bring him closer to the lived world, while knitting him into the wider human fabric.

Montaigne invented the modern essay, [...] the form through which the fundamental questions of the existence of modern man could be posed in relation to the concrete reality which is the subject (in every sense) of any particular essay. (Wilden, 1968, p. 577)

“It is a difficult thing to set one’s judgement against accepted opinions.”^{xxix}

We are beginning to see that the *Essays* lead us on another route to knowledge, a more lively and accidental route to a different kind of knowledge, what Frampton (2011b) would call “a form of meeting” (p. 205), or what we might call understanding. It is in this conversational context that presence and friendship manifest themselves. We therapists are fellow travellers with Montaigne on this road. But it’s not an easy way to travel. He shares our anxiety about the itinerary. He too worried about knowledge and its institutions. Is what I’m writing going to be acceptable? Am I using a valid methodology? We share this the same struggle as thinkers. Our first impulse towards knowledge is to know more abstract truths and to become an expert. But what we therapists, Montaigne, and importantly, our patients, end up doing is going in a different direction, against the grain of mainstream thought. Montaigne described his own era as the “Hoc age”, which embraced the “just do it”, task-oriented approach of the Renaissance scholasticism (Hardison, 1998, p. 613). The scholastics twisted and turned great questions about man’s relation to the divine, into smaller, more logical forms. We too live in an age of doing rather than being, of classifications and definitions. What Montaigne realized is that in order to look at *the* world like a mathematician or a scholastic, you have to alienate yourself from yourself. But he was far more interested in drawing closer to *this* world. Great philosophers don’t necessarily give us more insight or make us wiser about who we are. The scholastics could write eloquently

about love, yet Montaigne's page knew perfectly well how to woo his lover without reading treatises on Platonic love:

Erudite works treat their subjects too discreetly, in too artificial a style far removed from the common natural one. My page-boy can court his lady and understands how to do so. Read him Leone Ebreo and Ficino: they are talking about him, about what he is thinking and doing And they mean nothing to him! I cannot recognize most of my ordinary emotions in Aristotle: they have been covered over and clad in a different gown for use by the schoolmen.^{xxx}

We can think of other moments in history, where thinkers turned away from the mainstream. Romanticism was a moment when we went into nature to walk, renouncing the trappings of materialism. Rebelling against the alienation of Enlightenment rationality, the Romantics sought to reclaim human freedom. Broadly speaking, they emphasized a return to the lived world through the artistic free play of personal expression, imagination, intuition and emotion. Schneider (2001), in "The Handbook of Humanistic Psychology", develops the idea that humanistic-existential psychology is the descendent of Romantic thinkers and essayists such as Emerson, Thoreau and later William James: "Romanticism nourished psychological insight." (p. 66) He is saddened by the fact that we have discarded such an important heritage in the frenzy to be scientific, to manualize and professionalize. Schneider encourages psychologists to re-engage with romanticism in order to revisit our richer conceptions of human life, and to stem the current tide of reductionism which threatens to wash away any lingering traces of the arts and humanities.

Many of the Romantics were deeply inspired by Montaigne. Rousseau, for example enjoyed what he saw as Montaigne's love of solitude, his confessional slant, his unpretentious, free and natural style. According to Bakewell (2010a), it was during the romantic heyday of "passionate swooning" (p. 197), at the beginning of the 19th century, that people began to visit Montaigne's tower. The Romantics were captivated by Montaigne's love for la Boétie. Parts of the tower were refurbished to their original configuration so that tourists could see it exactly as their beloved Montaigne once had. But Montaigne wasn't much for swooning. He tended to get quite irritated by this kind of frenzy, preferring "temperate and moderate natures."^{xxxi} (Bakewell, 2010a, p. 198)

It's true that we have shunted aside great literature in an effort to stick to "accepted" paths to knowledge. I would like to take Schneider's excellent argument in a different direction: rather than calling for a return to an intellectual tradition, let me suggest a friendship.

"Oh, a friend!"

I propose Michel de Montaigne as a patron of psychotherapy, a mentor, but most importantly, a friend for lonely therapists working away behind closed doors. Just as Montaigne was intrigued upon hearing about la Boétie through mutual friends, I want to inspire this same feeling: the delightful possibility of a world of friendship waiting to be discovered. Rather than introducing a substantive self, a factual or objective Montaigne, I hope to invite you into a world that is opened up through Montaigne's essaying. In the lived world of the essay, unlike in the material uni-verse, "personhood necessarily implies a relationship to other persons." (Jager, in press) Thus, I am encouraging a meeting in the intersubjective sense, by conveying some of the vivid interpersonal quality that comes through Montaigne's writing. For it is his way of being with and towards others that grants us access to a particular world. We can see this world clearly not only because of our own intelligence or Montaigne's unique experience, but because he stands beside us: "essaying requires an exchange of lives" (O'Neill, 1982, p. 191). In this realm, seeing is also being seen, speaking is also being heard, and writing is also being read. When I refer to Montaigne as a person, I approach him, not as an individual consciousness in the modern psychological sense, but as a body of work, a metaphorical unity – "a book consubstantial with its author"^{xxxii} – a manifestation of his presence that reveals a world.

Interestingly, our worlds have quite a bit in common. Like Montaigne, good therapists are substantial people; they have heft. Their solid presence conveys maturity, loyalty and safety, all vital when exploring unfamiliar territory. Maturity is almost a dirty word in our era of online therapies and cutting-edge neuroscience. But do we not want our therapist to be someone who has lived, and reflected on that life? "I have lived long enough to give an

account of the practice that has guided me so far. For anyone who wants to try it I have tasted it like his cupbearer.”^{xxxiii} In his journals, Emerson (1926) celebrates the aging Montaigne as an “autumnal star” hanging in the “heaven of letters” (p. 136).

As we have seen, Montaigne and his *Essays* affectionately remind us of a dialogical vision and it’s corresponding neighbourly stance or attitude, which we therapists also strive to embody. Despite our difficulties in articulating what we do within the constraints of scientific language, we too offer an essayistic experience, that of “making sense together” (Buirski et Haglund, 2009). Remember, essaying is a judging thing, a weighing of possibilities.

According to Montaigne, good judgment comprises the ability to observe carefully, to listen patiently, to speak plainly, and to remember to love life through thick and thin. [...] It entails continuously fuelling one’s individuality through serious-minded and playful engagement with the world. Good judgment also involves pondering this process, so that the teacher [here I would add, and supervisor or therapist] can learn to recognize and support its emergence in students [and patients]. (Hansen, 2002, p. 153)

This brings to mind a process research talk that I attended a couple of years ago. The speaker presented therapeutic variables that have been shown to contribute to positive outcomes in therapy. Science tells us that the person of the therapist makes a significant difference in patient outcomes. Effective therapists are those who have developed their capacity for “self-reflexivity in interaction”. When I asked the speaker, how do you develop this, he replied that a student could hopefully do so in supervision but beyond that, he didn’t know. We came to a dead end with this question because there is no “I” in the scientific realm. To understand and develop “self-reflexivity in interaction”, what Montaigne would have called judgement, we move from the realm of the natural sciences out into the broader awareness of the humanities.

The spaces in which students can learn to cultivate presence, which underpins judgement, are in the humanities. In my opinion, good supervision falls into this realm, but it is a shame that many of us have to wait until the end of our doctoral degrees to avail ourselves such learning. Psychology, of all disciplines that should value reflecting on itself, generally

favours a detached “view from nowhere” (Nagel, 1986, as cited in Jay, p. 35). Science cannot reflect upon itself because it is a unitary reality. You can’t step outside it. This has led to a pervasive dissatisfaction to which psychologists respond by adopting eclecticism, or integrated theories. We instinctively push boundaries, but often the wrong ones. We remain mutely confined within the horizon of our unitary material reality.

We entangle our thoughts in generalities, and the causes and conduct of the universe, which conduct themselves very well without us, and we leave behind our own affairs and Michel, who concerns us even more closely than man in general.^{xxxiv}

Montaigne invites us into wider, inhabited spaces where we can more fully come to terms with age-old questions about judgement, intersubjectivity, tolerance of ambiguity, and other human themes that come alive for us today in psychotherapy. One of these conversational spaces is psychotherapy itself.

It is highly fitting that our essayistic friend is a man of the Renaissance, since therapy helps us to enlarge our culture, in a sense to become Renaissance men and women. Culture gives us resources to face the groundlessness of our existence, to create order through conversation. As “Montaigne's latent and pervasive smile” (Tetel, 1979, p. 79) suggests, there is a positivity that comes from access to culture. I like André Gide's (1964) comment that the pleasure we take in reading the *Essays* is the pleasure that Montaigne took in writing them (p. 8). This suggestion of pleasure is remarkable considering the particularly dark and bloody times during which Montaigne lived, not to mention his recent and lingering bereavement. In addition to the loss of la Boétie, he was mourning the deaths his beloved father, five infant daughters, and an unlucky brother felled by a tennis ball.

Ideally, a therapist is a cultured person who has the ability to introduce the patient to the wider world. Such a therapist has access to poetry, literature, film, history, religion and art, as well as the sciences. He or she is someone who can dwell comfortably in and pivot between multiple worlds, including between utilitarian and cosmological realms. In the therapeutic conversation, there is a rhythm between lived experience in the here and now, and reflection on this experience. We distinguish and pivot between these views. As Donna Orange (2009,

November 10) says, “We engage and notice that we engage with our patients, [we do] not just observe them.” (34:13) The shared cultural task of the essay and psychotherapy, is to listen and draw closer to the familiar in order to understand the new.

Socrates and Montaigne: From Exemplar to Friend

Now that I’ve hopefully piqued your interest by giving you a taste of what we have in common with our potential friend, let me draw you in a little further. It may not be proper in our scientific world to ally ourselves with the world of a particular person, rather than a theory, a personal work rather than a group or an intellectual tradition. But from the Renaissance humanist viewpoint, it is individuals who bring us closer to understanding. Intersubjectivity is always about a particular person:

[...] revelations concerning an inhabited, intersubjective cosmos necessarily bear the distinctive mark of a particular person, place and time. They necessarily testify to a particular style and substance of intersubjective relations and to a particular manner of living our individual and collective life. (Jager, 1999, p. 69)

This is why calls for psychology to return to the Romantics, or to the Classics, or to turn towards Eastern philosophies, may be less compelling than an introduction to the oeuvre of a particular person. I propose that our discipline of psychotherapy, which is based on particular conversations with particular people, may also be fruitfully explored through a relationship with one such particular, personal world.

In a recent discussion with my psychotherapy colleagues, we wondered about what it might mean to align ourselves with a person instead of a theory or approach. The question arose of who would be this person, our mentor, our patron of psychotherapy. There was a somewhat unanimous vote for Socrates, who based his understanding on everyday conversations. He learned just as much from “carters, joiners, cobblers, and masons”^{xxxv} as he would from philosophers (Hansen, 2002, p. 130). I still voted for Montaigne, in part because with Montaigne, you also get Socrates. Montaigne engaged with Socrates to a greater and greater extent as he wrote. Had Montaigne participated in our vote, I’m pretty sure that he

would have voted for Socrates himself. But Montaigne not only engaged with the Socratic-Platonic tradition, he transformed it. In my opinion, some of the ways in which he transformed it are key to this debate.

Montaigne thought a lot about Socrates as a model or exemplar. For example, he took to heart Socrates' preoccupation with the Delphic inscription, "know thyself": the infinite pursuit of understanding "and insight into the things of the world, including himself." (Hansen, 2002, p. 129) He also appreciated the Socratic idea that true knowledge is knowing that you are ignorant. In his "stupid enterprise"^{xxxvi}, Montaigne wrote: "I, who make no other profession, find in me such infinite depth and variety, that what I have learned bears no other fruit than to make me realize how much I still have to learn."^{xxxvii}

By turning to Socrates, Montaigne was employing the Renaissance humanist strategy of looking to authority to understand the world. He took great pleasure in being Socrates' pupil, in bringing his ancestor back to life as his master, his ideal other. A pupil has to overestimate his teacher. Montaigne put Socrates on a pedestal, in order to deal with his teacher's ideas about a subject matter. This brings to mind positive unconditional regard in therapy. Your patient may be in a terrible state, but you make him the authority on his subject matter because this initial stance is essential to learning.

Montaigne didn't rely only on this strategy. In typical fashion, he threw it all into question: Peasants, "who know neither Aristotle nor Cato, neither example nor precept"^{xxxviii} are able to perform everyday feats of greater endurance and patience than those that we learn at school. One of Montaigne's misgivings about imitating or following exemplars like Socrates or revered kings, was that they are too abstract. Compared to kings and their heroic deeds, we feel alienated, dissatisfied and anxious. According to Montaigne, "the most barbarous of our maladies is to despise our being."^{xxxix} He adamantly refused to set himself up as any sort of lofty example, like a public statue:

I consider myself one of the common sort, except in that I consider myself so; guilty of the commoner and humbler faults, but not of faults disavowed or excused; and I value myself only for knowing my value.^{xl}

Today, in psychotherapy, our ideals or exemplars are not individuals, but theories about the self, statistical means, positions on curves of normality. They lead us to mischaracterize and loathe ourselves (de Botton, 2012, July 13, 12:25). By painting such a frank portrait of a very ordinary human being rather than an exemplary person, Montaigne “makes our human follies less shameful” (9:49). His “gentle mockery of human beings” (10:50) make us feel less alone, and able to laugh at ourselves. It’s possible to be serious and ridiculous: we are all steeped in just as much “inanity and nonsense”^{xli}. Montaigne admired Socrates for his rigour, but he cut himself a lot more slack and had more fun (Spears, 1988, p. 315) than his hemlock-drinking forefather: “I have not, like Socrates, by the force of reason, corrected my natural propensities, and have not in the least interfered with my inclinations by art. I let myself go as I have come. I combat nothing.”^{xlii}

Psychotherapy is also about articulating and learning to live with our faults, our weaknesses, our insecurities, not necessarily about *doing* anything with them. To a certain extent, we learn to give them space and let them be. We meet our problems and let them speak rather than solve them. Like Montaigne, we come to the idea that reality is messy, but that a good life involves a “more or less gracious accommodation [...] with reality” (de Botton, 2012, July 13, 15:02), all while keeping our intellectual confidence in check. “[W]e try to be fully human, but not more than human” (Spears, 1988, p. 318).

Second Best Friend

In our modern world we don’t really have room for the idea of friendship. We see it as biological, or as some sort of economics of self-interest, or as repressed homosexuality, or at best as something sentimental. Its original primacy, as felt during Antiquity and the Renaissance, is completely lost. Montaigne reminds us that letting our guard down and seeing something together leads to discovery. He reminds us of the *pleasure* of being together in the search for understanding. The *Essays* shows us that friendship is the very condition for understanding, for clarity. Whether we are approaching a friend, a patient, or a work of art,

we are seeking a mutual revelation of presence, which allows us to see. (Jager, personal communication, December, 2012)

Montaigne, (whom the French Vatican referred to as the French Socrates), and Socrates each valued intimate conversation over speaking to groups, be it in a treatise or in a lecture. We have the timeless image of Socrates, strolling and talking with his young students, and we can imagine spirited discussions between young Montaigne and la Boétie lasting well into the night. Without a teacher or a friend close at hand, Montaigne invented essaying as the next best thing, bringing “writing as near as it can come to talk among friends.” (Hampshire, 2003, p. xxv) He transformed the Socratic-Platonic dialogue into a new type of conversation: the essay.

That Montaigne did not originate ideas but rather lent them form and colour, was a fact that did not prevent him from transforming them. He put old conceptions in such a fresh aspect that he changed their nature, he threw a light upon them which altered proportions and made them unrecognisable. He renewed their vitality – they were born again. (Sichel, 1911, p. 180)

Montaigne recognized and valued the confidence and vitality that he could draw from a sustaining relationship with a friend as opposed to with an anonymous public:

If I had somebody to write to I would readily have chosen it as the means of publishing my chatter. But I would need some definite correspondent, as I used to have, who would draw me out, sustain me and keep me going. [...] I would have been more observant and confident if I were addressing one strong and beloved friend than I am now when I need to have regard for a many-sided public. Unless I deceive myself my achievement then would have been greater.^{xliii}

Few would agree that his achievement would have been greater. For it was precisely because he lacked la Boétie as his living correspondent that Montaigne invented essaying. Essaying was a new way of practicing friendship, of intimately addressing individual readers rather than a “many-sided public”. By maintaining the conversational form, he was able to speak to the other in the absence of the other. Therapy is like essaying, in the sense that it too is often the next best thing to having a great friend, or a great teacher. People without a sustaining relationship in their lives can visit a professional who will draw them out, and

keep them going. Often, the therapeutic conversation is a space in which to address someone or even parts of one's self who are absent. As Montaigne discovered, even a second-best relationship can give you the confidence to observe things as they are, to live a particular life, to dare to love things in their particularity.

Montaigne enthusiastically offered himself as a friend, intended "for a nook in the library, and to amuse a neighbor, a relative, a friend, who may take a pleasure in associating and conversing with me again in this image."^{xlii} Moreover, he had a particular type of friend in mind when writing his *Essays*. Common minds with no interest in the Delphic inscription would not fit the bill. Nor would stuffy intellectuals: "[T]he former would not understand enough about them [the *Essays*], the latter too much."^{xlii} Montaigne was extending his friendship to a much smaller third group "into whose hands you come, that of minds regulated and strong in themselves"^{xlii}. He envisaged this "middle region"^{xlii} to be self-reflective, "potential essayists" (Brush, 1994, p. 162) like himself: undeniably well-educated, yet capable of living with mistakes, that is, of not holding too fast to reason. In a fascinating passage in "On experience", he ponders the type of thing that such a person would be good for. He concludes "[f]or nothing"^{xliii}, except for the task of examining another man's soul. His ability is worth "nothing" in a utilitarian or material sense, however, "[t]he long attention that I devote to studying myself trains me also to judge passably of others"^{xliii}. This task "would be a nameless office"ⁱ and he sets about imagining just what it might involve. Kings come to mind. Given that royals are usually surrounded by untrustworthy flatterers, kings have difficulty knowing themselves, and tend to have spoiled, "flighty and erratic character[s]". Montaigne would perform a "remarkable act of friendship" for such a king, a person for whom "the fidelity of silence"^{li} is paramount:

I would have told my master home truths, and watched over his conduct, if he had been willing. Not in general, by schoolmasterly lessons, which I do not know – and I see no true reform spring from them in those who know them – but by observing his conduct step by step at every opportunity, judging it with my own eyes, piece by piece, simply and naturally, making him see how he stands in public opinion [...] I should have had enough fidelity, judgement and independence for that. [...] And it is a part that cannot be played indiscriminately by all. For truth itself does not have the privilege to be employed at any time and in any way; its use, noble as it is, has its circumscription and its limits. It often happens, as the world goes, that people blurt it out into a prince's ear not only fruitlessly, but harmfully and even unjustly. And no one can make me believe that a righteous remonstrance cannot be applied wrongfully, and that the interest of the substance must not often yield to the interest of form.^{lii}

In his search for a kindred spirit, Montaigne conjured up a profession that would best suit essayists. It strikes me that this “nameless office” might very well be called “therapist” in our day. Not only would Montaigne be a good friend for therapists, it appears that therapists may be just the type of company that Montaigne was seeking.

A Humanist Psychotherapy

That somewhat off-the cuff conversation with my colleagues who voted for Socrates as the patron for psychotherapists has stayed with me. It prompted me to want to introduce Montaigne and his *Essays* more formally to fellow psychotherapy students, and to think about what might be pertinent in such an introduction. It also got me thinking about why it might be important for our discipline to have a friend, in addition to our conventional relationships with intellectual traditions. I realized that with a friend we are better able to do two things: to say who we are and to see where we belong. Having someone at our side gives us the courage to reflect on the specificity of things, and to look around and see where we stand, just as we do with our patients.

Montaigne's project was to describe his personal experience with groundbreaking candour and honesty: “I am all in the open and in full view, born for company and friendship.”^{liii} In doing so, he “provides companionship for us in [our own] process of self-definition and thereby consoles and encourages us.” (Spears, 1988, p. 318) He not only

documented his own fluctuating and fallible nature, but also what he learned about human nature, knowledge that would not be accessible from a universal viewpoint. Furthermore, in his “restless inquiry” (Hampshire, 2003, p. xx), Montaigne explored how best to live well given our overreaching nature. (Bakewell, 2010b, para. 5).

Therapy is a remarkably similar endeavour. Like essaying, it flows from a particular disciplined relationship, an attempt to be together in a world made coherent by the practices of friendship and hospitality. Together, therapist and patient find the heart to engage with their subject matter and follow it closely, which paradoxically allows us to become aware of other things, to inscribe our experience within a larger story. Therapy and essaying share this central aim: to draw people out into the light of relationships, to live more intensely, in richer colour and finer detail.

Essays and therapy are brief visits, tentative attempts to make sense, conversations marked by beginnings and ends. Each is a way of dealing with the loss and separation underlying painful discontinuities in our lives. Like all conversations, they are forms of staying together in a relationship that is not static, but must be continually recreated.

Our common attitude is one of humility, for ultimately all we can do is essay, and that is enough. (This is in contrast to the natural sciences, in which you cannot speak until you know.) Like Montaigne, we accept that we cannot make pronouncements that will reverberate throughout the ages: “How many things were articles of faith to us yesterday that are fables to us today?”^{liv} Instead of uncovering timeless anonymous facts about human nature, we renew the question of how to think our humanity. We continue to essay our beginnings and revisit our creative works. Such is the work and imagination required to maintain relationships.

Montaigne’s immediate presence imbues us with the Renaissance spirit of discovery, a sense that we are beckoned by something more. The *Essays* sensitize us to the experience of presence and to the question inherent in presence which asks us to step forward and be candid ourselves. It is tragic that in our modern time we get to truth by making ourselves absent in

an indifferent world. Montaigne shows us that hospitality and friendship are fundamental moves that open a human world to self and other. The *Essays* began in wonder about his own humanity and that of his neighbours. Montaigne wondered about how to be good neighbours, how to leave space for the other, how to cultivate difference. The question that arises for therapists is how do we create an atmosphere in which people can stop being scared, and start talking with confidence in a benevolent world, instead of clamming up? (Jager, personal communication, May, 2011) How do we lay the table for such a vital conversation? This cultural exercise is the basis for a humanist psychotherapy.

There is an essential second act to a humanist psychotherapy. The task of the therapist is not only to help heal, but also to transmit the questions and discoveries that arise from our privileged encounters. Like Freud, Jung, van den Berg, or William James, we can favour the essay form rather than the scientific article to communicate our experiences, keeping their nuance, particularity, richness, and life. An essay, as conceived by Montaigne, is uniquely apt to explore and reflect upon a conversation, to bring forth the “I”, to make new discoveries, and invite others to respond.

Psychotherapy Comes Home

We’ve looked at how the *Essays* and psychotherapy are open-ended responses to the question of the position of man in the world. Correspondingly, engagement with the *Essays* helps us to position the discipline of psychotherapy itself. We come to better understand what the humanities are, to reflect on their significance for us moderns, and to find a home for psychotherapy within their dialogical realm.

The broad sense of the humanities is an acknowledgement of other sources of inquiry. Like the Renaissance humanists, we engage with other voices in the conversation about what it means to be human, about how we cultivate our humanity. These questions are reflections of our communal history of thought, in which this very particular book holds an important place. Our deepest understanding arises from such a conversation, rather than from

methodical or abstract observation. In the humanities, we learn from all of the different, incommensurate branches, adjusting our attitude and approach to the subject and context at hand.

When I dance, I dance; when I sleep, I sleep; yes, and when I walk alone in a beautiful orchard, if my thoughts have been dwelling on extraneous incidents for some part of the time, for some other part I bring them back to the walk, to the orchard, to the sweetness of this solitude, and to me.^{lv}

The *Essays*' "patchwork and motley"^{lvi} form and style reflect the coming together of disparate voices through conversation. This brings to mind Heaton's conception of therapy: "[...] a motley of techniques and practices employed to help people in mental pain and distress." (Heaton, 2010, p. 52) Within the horizon of the humanities, the diverse disciplinary practices come together not through a unifying theory, but through the felt unity of mutual presence: "I shall know it well enough when I feel it."^{lvii}

Bernd Jager says that psychotherapy is like an offshoot in the tree of the humanities. It is a new way of practicing the humanities, of furthering the conversation that has so many sites already. Dance, music, history, religion, and philosophy are all discrete sites of conversation. *Psychotherapy is its own site*. As in essaying, the practices involved in psychotherapy are not totally novel, but they have arisen in a new context, in a new type of conversation. I see psychotherapy is a much-needed response to the alienation and deculturization of our modern life. It is a space in which we seek understanding by making a home for ourselves rather than making ourselves absent. In many ways, we visit a therapist to help us get back in touch with the lived world. A common scenario is one in which the patient knows how to work hard, but is unhappy because he can't get out of the instrumental perspective in order to form a sustaining relationship. Or, the patient may be fleeing part of his lived experience, using emotional or behavioural strategies that ultimately isolate and confuse him.

As a society, we have become much less connected to the humanities in our education and in our daily lives. But we still crave culture. Historian Simon Schama says that "we want a story that tells us about our humanity that is wider than our brief lives." (Bragg, 1998, December 3) Psychotherapy is one modern response to this need. "It is this experience 'of

being more than' [...] that is the essential power of psychotherapy" (Todres, 1993, 2000a, as cited in Todres, 2003, p. 202).

Academic psychologists are homeless in the intellectual world, as evidenced by our ever-shifting search for identity: from biologists to mathematicians to information engineers to philosophers to applied neuroscientists, etc.¹² We are especially nervous around art and literature. In this realm, we feel like tourists or consumers of experience because we have no place to bring these experiences, to integrate them as therapists. Having a home is essential for thinking and observing. A home situates you and makes you embody your ideas so that you can go back out into the world. "The greatest thing in the world is to know how to belong to oneself."^{lviii}

Montaigne referred to his intellectual home as his "arriere boutique"^{lix}: "We should set aside an *arriere boutique*, a room, just for ourselves, at the back of the shop, keeping it entirely free and founding there our true liberty and our principal place of retreat and solitude."^{lx} It is a protected and inhabited space for reflection, but one that is still connected to the hustle and bustle of commerce and production. I can imagine Montaigne comfortably seated at small table in a warm, intimate room, writing attentively, but with one eye on the happenings in the shop. Frequent noisy interruptions would no doubt occur. Friends might drop by for a chat while on break from their work in the storefront. The back of the shop and the storefront are each places of meeting in which complementary, interacting, and yet fundamentally different types of encounters occur. The metaphor of the *arriere boutique* distinguishes between the systematically ordered world of work, technology, facts and measurements, and the festive world of intimate conversation. From his *arriere boutique*, Montaigne could venture out to see things, ideas and people from a more distanced perspective. Once returned to the room at the back of the shop, he could recollect all that he observed, and make sense by bringing his observations into the conversation of the essay.

¹² For a compelling description of one man's discontinuous professional journey through the various incarnations of academic psychology, read Yoshida's (2001) essay, "My Life in Psychology: Making a Place for Fiction in a World of Science".

With renewed understanding of what was most familiar, namely, himself, he would set out again. The practice of essaying encompasses this movement between the personal space at the back of the shop and the utilitarian encounters in the boutique itself. For the discipline of psychotherapy, as is often the case for our patients, our *arriere boutique* is our therapy office.

There is circular movement in thought: it begins with what we know, moves out into the realm of the objective or distanced perspective, and then comes home to see what we know in a new way, to be woven into our particular mental life.¹³ We collect our thoughts around the nucleus of a particular kind of conversation, for example, an essay or therapy, a dance or a poem. The world comes together in this conversation; all of life is there. There is no teleological quality to thought in the *Essays*, no progress from opinion to truth. As the title of the *Essays*' very first chapter tells us, "By diverse means we arrive at the same end"^{lxii}, that is to say, back to the beginning, to the room at the back of the shop. Essaying is homecoming.

The circular path of Montaigne's thought forms a horizon of presence or sense of unity around the *Essays*. It reminds me of how, in therapy, I often find that hard-earned discoveries turn out to have been revealed in the very first moments of our encounter. When I look back at what was said in the waiting room on that first afternoon, or even during the initial phone call to set up a session, I see that everything was already there. I understand anew. These banal beginnings take on deeper meaning and fresh import.

Our modern conception of thought or theorizing is one of a unidirectional, progressive, and individualized search for truth. But a journey without homecoming is blind wandering: "to be everywhere is to be nowhere"^{lxiii}.

¹³ The earliest usage of the Greek word *theory* brings us back to the 6th century B.C. The poet, Theognis described the *theoretician* as the chosen representative of the community who sets out to question the Delphian oracle and returns to faithfully transmit the divine response (Jager, 1975).

The career of our desires ought to be circumscribed and restrained to a short limit of the nearest and most contiguous commodities; and their course ought, moreover, to be performed not in a right line, that ends elsewhere, but in a circle, of which the two points, by a short wheel, meet and terminate in ourselves. Actions that are carried on without this reflection – a near and essential reflection, I mean – such as those of ambitious and avaricious men, and so many more as run point-blank, and to whose career always carries them before themselves, such actions, I say; are erroneous and sickly.^{lxiii}

The intersubjective world forms “the ultimate ground of a human world” (Jager, personal communication, November, 2012). It is from here that we move out into the objective world, and it is to here that we return. In “a near and essential reflection”, how we speak about what we have learned to our friends, to our patients, or to the page of an essay, is very different from the language, stance and attitude that we use when we are out in the theoretical world. Academic psychology, “this strange modern discourse on the human soul” (Jager, 1991, p. 70), often conflates the intersubjective realities that make up the dual cosmos with the unitary reality underlying the natural universe. We conflate the *arriere boutique* with the boutique itself. As such, we have lost touch with the ability shift between complementary perspectives, and we have delegitimized coming home to the intersubjective world. I’ve noticed that at scientific psychology conferences, the speaker usually begins or ends with a philosophical quote, or a poem, or some fragment of the humanities. We have a sense that this is where thinking about humanity begins and must come home to. But there is no satisfying way of speaking about the poem within the language of the traveller. Furthermore, within a scientific perspective, it is not valid to change your stance and attitude to accommodate the poem. So the fragments remain floating bookends to the main discourse. On the other hand, therapists can also render thinking sterile by getting caught up in the isolating routine of therapeutic conversations, without ever turning to colleagues or to the larger public. A home for thought can only remain a home if there is a journey to renew it.

Psychotherapy is best understood within the context of the humanities, but this does not mean that we adopt an anti-science attitude. In fact, quite the opposite. Humans have always been both scientists and myth-makers. The objective and dialogical perspectives are the two complementary yet distinct poles of human life; each can only be understood in relation to the other. Each is a distinct type of relationship to self, other and world. We pivot between

them throughout each day as we work and love, consume and celebrate, manufacture and create. The natural universe of the sciences is but one possibility of the dual human cosmos. The scientist's perspective is no less human than the artist's. The scientist and artist's humanity arises from his or her ability to shift between these poles. For this reason, a humanist psychotherapy is not pre-modern, or post-cartesian, or postmodern. We understand and deepen our engagement with both features of life. From the inhabited standpoint of the humanities, psychotherapy is able to bring the natural sciences home, into conversation, to engage with and reflect upon them, (just as Montaigne did). The inverse is not tenable. Science cannot converse with the humanities, because it is a unitary view. This doesn't mean that you can't comment on psychotherapy from a scientific perspective, but it should not substitute for the humanities. I am not critiquing science, but scientism. Contrary to what Freud initially claimed, the humanities are not fodder for the sciences to be eventually mathematicized. Humanist psychotherapists are in a unique position to cultivate the gap between these perspectives, to open much-needed possibilities of living together.

No Longer a "Nameless Office"

We therapists need to start understanding ourselves as practitioners of a particular type of conversation, rather than as theoretical experts. Whatever we hear in our daily lives is always brought back to this curious conversation. It's not an easy stance; it requires that we tolerate groundlessness, relinquishing the comforts and power of abstract knowledge. It would certainly be easier to just sit back and come up with gratifying explanations, to literally be an armchair theorist, a "theorist who chooses not to return." (Jager, 1975, p. 240) In therapy, patients ask, how should I live and love, what are the rules? They suspect that the therapist is on solid ground, that he or she holds the key to some secret foundational knowledge. But we teach them to live on the basis of a conversation, nothing more solid than that. All we can do is band together with someone with similar experience, and build something together. This is the only security that we have in life. We confess to each other that ultimately we do not have a clue, but we can live this cluelessness together. Such a conversation, like essaying, is a "thorny undertaking"^{lxiv} because it puts a lot more than facts

and knowledge into question. We risk our understanding of ourselves and our world. The *Essays* show us how one person lived this groundless experience without succumbing to nostalgia for an absolute unity in which there is no place for man.

Why is it important to explicitly belong to the humanities? Why not just say that we are very “qualitative” scientists? Are we just niggling over terminology? I argue no. This essay is an attempt to show that by coming home to the humanities, therapists have so many friends! Not only Montaigne, but historians, musicians, philosophers, and theologians, past, present and future. We deprive ourselves of humanizing dialogue, rich resources and untold discoveries by positioning ourselves within natural world of the sciences, or in the overly complicated netherland between medicine and philosophy.

I suggest that by naming our office, “humanist psychotherapists”, we shed the false pretences of being applied philosophers, applied neuroscientists, experts on how to live, health managers, etc. We can be more authentic if we are up front about the fact that we are based on nothing more (or less) than a conversation. Taking the risk of humility opens the possibility of real dialogue in which we can assert the “I” of our own discipline. We can talk freely about what it means to see the world from our highly particular standpoint. We can talk about philosophy or science, but from our own perspective, asking what does this science, or this book, or this person tell us *as therapists*.

While we share a dialogical vision with the other sites in the humanities, our relational practices of hospitality, love and friendship have their own colour and nuance. Montaigne called himself an “accidental philosopher”^{lxv} because despite his great erudition, he insisted that his intellectual home was the *Essays*, rather than the works of Antiquity. The *Essays*’ indirect and conversational nature allowed for chance encounters with philosophical questions. In this sense, psychotherapists might sometimes be accidental philosophers, accidental artists, or accidental scientists. Philosophical questions come to us in a different way than to philosophers. For example, by being astonished at how we resent people we love, or struck by how alone we feel in grief. These questions come alive because we are in constant contact with them. We talk about them differently.

Where a philosopher might never tire of rereading his favorite authors or a writer the classics of his trade, the psychotherapist forever returns to his conversations with his patients and to the moments of discovery that have marked his career. (Jager, 2013)

During my first practicum, I wondered about the tentative and digressive character of the therapeutic conversation. Turning to essaying was a fruitful way of deepening my understanding and tolerance of therapy's ambulatory nature. Another therapist might be struck by how his conversations tend to follow the narrative arc of a novel. At other times, we might be surprised by the musical rhythm of a particular exchange. Perhaps questions that touch on ethics or societal customs come to the fore. It is through the mutual awareness of presence in therapy, as opposed to methodical observation, that we gain access to literature, music, theology and sociology. These sensibilities colour our conversation at different moments, bringing us into closer contact with our companions in the humanities. We can enrich our understanding of themes in therapy by bringing other voices into our inquiry.

Taking the risk of authenticity opens up the possibility of a real vision of the world that can do important work. In a rarefied academic world, we are safe with each other but have little relevance in the larger world. We are just another producer of knowledge and facts, a content-provider for journals and news headlines. Finding a place in our culture would allow us to become more relevant. Our place, like that of Montaigne's middle ranked "nameless office", is neither super-academic nor non-academic.

[A]nd born to a middle rank; because on the one hand he would not fear to touch his master's heart deeply and to the quick, at the risk of losing his preferment thereby; and on the other hand, being of middle station, he would have easier communication with all sorts of people.^{lxvi}

Thinking about therapy in this way opens up new (and old) ways for us to explore and write about our experiences. We could contribute in some way to understanding our modern predicament and the critical human decisions that we face as a society. Therapists have such exceptional access to so much human life that it is a shame to constrain our experiences within the confines of scientific discourse, or apply it to endless diagnostical redefinitions, or neuter it in a barrage of tests and measures. We need to go public, like Montaigne! In the

humanist tradition, you cannot divorce psychotherapy from writing, from communicating with other therapists and the public in general.

“That such a human being has written, truly increases one’s desire to live on this earth.”¹⁴

In the tree of the humanities, psychotherapy’s closest neighbour is the essaying branch. Their knotty limbs often intertwine. Essaying is its own thing, but, as we have seen, it shares a lot of common ground with psychotherapy. This proximity is part of what makes Montaigne such an ideal friend for therapists. You need a bit of familiarity to discover something new.

At the outset of my doctoral studies, I saw the question of positioning our discipline as a preliminary step towards a more important thesis. It is a question that often gets eventually erased by “bridging the gap” between theory and practice, or by placing our discipline on a continuum between the quantitative and qualitative approaches, or by subsuming the humanities into the sciences. But it turns out to be a very old and very important question. To position ourselves requires that we cultivate differences, that we describe our experiences with more specificity, with candour and honesty. We need a friend to stand by us as we articulate our particular creative work, and to help us to see where we stand in conversation with our ancestors, other disciplines, our patients, and ourselves. Montaigne is our man.

The *Essays* are our heritage. As once la Boétie bequeathed his beloved library to his great friend, Montaigne bequeaths the *Essays* and the essay form to modernity in an act of friendship. We receive Montaigne’s *Essays* not as information, but as a symbol of the humanist transfer of knowledge, turning his absence into a gift. His gift reminds us of our lost vision of humanity, and suggests other possibilities of courageously responding to its absence. The discipline of psychotherapy is one such response.

¹⁴ (Nietzsche, 1874, as cited in Langer, 2005)

The novice therapist today, like myself, has probably received little education in the humanities. We may feel daunted at the prospect of turning towards this field of inquiry, as well as some anxiety about going against the grain of scientific thought. For us, the *Essays* are an ideal entry point into to this vast resource. Montaigne's willing ear, the generous scope of voices, his erudition and playfulness, his "intellectual gaiety" (Hampshire, 2003, p. xxv), and most importantly, the sense that you are not alone, help to ease us back into the conversation of humanity, as we try to do with our patients. I'm not advising against going directly to Socrates or any other literary figure, I'm just suggesting that Montaigne is an ideal companion, especially if you are feeling a little unsure or intimidated.

Montaigne encouraged mixing with all sorts of people, not to learn facts or "measurements", but to learn of their "characters and ways [...], to rub and polish our brains by contact with those of others"^{lxvii}. Now that I've introduced you, fellow therapists, to our friend from Bordeaux, I hope that you will open a bottle of wine together, (preferably a Montaigne wine, which, by the way, is still in production), enjoy and marvel at each other as you "rub and polish" each other's minds.

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Notes

ⁱ (S, 11:18, 755)

« Je n'ay pas plus faict mon livre que mon livre m'a faict, livre consubstantiel à son auteur, d'une occupation propre, membre de ma vie » (T-R, II:18, 648)

ⁱⁱ (F, preface, 2)

« la matiere de [son] livre » (T-R, Au lecteur, 9)

ⁱⁱⁱ (S, III:2, 908)

C'est un contrerolle de divers et muables accidens et d'imaginations irresoluës et, quand il y eschet, contraires; soit que je sois autre moymesme, soit que je saisisse les subjects par autres circonstances et considerations. Tant y a que je me contredits bien à l'adventure, mais la vérité, comme disoit Demades, je ne la contredy point. (T-R, III:2, 782)

^{iv} (F, III:2, 740)

Si mon ame pouvoit prendre pied, je ne m'essaierois pas, je me resoudrois ; elle est tousjours en apprentissage et en espreuve. (T-R, III:2, 782)

^v (F, I:9, 25)

« chimeres et monstres » (T-R, I:9, 34)

^{vi} (F, III:10, 936)

« Qui ne vit aucunement à autrui, ne vit guere à soy. » (T-R, I:10, 984)

^{vii} (F, preface, 2)

Je veus qu'on m'y voie en ma façon simple, naturelle et ordinaire, sans contantion et artifice : car c'est moy que je peins. Mes defauts s'y liront au vif, et ma forme naïfve, autant que la reverence publique me l'a permis. Que si j'eusse esté entre ces nations qu'on dict vivre encore sous la douce liberté des premieres loix de nature, je t'asseure que je m'y fusse tres-volontiers peint tout entier, et tout nud. (T-R, Au lecteur, 9)

^{viii} (F, II:37, 696)

« [c]e fagotage de tant de diverses pieces » (T-R, II:37, 736)

^{ix} (F, III:9, 895)

« Moy à cette heure et moy tantost, sommes bien deux; mais quand meilleur? je n'en puis rien dire. » (T-R, III:9, 941)

^x (F, II:16, 570)

Mais nous sommes, je ne sçay comment, doubles en nous mesmes, qui faict que ce que nous croyons, nous ne le croyons pas, et ne nous pouvons deffaire de ce que nous condamnons. (T-R, II:16, 603)

^{xi} (F, I:28, 169)

Nous nous cherchions avant que de nous estre veus, et par des rapports que nous oyõns l'un de l'autre, qui faisoient en nostre affection plus d'effort que ne porte la raison des rapports, je croy par quelque ordonnance du ciel: nous nous embrassions par noz noms. Et à nostre premiere rencontre, qui fut par hazard en une grande feste et compagnie de ville, nous nous trouvasmes si prins, si cognus, si obligez entre nous, que rien des lors ne nous fut si proche que l'un à l'autre. (T-R, I:28, 187)

^{xii} (F, I:28, 169)

« Cette cy [amitié] n'a point d'autre idée que d'elle mesme, et ne se peut rapporter qu'à soy. » (T-R, I:28, 187)

^{xiii} (F, I:28, 174)

« Car les discours mesmes que l'antiquité nous a laissé sur ce subject, me semblent lâches au prix du sentiment que j'en ay. Et, en ce point, les effects surpassent les preceptes mesmes de la philosophie » (T-R, I:28, 191-192)

^{xiv} (F, I:28, 169)

« En l'amitié dequoy je parle, elles se meslent et confondent l'une en l'autre, d'un melange si universel, qu'elles effacent et ne retrouvent plus la couture qui les a jointes. » (T-R, I:28, 186)

^{xv} (F, II:37, 696)

« s'est basti à diverses poses et intervalles » (T-R, II:37, 736)

^{xvi} (F, III:5, 809)

« les imperfections qui sont en moy ordinaires et constantes » (T-R, III:5, 853)

^{xvii} (F, I:28, 175)

« Mais oyons un peu parler ce garçon de seize ans. » (T-R, I:28, 193)

^{xviii} (F, I:28, 164)

Considérant la conduite de la besongne d'un peintre que j'ay, il m'a pris envie de l'ensuivre. Il choisit le plus bel endroit et milieu de chaque paroy, pour y loger un tableau élaboré de toute sa suffisance; et, le vuide tout au tour, il le remplit de crottesques, qui sont peintures fantasques, n'ayant grace qu'en la varieté et estrangeté. Que sont-ce icy aussi, à la verité, que crottesques et corps monstrueux, rappez de divers membres, sans certaine figure, n'ayants ordre, suite ny proportion que fortuite? (T-R, I:28, 181)

^{xix} (F, I:29, 177)

« Ces vers se voient ailleurs » (T-R, I:29, 194)

^{xx} (F, III:3, 762)

« Je suis sur l'entrée » (T-R, III:3, 807)

^{xxi} (F, III:5, 777)

« des essays en cher et en os » (T-R, III:5, 821)

^{xxii} (S, I:28, 169)

« Si on me presse de dire pourquoi je l'aymois, je sens que cela ne se peut exprimer, qu'en respondant: « Par ce que c'estoit luy; par ce que c'estoit moy. » » (T-R, I:28, 186-187)

^{xxiii} (F, I:28, 174)

« je ne fay que trainer languissant; et les plaisirs mesmes qui s'offrent à moy, au lieu de me consoler, me redoublent le regret de sa perte. Nous estions à moitié de tout; [...] J'estois desjà si fait et accoustumé à estre deuxiesme par tout, qu'il me semble n'estre plus qu'à demy. » (T-R, I:28, 192)

^{xxiv} (passage from III:9 as translated by and cited in Frampton, 2011b, p. 39)

« Ils sont trespassez. Si est bien mon pere, aussi entierement qu'eux, et s'est esloigné de moy et de la vie autant en dixhuict ans que ceux-là ont faict en seize cens; » (T-R, III:9, 975)

^{xxv} (F, II:12, 522)

Or ce sont choses qui se choquent souvent; et m'a l'on dit qu'en la Geometrie (qui pense avoir gagné le haut point de certitude parmy les sciences) il se trouve des demonstrations inevitables, subvertissans la verité de l'experience : comme Jacques Peletier me disoit chez moy qu'il avoit trouvé deux lignes s'acheminans l'une vers l'autre pour se joindre, qu'il verifioit toutefois ne pouvoir jamais, jusques à l'infinité, arriver à se toucher; (T-R, II:12, 555)

^{xxvi} (F, III:9, 911-912)

Outre ce profit que je tire d'escrire de moy, j'en espere cet autre que, s'il advient que mes humeurs plaisent et accordent à quelque honneste homme avant que je meure, il recherchera de nous joindre; je luy donne beaucoup de pays gagné, car tout ce qu'une longue connoissance et familiarité luy pourroit avoir acquis en plusieurs années, il le voit en trois jours en ce registre, et plus seurement et exactement. [...] Si à si bonnes enseignes je sçavois quelqu'un qui me fut propre, certes je l'irois trouver bien loing; car la douceur d'une sortable et agreable compaignie ne se peut assez acheter à mon gré. O un amy! (T-R, III:9, 959)

^{xxvii} (S, II:8, 451)

« A cettuy-cy [brain children, Essais], tel qu'il est, ce que je donne, je le donne purement et irrevocablement, comme on donne aux enfans corporels » (T-R, II:8, 383)

^{xxviii} (S, II:17, 730)

Les mains, je les ay si lourdes que je ne sçay pas escrire seulement pour moy: de façon que, ce que j'ay barbouillé, j'ayme mieux le refaire que de me donner la peine de le démesler; [...] Autrement, bon clerc. Je ne sçay pas clorre à droit une lettre, ny ne sçez jamais tailler plume, ny trancher à table, qui vaille, ny equipper un cheval de son harnois, ny porter à point un oiseau et le lascher, ny parler aux chiens, aux oiseaux, aux chevaux. (T-R, II:17, 625)

^{xxix} (F, III:11, 957)

« C'est chose difficile de resoudre son jugement contre les opinions communes. »
(T-R, III:11, 1005)

^{xxx} (S, III:5, 988)

Les sciences traictent les choses trop finement, d'une mode trop artificielle et differente à la commune et naturelle. Mon page faict l'amour et l'entend. Lisez luy Leon Hébreu et Ficin: on parle de luy, de ses pensées et de ses actions, et si il n'y entend rien. Je ne recognois pas chez Aristote la plus part de mes mouvemens ordinaires: on les a couverts et revestus d'une autre robe pour l'usage de l'eschole. (T-R, III:5, 852)

^{xxxi} (F, I:30, 177)

« les natures tempérées et moyennes. » (T-R, I:30, 195)

^{xxxii} (F, II:18, 612)

« livre consubstantiel à son auteur » (T-R, II:18, 648)

^{xxxiii} (F, III:13, 1008)

« J'ay assez vescu, pour mettre en compte l'usage qui m'a conduit si loing. Pour qui en voudra gouter, j'en ay faict l'essay, son eschançon. » (T-R, III:13, 1057)

^{xxxiv} (F:III:9, 882-883)

Nous empeschons noz pensées du general et des causes et conduittes universelles, qui se conduisent tres bien sans nous, et laissons en arriere nostre faict et Michel, qui nous touche encore de plus près que l'homme. (T-R, III:9, 929)

^{xxxv} (F, III:12, 965)

« [...] cochers, menuisiers, savetiers et maçons » (T-R, III:12, 1014)

^{xxxvi} (F, II:8, 337)

« sottie entreprise » (T-R, II:8, 364)

^{xxxvii} (F, III:13, 1003)

« Moy qui ne faicts autre profession, y trouve une profondeur et varieté si infinie, que mon apprentissage n'a autre fruit que de me faire sentir combien il me reste à apprendre. » (T-R, III:13, 1052)

^{xxxviii} (F, III:12, 968)

« qui ne sçavent ny Aristote ny Caton, ny exemple, ny precepte » (T-R, III:12, 1017)

^{xxxix} (F, III:13, 1039)

« de nos maladies la plus sauvage, c'est mespriser nostre estre. » (T-R, III:13, 1091)

^{xl} (F, II:17, 584)

Je me tiens de la commune sorte, sauf en ce que je m'en tiens : coupable des defectuositez plus basses et populaires, mais non desadvouées, non excusées; et ne me prise seulement que de ce que je sçay mon prix. (T-R, II:17, 618)

^{xli} (F, III:9, 931)

« pleins d'inanité et de fadaise » (T-R, III:9, 979)

^{xlii} (F, III:12, 988)

« Je n'ay pas corrigé, comme Socrates, par force de la raison mes complexions naturelles, et n'ay aucunement troublé par art mon inclination. Je me laisse aller, comme je suis venu, je ne combats rien, » (T-R, III:12, 1037)

^{xliii} (S, I:40, 283)

Et eüsse prins plus volontiers ceste forme à publier mes verves, si j'eusse eu à qui parler. Il me falloit, comme je l'ay eu autrefois, un certain commerce qui m'attirast, qui me soustinst et souslevast. [...] J'eusse esté plus attentif et plus seur, ayant une adresse forte et amie, que je ne suis, regardant les divers visages d'un peuple. Et suis deceu, s'il ne m'eust mieux succédé. (T-R, I:40, 246)

^{xliv} (F, II:18, 611)

« C'est pour le coin d'une librairie, et pour en amuser un voisin, un parent, un amy, qui aura plaisir à me raconter et repratiquer en cett' image. » (T-R, II:18, 647)

^{xlv} (F, I:54, 276)

« ceux-là n'y entendraient pas assez, ceux-cy y entendraient trop; » (T-R, I:54, 300)

^{xlvi} (F, II:17, 605)

« à qui vous tombez en partage, des ames réglées et fortes d'elles-mesmes »
(T-R, II:17, 640)

^{xlvii} (F, I:54, 276)

« la moyenne region » (T-R, I:54, 300)

^{xlviii} (F, III:13, 1005)

« A rien, fis-je.. » (T-R, III:13, 1055)

^{xlix} (F, III:13, 1004)

« Cette longue attention que j'employe à me considerer me dresse à juger aussi passablement des autres, » (T-R, III:13, 1053)

ⁱ (F, III:13, 1006)

« Ce seroit un office sans nom » (T-R, III:13, 1055)

ⁱⁱ (F, III:13, 1006)

« la fidelité du silence » (T-R, III:13, 1056)

ⁱⁱⁱ (F, III:13, 1005-1006)

Mais j'eusse dict ses veritez à mon maistre, et eusse contrerrolé ses meurs, s'il eust voulu. Non en gros, par leçons scholastiques, que je ne sçay point (et n'en vois naistre aucune vraye reformation en ceux qui les sçavent), mais les observant pas à pas, à toute oportunité, et en jugeant à l'œil piece à piece, simplement et naturellement, luy faisant voyr quel il est en l'opinion commune, [...] J'eusse eu assez de fidelité, de jugement et de liberté pour cela. [...] Et est un rolle qui ne peut indifferemment appartenir à tous. Car la verité mesme n'a pas ce privilege d'estre employée à toute heure et en toute sorte: son usage, tout noble qu'il est, a ses circonscriptions et limites. Il advient souvent, comme le monde est, qu'on la lache à l'oreille du prince, non seulement sans fruict mais dommageablement, et encore injustement. Et ne me fera l'on pas accroire qu'une sainte remontrance ne puisse estre appliquée vitieusement, et que l'interest de la substance ne doive souvent ceder à l'interest de la forme.
(T-R, III:13, 1055)

^{liii} (F, III:3, 758)

« [J]e suis tout au dehors et en evidence, nay à la société et à l'amitié. »
(T-R, III:3, 801)

^{liv} (F, I:27, 164)

« combien de choses nous servoyent hier d'articles de foy, qui nous sont fables aujourd'huy? » (T-R, I:27, 181)

^{lv} (F, III:13, 1036)

Quand je dance, je dance; quand je dors, je dors; voyre et quand je me promeine solitairement en un beau vergier, si mes pensées se sont entretenues des occurences estrangieres quelque partie du temps, quelque autre partie je les rameine à la promenade, au vergier, à la douceur de cette solitude et à moy.
(T-R, III:13, 1087-1088)

^{lvi} (F, II:20, 621)

« rapiessément et bigarrure » (T-R, II:20, 656)

^{lvii} (F, III:13, 1001)

« Je la sçauray assez quand je la sentiray. » (T-R, III:13, 1050)

^{lviii} (F, I:39, 216)

« La plus grande chose du monde, c'est de sçavoir estre à soy. » (T-R, I:39, 236)

^{lix} (T-R, I:39, 235)

^{lx} (passage from I:39 as translated by and cited in Screech, 2000, p. 68)

« Il se faut reserver une arriere boutique toute nostre, toute franche, en laquelle nous établissons nostre vraye liberté et principale retraicte et solitude. » (T-R, I:39, 235)

^{lxi} (F, I:1, 3)

« Par divers moyens on arrive à pareille fin. » (T-R, I:1, 11)

^{lxii} (F, I:8, 24)

« c'est n'estre en aucun lieu, que d'estre par tout. » (T-R, I:8, 34)

^{lxiii} (C, III:10)

La carriere de nos desirs doit estre circonscripte et restraincte à un court limite des commoditez les plus proches et contigües; et doit en outre leur course se manier, non en ligne droite qui face bout ailleurs, mais en rond, duquel les deux pointes se tiennent et terminent en nous par un brief contour. Les actions qui se conduisent sans cette reflexion, s'entend voisine reflexion et essentielle, comme sont celles des avaritieux, des ambitieux et tant d'autres qui courent de pointe, desquels la course les emporte tousjours devant eux, ce sont actions erronnées et maladives.
(T-R, III:10, 988-989)

^{lxiv} (F, II:6, 331)

« une espineuse entreprinse » (T-R, II:6, 358)

^{lxv} (F, II:12, 497)

« Nouvelle figure : un philosophe impremedité et fortuite! » (T-R, II:12, 528)

^{lxvi} (F, III:13, 1006)

[E]t nay de moyenne fortune; d'autant que, d'une part, il n'auroit point de craincte de toucher vifvement et profondement le coeur du maistre pour ne perdre par là le cours de son advancement, et d'autre part, pour estre d'une condition moyenne, il auroit plus aysée communication à toute sorte de gens. (T-R: III:13, 1055)

^{lxvii} (F, I:26, 136)

« les humeurs [...] et leurs façons, et pour frotter et limer nostre cervelle contre celle d'autrui. » (T-R, I:26, 152)

CHAPTER II

SHOULD WE BE WRITING ESSAYS INSTEAD OF ARTICLES? A PSYCHOTHERAPIST'S REFLECTION ON MONTAIGNE'S MARVELOUS INVENTION

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary psychology may be overlooking an important mode of inquiry by insisting that our primary mode of communication should take the form of scientific articles rather than that of literary essays. The essay was first practiced and then refined by Michel de Montaigne in the late Renaissance and constitutes a unique literary form that incorporates both Renaissance humanism and the then-emerging spirit of scientific discovery. The aim of the present essay is to explore the uses psychotherapists might make of Montaigne's *Essays*, both as a fruitful model for writing about and for reflecting on the human condition. The essay was born at a time of great intellectual and spiritual upheaval and renewal. It is freewheeling, unorthodox, forever inventive, and at the same time learned, disciplined, and profoundly respectful of the past. The author looks to the humanist essay as developed by Montaigne as a useful literary and disciplinary device that can help in understanding the gap between purely theoretical or academic psychology and the actual practice of therapeutic psychology.

Keywords: Montaigne, essay, theory, Renaissance, humanism, bridging the gap, psychotherapy, ordinary experience, modernity, conversation

RÉSUMÉ

En insistant pour que notre principal mode de communication prenne la forme d'articles scientifiques, la psychologie contemporaine néglige probablement un mode de recherche important, l'essai littéraire. Vers la fin de la Renaissance, Michel de Montaigne fut le premier à pratiquer et affiner l'essai littéraire qui constitue un genre unique, en intégrant l'humanisme de la Renaissance et l'esprit, alors émergent, de la découverte scientifique. L'objectif du présent essai est d'explorer les diverses utilisations que les psychothérapeutes pourraient faire des *Essais* de Montaigne, autant comme modèle fructueux pour écrire que pour réfléchir sur la condition humaine. L'essai est né à une époque de grands bouleversements et renouvellements, intellectuels et spirituels. Il est désinvolte, non orthodoxe, toujours innovant, et à la fois cultivé, discipliné, et profondément respectueux du passé. L'auteur se penche sur l'essai humaniste tel que développé par Montaigne en tant qu'outil littéraire et didactique utile pouvant aider à comprendre l'écart entre la psychologie purement théorique ou académique et la pratique concrète de la psychologie thérapeutique.

Mots-clés : Montaigne, essai, théorie, Renaissance, humanisme, combler l'écart, psychothérapie, expérience ordinaire, modernité, conversation

The scientific article or paper is by far the most privileged form of communication within the psychotherapeutic community. Yet our humanist vision might be more at home in other forms of literary expression, such as the essay in the way it was first proposed by Michel de Montaigne. Adopting the essay form might enable us to stay in closer and richer contact with the psychotherapeutic experience as we discuss the many challenges and possibilities of our profession.

Michel de Montaigne, inventor of what he called the “unscientific” essay genre, challenges us to consider the “terrifying [...] instability” (Taylor, 1989 178) of ordinary experience without recourse to the comforting authority of established theory and systematic methods. As Montaigne himself professed: “Yet there is no use our mounting on stilts, for on stilts we must still walk on our own legs. And on the loftiest throne in the world we are still sitting only on our own rump.”¹

The New Idea of Discovery and the Invention of the Essay

The Renaissance was an era of crucial astronomical and geographical discoveries, including the discovery of the *idea of discovery* itself. Until this time, the paradigm of the ancient stable world had remained unchallenged. It was a world where the planets and sun revolved around the Earth, and where the understanding of man’s place in the cosmos fit nicely with religious beliefs. While looking for new trade routes in 1492, Columbus “discovered” America, but because he was not looking for a New World, he did not see it in this way. It took other voyages to America before the idea that a new land had been discovered began to take shape. Now it appeared that there was more to the universe than was already known, and thus the possibility of discovery, the possibility of new possibilities that

¹ For ease of reading, I have placed all of the references to the *Essays* in the end notes using the following format: (TRANSLATOR INITIAL, BOOK:chapter, page). I refer to Donald Frame (Montaigne, 2003) and Charles Cotton’s (Montaigne, 1877) English translations of the *Essays*. I also provide the original French text as found in the Thibaudet-Rat edition (Montaigne, 1962).

were not already told by the Bible, or by received scholars, dawned on Europe. Gradually, the cosmological, religious and social implications of such an idea began to be felt and seen.

The spirit of discovery and the collapse of established views were bolstered by other inventions and discoveries during this time. Besides the Copernican revolution and the discovery of the New World and its peoples, the Renaissance saw the invention of the mariner's compass, the printer, and the telescope. This period also witnessed the restoration of Latin and Greek languages and the recovery of the wisdom of antiquity through the translation and printing of long-lost classical works. It was as if the stable world horizon had broken open, allowing both the ancient world and the New World to flood in. If standard assumptions about the place of the Earth in the universe, or about the place of Europe in the Bible, could be overturned, then all beliefs became suspect. This new uncertainty, this concurrent re-examination of the past and questioning of the New World order, necessitated a new mode of conversation. Michael L. Hall's (1989) wonderful essay, *The Emergence of the Essay and the Idea of Discovery*, pairs the voyages of the new age of discovery in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with a new genre of discourse: the essay. At a time when accepted notions about the outside world were under question, the expanding world horizons allowed for the inward search for truth as well. In 1580, Michel de Montaigne launched his inward textual voyage of discovery, in a vessel christened *Essays*. Following closely in his boisterous wake in 1597, was Francis Bacon, an early disciple of the essay form, and father of the scientific method, who strove for a more orderly path through the uncharted waters of early modernity. The essay was a "new mode of inquiry and a new style of prose" (p. 78). It opened a textual space in which to contemplate movement between tradition, man, and the world, while emphasizing the interplay between recovery and discovery.

Truth could no longer be arrived at by simply assimilating accepted wisdom. Instead, truth evolved into something that must be discovered, experienced by oneself, just as one would explore new lands, both inwardly and outwardly. Thus, for the first time, ordinary experience became a context for truth. Montaigne vividly develops and articulates this novel insight in his *Essays*, particularly in what some consider to be his greatest chapter, "On experience":

I study myself more than any other subject. That is my metaphysics, that is my physics [...] In the experience I have of myself I find enough to make me wise, if I were a good scholar.ⁱⁱ

Although the essay as “inquiry into the value, meaning, and true nature of experience” (Sanders, 1989, p. 36), has evolved into several forms over the past four centuries, its basic “essayness” remains, and we owe this to one man, Michel de Montaigne.

The Education of Michel de Montaigne

Michel Eyquem de Montaigne was born into new nobility in Bordeaux in 1533. His mother, Antoinette López de Villanueva, was a descendent of Spanish Jews. His father, Pierre Eyquem, who served briefly as the mayor of Bordeaux, was an avid proponent of Renaissance humanist educational methods, which valued a perfect command of Latin (Bakewell, 2010a). Latin unlocked the door to the home of human wisdom, embedded in the classical world, as well as to the professional cultures of law and civil service. The enthusiastic educational reform of the day encouraged natural independence of thought through freedom, pleasure, and games, rather than structured work. During Pierre's generation, the nobility were more superficially educated and generally wore their knowledge of the classics as ornament. To ensure a deeper engagement with the classics, Montaigne's father decided that the boy would be raised with Latin as his native tongue. This was difficult to do, considering that few French people spoke Latin, and fewer still, with any fluency. Pierre hired a Latin-speaking tutor and forbade anyone on the estate to speak to the child except in Latin. Montaigne's parents learned rudimentary Latin phrases, but the boy was largely linguistically isolated from his family until the age of six, when he learned French². Later, he received a top boarding school education, steeped in the Greeks and Romans,

² As a newborn, until he was weaned, Montaigne was sent to live with peasants on his estate, where he was likely exposed to the local Périgord dialect. Pierre wanted his son to feel comfortable among commoners, engendering a very early appreciation of ordinary lives.

rhetoric and oratory, but never developed perfect French. Montaigne “follow[ed] common usage in language”ⁱⁱⁱ, writing the *Essays* in an idiosyncratic vernacular.

After probably studying law, Montaigne worked in the court system in Bordeaux, eventually serving two terms as mayor. It was in the courts that Montaigne met the great friend of his life, Étienne de la Boétie, a well-known poet. Montaigne credits this deep love and intellectual bond as ground for the development of his ideas. The death of la Boétie in 1563 was a profound loss that in part motivated Montaigne’s turn to writing as an effort to continue his dialogue with an ideal friend (Henry, 1987).

In 1572, at the age of 38, Montaigne left public life and retreated to his tower on the family estate to write. He wrote the *Essays* over the next eight years, first publishing in 1580. The Gutenberg press had recently been invented in 1452, and our cheerful socialiser took advantage of this new opportunity for conversation with a potentially vast number of readers, with great success. Montaigne edited the *Essays* constantly, publishing five editions before his death in 1588.

The *Essays* were an entirely new form of writing. No one had ever written about himself in this way, testing his judgement by studying himself (Bloom, 2002). Whereas people had previously written about themselves as a way to glorify their exploits, or to serve God, or to interpret the classics, Montaigne invented the introspective self- reflexive writing style with which we are familiar today as the essay genre. He claimed:

I set forth a humble and inglorious life [...] Authors communicate with the people by some especial extrinsic mark! I am the first to do so by my entire being as Michel de Montaigne, not as a grammarian or a poet or a jurist.^{iv}

Montaigne wrote 107 chapters in a rambling, unstructured manner, spanning three books. Like many of his Renaissance contemporaries, he was fascinated by the question “how to live”, as opposed to “how one ought to live.” The *Essays* are his response. American essayist and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson (1926) enjoyed Montaigne’s wide-ranging interests: “[the *Essays* are] full of fun, poetry, business, divinity, philosophy, anecdotes, smut” (p. 136).

Essay titles include “On friendship”, “On smells”, “On the custom of wearing clothing”, and “How our mind hinders itself”. The content of the *Essays* often has little to do with the title, which serves only as a starting point for his chain of thought. Montaigne takes great pleasure in contradicting himself, gleefully examining his subjects (including himself and his own writing process) first from one perspective, then from another. He explicitly criticizes Renaissance scholasticism’s³ logical specialization of knowledge as obscuring the complexity and coherence of real life. His rhetorical style generates a new discourse about knowledge, advocating “a personal worldliness or personal outwardness” (Spellmeyer, 1989, p. 254), terms that would have affronted the purists of the scholastic movement. In contrast to the categorizing conventions of scholasticism, Montaigne viewed convention as a “‘coming together’ of dissonant perspectives in order to restore the lived world, at the risk of imprecision and incongruity” (p. 254). He sought to find a style that was unrestrained by contrived formality and more able to represent the passing moments of the self, “the actual process of the mind seeking truth” (Croll, 1966; Williamson, 1966, as cited in Hall, 1989, p. 79).

A New Literary Genre

The word *essay* comes from the Latin *exagium*, the act of weighing, discussing, or counselling. It was Montaigne who coined this term with reference to a literary style. At the time, the French verb *essayer* had several meanings: to try to do something, to experience a thing, to suffer something disagreeable, or to test something, putting it through trial runs. With the title *Essays*, Montaigne implies that he is a novice, attempting trial runs of his

³ Scholasticism was the standard method of teaching knowledge during the Renaissance. It arose as a way of logically reconciling classical philosophy with Christianity. For example, one of its aims was to build rational arguments for God’s existence. Montaigne launches sceptical arguments against the possibility of revelation as certain knowledge. As a Catholic, he does not question that God exists, but he argues that we cannot be certain of our human interpretations of revelation. According to Montaigne, religious revelation is human arrogance because it creates God in a human image.

judgement and presenting them to his readers for assessment (Brush, 1994). Importantly, rather than *The Essays*, Montaigne used the single word *Essays* in the plural, in reference to both the text in its dynamic entirety *and* to the process of producing the book. He wrote and edited his *Essays* over a period of 16 years, constantly revisiting them and rarely making any deletions or corrections, only additions. As he gained experiences, he added to his work, integrating new elements and new chapters, transforming the body of work as a whole. Later publishers added the article *The (Les)* to the title, and, as per the modern sense, we now use the word *essay* to denote one chapter of the book.

In German, there are two words for *essay*: *Abhandlung* which means a dealing with something, and *Aufsatz*, which refers to a setting forth (Hardison, 1989). Basically, the former term indicates a systematic discourse on a subject, while *Aufsatz* refers to a lighter, more personal tone, such as the essay conceived by Montaigne. Heidegger called it *andenkendes Denken*, thought thinking about itself. His work, *Das Ding*, is an *Aufsatz*.

From Stardom to the Dentist's Office

The essay is the most difficult to pin down of all the literary genres. In its resistance to classification, it is the most human, that is, the most representative of diversity of thought and experience. The essay resists resolution into one form, or even into itself. If anything, it goes in the opposite direction: towards greater openness. The Montaignian essay is rambling, open-ended, doubtful, contradictory, fragmented, critical, tentative, and vernacular. It is a space of continual beginnings, but with an explicit acknowledgement of finitude. The essayist is engaged with the world and the self, occupying the tension between public and private, as well as between experience and reason, refusing to hold fast to concepts or theories. Unlike autobiography, which "dwells complacently on the self" (Sanders, 1989, p. 37), the personal essay is conversational; it looks out onto the world. Essayists use "language to put themselves on display and gesture at the world" (p. 39). Like any good conversationalist, Montaigne

doesn't pontificate, but rather digresses and shares stories: "I do not teach, I [relate]"^v 4. The essay is distinguished from prose, poetry and academic writing by what Spellmeyer (1989) calls its "situatedness": the prominence of the writer's actual situation (p. 255).

With the publication of Bacon's aphoristic *Essayes*, Britain embraced the essay, unlike France, where, after a brief spell of stardom, the Catholic Church placed Montaigne's *Essays* on the Index of Prohibited Books in 1676. Eminent purveyors of the vibrant tradition of English essayists include Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt, P.K. Chesterton, and T.S. Eliot. Bacon may be seen as the initiator of the more objective and less personal essay that gradually evolved into the staid university paper or article permeating today's academic world.

As the great E.B. White lamented in 1932, essayists had become second-class citizens (Butrym, 1989). In recent times, the essay has continued its fall into disrepute. A great essay these days is often only chanced on, leafing through a *Harper's* magazine at the dentist's office. The essay itself is partly to blame for this. Montaigne nonchalantly illustrates how the essay can accommodate all sorts of topics. In the same breath, the essayist may explore the most quotidian concrete detail and the most abstract philosophical concepts. Thus, the essay has come to be associated with other genres, which have chipped away at its distinct significance. The rise of the journalistic feature, or op-ed, created a less literary, albeit popular, genre, which has been conflated in our minds with the essay. In academia, the essay began to be relegated to a pedagogical tool, a way of demonstrating clear, logical thinking on the written page. Today's essay has hardly has anything in common with the Montaignian essay. But we still often call it an essay, "preserving the illusion that we are deeply devoted to the progressive spirit of the humanities" (Ellis, 2008, p. 16).

The next step was for more advanced students to rename their writing "articles." A scientific article must be written in objective universal language, using short sentences and no

⁴ The original phrase is "Je n'enseigne point; je raconte." Frame's translation is "I do not teach, I tell", which misses the conversational nuance of "raconte".

adjectives. Here the “I” is explicitly banned, thus closing the door to reflection. Novelist William H. Gass (1985) distinguishes between the scholarly article and the essay:

The essay is obviously the opposite of that awful object, “the article”, which [...] represents itself as the latest cleverness, a novel consequence of thought, skill, labor, and free enterprise; but never as an activity the process, the working, the wondering. [...] [T]he article pretends that everything is clear, [...] that there are no soggy patches, no illicit inferences, no illegitimate connections [...] it is the careful product of a professional. [...] and its appearance is proof of the presence, nearby, of the Professor, the way one might, perceiving a certain sort of speckled egg, infer that its mother was a certain sort of speckled bird. (p. 25)

The “Crooked Path”⁵ of Ordinary Experience

Many Renaissance writers turned to the great scholars, both classical and contemporary, or to divine revelation in order to speak about the human condition. Just as today, we often turn to scientific articles or experts for truth or to tell us what to “do” in psychotherapy. Montaigne was the first thinker to turn inward and to value his own experience as his most dependable source of knowledge: “The world always looks straight ahead; as for me, I turn my gaze inward, I [amuse it]. Every man looks in front of him; as for me, I look inside of me”^{vi} 6. Montaigne launches classical sceptical arguments to renounce the pretension of “regimenting, arranging, and fixing truth”^{vii}. He is sceptical of the senses, reason, and revelation as reliable sources of truth, and comes up with the profound idea that ordinary experience is “what we know best and to which we can have access” (Levine, 1999, p. 59).

⁵ (Kauffmann, 1989, p. 224)

⁶ I have altered Donald Frame’s translation, replacing “fix it there” with “amuse it”. The original French is “je l’amuse là”. This nuance better captures the fleeting and playful nature of Montaigne’s approach to experience.

[...] that no man ever treated a subject he knew and understood better than I do the subject I have undertaken; and that in this I am the most learned man alive. Secondly that no man ever penetrated more deeply into his material, or plucked its limbs and consequences cleaner, or reached more accurately and fully the goal he had set for his work.^{viii}

In *Sources of the Self* (1989), Charles Taylor charts the development of threads of our modern identity. One of the most foundational strands of the modern self begins with Augustine's turn inwards in the search for God. Michel de Montaigne inaugurates the modern idea of turning inward to know oneself, as opposed to turning inward to seek the divine. René Descartes, 50 years after Montaigne, takes this form of radical reflexivity in a new direction; he uses inwardness as a source of disengaged reason rather than as a route to a perfect God. Both the Cartesian and Montaignian approaches turn inward, but Montaigne does not try to disengage from himself in order to examine himself. The self and the world remain infinite sources of conversation rather than observable objects. For this reason, part of our self is always unknowable; the self remains a fluctuating experience, a question to be pursued. We explore this open question of the self in therapy, one of the few spaces in our modern world to do so.

Rather than objectifying our own nature and hence classing it as irrelevant to our identity, [Montaigne's stance] consists in exploring what we are in order to establish this identity, because the assumption behind modern self-exploration is that we don't already know who we are. (Taylor, 1989, p. 178)

Jacques Quintin (2008) says that the task of philosophy and psychotherapy is to keep our relation to our self open, to not contain it in a system of causes and answers, to keep the question alive. Faced with this openness, we are surprised at our own oscillating existence and our own liberty. The *Essays* share this task and offer us one of the best illustrations of what it means to continually revive the question that we are:

I have seen no more evident monstrosity and miracle in the world but myself. We become habituated to anything strange by use and time; but the more I frequent myself and know myself, the more my deformity astonishes me, and the less I understand myself.^{ix}

Taylor suspects that, like others of his time, Montaigne initially would have believed he had a stable core; a true nature (a universal human nature) that served as a foundation for the fluctuating passions of the soul. But when he embarked on his voyage of self-discovery, he “experienced a terrifying inner instability” (Taylor, 1989, p. 178). Instead of finding an immutable core, Montaigne discovered flux and human limits and thus set about describing the particular (himself), rather than the universal. He “recognized the decentred quality of selfhood” (Kauffmann, 1989, p. 224). One cannot grasp the self and world in flux, only visit:

I do nothing but come and go. My judgement does not always go forward; it floats, it strays, [...] Nearly every man would say as much of himself, if he considered himself as I do.^x

Thus, Montaigne launched a new kind of intensely individual reflection to find truth. There is nothing “scientific” in his inquiry, it is conducted entirely in the first-person. Taylor sees Montaigne’s self-discovery as

the point of origin of another kind of modern individualism [...] which differs from the Cartesian both in aim and method. Its aim is to identify the individual in his or her unrepeatable difference, where Cartesianism gives us a science of the subject in its general essence; and it proceeds by a critique of first-person self-interpretations, rather than by the proofs of impersonal reasoning. (Taylor, 1989, p. 182)

The *Essays*’ authority lies in Montaigne’s experience, not in his knowledge. The essay follows “the crooked path of actual experience.” (Kauffmann, 1989, p. 224):

Instead of imposing a discursive order on experience, the essay lets its discourse take the shape of experience. [...] The truth of the essay is a *limited* truth, limited by the concrete experience, itself limited, which gave rise to it. [...] The essay is a provisional reflection of an ephemeral experience of an event or object. (Good, 1988, p. 7)

Both Montaigne and Descartes began their search for truth with an Augustinian turn inward toward experience, in an attempt to bring order to the soul (Taylor, 1989, p. 182). However, whereas Descartes applied a scientific or “intellectual order by which things in general can be surveyed” (p. 182) to his experience, Montaigne relinquished this goal and happily set about following the rollicking path of the particular: “The Cartesian calls for a

radical disengagement from ordinary experience; Montaigne requires a deeper engagement with our particularity” (p. 182)⁷.

At the Crossroads of Modernity: The Essay and the Natural Sciences

At the historical moment of the essay’s birth during the late Renaissance, modernity may be seen as having two paths: the classical scepticism of Renaissance humanism or the New Philosophy’s abstract rigour. In *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (1992), Stephen Toulmin shows how different modernity might have been if Montaigne’s humble scepticism was seen as the starting point instead of the “decontextualized rationalism of Descartes’ *Discourse* and *Meditations*” (p. 42). The humanists viewed abstract theoretical claims as beyond the scope of human experience to either deny *or* assert, choosing instead to tolerate a diversity of ideas, ambiguity, and uncertainty. It is important to not confuse classical scepticism with the modern scepticism of the New Philosophy. The latter is a method of systematic doubt, a denial of any proposition that is not arrived at by “rationally validated methods” (p. 29). Humanist scepticism is a movement toward a totality of truth that encompasses contradiction, whereas scientific scepticism is a refusal to accept that which is not proven by scientific method. This is a negative dogmatism in which it is implicit that finite truth, or an ultimate “reality”, is out there to be found, if only we continue to refine our methodology. The shift from humanist to rationalist thought demanded a radical change in legitimate interests:

[After Descartes,] the focus of philosophical inquiries has ignored the particular, concrete, timely, and local details of everyday human affairs [...] it has shifted to a higher, stratospheric plane, on which nature and ethics conform to abstract, timeless, general and universal theories. (p. 35)

⁷ Kierkegaard (1964) expressed this idea poetically: “I can circumnavigate myself, but I cannot erect myself above myself. I cannot find this Archimedean point” (p. 90).

Toulmin (1922-2009) was a British physicist and philosopher who studied under Wittgenstein at Cambridge. His work focused on developing practical arguments to analyse moral reasoning, in order to overcome the limited practical value of both absolutism and relativism. Like most scholars of his generation and before, he took for granted the commonly held view of modernity. The standard modern view of its own beginnings tells us that it began in 17th Century Europe with a new rationality that was able to emerge because of the relaxed ecclesiastical constraints and a burgeoning economic growth. In the standard narrative, Descartes and other thinkers were able to remove themselves from the influences of medieval superstition and the Church. Wiping the slate clean of traditional authority, alone in a chalet, Descartes was able to uncover “clear” and “certain” ideas, which could be demonstrated with geometrical proofs, thus kick-starting the modern sciences.

Toulmin looked to the past to make sense of the current crisis in philosophy⁸, which can be broadly described as the crumbling of its Cartesian foundations, the disillusionment with modernity’s goals of geometric exactitude and abstract rigour, the questioning of the tyranny of method and scientism, and the philosophical quest for alternative ways of thinking. Deeply struck by just how relevant the *Essays* were to the present crisis in modern philosophy, Toulmin was galvanized to build a richer and more comprehensive picture of the birth of modernity, looking for clues as to *why* we moved from the partly practical philosophy of the 16th century to the purely theoretical philosophy of the 17th century. “The seduction of High Modernity lay in its abstract neatness and theoretical simplicity: both of these features blinded the successors of Descartes to the unavoidable complexities of concrete human experience” (p. 201). If the historical era that we call modernity is ending, what intellectual stance should we take as we look to the future? Such clues might shed light on this question.

⁸ Since the 1960s and 1970s, many Western thinkers have found themselves knee-deep in an intellectual crisis. For example, Hans-Georg Gadamer sees the Cartesian quest as an intellectual dead end and profoundly questions the tyranny of method: The “modern obsession with Method has distorted and concealed the ontological character of understanding.” (Bernstein, 1983, p. xi) Questions of being (such as those that are important in psychotherapy) may be better served by other modes of inquiry.

Toulmin's research findings subvert our accepted history of the origins of modernity: The opening gambit of modern philosophy was not Descartes, but Montaigne's "restatement of classical scepticism [...] unless some one thing is found of which we are *completely* certain, we can be certain about nothing" (p. 42). There is no *general* truth about which we can be certain. Descartes' move was the Black *reply* to Montaigne's White. He responded directly to Montaigne's sceptical move with his own search for the *cogito*, finding the one thing of which he could be certain.⁹

These two starting points of modernity underlie the modern humanities and the modern sciences. Why are they not still seen as complementary rather than mutually exclusive? Why do we have to lose the practical wisdom of Shakespeare, Montaigne, and Erasmus, in order to reap the benefits of Galileo, Descartes, and Newton? And why did this change happen so rapidly, and so drastically in only 50 years (1590-1640)? The *Essays* were still on the bestseller lists at the beginning of the 17th century, and Descartes' work was the most prominent player on the philosophical field soon after the 1630's. Why did the quest for certainty arise specifically at this time? Why was Montaigne's practical contribution to philosophy discarded and forgotten?

The Wars of Religion (1562-98) brought France almost to its knees. This epoch is crucially marked by the assassination of King Henry of Navarre (Henri IV) of France on May 14, 1610. Montaigne worked as mediator in negotiations between the Protestant and Catholic leaders of his time, including for Henry of Navarre. Influenced by Montaigne, the King practiced a politics of relaxed tolerance based on modest scepticism rather than negative

⁹ Montaigne finds a different kind of truth, an unstable truth discovered in the give and take of conversation with the self or other: a sceptical movement versus a fixed Cartesian truth. Thus, the search for meaning must be constantly renewed. Merleau-Ponty (1964), in his outstanding reading of Montaigne, shows that scepticism opens us to the "idea of a totality of truth in which contradiction is a necessary element in our experience of truth" (O'Neill, 1982, p. 16). Kauffmann (1989) describes Montaigne's modest humanistic scepticism as rooted in the paradox of the "conscious being" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 199). We are constantly participating in the world "through perception, politics or love, and yet always at a distance from it without which we would know nothing of it" (O'Neill, 2001, p.16).

dogmatism “which systematically refuses to accept whatever is not totally certain” (Toulmin, 1992, p. 50). Other European countries were picking sides in the religious wars, each monarch persecuting the opposition. But Henry wanted to build a France in which both Catholicism and Protestantism could thrive. The Edict of Nantes in 1598 gave the Calvinist Protestants, (also known as the Huguenots) rights within a nation dominated by the Catholic League. The Edict separated civil unity from religious unity. In some ways it was a civil rights document, and it was to end the civil wars of the late 1500s.

After the King’s assassination, the Edict was gradually revised, removing the rights of the Huguenots and opening the door to new religious wars, before it was revoked entirely in 1685. The message read by Europe was that a policy of religious toleration had been tried and had failed. The bloody wars continued all over the continent with the exception of tolerant Holland. For those living among the bloodshed, it appeared that the humanistic embrace of uncertainty had not prevented the religious conflict from becoming so bloody. In fact, it seemed to worsen the mess. Uncertainty was unbearable and intellectual discussion was nonexistent; what mattered now was belief in belief. There was a craving for proof of certainty. But as fighting continued, it became less likely that each side would concede certainty of the other’s religious doctrines. So they turned to experience, which Montaigne had already shown to be intersubjective, as a source of certainty that the humanists had failed to notice. Toulmin’s thesis is that the assassination of the king brought this “desperation into sharper focus, and provided a natural context in which the Quest for Certainty could take shape” (p.56), to “escape the [bloody result of] doctrinal contradictions” (p. 62).

The 17th century philosophers’ quest for certainty was an intelligible response to the historical challenge of their day: “the social, political, and theological chaos embodied by the Thirty Years’ War” (p. 70). The decontextualization of the problems of science and philosophy was a useful move to end the seemingly interminable concrete conflict. The New Philosophy did not arise in a vacuum; Descartes did not suddenly have access to a truth emanating from a pure spirit. His reflections gave people real hope for a way to reason their way out of this bloody mess, out of the hardening theological dogmatism. By basing theories on “clear” and “distinct” concepts, the Cartesian program fulfilled both instrumental and

intrinsic goals. It could solve problems empirically, and it provided certainty in a world torn apart by uncertainty, thus putting aside the Renaissance reasonable uncertainties. It created a “formally ‘rational’ theory grounded on abstract, universal, timeless concepts” (p. 75).

The concurrent timing of another event cemented the shift in the 16th century balance between the Aristotelian practical concerns and Platonic theoreticalness: the upheaval of classical cosmology by Galileo and Copernicus. Simultaneously, people desperately looked for a “rational” way out of the dogmatic stalemate of warring sides in the religious wars *and* sought a new natural philosophy that could incorporate the astronomical discoveries. People strove to find a new foundational and celestial grounding. In this sense, they moved away from the everyday practical concerns to a greater overarching natural theory: “Granted, *nothing in particular* is at stake in our cosmology: what is at stake is *everything in general*” (p. 83).

The dire situation called for a drastic restructuring of natural philosophy through the certainty of geometrical foundations. What a relief it was to build a “fresh cosmology from scratch” (p. 83).

The essay and the New Philosophy arose at the same time, each criticizing blind reliance on the authority of traditional texts, and each turning inward to experience. The *Essays* directly influenced Descartes to embark on his own, more fearful journey of self-inquiry in the *Meditations*. As a young student, Descartes attended the renowned Jesuit Collège La Flèche. He was captivated by Montaigne’s celebrated *Essays*. Scholars believe that the annotations that we see today in the Collège’s copy of the *Essays* belong to Descartes. Given the historical context – Descartes’ entire life was engulfed by the Thirty Year war (1614 to 1648) – we begin to see why Descartes responded so vehemently to Montaigne’s jaunty scepticism. In *Meditations*, Descartes begins by essaying his experience of the chalet room warmed by the stove in the midst of a German winter. But, as Good (1988) wryly notes, these personal reflections are only a “prelude to the moment of enlightenment” (p. 37). Once Descartes finds the one certain thing, a fixed centre: his *cogito*, his writing moves from the fluid essay form to the general perspective of a structured treatise, a precursor to today’s

scientific article. Montaigne's inward turn finds movement and flux, the experience of which he cheerfully describes in the open-ended, intimate essay form. The ever-hospitable Montaigne visits himself when describing experience, whereas Descartes observes the self systematically. Instead of becoming the basis for a new discipline, the essay, like a conversation, remains an open, spontaneous description of *and* "a *provisional* [italics mine] ordering of the encounter" (p. 4). Interestingly, in "On experience", Montaigne also talks about German stoves, in some ways literally setting the stage for Descartes' project: "For in truth, that stifling heat, and the smell of that material they are made of when it gets hot, give most of those who are not used to them a headache; not me" (III:13, 1008). *Cogito ergo sum* is Descartes' response to the *Essays*, the repercussions of which permeate our modern world.

In Montaigne and Shakespeare, there is a confidence and a curiosity to explore human possibilities. For these thinkers, "experience puts the limits on Theory and Doctrine, not the other way about" (Toulmin, 1992, p. 130). In "On experience", published 50 years before Descartes' *Meditations*, Montaigne addressed philosophical questions about the nature of truth and knowledge, "and he drew reasons from his own experience to reject *in advance* the conclusions that Descartes argued for in general, abstract terms" (p. 37). The *Essays* anticipate and reject the "systematic ambitions of the new science" (Good, 1988, p. 3). Exploring the essay's history shows us that for a very brief period, the two visions of the world, that of classical scepticism and of modern rationalism¹⁰, were in conversation! Montaigne anticipated modern rationality and put it into question. The *Essays* cultivate this fundamental conversation between the sciences and the humanities.

Psychotherapy and the Humanist Vision

The *Essays* constitute a vital touchstone for humanistic psychotherapy; they are an enduring reminder of two fundamental, ontologically distinct, yet complementary visions of

¹⁰ In this vision, modern reason equates rationality with abstract theory alone and this scientific rationality is applied unreflectively everywhere, beyond its own reasonable limits.

the world. The modern vision of our Western culture is one formed by the natural sciences, that of the solitary observer who sees fixed, immutable objects in front of him or her as part of a continuous universe. This observer, alone in his or her unidirectional view, cannot help but have the impression that he or she sees an ultimate reality. In contemporary psychotherapy, we often obscure the other vision that founds the humanities, the arts, and the human sciences. This human view is based not upon observation, but on the visit, the encounter with the other and the world. It is a reciprocal vision; I am seen by the other and my vision is changed by this presence. Here, reality or truth is not in front of us, but it dynamically arises in dialogue. To explore this mutual reality, we must be invited to converse with the other, be it a neighbour, an ancestor, or a god (Jager, 2009).

Psychotherapy is a dialogical *métier* in which the conversation between patient and therapist at once illuminates and creates the intersubjective world. The mutuality of our vision enables a rhythmic movement between question and answer, between invitation and acceptance, and forms the wellspring for the ever-expanding totality of understanding. The task of the psychotherapist is to lay the table for such a conversation. The arts, the humanities, and psychotherapy all share this vision of the human world and reciprocally nourish our understanding of humanity. There have been calls in this journal and elsewhere for a return to a liberal arts education in order for humanistic psychology to withstand the grasp of modernity's scientific reach. Both Dillon (2008) and Graumann (1981) advocate a return to the early humanistic texts in order to reclaim some of the content and vision of the premodern humanistic tradition. These texts include Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, classical Greek and Roman philosophy, and the works of the humanist writers of the medieval Renaissance. The *Essays* fall into this range of poetical works that continue to speak with us throughout the centuries. They help us to better understand the psychotherapeutic dialogue in a wider context than the natural sciences, bringing to the fore our often obscured humanist vision. Yet I contend that the *Essays* are an *exceptionally* important and relevant interlocutor for our discipline.

As we have discussed, Michel de Montaigne was the first Western thinker to value ordinary experience as our most dependable source of an always imperfect truth, and the

Essays remain one of our most profound articulations of this theme. "He witnesses how his person increases in substance, rather than decreases, the more he strives to understand and articulate his experience" (Hansen, 2002, p. 137). We saw that Descartes also took a radical turn inward to "essay" his ordinary experience. However, he found something quite different, an objective truth, a *cogito*. Humanistic psychology contains these twin strands of modernity, these two approaches to experience, (elaborating it through conversation or observing it systematically), often awkwardly and as a source of confusion. The shared historical context reminds us of the original distinctiveness, complementarity, and later lost balance of two visions of the world. This fascinating history highlights the idea that science's starting point was a conversation, not a fixed truth or an ultimately real thing. It reaffirms the legitimacy of "inquiry as conversation" (Spellmeyer, 1989, p. 264). We are reminded that scientific methods are not the only valid routes to knowledge, and that science is a perspective, a human lens through which we see a particular world.

The Conversation

We look to the Renaissance to reappropriate the word *humanist*, which is founded on the encounter between two civilizations: the renaissance of interest in Greek and Roman antiquity by Christian Europeans during the 14th and 15th centuries¹¹. The Renaissance humanists, including Montaigne, picked up the unique trait of appropriating another culture, just as the advanced Romans chose the Greeks as their cultural ancestors. In this way the humanistic vision is one based on an idea of dialogue between two cultures, which finds its full expression in the essay, understood as an imperfect, open-ended attempt to bring together two worlds.¹²

¹¹ For an excellent account of this encounter, read Rémi Brague's *Eccentric Culture: A Theory of Western Civilization* (2002).

¹² Mendelowitz's lively essay, *Meditations on Oedipus* (2006), is a fine example of bringing together Greek mythology and modern literature to shed new light on psychotherapy.

The humanist way of proceeding is to create a conversational mis-en-scene that facilitates the meeting between two cultures, between patient and therapist, between estranged aspects of the patient's being, or between patient and society. "[...] the essay, of all the genres in Western letters, acknowledges most openly the tentative, recursive, and conversational nature of discourse" (Spellmeyer, 1989, p. 257). Dialogue is the context of Montaigne's profound self-reflection. The *Essays* are one of the most enduring, dynamic and enjoyable conversations in Western history. Literary critic Harold Bloom (2002) describes the conversational dimension of the *Essays*: "Montaigne writes for his own sake [...] and yet he needs us, his readers, if he is to reveal himself to himself" (p. 43). Blaise Pascal saw Montaigne's *Essays* as "totally composed of thoughts born out of the ordinary conversations of life" (Pascal, *Pensées*, Br. no. 18., cited in Hartle, 2003, p. 73). Once retired from the business of public life, Montaigne was better able to embrace intimate conversation:

There are private, retiring, and inward natures. My essential pattern is suited to communication and revelation. I am all in the open and in full view, born for company and friendship. The solitude that I love and preach is primarily nothing but leading my feelings and thoughts back to myself, restraining and shortening not my steps, but my desires and my cares, abandoning solicitude for outside things, and mortally avoiding servitude and obligation, and not so much the press of people as the press of business.^{xi}

Montaigne had the courage to come closer to and articulate his ordinary experiences, not from within a closed realm of private subjectivity but in conversation with the world and with the canonical texts. Reading the *Essays*, Merleau-Ponty (1964) observed that: "It is in communicating with the world that we communicate with ourselves" (p. xv). Montaigne's native fluency in Latin afforded him a uniquely intimate engagement with the stories from Ovid, the histories of Caesar and Tacitus, and advice from Plutarch, Heraclites, Seneca and Socrates. The *Essays* are chock-full of quotations, creating a reflexive structure of many voices and levels. It is this open dialectic that keeps the *Essays* so fertile and alive. Montaigne, by turning inward, revealed "the self as openness towards the world and men" (O'Neill, 1982, p. 18). Like the therapeutic conversation, the essay is a dialogical expression of experience. Montaigne beautifully exemplifies how in sharing our experience, it enters the larger world, and in doing so, we may then see it in a different light. Essaying, an activity in which the voices of the conversation are put to paper (recorded), forms a literary parallel to

psychotherapy. If we think of recording as speaking and being heard by another person, Good's (1988) description of essaying enriches our conception of therapy: "testing and tasting one's own life while experiencing it, thinking about it and recording the thoughts, reading and revising and adding to those thoughts, and comparing them to the recorded thoughts of others" (p. 32).

The goal of a conversation, as opposed to an experiment, is not to explain and simplify, but to illuminate nuance and contradictions, to stimulate possibilities, and to enliven the intersubjective world. Many critics have attempted to organize Montaigne's work, to regroup levels of discourse and different voices, to impose order on his thought (Defaux, 1994, p. 50). In modern psychotherapeutic research, we also try reduce aspects of the conversation to measurable constructs. But a conversation is not a controllable, organized structure:

I cannot keep my subject still. It goes along befuddled and staggering, with a natural drunkenness [...] If my mind could gain a firm footing, *I would not make essays, I would make decisions* [emphasis mine]; but it is always in apprenticeship and on trial.^{xii}

In fact, Montaigne calls his approach "unscience"¹³, a position of ignorance, which stresses being rather than systematic learning:

I deliver my ignorance in pomp and state, and my learning meagerly and poorly; this accidentally and accessorially, that principally and expressly; and write specifically of nothing but nothing, nor of any science but of that inscience.^{xiii}

"Every Man Carries the Entire Form of Human Condition."^{xiv}

An additional vital task of psychotherapists is to turn toward the larger public, toward society past and present, to convey the basic human questions that invariably arise in our therapeutic conversations. Freud did this with his writing, following in Montaigne's path. The *Essays* are so relevant for our discipline because, with remarkable intimacy, Montaigne

¹³ My translation of Montaigne's word, *inscience*.

shows us how the more deeply he delves into his singularity, the closer he comes to something profoundly human, to the fundamental questions of existence. The *Essays* are one of our richest examples of how conversation with a particular person becomes part of the larger human conversation, shedding light on the questions of humanity. Like psychotherapy, the *Essays* are a dialectic movement between private and public arenas. This movement allows us to renew the question of ourselves and thereby rethink humanity. For the patient and the therapist alike, the conversation is a humanizing process in which we learn to symbolize and thus tolerate our own humanity, becoming part of the wider human community. Questioning oneself is making place for another. Montaigne shows us the wisdom that we find in the movement from the particular to the general; his own experience brings him closer to the lived world, revealing insights into the human condition. In the same way, the therapeutic conversation can be the preamble to the broader conversation about the human condition, which is thoughtfully opened up by the essay. "The essay presents 'special' instances to the 'general' reader, where the disciplines present 'general' conclusions to the 'specialist'" (Good, 1988, p. 6).

Like many of his Renaissance contemporaries, Montaigne was fascinated by the question "What do I know?"¹⁴. To explore this question, Montaigne weighed or "essayed" his judgements, his experiences, and his knowledge. He presented his philosophical approach in the form of self-portrait (Tanguay, 1999). But his Socratic self-questioning does not arise solely from a private subjectivity. Instead, he is guided by basic human questions that help to place him within the human community. What do I know about happiness? What do I know about a good life? What do I know about friendship? Such self-understanding is less about what is unique about the individual and more about what he or she has in common with other human beings.

¹⁴ Montaigne had his now famous motto *Que scay-je?* and a pair of scales engraved on a medal as a symbol of himself.

Montaigne revels in the particular, notably himself, but he also loves to give particular examples from history, poetry, and stories that he hears. Anne Hartle (2002) beautifully characterizes the significance of examples:

And it is only through attention to examples that the unfamiliar can strike us, that we can be open to the possible, and then return to the familiar to find the strange in the familiar. Examples are the mirror in which we can see ourselves. (p. 68)

However, Montaigne noted the difficulty in understanding the subject matter without reference to theory or universals: "Example is a hazy mirror, reflecting all things in all ways."^{xv} How do we find truth through particular examples? This is a key issue for modern psychologists deeply immersed in scientific theories. Montaigne would respond by saying that examples lie in the realm of experience and the authority of experience lies in the chance encounter with wisdom. Our "accidental philosopher"^{xvi} is aware of the role of chance in the revelation of truth. Digression, unpredictable elements, and parts of our everyday experience that do not appear to be relevant to our understanding may suddenly reveal an unexpected truth, an important discovery: "This also happens to me: that I do not find myself in the place where I look; and I find myself more by chance encounter than by searching my judgment."^{xvii}

Being a man of his time, with its many unexpected discoveries, primed Montaigne for his high estimation of the value of wisdom revealed by chance. When it comes to self-knowledge, our most dependable, though ephemeral, source of truth, Montaigne finds that he comes to it by accident. The more directly he searches, the more elusive it becomes. Montaigne describes his own "disciplined digression" (Kauffmann, 1989, p. 238) which allows for the sidelong glance in "On vanity":

This stuffing is a little out of my subject. I go out of my way, but rather by license than carelessness. My fantasies follow one another, but sometimes it is from a distance, and look at each other, but with a sidelong glance.^{xviii}

The essay, unlike the straightforward scientific article, is the literary form of the sidelong glance, which allows for meaning to unexpectedly arise "from a word [...] in a corner"^{xix}.

This particular word opens up a world, pointing to an underlying unity: "It is the inattentive reader who loses my subject, not I. Some word about it will always be found off in a corner, which will not fail to be sufficient, though it takes little room."^{xx}

Montaigne's accidental mode of self-knowledge does not follow the systematic "order of things and kinds" (Hartle, 2002, p. 76). The *Essay*'s chapters are not in any specific order, and they rarely flow from their title or tie in with neighbouring chapters. What Montaigne does follow, in his "unmethodical method" (Kauffmann, 1989), is the order of human testimony, that is to say, of conversation.

Montaigne faced the tension underlying the precarious nature of truth and identity with exuberant confidence. Anne Hartle (2002) reminds us of philosopher David Hume's description of understanding as the expansion of human experience that comes through books and conversation. For this fruitful dialogue to happen, there needs to be "a confidence in human testimony" (Hume, 1977, p. 71). Modern psychology appears to have lost much of this confidence in human dialogue, as evidenced by its frenzied rush to advance theory and technique, as well as by its anxiety about method. I would compare contemporary therapists to Kaufmann's modern essayist, in *Essaying as Unmethodical Method* (1989):

Whereas Montaigne wrote with one eye on the world and the other on himself, the modern essayist, *sub specie academia*, works with one eye on the object of study while the other nervously reviews the methods by which he is authorized to know or interpret. (p. 223)

The *Essays* inspire humanistic psychotherapists to regain this lost confidence in particular human testimony, indeed in the testimony of our patients themselves. Engagement with the *Essays* helps us to reaffirm our participation in what philosopher Michael Oakeshott (1991) would call "the conversation of mankind" (p. 197):

This conversation is not only the greatest but also the most hardly sustained of all the accomplishments of mankind. Men have never been wanting who have had this understanding of human activity and intercourse, but few have embraced it without reserve and without misgiving, and on this account it is proper to mention the most notable of those who have done so: Michel de Montaigne. (Oakeshott, 1962, p. 491)

Mind the Gap

My aim is to address fellow novice therapists, who also feel that there is an awkwardness between the scientific theories that we study in graduate school and our experiences in conversation with our patients. This uneasiness is highlighted in contemporary discussions about “bridging the gap” between research and practice, which often look at how best to implement evidence-based practices in therapy. Earlier, we looked at the original “bridging the gap” problem in modernity. Descartes wanted to eventually tie in the “clear” and “distinct” geometrical foundations of “abstract theories of nature” (Toulmin, 1992, p. 130) with the empirical facts of experienced phenomena. This led to our modern desire for a marriage between different types of truths: theoretical doctrines and personal experience (p.130). Psychology continues to hold onto its dream of a new vision that unites these realms (Jager, 1991). The story of the co-birth of the natural sciences and the essay suggests another way of looking at the debate: the gap is between two rich visions of the world that are complementary but not translatable. Instead of desperately trying to justify humanistic ideals in the court of scientific rationality, we should deepen our engagement with the humanistic vision, that is, with the arts and humanities. The essay is a space in which we can revive the abandoned humanistic roots of modernity and strike a better balance between these two cultures.

There are few academic opportunities for students to learn about psychotherapy outside of the natural scientific model. Almost all Canadian psychology graduate schools use the scientist-practitioner model (Peluso, Carleton et Asmundson, 2010). In this model, the humanities are seen as a nonserious diversion. In a sense, our debate about bridging the gap between theory and practice in psychology reflects an impoverished response to the larger crisis in philosophy, which could be described as the end of modernity. This brings us to a point where we begin to question tyranny of method and its collapse into scientism. As we discussed, Toulmin returns to the birth of the natural sciences and the essay to better understand what has been obscured and to rebalance the two complementary visions as a way of responding to this crisis in thought. Psychotherapy, as an increasingly hyper-specialized set of scientific disciplines, has little ability (or inclination) to reflect on itself and question its

position within a larger philosophical and historical context. Recently in this journal, Mozdierz, Peluso, & Lisiecki (2010) called for a new organizing principle that frames the human encounter. Their approach would allow therapists to think non-linearly, while also, if imperfectly, remaining coherent with evidenced-based psychological practices. The authors present a highly complicated and rather strenuous articulation of their “new” way of thinking. We have forgotten the humanist vision, putting aside centuries of exploration and elaboration of the fundamental dimensions of the human encounter reflected in the arts and humanities. We necessarily reduce significant ideas by trying to validate them within the framework of a few decades of process therapy research: “For external complexity has produced an insane simplification of thought, preying upon personal variety and spontaneous social expression” (McLuhan, 1999, p. 10). Psychotherapists should consider heeding Toulmin’s call for a humanized intellectual stance as we stand at a crossroads and look beyond the end of modernity. The *Essays* offer a uniquely fertile terrain on which this humanizing reconnection with our tradition can occur.

Contemporary psychotherapeutic research often tries to address humanistic concerns because we have a sense that something is missing in our profusion of scientific theories, without acknowledging or understanding the vision from which they originate. This confusion is exacerbated by language. For example, the word *experience* in the humanist vision, as is so eloquently developed by Montaigne, comes alive in a description of movement, flux and human limits. This description inevitably refers back to the art of conversation. Ordinary experience can never be pinned down or fully grasped. It is not predicated on disengaged reason like experience in the sense of scientific empiricism. There is no path between the two; they are two ontologically distinct, yet complementary, realms of modern individuality. We need to reclaim and clarify our concepts and experiences of dialogue and conversation. Marshall McLuhan aptly describes our age as one in which we propagate “information and knowledge without literacy.” (McLuhan, 1999, p. 60) The *Essays* help us to become more literate.

I have introduced Montaigne’s *Essays* as an essential companion for humanistic psychotherapists, and presented three interrelated reasons, chosen (among many) for their

pertinence as well as for their merit in introducing the *Essays* to new readers. First, Montaigne is the first thinker to value ordinary experience as our best, though fallible, source of knowledge. The *Essays* are a wonderful articulation of the reorientation of value from abstract truths to concrete bodily experience:

I know a man who, when I ask him what he knows, asks me for a book in order to point it out to me, and wouldn't dare tell me that he has an itchy backside unless he goes immediately and studies in his lexicon what is itchy and what is backside.^{xxi}

In therapy today, we take for granted that individual reflection or exploration of everyday experience through conversation is a valuable route to understanding, but we owe this idea to Montaigne. We see echoes of this older humanism in the writings of Rollo May and other more familiar names in humanistic psychology. However, the Enlightenment humanism, from which 1960s humanistic psychotherapy more directly flows, is a current that underlies modernity and individualism and embodies a break from tradition: We become human by detaching from our past and becoming an independent individual. Renaissance humanism values the return to tradition in order to refine our own experiences and discover new possibilities. In this light, I encourage our profession to not only explore our existential and phenomenological traditions, but to venture further back along the roots of our thought, to the humanist voices of the Renaissance.

The second reason why the *Essays* are a valuable resource for psychotherapists, is that the story of the birth of the essay and the natural sciences illuminates two fundamental yet complementary visions of the world, that of the natural sciences and that of the arts and humanities, founded on the individual observer and on the encounter, respectively, which are often confused or conflated in contemporary psychotherapeutic discourse.

Finally, the *Essays* are a wonderful illustration of how conversation with a particular person can become part of the larger conversation of humankind. The convivial atmosphere invites us to engage in a festive conversation, which over the centuries “has turned from a private dinner party to a great lively banquet” (Bakewell, 2010a, p. 9). Montaigne’s *Essays*

reaffirm our faith in human testimony, which is often devalued in this era of neuroscientific and genetic research.

The Montaignian essay forms a fertile parallel to the psychotherapeutic conversation. Each is a hermeneutic encounter that brings together an intimate, personal, and a public world. Montaigne invented the essay as a new form of conversation to express a way of being together that reveals the self, the other, and the world. I see the essay as the corresponding literary form *par excellence* to the therapeutic conversation. Exploring and practicing this friendly form of prose and discourse serves to contextualize humanistic psychotherapy, to illuminate and articulate the values, experiences and history that shape our perspective.

The “irrepressible vivacity” (Woolf, 2003) of Montaigne’s writing reveals the human world in new ways (Jauregui, 2001) and inspires us to turn to essaying as a different yet fruitful mode of inquiry into psychotherapy. While the scientific article reflects the systematizing view of an outside observer seeking predictive control of his or her subject, the essay dares us to draw even closer to our lived world in therapy. Through essaying, psychologists can share their therapeutic experiences in all of their particular richness, colour and variety. Conversation with the *Essays* enlivens our profession, in the hospitable presence of Michel de Montaigne, who put “consciousness astonished at itself at the core of human existence” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 203).

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Notes

ⁱ (F, III:13, 1044)

« Si, avons nous beau monter sur des eschasses, car sur des eschasses encores faut-il marcher de nos jambes. Et au plus eslevé throne du monde, si ne sommes assis que sus nostre cul. » (T-R, III:13, 1096)

ⁱⁱ (F, III:13, 1000-1001)

Je m'estudie plus qu'autre subject. C'est ma metaphisique, c'est ma phisique. [...] De l'experiance que j'ay de moy, je trouve assez dequoy me faire sage, si j'estoy bon escolier. (T-R, III:13, 1050-1051)

ⁱⁱⁱ (F, III:1, 732)

« Je suy le langage commun » (T-R, III:1, 774)

^{iv} (F, III:2, 740-741)

Je propose une vie basse et sans lustre [...] Les auteurs se communiquent au peuple par quelque marque particuliere et estrangere; moy, le premier, par mon estre universel, comme Michel de Montaigne, non comme grammairien ou poëte ou jurisconsulte. (T-R, III:2, 782)

^v (F, III:2, 742)

« Je n'enseigne poinct, je raconte. » (T-R, III:2, 784)

^{vi} (F, II:17, 606)

« Les autres vont tousjours ailleurs, s'ils y pensent bien; ils vont tousjours avant, moy je me roule en moy mesme. » (T-R, II:17, 641)

^{vii} (F, II:12, 454)

« de regenter, d'ordonner, d'establir la vérité » (T-R, II:12, 485-486)

^{viii} (F, III:2, 741)

[...] que jamais homme ne traicta subject qu'il entendit ne cogneust mieux que je fay celuy que j'ay entrepris, et qu'en celuy-là je suis le plus sçavant homme qui vive; secondement, que jamais aucun ne penetra en sa matiere plus avant, ny en esplucha plus particulierement les membres et suites; et n'arriva plus exactement et plainement à la fin qu'il s'estoit proposé à sa besoingne. (T-R, III:2, 783)

^{ix} (F, III:11, 958)

Je n'ay veu monstre et miracle au monde plus exprès que moy-mesme. On s'apprivoise à toute estrangeté par l'usage et le temps; mais plus je me hante et me connois, plus ma difformité m'estonne, moins je m'entens en moy. (T-R, III:11, 1006)

^x (F, II:12, 517)

Je ne fay qu'aller et venir : mon jugement ne tire pas tousjours avant; il flotte, il vague, [...] Chacun à peu pres en diroit autant de soy, s'il se regardoit comme moy. (T-R, II:12, 549)

^{xi} (F, III:3, 758)

Il y a des naturels particuliers, retirez et internes. Ma forme essentielle est propre à la communication et à la production; je suis tout au dehors et en evidence, nay à la société et à l'amitié. La solitude que j'ayme et que je presche, ce n'est principalement que ramener à moy mes affections et mes pensées, restreindre et resserrer non mes pas, ains mes desirs et mon soucy, resignant la sollicitude estrangere et fuyant mortellement la servitude et l'obligation, et non tant la foule des hommes que la foule des affaires. (T-R, III:3, 801)

^{xii} (F, III:2, 740)

Je ne puis asseurer mon object. Il va trouble et chancelant, d'une yvresse naturelle. [...] Si mon ame pouvoit prendre pied, je ne m'essairois pas, je me resoudrois; elle est tousjours en apprentissage et en espreuve. (T-R, III:2, 782)

^{xiii} (C, III:12)

Je dis pompeusement et opulemment l'ignorance, et dys la science megrement et piteusement; accessoirement cette-cy et accidentalement, celle là expressément et principalement. Et ne traicte à point nommé de rien que du rien, ny d'aucune science que de celle de l'inscience. (T-R, III:12, 1034)

^{xiv} (C, III:2)

« chaque homme porte la forme entiere de l'humaine condition. » (T-R, III:2, 782)

^{xv} (F, III:13, 1017)

« L'exemple est un miroüer vague, universel et à tout sens. » (T-R, III:13, 1067)

^{xvi} (F, II:12, 497)

« Nouvelle figure : un philosophe impremedité et fortuite! » (T-R, II:12, 528)

^{xvii} (F, I:10, 31)

« Ceci m'advient aussi: que je ne me trouve pas où je me cherche; et me trouve plus par rencontre que par l'inquisition de mon jugement. » (T-R, I:10, 41-42)

^{xviii} (F, III:9, 925)

Cette farcisserie est un peu hors de mon theme. Je m'esgare, mais plustost par licence que par mesgarde. Mes fantasies se suyvent, mais par fois c'est de loing, et se regardent, mais d'une veuë oblique. (T-R, III:9, 973)

^{xix} (F, III:9, 925)

« il s'en trouvera [le sujet] tousjours) en un coing quelque mot » (T-R, III:9, 973)

^{xx} (F, III:9, 925)

« C'est l'indiligent lecteur qui pert mon subject, non pas moy; il s'en trouvera tousjours en un coing quelque mot qui ne laisse pas d'estre bastant, quoy qu'il soit serré. » (T-R, III:9, 973)

^{xxi} (F, I:25, 122)

J'en cognoy à qui, quand je demande ce qu'il sçait, il me demande un livre pour me le montrer; et n'oseroit me dire qu'il a le derriere galeux, s'il ne va sur le champ estudier en son lexicon, que c'est que galeux, et que c'est que derriere. (T-R, I:25, 136)

CHAPTER III

A SIDELONG GLANCE AT PSYCHOTHERAPY

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ABSTRACT

The unruly and fleeting lived experience of Renaissance writer Michel de Montaigne, as wonderfully described and evoked in his *Essays*, strikes a surprisingly resonant chord with my own experience of the therapeutic conversation. Rather than explaining or defining his experience, Montaigne cultivates it, like fine wine. He draws us into the richness of his world, abuzz with conversations and cheer. Ever the personable and attentive host, he makes room for each of his lively guests: his readers, his classical ancestors, his contemporaries, and himself. While chatting with one person, he acknowledges others through playful sidelong glances, creating a festive order.

I use Montaigne's metaphor of the sidelong glance as a starting point of inquiry into what actually goes on in therapy, as a way of relooking at what is close to us already. Our essayistic frame is unabashedly first-person, limited, dialogical, embodied, and wobbly. We see how this metaphor points to the shared horizon of essaying and therapy: that of the humanities. And we learn that therapy itself is an invitation to rediscover the resources of the humanities, to rediscover how to be together in a human world – an understanding that is increasingly obscured in our modern age.

Keywords: Psychotherapy, Montaigne, humanism, Renaissance, humanistic, embodiment, lived experience, accompagnement, conversation

RÉSUMÉ

L'expérience de vie indisciplinée et fugace de l'écrivain de la Renaissance Michel de Montaigne, telle que merveilleusement décrite et évoquée dans ses *Essais*, trouve une résonance étonnante avec ma propre expérience de conversation thérapeutique. Plutôt que de chercher à expliquer ou à définir son expérience, Montaigne la cultive, comme du bon vin. Il nous entraîne dans la richesse de son monde, effervescent de conversations et de gaieté. Sans cesse l'hôte courtois et attentif, il fait place à chacun de ses invités : ses lecteurs, ses ancêtres classiques, ses contemporains, et lui-même. Tout en discutant avec une personne, il reconnaît la présence des autres à travers de ludiques regards obliques, créant une ambiance festive.

J'utilise la métaphore du regard oblique de Montaigne comme point de départ pour explorer ce qui se déroule concrètement en thérapie, comme une manière de réexaminer ce qui est déjà près de nous. Notre cadre d'essayiste est résolument à la première personne, limité, dialogique, incarné, et instable. Nous voyons comment cette métaphore pointe vers l'horizon partagé de l'essai et de la thérapie : celui des humanités. Et nous apprenons que la thérapie elle-même est une invitation à redécouvrir les ressources des humanités, à redécouvrir

comment être ensemble dans un monde humain, une compréhension qui est de plus en plus obscure dans notre ère moderne.

Mots-clés : psychothérapie, Montaigne, Renaissance, humaniste, incarnation, expérience vécue, accompagnement, conversation

During our therapeutic conversation, I often try awkwardly to follow my patient – not quite keeping up to her, or else lumbering on by. Either way, we miss little windows of understanding that wink in the dark as we retrace well-worn tracks. But once in a while, we fall into step, side by side, with a new rhythm. The fresh jaunt in our gait inspires the confidence to venture down the oblique paths that arise in our conversation, suddenly aware that we are drawing closer to something vital. We may witness a flickering memory as it comes into view, or begin to discern the dark contours of shame. We may encounter the spontaneous pleasure of recognition, or feel a momentary spark of connectedness. These experiences share a sensation of groundlessness and yet we are drawn to them.

If such revelatory glimpses are too unsettling, we retreat from our neighbourly stance to the separate and safer perches of expert and patient. From our anchored positions, we can get a clear, global view of the matter at hand, or have the stability to lean in for a detailed analysis. These direct perspectives allow us to impose our own systematic order or technique, and to come up with explanations, circumscribing the unknown. It's comforting for both of us.

Our most fruitful moments in therapy occur when, together, we have the courage to be obliquely attentive to the lively order of the subject at hand, to look at it from many perspectives without subduing it. We draw closer, but not too close; we step back, but not too far; we move at a speaking distance. Instead of trying to pin down or define our exchange, we let it unfold, keeping the conversational ball in the air, alert to the opening of unexpected possibilities.

I am profoundly struck by one particular evocation of such a moment, one that comes not from the scientific literature, nor even from the phenomenological-existential writings of the last couple of hundred years – works that typically inform our practice of psychotherapy. Let's take a look:

Lately when I retired to my home, determined so far as possible to bother about nothing except spending the little life I have left in rest and seclusion, it seemed to me I could do my mind no greater favor than to let it entertain itself in full idleness and stay and settle in itself, which I hoped it might do more easily now, having become weightier and riper with time. But I find [...] that, on the contrary, like a runaway horse, it gives itself a hundred times more trouble than it took for others, and gives birth to so many chimeras and fantastic monsters, one after another, without order or purpose, that in order to contemplate their ineptitude and strangeness at my pleasure, I have begun to commit them to writing, hoping in time to make it ashamed of itself.¹

This passage was written by the French nobleman, winemaker, and renowned humanist, Michel de Montaigne, during the waning years of the Renaissance. In 1571, at the ripe old age of 38, “long weary of the servitude of the court and of public employments,” (Brush, 1994, p. 55)² this reluctant magistrate and sometime diplomat for the Catholic King Henri III and later for the Protestant King Henry de Navarre, withdrew from public life to the tower on his private estate to write. Montaigne was likely motivated in part by the reclaimed Stoic ideals of achieving *apatheia*, or tranquillity of the mind through solitude and contemplation of the mind (Kim-Reuter, 2008, p. 40). Once ensconced in his library, free from “press of business”ⁱⁱⁱ, Montaigne hoped to uncover his immutable core. Instead, he discovered the fluctuating, ungraspable nature of his inner world in which his thoughts and feelings followed no logical order, but tumbled along oblique and ephemeral paths. On what was a pioneering inward voyage, he discovered that he was no less infinitely variable and diverse than the

¹ For ease of reading, I have placed all of the citations from the *Essays* in the end notes using this format: (TRANSLATOR INITIAL, BOOK:chapter, page). I refer to Donald Frame (Montaigne, 2003), M.A. Screech (Montaigne, 1991), and Charles Cotton’s (Montaigne, 1877) translations of the *Essays*. I also provide the original French text as found in the Thibaudet-Rat edition (Montaigne, 1962).

² This is from Frame’s (1965) translation of a Latin inscription painted on the wall of a room connected to Montaigne’s library: “In the year of Christ 1571, at the age of thirty-eight, on the last day of February, his birthday, Michael de Montaigne, long weary of the servitude of the court and of public employments, while still entire, retired to the bosom of the learned Virgins, where in calm and freedom from all cares he will spend what little remains of his life, now more than half run out. If the fates permit, he will complete this abode, this sweet ancestral retreat; and he has consecrated it to his freedom, tranquillity, and leisure.” (p. 115)

outside world³. The self-unity and self-mastery that he had hoped to find by allowing his mind to “stay and settle in itself” were illusory. In a sense, he was searching for a fundamental “I”, but concluded that there is no solid “I”, only an elusive shadow of the self.

Montaigne cheerfully relinquished his hope of finding a solid foundation of the soul, a true and universal human nature: “Others form Man; I give an account of Man and sketch a picture of a particular one of them [...]”ⁱⁱⁱ Despite feeling disconcerted and perhaps a little disappointed by this raucous and mysterious vision of reality, he set to writing *essais*, which we might translate as “attempts”, or “tries”, to conversationally describe the strange “chimeras and fantastic monsters” of his world.

Montaigne coined the term *Essays* to denote his new literary invention. Essaying was a means of both following, shaping and expressing his own particular experiences, “tumultuously”^{iv} and “without any system”:^v “If my mind could gain a firm footing, I would not make essays, I would make decisions; but it is always in apprenticeship and on trial.”^{vi}

The *Essays* both describe and evoke a vision of reality that speaks to my experience of therapy. In the psychotherapeutic moments described above, my patient and I also explore a reality that is ephemeral, unwieldy and in constant flux. Thus, like the *Essays*, our conversation is an amalgam of oblique attempts to draw closer to experience as it is lived, to reveal aspects of a world that will always remain partially hidden.

Like many academic psychologists, Montaigne was unsure about the value of his own ordinary experience; he was a little “ashamed” of its insubstantiality in comparison with the weighty abstract truths found in more commendable sources. For Montaigne, these sources would have included Latin and Greek thinkers as well as the Bible. He was acutely aware that this “new and extraordinary amusement”^{vii} of essaying the self might be perceived as self-flattery. In his introduction to what would become an instant best-seller, he assures the reader

³ The Renaissance was an era of great discovery and rediscovery of the New World of the Americas and the ancient classical world respectively.

that his goal is to reveal himself, warts and all. On the other hand, with an insouciant modesty typical of the Renaissance *ordo neglectus* style, his prefatory remarks "To The Reader" constitute an apologia for "this fricasee that I am scribbling here"^{viii}:

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

Nevertheless, over the twenty-year course of his writing and adding to the 107 chapters in 3 books, (from 1572 until the day he died in 1592), the *Essays* reflected his growing enjoyment and confidence in his own self-reference. Through essaying, Montaigne developed the profound idea that ordinary experience, rather than abstract theory or religious doctrine, was his best, though fallible, source of truth.

I study myself more than any other subject. That is my metaphysics, that is my physics [...] In the experience I have of myself I find enough to make me wise, if I were a good scholar.^x

Beginning with relatively straightforward remarks about his favourite aphorisms from Antiquity, (including Ovid, Plutarch, Heraclites, Seneca and Socrates), the *Essays* bloomed into an unabashed inquiry into the manifold dimensions of his self and worlds in flux. He acquired "faith in dwelling with the variety and richness of expressions as they appear" (Todres, 1991, p. 100), and renounced the Scholastic pretension of "regimenting, arranging, and fixing truth"^{xi}. Instead of searching for truth about a specific topic by accumulating adages from authoritative writers, he began to use the citations as voices in conversation. The *Essays'* inaugural shift away from the Scholastic approach, towards observation and experience as sources of truth, was taken up by the New Philosophy of the 17th century. However, the *Essays* anticipated and rejected the later systematic and progressive empiricism of the natural sciences in favour of spontaneous or accidental routes to more temporary, particular, and local truths.

Montaigne's "unmethodical method" (Kauffmann, 1989) was to write down or dictate everything that came into his head, following his "disciplined digression[s]" (p. 238) with "a studied naivety" (McGowan, 1974, p. 24). He juxtaposed his questions about the recently discovered New World with musings about the rediscovered classical world. In this "happy combination of seriousness and free play" (O'Neill, 1982, p. 74), he tells wide-ranging stories about all sorts of topics, including cannibals, Socrates, farting, war-horses, thumbs, the subjective experience of his cat, and death. The *Essays* are "countless examples, anecdotes, differing opinions, other voices of the citations – [...] exchanges of views around a posed question." (Rudent, 2001, p. 106, my translation).

Montaigne's *Essays* gleefully flout any externally imposed structure, such as the dominant treatise genre of his time, a forerunner of scientific article with which most psychotherapists communicate today. While freewheeling and open-ended, the *Essays* are not random or chaotic. They follow experience on its own terms. According to Montaigne, the "able"^{xii} and attentive reader will see that his *Essays* follow the provisional order of sidelong glances:

This stuffing is a little out of my subject. I go out of my way, but rather by license than carelessness. My fantasies follow one another, but sometimes it is from a distance, and look at each other, but with a sidelong glance. [...] I love the poetic gait, by leaps and gambols. [...] It is the inattentive reader who loses my subject, not I. [...] My style and my mind alike go roaming.^{xiii}

This passage, from the chapter "On vanity", is the touchstone of our current reflection. Montaigne acknowledges that the *Essays'* multifarious themes are oblique; they don't necessarily flow smoothly from the titles. He deliberately allows the disobedient subject, like stuffing bursting at the seams, to exuberantly reveal itself :

I want the matter to make its own divisions. It shows well enough where it changes, where it concludes, where it begins, where it resumes, without my interlacing it with words, with links and seams introduced for the benefit of weak or heedless ears [...] ^{xiv}

True to the way they appear, the *Essays* place his opinions, feelings, stories, and experiences in a position to encounter each other. They look at each other obliquely, "from a

distance” at which they can be seen in light of the other.⁴ The order of the sidelong glance is that of conversation. The *Essays* are an unruly form of writing, a reflective “conversation with the reader” (Hansen, 2002, p. 142):

No pleasure has any savor for me without communication. Not even a merry thought comes to my mind without my being vexed at having produced it alone without anyone to offer it to.^{xv}

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1996), an avid reader of the *Essays*, agreed: “I know not anywhere the book that seems less written. It is the language of conversation transferred to a book” (p. 95).

We have briefly sketched out the idea that psychotherapy and the *Essays* share a vision of reality or experience as unstable and ephemeral, which is best accessed by oblique attempts to draw near rather than by pinning down. Montaigne describes the nature of this reality as being on the order of the sidelong glance. The second idea that I want to elucidate is that Montaigne’s metaphor of the sidelong glance guides us to another, perhaps more essential notion: this vision of reality is fundamentally dialogical.

Here, our exploration of the sidelong glance runs up against a paradox which affronts our modern sensibilities. If Montaigne turned inward to essay his experience, how can we say that it is dialogical? This paradox is the beating heart of the *Essays*, the reason why they continue to speak to so many readers throughout the centuries. The *Essays* show us how in drawing closer to his own experience, Montaigne is revealed and open for friendship. The *Essays*’ sidelong glances invite a response. The last line of the first edition of the *Essays* became the first line of the third edition: “I speak to my paper, as I speak to the first man I meet.”^{xvi} The experience of experience, or what we might call lived experience, is continually born in conversation. It was not enough for Montaigne to explore his experience alone. He was searching not only for information, but for company: “There are private, retiring, and

⁴ Frame translates “mise en regard” as “from a distance”. I prefer “to be seen in light of the other”.

inward natures. My essential pattern is suited to communication and revelation. I am all in the open and in full view, born for company and friendship.”^{xvii} His discoveries connected him to the world around him. This is what humanizes him and makes him come alive, to the delight of countless readers throughout the centuries.

Let’s go back to the famous image of Montaigne writing alone in his tower. It seems a rather isolated and “lofty” pursuit, and brings to mind the lonely ivory tower of academia. But if we look a little more closely, we see that he is hardly alone. Colourful frescoes of classical scenes adorn the walls around him. Above, on the wooden beams of his curved ceiling are carved 57 of his favourite aphorisms from antiquity (Marchi, 1994, p. 304). Among them, we find “The plague of man is the opinion of knowledge”, “I establish nothing. I do not understand. I halt. I examine”, and this maxim from Sextus Empiricus: “To any reason an equal reason can be opposed”. Through the windows, the voices of his estate trickle in from all sides: the labourers, perhaps those of his wife and only surviving daughter, Leonor. (Five other daughters died as infants). As he listened to the daily chapel services, he may have wondered about future readers of his book – what would these friends be like?

Montaigne spent cosy winter days with the 1500 books of his tower library. In the 16th century, barely one hundred years after the invention of the printing press, this was an impressive number of books. His study actually housed more books than the Oxford library. Many had been bequeathed to him by his great friend, the poet, Étienne de La Boétie. The tower firmly rooted Montaigne in his everyday world while affording him an intimate engagement with other worlds. Whether he was listening, writing, reading, walking or dictating, his sidelong glances acknowledged that something else was going on as well.

Montaigne’s celebrated tower is one way of illustrating the dialogical nature of the *Essays*. We can also think about a painting. The 1611 and 1617 editions of the *Essays* featured an engraved portrait by Flemish painter, Thomas de Leu (1608):



Figure 3-1 Montaigne had several portraits painted of himself, but interestingly did not include one in the frontispiece of his *Essays*. Thomas de Leu's engraving is based on an earlier anonymous portrait of Montaigne as mayor of Bordeaux. This engraving appeared in posthumous editions of the *Essays*.

The *Essays* are a self-portrait and like many Renaissance portraits, the subject gazes out at the viewer with a sidelong glance. From this painting, Montaigne's oblique gaze draws you into the scene. His expectant look makes space for us; he is aware of us as co-creator of the meaning or experience of the painting. It is not enough for Montaigne to see what he sees, the viewer has to see it in a different way. The sidelong glance is a way of looking that underlies our relational life. In contrast, a probing stare does not invite conversation; it dominates.

The shared goal of psychotherapy and the *Essays* is to create a canvas or a mis-en-scene for a conversation, an encounter that illuminates a world. When the patient and therapist address each other, it is not to establish a law. Each is asking the other to judge, to change their words, to add new meanings to their words. The light of understanding comes from this exchange, not from theory, or from either individual subjectivity. This light allows us to see our world as it is and also inspires us to deviate from what we set out to do and discover other worlds.

The sidelong glance that emerges from the *Essays* is playful and seductive, not authoritarian. It seeks encounter and not facts. The questions it raises have to do with presence rather than information. Together, writer and reader, (Montaigne was also a close reader of his own text, endlessly reflecting on the writing and language of the *Essays*), draw close to lived experience and show it to be on the order of the sidelong glance. This conversational order of reality differs from the purely subjective or objective realms of autobiography or philosophical treatises respectively. The *Essays'* profound sense of humanity is that you don't see it alone; that it doesn't suffice for one person to see the thing. In the Renaissance humanist view, a person becomes human by encountering another, and a civilization becomes a civilization by actively looking for and engaging with another. There is no lived world without a neighbour (Jager, personal communication, September, 2010). Montaigne caught a glimpse "into the truth, lost afterwards to much of the Western philosophical tradition, that the being of the subject is not reducible to the being of consciousness" (Kim-Reuter, 2008, p. 42) Psychotherapy is one of the few remaining public spaces in our modern world where we can cultivate this understanding. We have an intuition that psychotherapy can serve as a counterweight to the alienation of modernity.

Tentative Beginnings

We are beginning to hear a harmonious chord struck between the experiences of a 500 year-old winemaker from Bordeaux, and my contemporary experience of the therapeutic conversation. Both essaying and therapy lead us to express, shape and cultivate "a more

vividly experienced human world” (Jager, personal communication, September, 2012). The sidelong glance is uniquely adapted to *orient ourselves* within a “recalcitrant and unwieldy human reality” (Jager, 2001, p. 104) which “staggers confusedly along with a natural drunkenness.”^{xviii} Essaying and therapy share a dialogical and limited vision of reality that, in our modern world “offends the dignity of the individual and the authority of reason” respectively (Kim-Reuter, 2008, p. 42). Intrigued by this initial resonance, I propose that we further investigate how Montaigne’s metaphor illuminates what actually happens in therapy. Clearly, the sidelong glance is a different starting point of inquiry than that of abstract theory or the search for medical causes.

A Change in Aspect

In the larger picture, we are taking a sidelong glance at the discipline of psychotherapy itself, wandering off of the Royal Road of scientific progress. It certainly felt a little out of left field when I began this work, given that almost all of psychotherapy education in Canada is firmly entrenched in the medical model and the natural scientific tradition. The sidelong glance in the natural sciences is one in which we check to see how we are progressing, looking for indications that we are on the right path towards an ultimate, objective reality. Here the sidelong glance is instrumental, in the service of progress, eventually to be cast off as we acquire more information or technology. The underlying belief is that eventually you won’t need any more sidelong glances once you arrive at the truth. In fact, what you see off to the side might not only be trivial, but downright dangerous. Similarly, when you drive down a highway, it may be risky to go off the road and enter the unfamiliar countryside. The ultimate goal of the sciences is to predict reality; you certainly don’t need to look around you any more when you can predict.

In therapy and essaying, we don’t only follow the predictive road of theory, but look for other paths: “one doesn’t direct the future but open possibilities towards it” (Leeming, Madden et Marlan, 2009, p. 741). If, like Montaigne, we dare to renounce our grand ambitions, and risk following the oblique and crooked paths spotted in our dusty side view

mirror, we glimpse a different and wider order of reality. As we bounce along a country road, what we see in the mirror is limited and transitory – the blur of an old gas station quickly receding, the smudged sunset disappearing into the horizon, ever-shrinking crows on an endless telephone wire. We understand that much will always remain unseen.

Despite the professional pressures to progress along the main highway paved by empirical evidence, taking a sidelong glance at psychotherapy is highly pertinent because the goal of psychotherapy itself is a change in aspect. Psychotherapy is a reframing of particular experience through conversation with another person, in the service of reducing suffering. Therapy and essaying are putting an old description into a new context, to see it anew and to judge it, to open it up and enlarge our vision.

Human understanding is marvellously enlightened by daily conversation with men, for we are, otherwise, compressed and heaped up in ourselves, and have our sight limited to the length of our own noses.^{xix}

The sidelong glance offers a re-looking at what is close to us already. Rather than learning new explanations or concepts, we recognize what we know, what is familiar, but in a different way, i.e. obliquely.

The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something – because it is always before one's eyes). And this means: we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful. (Heaton, 2010, p. 134)⁵

The talking cure involves “reminders of what we have overlooked” (p. ix). Montaigne encourages his reader to be attentive: “For while we are looking for powerful and weighty causes and ends, worthy of such great renown, we lose the true ones; they escape our view by their littleness.”^{xx} The sidelong glance reveals connections that we may not have noticed before. Shifts in perspective lead to shifts in understanding or meaning.

⁵ For an excellent illumination of the value of particular reflection over abstract theory in talk therapy, I highly recommend Heaton's book, *The Talking Cure Wittgenstein's Therapeutic Method for Psychotherapy* (2010).

"It is the inattentive reader who loses my subject, not I. Some word about it will always be found off in a corner, which will not fail to be sufficient, though it takes little room."^{xxi} The "word [...] in a corner" has a "poetic gait"; it opens a new conversation. It puts things into relation, into a metaphorical whole, by revealing new connections in the familiar. On the other hand, a definition or concept closes the conversation: "[...] an essay, in the sequence of its paragraphs, explores a thing from many sides without wholly encompassing it – for a thing wholly encompassed suddenly loses its scope and melts down to a concept" (Musil, 1995, p. 270).

We are forever relooking at the familiar in essaying and therapy because the nature of what we are looking at is not graspable – it is too diverse and changing and mysterious. We, the lookers, are also in constant flux.

This is a register of varied and changing occurrences, of ideas which are unresolved and, when needs be, contradictory, either because I myself have become different or because I grasp hold of different attributes or aspects of my subjects. So I may happen to contradict myself but, as Demades said, I never contradict truth.^{xxii}

Montaigne constantly essayed his reason and his senses, running up against the limits of his own uncertain knowledge and fallible perception: "For I do not see the whole of anything; nor do those who promise to show it to us"^{xxiii}. He found these limits to be a source of wonder and exhilaration rather than a weakness to be overcome. By acknowledging that he was dependent on the perception of another in order to better understand himself and the world, Montaigne transformed his limits into thresholds, or areas of exchange. The *Essays* are a continually renewed invitation to pull up a seat at the banquet. Montaigne, ever the convivial host, notices you standing shyly in the corner and with a merry wave, beckons you over to the table.

“Language most shewes a man, speake that I may see thee.”⁶

Montaigne explicitly chose to write the *Essays* in French rather than Latin because he felt that French was closer to the fleeting nature of experience that he was describing. Characteristics of the French language that were seen as limitations by most of his contemporaries were transformed into sources of new possibilities for Montaigne. In the 16th century, before grammarians⁷ stepped in to “codify the language” (Friedrich, 1991, p. 363), the French vocabulary was still semantically imprecise. Montaigne revelled in the changeability and ephemerality of the language which “slips out of our hands every day, and has halfway changed since I have been alive.”^{xxiv} He saw French as an “airy medium of words”^{xxv} which would likely not even be understood in 50 years, unlike Latin, which was universal and sure to last forever. In fact, Montaigne was the first renowned writer to write in French rather than Latin or in some combination of the two. The *Essays* are the first “significant and original body of thought [written] exclusively in the language spoken by ordinary people” (Friedrich, 1991, p. 23) in France, Spain or Italy – a fact of which Montaigne was well aware as he wrote “the only book in the world of its kind”^{xxvi}. His decision was even more remarkable when you consider that his native language was Latin, and that he did not learn French until the age of six.

The speech I love is simple, natural speech, the same on paper as in the mouth; a speech succulent and sinewy, brief and compressed, not so much dainty and well-combed as vehement and brusque.^{xxvii}

French (and its various dialects) was the language in which people actually conversed. The kind of truth accessed through everyday conversation is different than that learned

⁶ The poet Ben Jonson, (another admirer of Montaigne), echoes Seneca in the collection *Timber; or, Discoveries Made upon Men or Matter*, line 1661, published in 1640.

⁷ In 1634, the Académie française was founded with the aim standardizing and preserving the French language. To this day, the esteemed Académie continues to protect the purity of the official French language, in part by preventing words from other languages from being incorporated.

through more academic pursuits. Montaigne returns again and again to the distinction between understanding and explanation, between “well-formed” and “well-filled”^{xxviii} brains:

Do we witness more of a jumble in the chatter of fishwives than in the public disputations of the professional logicians? I would rather have my son learn to speak in the taverns than in the schools of talk.^{xxix}

Therapy in the humanist paradigm is not about sophisticated language. It too is about language that is close to the heart, “succulent and sinewy”, which draws us closer to the experience of understanding. We attempt to articulate that which is, to listen for the “murmur of the indiscernible” (Heaton, 2010, p. 60). Instead of making irrefutable connections between sturdy pronouncements of the ancient sages or the Stoic prescriptions, Montaigne gleefully clambered over the shifting sands of the French language. By “follow[ing] common usage in language”^{xxx}, he opens himself to further conversation. In academic psychotherapy, we would often rather turn to explanatory models or to the categorizing language of the DSM, than admit that what we do is ordinary and best expressed plainly. I think that Montaigne might have compared us to architects:

I don't know whether it happens with others as with me; but when I hear our architects puffing themselves out with those big words like pilasters, architraves, cornices, Corinthian and Doric work, and suchlike jargon, I cannot keep my imagination from immediately seizing on the palace of Apollidon; and in reality I find these are the paltry parts of my kitchen door.^{xxxi}

But plainspoken does not mean easy. Montaigne's exuberance for plain and homely speech belies just how difficult this is. To see and tell things as they are, “to hold pleasant and reasonable conversation with oneself and one's family, [...] this is rarer and more difficult to achieve.”^{xxxii} Imagine sitting down and writing thoughts as they come into your head. Would they be interesting or even make sense? Writing plainly about the *Essays* brings this difficulty into stark relief. Plain speech reveals my ordinary thinking and the limits of my understanding. Given that I'm writing about the greatest essayist in literature, my awkward striving for the right words is even more painfully exposed. With my need to feel competent

under threat, it would be less daunting to revert to a very literary or philosophical stance.⁸ I can at least take some comfort in knowing that Montaigne too felt like this sometimes:

When I write, I prefer to do without the company and remembrance of books, for fear they may interfere with my style. Also because, in truth, the good authors humble and dishearten me too much.^{xxxiii}

As therapist and patient, our task of finding the words to express what goes on in therapy is also infinite and at times overwhelming. The unsayable points to the fact that there is something we would like to say, but fail to find the word, the *mot juste*, “the word [...] off in the corner” that can reach the other. Montaigne faced the unsayable with equanimity and charm and inspires us to do the same. In therapy, as in essaying, we find the right words spontaneously, when we draw closer to experience and let ourselves be surprised. Conversational speech, rather than jargon or concepts, allows this to happen.

To tell it like it is in conversation means to incorporate playfulness, charm, seduction, humour and tact. (Interestingly, these expressions are all evoked by the sidelong glance). The “essays in flesh and bone”^{xxxiv} use an intimate language which is close at hand, words that gesture at the world from the page. The 17th century essayist, Francis Bacon, suggested that “[a]s the tongue speaketh to the ear, so the gesture speaketh to the eye” (Bacon, 1605, as cited in Frampton, 2011a). Plain speech is personal but also common, evoking what Saul Frampton (2011b) calls “a sense that what we are is somehow between us” (p. 273).

I am not proposing that therapists dismiss formal language. Theorizing helps us to stay composed and get through the initial strangeness and confusion of the therapeutic encounter. In the beginning, we may see the patient as belonging to a pathological or sociological group. Theory and its language provide the vital road markers that we need to get started, to get moving down the road, especially as a novice therapist. In another a sense, theory is how to

⁸ For this reason, I admire Sarah Bakewell’s (2010a) biography of Montaigne, the first in 50 years. Her plainspoken book rises to the challenge of staying true to the *Essays*’ vision, thus serving as an excellent introduction to new readers.

meet the stranger. It gives you a little bit of familiarity so that you aren't completely overwhelmed by the unknown. But as you go along, both you and your patient loosen your grip on theories and embark on a different journey. We begin to stray from our itinerary, to turn towards the conversational realm of the humanities. "One of the major life tasks of a therapist is to learn to tolerate this confusion and uncertainty, even embrace the mysterious nature of human experience." (Kottler, 2012, p. 41) A good conversation, like a good essay, is on the edge of not being safe, but not off-putting. Once we are on our way, with the help of theories, we become agreeable to taking a risk, to stepping off the path. I like therapist Susie Orbach's conception of therapy as being "continually engaged with being wrong-footed" (Longplayer, 2009, 29:54). She says that you feel "wobbly" (30:06) when you are in a new potential space, but it is this very wobbliness that allows you to think about something you know but have never thought about.

"This Bundle of so Many Disparate Pieces"^{xxxv}

Montaigne chose a vernacular language as one way of drawing closer to everyday experience in order to marvel at how strange it seems when you look at it from different angles. Let's take another look at how the *Essays*' sidelong glances lead to new understanding. Mary B. McKinley (1981) sees Montaigne's use of more than 1300 Latin quotations as fragments that invite "the reader to make a detour temporarily from the *Essays* and to sojourn in the text of its origin before moving on" (p. 103). She views the words as doors "opening off the winding corridors of Montaigne's discourse" (p. 103). The Latin quotations are pauses, moments where the reader can catch glimpses of another world. Montaigne's use of the national language served to create a distance between him and the authoritative voices of tradition – a speaking distance at which each can engage with and judge the words of the other. In the original books, the chapters (or what we now refer to as individual essays), were single paragraphs. The quotations stood on their own – they were rarely introduced or cited, and never translated. Their linguistic strangeness and typographical separateness gave them presence. Like any good host, Montaigne let his guests speak naturally. He did not try to organize or classify their words. You can see such a page

for yourself: a colour reproduction of the last edition of the *Essays* published while Montaigne was alive, known as the Bordeaux copy, was published in 2002. This document is part book and part written manuscript, complete with all of Montaigne's marginalia.⁹

The very crookedness of the *Essays*' path primes the reader for such pauses and breaks, which seem less like intrusions and more like invitations to discover something unexpected. There is a sense of discontinuous time as we are transported to different centuries sometimes holding on to a thread of common thought, sometimes taking the risk to lose our footing altogether. The Latin quotations offer wobbly jumping off points from the familiar French into the unfamiliar, after which the reader and author return to the text transformed. Montaigne's unique and profound intimacy with the Latin texts allowed him to develop the confidence to juxtapose these worlds so conversationally, without resorting to Scholastic classification. Similarly, a therapist gradually comes to know his patients in a fluent way rather than systematically.

I happened the other day to come upon such a passage. I had dragged along languidly after French words so bloodless, fleshless, and empty of matter and sense that they really were nothing but French words. At the end of a long and tedious road I came upon a bit that was sublime, rich, and lofty as the clouds. [...] after the first six words I realized that I was flying off into another world.^{xxxvi}

Therapy and essaying are a negotiation between familiarity and strangeness, between academic spheres and social worlds. This oblique movement is lost in an objective view. In scientific articles, or in scholarly essays, every voice is cited and introduced clearly. For example, the APA formatting of citations calls for the same line height and font size as the body text. A small indent provides the only faint distinction between the quote and the body of the text. Using the first person "I" or "we" is discouraged. The voices are muted, laying bare the facts, or underlining the authority with which we justify ourselves. There are no I's or "eyes", no expectant gazes or sidelong glances emerging from the text. Montaigne's metaphor highlights the difference between two fundamental human impulses: to synthesize

⁹ http://humanities.uchicago.edu/orgs/montaigne/h/bordeaux_copy/

fragments into a whole or to place them together in a fruitful relationship – into a metaphorical or symbolic unity. The essay, like conversation, juxtaposes fragments in endlessly different ways – constantly testing and retesting and waiting for the “chance encounter” with wisdom, or for the chance to fly “off into another world”. This is a first-person endeavour, an infinite cultural task in which Montaigne makes himself at home amongst his newly introduced guests. In the natural sciences we labour in an indifferent universe, where man is superfluous to reality.

The *Essay*'s oblique movement between prose and quotations allows the reader to respond, to fill in the gaps and create their own conversational order. Montaigne is searching for an attentive and able reader who can bring the text to life. The attentive reader is “alert to twists and turns of Montaigne's text and to the words in a corner that mark them” (McKinley, 1981, p. 112). This attentiveness may come about through sidelong glances, which are particularly apt for picking up on such peripheral words. Such moments of encounter between the reader and the text point to an underlying unity or coherence. The able reader is able to make new connections, to create new paths of understanding. “An able reader often discovers in other men's writings perfections beyond those that the author put in or perceived, and lends them richer meanings and aspects.”^{xxxvii}

In his instructions to the printer, Montaigne acknowledged his unusually frequent use of capitals and full stops over commas, and advised the printer to not correct his punctuation. The full stops place divided worlds in relation to each other, creating a separation or difference. To encounter the other, you have to come to a stop, and tolerate the ambiguity of living at a distance. Recall one of the aphorisms engraved on Montaigne's ceiling: “I establish nothing. I do not understand. I halt. I examine.” Like the discontinuous Latin quotations, the full stops create and elaborate thresholds; they humbly open the text up for the reader to respond. The reader can form her own links between meanings and perspectives, and create new relationships. Analogously, in the spontaneous rhythms of therapy, the therapist and patient have to be able and attentive readers of the patient's testimony or experience.

The constant task of the therapist is to override concepts and labels in order to be attentive to alterity. A patient may be saying one thing, but you remain alert to the possibility of bringing tangential concerns into conversation. The sidelong glance is not fully integrated into main subject. Like Montaigne's marginalia in the Bordeaux palimpsest, the peripheral things spice it up, and keep the conversation alive for past and future readers. On the other hand, the sidelong glance may lead to an entirely different concern altogether, as so often happens in therapy.

Neither these stories nor my quotations serve always simply for example, authority, or ornament. I do not esteem them solely for the use I derive from them. They often bear, outside of my subject, the seeds of a richer and bolder material, and sound obliquely a subtler note, both for myself, who do not wish to express anything more and for those who get my drift.^{xxxviii}

Montaigne called himself an "accidental philosopher"^{xxxix} because his greatest discoveries occurred indirectly: "I am displeased with my soul for ordinarily producing its most profound and maddest fancies, and those I like the best, unexpectedly and when I am least looking for them"^{xl}. In fact, the more directly Montaigne searched for truth, the more elusive such knowledge became. Thoreau (1856, as cited in Matthiessen, 1968) described the accidental approach as seeing "with the unworn sides of your eye" (p. 90). Freud's practice of free association also comes to mind. Keats too relished the "sidelong glance"¹⁰. He found that his most fruitful intuitions flourished when he adopted an indolent attitude (Matthiessen, 1968, p. 90). The humanities, in which I include the arts, myth, philosophy and religion, have no abstract purpose or goal – in this way they are indolent. They do not strive to bolster theory, predict outcomes, or attempt to grasp an ultimate reality. Instead, they serve to inspire reflection, to cultivate intuitions, indirectly drawing us closer to the liveliness of the common world. In the chapter, "On the education of children", Montaigne asserts that

[...] the teacher best helps children learn by drawing them further into the life of things, so that, indirectly, they come to understand themselves and the larger human condition which they embody and inhabit (Hansen, 2002, p. 150)

¹⁰ From the poem, *To G. A. W.*, published in 1817.

Sometimes, the sidelong glance can be an evasion, a way of always looking out the window disinterestedly. The essayist and therapist must think about how to deal with diversions. To what extent do you allow things to come in and colour the theme? Will you see them purely as a disturbance or as a spice? Or as a possible route to a surprising new subject altogether?

“Every movement reveals us.”^{xli}

Donald Frame translates “la vue oblique” as the “sidelong glance”. I prefer his translation to the more literal “oblique look”. The sidelong glance evokes the ambiguous and lively motion of Montaigne’s writing and his understanding of the spirited nature of reality.

And we, and our judgement, and all mortal things go on flowing and rolling unceasingly. Thus nothing certain can be established about one thing by another, both the judging and the judged being in continual change and motion.^{xlii}

So far I have described the *Essays*’ sidelong glances as digressive, relaxed, indolent, limited, nonchalant, and festive. I would also characterize them as amused, doubtful, judging, sceptical, erotic, or slippery. Perhaps you take a darker view: furtive, disdainful, suspicious, devious, even envious. One thing we can probably agree on is that the sidelong glance is ambiguous. Each time we try to define it, it wriggles out of reach.

By the way, as graphic designer Milton Glaser (2004) reminds us, “ambiguity is a military term that means to be attacked from two sides simultaneously” (p. 3). The Montaigne estate, thirty miles to the west of Bordeaux, lies on the border between what were, during the 16th and 17th century, Catholic and Protestant strongholds. While the religious wars raged on in pursuit of absolute truth on either side of him, Montaigne kept an open door policy. In “On physiognomy”, he recounts the story of a gang of robbers who came to his chateau with the intent of deceiving their way in and looting. Despite his suspicions given the frequency of such schemes during this tempestuous time, Montaigne “gave orders for them to come in.”^{xliii} The leader and his 25 or 30 henchmen were met with frank hospitality.

Completely disarmed by Montaigne's pleasant and open attitude, the rogues ended up leaving without stealing anything. This approach paid off, although Montaigne, ever the sceptic, is quick to recount other anecdotes where such "ambiguity" had the opposite result.

Montaigne was deeply intrigued by the way that his own thoughts, opinions, and emotions changed from moment to moment:

My footing is so unsteady and so insecure, I find it so vacillating and ready to slip, and my sight is so unreliable, that on an empty stomach I feel myself another man than after a meal. If my health smiles upon me, and the brightness of a beautiful day, I am a fine fellow; if I have a corn bothering my toe, I am surly, unpleasant, and unapproachable.^{xliv}

For this reason, Montaigne considers his *Essays* to portray becoming not being: "I do not portray being: I portray passing."^{xlv} The realm of the essay is the realm of change and flux – the movement of life itself. Montaigne, whom Starobinski (1985) christened the "Man in Motion", was unafraid to see life as "a material and corporeal movement, an action which by its very essence is imperfect and irregular", nor to strive "to [serve] it in its own way."^{xlvi} We cannot completely grasp our consciousness nor pin down the world around us. Instead we gesture back and forth from one to the other, caught up in the rhythms of dialogue.

For Montaigne [...] we are interested in a world we do not have the key to. We are equally incapable of dwelling in ourselves and in things, and are referred from them to ourselves and from ourselves to them. (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 199)

Montaigne was not interested in removing himself from the motion of life in order to grasp universal truths. He refused to sit still and pose for his portrait. Nor did he pose in the sense of presenting himself inauthentically. (Hansen, 2002, p. 137) But describing the constant variability within himself did not dilute his self-portrait: "The brush-strokes of my portrait do not go awry even though they do change and vary."^{xlvii} Instead, the infinite motion of his textual brush reveals what is unique about him while tracing our common ground: "all waver with a common motion and their own."^{xlviii} Montaigne invites the reader to take his hand and follow his roaming mind and style. Through "the leaps and gambols" of his text, we become aware of the motion of our own thoughts and experiences. For this reason, readers throughout the centuries have wondered "how did he know all that about me?" (Bakewell,

2010a, p. 6) Even Pascal marvelled, "It is not in Montaigne but in myself that I find everything I see there" (Pascal, 1670, as cited in Bakewell, p. 6).

Montaigne tells us that he likes to scratch his ears, that he can't have sex standing up, that he prefers his wine mixed with water, and what it's like to pass a kidney stone. He used to like radishes, then disliked them, and now likes them again. These are not trifling details:

I am not excessively fond of either salads or fruits, except melons. My father hated all kinds of sauces; I love them all. Eating too much bothers me; but I have as yet no really certain knowledge that any kind of food intrinsically disagrees with me; even as I do not notice whether the moon is full or waning, or whether it is spring or autumn. There are changes that take place in us, irregular and unknown. Radishes, for example, I first found to agree with me, then to disagree now to agree again. In several respects I feel my stomach and appetite vary that way: I have changed back from white wine to claret, and then from claret to white.^{xlix}

Many readers, including Virginia Woolf's (2003) "Common Reader", find that such infinite and variable brush-strokes have "the force of a revelation about both the fragility and the strength of the human fabric" (Hansen, 2002, p. 137).

Montaigne took great "delight [...] in the sudden movements of life and of language, in the aggravated sensation of being alive" (Hampshire, 2003, p. xxvi). In contrast to continuous staring, sidelong glances, or what Thoreau (1852) might call the "sauntering of the eye" (as cited in Matthiessen, 1968, p. 90), reveal the textures of our world:

My sight is confounded and dissipated with poring; I must withdraw it, and refer my discovery to new attempts; just as, to judge rightly of the lustre of scarlet, we are taught to pass the eye lightly over it, and again to run it over at several sudden and reiterated glances.¹

The above passage brings to mind Merleau-Ponty who said that in order to feel a table beneath your hand, you have to move your hand. Otherwise, the contact stops. Movement evokes the other. In his celebrated essay, *Reading Montaigne*, Merleau-Ponty (1964) attributes the *Essays'* impression of movement to Montaigne's scepticism. Montaigne was a major contributor to the rebirth of scepticism during the XVIth century. The Renaissance sceptic would say that we can never be certain that something is true, nor can we be sure that

something is false. Buoyed by a “sceptic ease”¹¹, “a [...] languid rocking to and fro”^{li}, Montaigne cheerfully sets out to explore that most human of questions: What do I know? He sifts his own words for possibilities:

[Essaying] is a new pastime, outside the common order; it withdraws us from the usual occupations of people – yes, even from the most commendable ones. [...] No description is more difficult than the describing of oneself; and none, certainly, is more useful.^{lii}

In the above passage, Montaigne plays with the contradiction that essaying is both a “pastime”, something one does without effort for light amusement, *and* one of the most valuable and difficult endeavours than one can engage in. Contradictions are the wellspring of Montaigne’s sceptical rhythm. He throws out the idea on the page in front of him, to see it, to essay it, to weigh his judgement. He takes his question about the worth of his project and sets it out to sea in a precarious boat. The rocky waves bring it close and move it far, but doubt keeps it afloat and in motion. He writes to find out what he thinks and what doesn’t think. There is no final resolution to the sceptical movement, only presence:

In these extraordinary volumes of short and broken, long and learned, logical and contradictory statements, we have heard the very pulse and rhythm of the soul, beating day after day, year after year, through a veil which, as time goes on, fines itself almost to transparency. (Woolf, 2003)

The *Essays* renounce the stillness of a *cogito* and any “mooring beyond ourselves” (Frampton, 2011b, p. 270), and playfully embrace the self and world in motion. By being deeply attentive, listening, waiting and describing rather than pinning down experience and things, Montaigne draws closer to life, to presence, and makes room for the revelation of the other.

¹¹ Hail sceptic ease! When error’s waves are past,
How sweet to reach thy tranquil port at last,
And, gently rock’d in undulating doubt,
Smile at the sturdy winds, which war without!

(Moore, 1823, as cited in Bakewell, 2010a, p. 126)

“You cannot point out a star to someone without putting your other hand on his shoulder.”¹²

The metaphor of the sidelong glance evokes the image of accompaniment or walking side by side. Montaigne dedicated his essay, “On friendship” to the memory of his friend, the poet Etienne de La Boétie. His greatest friend knew the “best side” (Hansen, 2002, p. 134) of him, and now, through essaying, Montaigne keeps glancing to his side, keeping a conversation going with his long lost friend. He certainly made many new friends, including Nietzsche who effusively wrote:

Montaigne. The joy of living on this earth has truly been increased by the fact that such a person wrote. At any rate, since my first encounter with this freest, most energetic of spirits, I have found it necessary to say of him what he said of Plutarch: “As soon as I cast a glance at him, I sprouted another leg or a wing.” I would take my example from him if I were set the task of making myself feel at home on this earth. (Nietzsche, 1995, as cited in Hansen, 2002, p. 127)

Together, alongside of each other, the patient and therapist can bravely face the world, just as Montaigne, alongside his reader, faced the precarious nature of truth with cheerful affection, confident in an ultimately benevolent human world. For us Moderns, this is difficult because the natural universe is not a particularly hospitable place. Psychotherapy is always about giving up the dream of being sufficient to yourself. Our starting point is loss. Rather than seeking truth as an ultimate haven so that you don’t lack anything, you let someone in on your thought. You give up on your own truth in favour of presence.

The etymology of the word *cura* underscores the distinctive attitudes toward therapy in the medical and humanist paradigms. If we go back to the foundations of the term *cura*, as in *cura animarum*, it meant “care of the souls” rather than “cure”. Contemporary therapies follow a medical model of “cure”, which entails symptom reduction and problem solving, decision-making, a “doing to”. The original therapeutic attitude was one of accompaniment, a “walking with”, or a “companionship through the existential transitions of life” (Leeming,

¹² (Yizhar, 1959, as cited in Grossman, 2010, p. 165)

Madden et Marlan, 2009, p. 740). We walk beside our patient in solidarity as he presents his case to the wider world. Together, we contemplate the patient's experience and look for meaning by placing it in a broader human context, in the wider space of conversation.

The essay, like the humanist vision in contemporary psychology, is marginalized in our modern world. We no longer have the time to meander with the essayist through an "investigation of the self in its manifold relations" (Butrym, 1989, p.4), never mind embark on a long-term psychotherapy. We have forgotten the great pleasure to be found in meandering with a friend along new paths, unhurried by pressure to get to an end point. As the wonderful Australian essayist, Robert Dessaix (2010) notes, you have to be "adept at idleness" (p. 39) if you want to be able to describe and remark upon:

We [essayists] circle, look over our shoulder, pause to greet passers-by, sniff the air and lurch a lot. For us the underlying air of incoherence that characterises our thought is something to be joyfully acknowledged – it's what makes us who we are. (p. 39)

An expert does not meander beside you, shoulder to shoulder, but observes you from a superior fixed position of diagnostical knowledge and theory. Since Freud, we have delegated the responsibility of understanding ourselves to experts. The lay person may be able to understand some of their conscious experience, but the realm of the unconscious is best tackled by the expert analyst who has a privileged perspective and a firm theoretical grasp. Early on, Freud knew that he had to get out of the medical model to understand the person in his office. His starting point of the talking cure was the fortuitousness of speaking in conversation. He began with practice, rather than theory or psychiatry. However, in order to validate his new practice, Freud then did his best to build his own system or theory of forces, to explain rather than describe. Thus, he created a new type of expert: the analyst.

Heaton (2010), a student of Wittgenstein, says that we turn to both philosophy and psychotherapy when we have lost our way (p. viii). When we have lost our way, we need clarity and meaning rather than expert explanations:

Mystifications play no part such as the therapist claiming to have special knowledge to impart. When we are disorientated we do not need to learn truths, but we need to make sense. This involves seeing connections which we are blind to and learning to express ourselves in a meaningful way. (p. 213)

The expert psychologist who applies theories and techniques to the patient is uncovering external paths between the theory and the patient. This is fundamentally different from and incommensurable with the spontaneous making of connections within the patient's particular experience. "For what is specific to the subject is precisely its ability to elude its own grasp, which is why reflection is called for rather than theory" (p. 210).

To turn to the humanities as a psychotherapist is to give up the comforts of expertise – be it in neuro-imaging, Stoic philosophy, literature, theology or history. In our current academic climate, this is quite destabilizing. We are embarrassed by what we do because it appears so simple. We would rather show off our knowledge, uphold the fantasy that we have incredible mastery over theories. Yet, as Montaigne discovered, when we are in a wondering and agreeable state, like a child, we are open to a different kind of access to the world. "Wonder is the foundation of all philosophy, inquiry its progress, ignorance its end."^{liii} When we are at ease with incompetence, when we consent that we cannot master our subject matter, then we are open to understanding.

I love terms which soften and tone down the rashness of what we put forward, terms such as 'perhaps,' 'somewhat,' 'some,' 'they say,' 'I think,' and so on. And if I had had sons to bring up I would have trained their lips to answer with inquiring and undecided expressions such as, 'What does this mean!' 'I do not understand that,' 'It might be so,' 'Is that true?' so that they would have been more likely to retain the manners of an apprentice at sixty than, as boys do, to act like learned doctors at ten.^{liv}

This is not to say that therapists should not be well-educated, or have advanced degrees. But we should have the ability to reflect upon our own knowledge and the place of that knowledge, and have the humility to restrain ourselves, like Montaigne, to abstain from holding fast to this knowledge.

It is because therapy is oblique that we are obliged to enter into it, rather than use it to solve problems or be seized by it [...] At no point must it be the realisation of pre-existing knowledge, even though knowledge has been painfully acquired by therapist. This restrained intensity on the part of the therapist allows the disclosure of thought. (Heaton, 2010, p. 60)

Like essaying, therapeutic reflection requires a less ambitious attitude than theory; we seek a relation between the self and the other that is not purely intellectual. We can fall into the trap of thinking that our intellectual expertise can cure, of taking ourselves very seriously, whether in the dominant scientific vision, or in other intellectual approaches. Walking shoulder to shoulder with our patient is a position underpinned by the fundamental notion of hospitality, not aspiration and progress.

Return now to the portrait of Montaigne on p. 114. Perhaps he seems detached or haughty to you. This look is authoritarian; its language is in the imperative. He covertly sizes you up from a distance, or intrusively peers at you from close up. He certainly doesn't trust you, as you no doubt have something to hide. Both objective distances are conducive to gathering information, but not to dialogue. This look is just as seductive, in its own way, as the playful Montaignian sidelong glance. In our modern era, as it was during the scholastic Renaissance, authority is tempting. We are living more and more in a world that we don't understand, or don't trust that we can understand – it is almost as though we are driven out of the world and into the natural scientific universe. Marilynne Robinson (2010) observes that “(t)he self is no longer assumed to be a thing to be approached with optimism, or to be trusted to see anything truly” (p. xviii). No less so in the therapeutic relationship. The seduction of a patient who pushes you to be an expert is difficult to resist. Access to secret knowledge is power and power promises a much simpler world. Power is what is at stake in the fierce renunciation of a human vision of psychology. For many contemporary therapists, engaging with a vision wider than that of the natural sciences carries risks, such as

“[...] failing the test, not getting the degree, position or job, internship or residency, postdoctoral position, promotion, bursary, stipend, grant, referral, honor or award; losing your license, approval, accreditation; not having your article, book, proposal accepted; being accused of unethical or unprofessional conduct [...]” (Mahrer, 2005, p. 233)

“Essays in Flesh and Bone”

As Robinson points out, in the natural scientific view, “the physical world that is manifest to us describes reality exhaustively” (Fay, 2008). Academic psychologists believe that science gives us a special perspective of “the world as it really is, if we climb on the shoulders of those we believe know more than we do” (Heaton, 2010, p. 210). Montaigne brings us right back down to Earth with a resounding thump: “And on the loftiest throne in the world we are still sitting only on our own rump.”^{lv} According to the *Essays*, it is the body that grounds us. This is the best vantage point from which to think about the human condition, to live more intensely, and to enter into conversation. Essaying, like therapy, is an embodied practice, it is not in the realm of the theoretical: “Yet there is no use our mounting on stilts, for on stilts we must still walk on our own legs.”^{lvi}

The *Essays* chart Montaigne’s reorientation of value from abstract truths to concrete bodily experience. Put simply, Montaigne values the body as our best source of understanding because we are closer to our bodies than to anything else (Frampton, 2011b, p. 255):

Now it is likely that if the soul knew anything, it would first of all know itself; and if it knew anything outside of itself, that would be its body and shell before anything else [...] We are nearer to ourselves than the whiteness of snow or the weight of stone are to us. If man does not know himself, how does he know his functions and powers?^{lvii}

Corporeality infuses the *Essays*. Montaigne explores such topics as death, illness, food, sex, war, suicide and nature. Not only do many of the themes have to do with the body, but the *Essays* themselves are remarkably physical body of work. Montaigne’s speech is rooted in the body. Emerson (1996) says of the *Essays*’ visceral style: “Cut these words, and they would bleed; they are vascular and alive” (p. 95).

The physicality of the *Essays* makes the portrait radically intimate. With a candour that was soon lost to the Cartesian prudery¹³ of the New Philosophy, Montaigne reveals all sorts of details about sexual habits, his dining preferences, his kidney stones, and his toiletry routines. "In this way the *Essais* became the most personal book that had appeared to date in world literature, despite all its precursors in the various categories of autobiography, confessions, memoirs, and letters" (Friedrich, 1991, p. 208). Montaigne makes fun of those who want to deny bodily experience, who "want to get out of themselves and escape from the man"^{lviii}: "Both kings and philosophers defecate, and ladies too."^{lix} Unlike the typical painted portrait, Montaigne's portrait candidly reveals the entire body, not just the face.

I expose myself entire: my portrait is a cadaver on which the veins, the muscles, and the tendons appear at a glance, each part in its place. One part of what I am was produced by a cough, another by a pallor or a palpitation of the heart – in any case dubiously. It is not my deeds that I write down; it is myself, it is my essence.^{lx}

The body becomes a limiting point, or a vantage point in the diversity of ideas and values that Montaigne explores. His sidelong glances come from an inhabited body. He is physically implicated in this first-person view. This is not the scientific "disembodied, spectatorial Cartesian *cogito*" (Jay, 2006, p. 35), an objective "view from nowhere" (Nagel, 1986 as cited in Jay, p. 35), which has become the human view in our modern world. Montaigne radically privileged the "particular, nongeneralizable body" (Freidrich, 1991, p. xxiv). His revolutionary appreciation of the embodied self or lived body led Merleau-Ponty to view Montaigne as a proponent of phenomenology "*avant la lettre*" (Marchi, 1994, p. 88).

The embodied sidelong glance brings to mind the premodern notion of the eye. Before the biological or mechanistic model of Melanchthon and Vives, the eye emitted a sort of light, or "cast glances", rather than simply passively receiving light as per our modern understanding (Jager, 1991, pp. 66-67). The eye's activity was as corporeal as a social

¹³ Recall Descartes' famous announcement that he enters the philosophical arena with his face hidden: "I come forward, masked" (*larvatus prode*o).

gesture. The eye reached out and could be seen within the same conversational realm as a shake of the hand:

A glance, like a hand raised in greeting, can signal the opening of a social space within which it becomes possible to exchange greetings, to bring each other news, or to ask and answer questions. (p. 67)

The modern conception of vision which arose concurrently with scientific empiricism, put vision as a passive observation within a material universe as opposed to an embodied activity that took place within an inhabited space shaped by conversation. Clearly, the ordered reality of the material universe is better passively observed by highly sensitive instruments, rather than by the human eye. This mute reality can be probed, but not conversed with. Jager (1991) says that the anatomical human eye can be studied by experimental science, but not the human glance, which is in this sense unseen and unheard: "In a world where the sun no longer rose or fell [as per the Ptolemaic vision of the heavens], there was also no longer a place for an eye that could light a path or cast a glance" (pp. 66-67).

Thus, can we prove that a certain expression is genuine? It often has to be felt. Subtleties of glance, gesture, tone of voice and familiarity with the person all play a part. It may be very difficult to put into words the difference between, for example, a genuine loving look and a pretend one. (Heaton, 2010, p. 73) 'Ask yourself: How does a man learn to get an "eye" for something?' (Wittgenstein, 2009, as cited in Heaton, 2010, p. 73)

Philosopher and therapist Donna Orange (2009, November 10) says that it is the body that creates perspective. We can't escape the place where we are situated and we can't escape our limited embodied perspective without engaging with the other. The inhabited body, moves beyond the Cartesian dichotomy between the thinking subject and the object of thought. Montaigne's reflections on the inseparability of the mind and body constitute a significant thread that runs through the *Essays*:

We are not bringing up a soul; we are not bringing up a body: we are bringing up a man. We must not split him in two. We must not bring up one without the other^{bi}

The scientific view is also embodied, but thinly; science is a work of disembodiment, a casting off and then forgetting that we are disembodied. The tragedy of our modern world is that we believe that the only way to truth is by making ourselves absent. We become scientific no-bodies, consisting only of fragments. Embodiment has to do with particularization and presence. In the humanities, as in psychotherapy, you have to present yourself. This is difficult; it requires work, as poet Ariana Reines (2008, April 30) puts it, to “heave yourself up” (1:01:23) and say specifically who you are.

Montaigne brings together disparate worlds, those of the reader and writer, the ancients and the modern. That is to say that he embodies them. The *Essays*, “limb of my life”^{lxii}, allow him to come out of the woodwork of the intellectual world, tell stories, set the table, and set the page abuzz. Instead of just presenting an idea, he makes it part of his existence. Ever the host, he creates order, bringing harmony to multiple worlds, “without violating their distinction” (Jager, 1997, p. 212).

“Let my eyes also taste, according to their capacity.”^{lxiii}

The French word “essay” can also mean “to taste”. Montaigne, the winemaker from Bordeaux, tastes life’s delicious eloquence. He delights in the Roman poet Lucan’s epitaph, “The speech that strikes the mind will have the most taste”^{lxiv}. His book is a savouring of life, a “bodily joy” (O’Neill, 1982, p. 93) rather than an explanation or a detachment from it as per the Stoical and later Cartesian traditions:

Everyone looks in front of him; as for me, I look inside of me; I have no business but with myself; I continually observe myself, I take stock of myself, I taste myself. [...] I roll about in myself.^{lxv}

Tastes, like glances, acknowledge the transience and proximity of embodied experience. In “On conversation”, Montaigne first wrote that through conversation “we seek the truth”, but later crossed this out and replaced it with “we seek what is” (Frampton, 2011, p. 258).

Essayng and therapy relinquish the quest for certainty and strive to deepen our engagement with “what is”. We cultivate our experience, like wine:

I try to increase it in weight; I try to arrest the speed of its flight by the speed with which I grasp it, and to compensate for the haste of its ebb by my vigor in using it. The shorter my possession of life, the deeper and fuller I must make it.^{lxvi}

Tasting is a form of intimate access, a way of paying attention to what is close to us. Coming closer to that which is makes experience “deeper and fuller”, which leads to an opening of possibilities, rather than simplification. In a way, despite the risks we may run, tasting is a loving act that is possible in the context of trust.

Therapy is teaching the client to become “more “faithful to her experience”, to be open to sudden upsurges of the spirit (Todres, 1991, p. 102). Coming close to that which is, within “a larger rhythm of distance and closeness to our lived situation” (p. 100), indirectly and spontaneously lights the spark of insight. If the therapist tries to encourage a particular insight, he “might obscure the experiential process that could empower the insight in a personally relevant way” (p. 101). If the client doesn’t “experience” or taste an insight, even if it is true, then she won’t have confidence in it. The therapist, like her trusted cupbearer¹⁴, also tastes the patient’s experience. In this way, therapy extends the patient’s palate, making life’s flavours more vivid and distinctive.

Tasting life means staying in motion, not staying with a particular interpretation. Gadamer reminds us that to understand is to understand differently each time (Gadamer, Weinsheimer et Marshall, 2004, p. 296). This happens when therapist and patient adopt a position of not knowing. Renouncing our grasp on things or selves means being present to the motion and gestures of our conversation, to the life of our subject matter. It means moving towards increased complexity over particular insights or solutions because these are always

¹⁴ A cupbearer in Montaigne’s era held a highly privileged position as the King’s intimate confidant. He would serve drinks to the King and often taste the wine before serving it. His tasks of creating hospitable and secure conditions are interestingly analogous to those of a therapist.

context-dependent and variable. "[W]hat is involved here is not correction but continuous reaffirmation of the accumulation of living, thinking and feeling" (O'Neill, 1982, p. 83).

Philosophy Brought Down to Earth

By drawing closer to his unruly experience rather than uncovering hidden facts, validating his method, or making some "permanent contribution to knowledge" (O'Neill, 1982, p. 82), Montaigne is able to continually let his self unfold through conversation.

I speak my mind freely on all things, even on those which perhaps exceed my capacity and which I by no means hold to be within my jurisdiction. And so the opinion I give of them is to declare the measure of my sight, not the measure of things.^{lxvii}

The nature of reality or experience that we explore in essaying and psychotherapy is lively, embodied, and continually reborn in the light of the other. Together, reader and writer, or therapist and patient, taste experience from many angles, gradually letting go of abstract theories and the false security of private subjectivity as we go. We do this by trying to tell it like it is, with words that seek a willing ear. Through word of mouth, plain speech brings us to the body, to salads and radishes, and to the motion of daily life. In moments of resonance, when we are revealed to ourselves and to our interlocutor, we gain a bit of vitality. Irvin D. Yalom (2008) says that he enjoys watching his patients "open up to life" (p. 290). Frampton (2011b) refers to this experience in his book's subtitle: "Montaigne and Being in Touch with Life". Through essaying the self, Montaigne discovered that the most fertile starting points of conversation are not abstract, but close to the bone: a personal observation, an opinion, a poem, the *Essays* themselves.

Therapists have techniques for symptom reduction, and in certain contexts use medical knowledge. But theory and technique are not our frame. Our frame is the sidelong glance, as described by Montaigne. Ours is an essayistic view, at once a wider and more personal frame of reference, which acknowledges other view-points, including the medical view. This frame roots our looking, our theories and our techniques within a first-person perspective while

reminding us that that our shared human condition is incarnate. The sidelong glance humbly invites us to engage at the limits of our frame. Limits at which you can pause, look back, see the other person, and see what else is going on. In the scientific frame of mind, we try to be an onlooker, rather than a glancer, because the entire natural universe lies before us. What we can't see only indicates ignorance that can ultimately be corrected.

The *Essays* show us that there are multiple starting points to think about psychotherapy other than the natural universe: works of art, myth, philosophy, religion, and our own observations in everyday life – in essence, the humanities. Each is a hospitable site where we can meet each other. Each inspires a continually renewed conversation. The essential human question is how to be together, given that we are separate, given that we have different worlds – man and god, parent and child, man and woman, man and animal, living and dead. Psychotherapy is about the same question: how can I live with my neighbour, with my mother, etc.? How can we transform this separation into a source of inspiration? It opens possibilities of living together rather than solving problems in a single universe. We learn about these questions by opening ourselves to other things and people. Essentially, psychotherapy is an invitation to enter into the humanities, to discover this grand resource that helps us to live in more than one world (Jager, personal communication, September, 2010).

I think that most experienced therapists would agree that they view their practice within a wider horizon than that defined by any systematic method. But it is very difficult to express the values, ideas and understandings that arise in our work when we lack any liberal arts education. Robinson (2010) says that we have “a conception of humanity that itself is very limited, excluding as it must virtually all observation and speculation on this subject that have been offered through the ages by those outside the closed circle that is called modern thought” (p. x). We exclude classical and humanist traditions as well as religious. Thus as she puts it, our modern conversation is truncated, often to the point of banality. We have created a schism that has “alienated science and humane learning” (p. xvi). Montaigne puts these traditions back into conversation through the essayistic frame.

If there is overlap in the two approaches: the natural sciences and humane learning – for example, when science is interested in themes like embodiment or conversation – the difference is the value or priority assigned to the theme, the starting point and shape of the investigation, the attitude, the types of truth sought, the goals (synthesis or juxtaposition of worlds), the consideration of ontological questions and epistemological questions, the language, and the level of tolerance of uncertainty. In the humanist vision, the essential value of essaying and psychotherapy is that we are together. In the scientific perspective, we describe lawful relationships in order to control and predict behaviour.

My work is part of a larger endeavour in psychotherapy to restore the humanities as a complementary source of understanding alongside the natural sciences. The wonderful fertility of our particular field arises from the fact that we espouse both the scientific and humanist perspectives. Unfortunately, in academic psychology we have a serious imbalance – the scientific reality completely obscures any other way of seeing the world. We have become lost in an explosion of psychological theories as we unsatisfactorily attempt to explore human reality only one set of tools. The *Essays* help us to redress this imbalance:

Montaigne's aversion to abstraction, [...] lets the eye that is blinded by the universe recover by viewing what is individual and close at hand, his feeling for the uniqueness of an event [...] his comfortable dwelling in milieu and everyday situations [...] (Friedrich, 1991, p. 369)

This imbalance is nothing new. Throughout Western history, we have witnessed an oscillation between the two human paradigms. In Antiquity, for example, Plato sought the truth in the ideal world, over the common world, and during Montaigne's time, scholasticism, also Platonic, reigned. The scholastics wanted to know everything in its eternal configuration; they revered categories and external definitions. Montaigne's *Essays*, with his novel idiosyncratic twist, briefly swung the pendulum back the other way, towards the valuation of ordinary lived experience; that highly particular and embodied type of experience. Montaigne considered himself an "accidental philosopher", because he was not a philosopher in the sense of espousing grand theories on human nature. The *Essays* and, I would say, psychotherapy, are philosophy brought down to earth:

Lay a beam between these two towers of such width as we need to walk on: there is no philosophical wisdom of such great firmness that it can give us courage to walk on it as we should if it were on the ground.^{lxviii}

Academic psychology is scholastic in its quest for classification and models. It strikes me that we are living in a parallel moment to the end of the Renaissance. We are beginning to see the pendulum swing back to a humanist vision in psychotherapy and in other disciplines such as philosophy, history, economics, and political thought. Inspired by the *Essays*, Saul Frampton (2011b), says:

The task of philosophy [and I would say therapy], therefore, is not to dig down to firmer, more resolute foundations, or to rise up into the beyond, but to show us where we already stand not to shake off the body, but to shake its hand. (p. 255)

Montaigne spurs us to use conversation as a mode of inquiry, not just as lip service to the talking cure.

To see keeping a conversation going as a sufficient aim of philosophy, [and I would say therapy], to see wisdom as consisting in the ability to sustain a conversation, is to see human beings as generators of new descriptions rather than beings one hopes to be able to describe accurately. (Rorty, 2009, p. 378)

What is important is that the pendulum keeps swinging, that therapists are able to move between the two distinct realms, to cultivate each without conflating them. It seems particularly relevant to reflect on what happens in psychotherapy through the lens of someone who lived so well with one foot in the scholastic and one foot in the humanist worlds.¹⁵

The *Essays* encourage psychologists to overcome the pathology of staring, oblivious to what is going on around us in other disciplines. (We can view pathology as an inability to escape our monolithic view of experience.) In school we are taught to focus on the teacher, the blackboard, and on a single topic at a time with the goal of grades, bursaries, acceptance

¹⁵ For a detailed exploration of this pivotal historical moment, see my paper "Should We Be Writing Essays Instead of Articles? A Psychotherapist's Reflection on Montaigne's Marvelous Invention" (Starr, 2012).

to university, etc. It is frowned upon to talk to the person beside you, or to look indolently out the window. This brings to mind Francis Bacon's rejection of ordinary embodied experience in favour of "experience ordered and arranged, not irregular and erratic" (Bacon, 1994, as cited in Jay, 2006, p. 31). He called this new type of experience, *experientia literata*: "experiences that have been taught how to read and write" (Jay, p. 31) like obedient students sitting quietly in neat rows of desks. The desks would have the same configuration with or without the students. Science seeks an order that already exists, and that will ultimately be unveiled. But Montaigne discovered that order of the human mind is an interpersonal order that is achieved, brought about through conversation. Without others, everything remains chaotic.

I am surprised at how overlooked the *Essays* are in humanistic psychology. Montaigne is a wonderful friend for therapists isolated in our lonely profession. He is a mentor with whom we can face questions with no answers. Just "as these essays reach not their end, but their suspension in full career" (Woolf, 2003), you don't finish the *Essays*, they become a lifelong companion. It feels good to be united with old texts, to preserve vital aspects of our humanity. We are in a delirium of novelty, but it is important to find our place in the story, just as we ask our patients to do. Engaging with our history through essaying or conversation is not the same as espousing a progressive view of psychology.

If we understand the goal of psychotherapy as entering the humanities, of learning to avail ourselves of the understanding and resources offered by the humanities, then the *Essays* offer a uniquely fertile entry point for therapists stuck in the scientific frame. Montaigne is a warm and generous teacher who makes us, his pupils, feel at home in new worlds.

Engagement with the *Essays* helps to raise questions about how we can better position our discipline of psychotherapy within a human perspective. We are reminded of a different vision of the world on which the humanities are based, and are intrigued by the possibility that we may be needlessly restraining ourselves within the scientific worldview. The aim of this essay is not to denigrate the scientific paradigm which has given us so much, but to put it

in perspective, to take stock of its limits and glance outside of this vision to see what else is there.

This great world of ours (which for some is only one species within a generic group) is the looking-glass in which we must gaze to come to know ourselves from the right slant. To sum up then, I want it to be the book which our pupil studies. Such a variety of humours, schools of thought, opinions, laws, and customs teach us to judge sanely of our own and teach our judgment to acknowledge its shortcomings and natural weakness. And that is no light apprenticeship.^{lxix}

This essay is about drawing close in therapy, about how to move between worlds, not about finding an answer to a problem. Montaigne takes us by the hand as we follow "the crooked path" (Kauffmann, 1989, p. 224) of ordinary experience, casting sidelong glances at our metier of psychotherapy. What might we catch a glimpse of when we avoid the full-on glare of scientific observation? What understanding might we stumble upon when we follow our bolting mind^{lxx} rather than guiding it?

"How many things did Montaigne discover that we have painfully rediscovered in our own times!" (Homans, 1984, p. 9)

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Notes

ⁱ (F, I:8, 25)

Dernierement que je me retiray chez moy, deliberé autant que je pourroy, ne me mesler d'autre chose que de passer en repos et à part ce peu qui me reste de vie, il me sembloit ne pouvoir faire plus grande faveur à mon esprit, que de le laisser en pleine oysiveté, s'entretenir soy mesmes, et s'arrester et rasseoir en soy : ce que j'esperois qu'il peut meshuy faire plus aisément, devenu avec le temps plus poissant, et plus meur. Mais je trouve, [...] que au rebours, faisant le cheval eschappé, il se donne cent fois plus d'affaire à soy mesmes, qu'il n'en prenoit pour autrui; et m'enfante tant de chimeres et monstres fantasques les uns sur les autres, sans ordre, et sans propos, que pour en contempler à mon aise l'ineptie et l'estrangeté, j'ay commencé de les mettre en rolle, esperant avec le temps luy en faire honte à luy mesmes. (T-R, I:8, 34)

ⁱⁱ (F, III:3, 758)

« la foule des affaires » (T-R, III:3, 801)

ⁱⁱⁱ (S, III: 2, 907)

« Les autres forment l'homme; je le recite et en represente un particulier [...] »
(T-R, III:2, 782)

^{iv} (F, III:9, 925)

« tumultuairement » (T-R, III:9, 973)

^v (F, III:13, 1004)

« sans regle » (T-R, III:13, 1054)

^{vi} (F, III:2, 740)

« Si mon ame pouvoit prendre pied, je ne m'essaierois pas, je me resoudrois ; elle est tousjours en apprentissage et en espreuve. » (T-R, III:2, 782)

^{vii} (F, II:6, 331)

« un amusement nouveau et extraordinaire » (T-R, II:6, 358)

^{viii} (F, III:13, 1007)

« cette fricassée que je barbouille icy » (T-R, III:13, 1056)

^{ix} (F, preface, p.2)

Si c'eust esté pour rechercher la faveur du monde, je me fusse mieux paré et me presenterois en une marche étudiée. Je veus qu'on m'y voie en ma façon simple, naturelle et ordinaire, sans contantion et artifice : car c'est moy que je peins. Mes défauts s'y liront au vif, et ma forme naïfve, autant que la reverence publique me l'a permis. Que si j'eusse esté entre ces nations qu'on dict vivre encore sous la douce liberté des premieres loix de nature, je t'assure que je m'y fusse tres-volontiers peint tout entier, et tout nud. » (T-R, Au lecteur, 9)

^x (F, III:13, 1000-1001)

Je m'estudie plus qu'autre subject. C'est ma metaphisique, c'est ma phisique. [...] De l'experiance que j'ay de moy, je trouve assez dequoy me faire sage, si j'estoy bon escolier. (T-R, III:13, 1050-1051)

^{xi} (F, II:12, 454)

« de regenter, d'ordonner, d'establir la vérité » (T-R, II:12, 485-486)

^{xii} (F, I:24, 112)

« un suffisant lecteur » (T-R, I:24, 126)

^{xiii} (F, III:9, 925)

Cette farcisserie est un peu hors de mon theme. Je m'esgare, mais plustost par licence que par mesgarde. Mes fantasies se suyvent, mais par fois c'est de loing, et se regardent, mais d'une veuë oblique. [...] J'ayme l'alleure poetique, à sauts et à gambades. [...] C'est l'indiligent lecteur qui pert mon subject, non pas moy; [...] Mon stile et mon esprit vont vagabondant de mesmes. (T-R, III:9, 973)

^{xiv} (F, III:9, 926)

J'entends que la matiere se distingue soy-mesmes. Elle montre assez où elle se change, où elle conclud, où elle commence, où elle se reprend, sans l'entrelasser de parolles de cousture introduictes pour le service des oreilles foibles ou nonchallantes [...] (T-R, III:9, 974)

^{xv} (F, III:9, 917)

Nul plaisir n'a goust pour moy sans communication. Il ne me vient pas seulement une gaillarde pensée en l'ame qu'il ne me fâche de l'avoir produite seul, et n'ayant à qui l'offrir. (T-R, III:9, 965)

^{xvi} (F, III:1, 726)

« Je parle au papier comme je parle au premier que je rencontre. » (T-R, III:1, 767)

^{xvii} (F, III:3, 758)

« Il y a des naturels particuliers, retirez et internes. Ma forme essentielle est propre à la communication et à la production; je suis tout au dehors et en evidence, nay à la société et à l'amitié. » (T-R, III:3, 801)

^{xviii} (F, III:2, 740)

« Il va trouble et chancelant, d'une yvresse naturelle. » (T-R, III:2, 782)

^{xix} (C, I:25)

Il se tire une merveilleuse clarté, pour le jugement humain, de la fréquentation du monde. Nous sommes tous contraints et amoncellez en nous, et avons la veuë racourcie à la longueur de nostre nez. (T-R, I:26, 156)

^{xx} (F, III: 11, 958)

« Car, poissantes et dignes d'un si grand nom, on pert les vraies; elles eschappent de nostre veuë par leur petitesse. » (T-R, III:11, 1006)

^{xxi} (F, III:9, 925)

« C'est l'indiligent lecteur qui pert mon subject, non pas moy; il s'en trouvera tousjours en un coing quelque mot qui ne laisse pas d'estre bastant, quoy qu'il soit serré. » (T-R, III:9, 973)

^{xxii} (S, III:2, 908)

C'est un contrerolle de divers et muables accidens et d'imaginations irresoluës et, quand il y eschet, contraires; soit que je sois autre moy-même, soit que je saisisse les subjects par autres circonstances et considerations. Tant y a que je me contredits bien à l'aventure, mais la vérité, comme disoit Demades, je ne la contredy point. (T-R, III :2, 782)

^{xxiii} (F, I:50, 266)

« Car je ne voy le tout de rien. Ne font pas, ceux qui promettent de nous le faire veoir. » (T-R, I:50, 289)

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- ^{xxiv} (F, III:9, 913)
 « Il escoule tous les jours de nos mains et depuis que je vis s'est alteré de moitié. »
 (T-R, III:9, 961)
- ^{xxv} (F, II:6, 332)
 « en ce corps aérée de la voix » (T-R, II:6, 359)
- ^{xxvi} (F, II:8, 338)
 « le seul livre au monde de son espece » (T-R, II:8, 364)
- ^{xxvii} (F, I:26, 154)
 Le parler que j'ayme, c'est un parler simple et naïf, tel sur le papier qu'à la bouche; un parler succulent et nerveux, court et serré, non tant delicat et peigné comme vehement et brusque (T-R, I:26, 171)
- ^{xxviii} (S, I:26, 168)
 « bien faict » et « bien pleine » (T-R, I:25, 149)
- ^{xxix} (F, III:8, 859)
 « Voit-on plus de barbouillage au caquet des harengeres qu'aux disputes publiques des hommes de cette profession? J'aymeroy mieux que mon fils apprint aux tavernes à parler, qu'aux escholes de la parlerie. » (T-R, III:8, 905)
- ^{xxx} (F, III:1, 732)
 « Je suy le langage commun » (T-R, III:1, 774)
- ^{xxxi} (F, I:51, 271)
 Je ne sçay s'il en advient aux autres comme à moy; mais je ne me puis garder, quand j'oy nos architectes s'enfler de ces gros mots de pilastres, architraves, corniches, d'ouvrage Corinthien et Dorique, et semblables de leur jargon, que mon imagination ne se saisisse, incontinent du palais d'Apolidon; et, par effect, je trouve que ce sont les chetives pieces de la porte de ma cuisine. (T-R, I:51, 294)
- ^{xxxii} (passage from III:2 as translated by and cited in Frampton, 2011b, p. 268)
 « converser avec les siens et avec soymesme doucement et justement, [...] c'est chose plus rare, plus difficile et moins remarquable. » (T-R, III:2, 787)

xxxiii (F, III:5, 808)

Quand j'escris, je me passe bien de la compagnie et souvenance des livres, de peur qu'ils n'interrompent ma forme. Aussi que, à la verité, les bons auteurs m'abattent par trop et rompent le courage. (T-R, III:5, 852)

xxxiv (F, III:5, 777)

« des essays en cher et en os » (T-R, III:5, 821)

xxxv (F, II:37, 696)

« Ce fagotage de tant de diverses pieces » (T-R, II :37, 736)

xxxvi (F, I:26, 131)

Il m'advint l'autre jour de tomber sur un tel passage. J'avois trainé languissant après des parolles Françaises, si exangues, si descharnées et si vuides de matiere et de sens, que ce n'estoient voirement que paroles Françaises; au bout d'un long et ennuyeux chemin, je vins à rencontrer une piece haute, riche et eslevée jusques aux nuës. [...] des six premieres paroles, je conneuz que je m'envolois en l'autre monde. (T-R, I:26, 145-146)

xxxvii (F, I:24, 112)

Un suffisant lecteur descouvre souvant és escrits d'autrui des perfections autres que celles que l'auteur y a mises et apperceües, et y preste des sens et des visages plus riches. (T-R, I:24, 126)

xxxviii (F, I:40: 224)

Ny elles [ces histoires], ny mes allegations ne servent pas toujours simplement d'exemple, d'autorité ou d'ornement. Je ne les regarde pas seulement par l'usage que j'en tire. Elles portent souvent, hors de mon propos, la semence d'une matiere plus riche et plus hardie, et sonnent à gauche un ton plus delicat, et pour moy qui n'en veux exprimer d'avantage, et pour ceux qui rencontreront mon air. (T-R, I:40, 245)

xxxix (F, II:12, 497)

« Nouvelle figure : un philosophe impremedité et fortuite! » (T-R, II:12, 528)

^{xi} (F, III:5, 811)

« Mais mon ame me desplait de ce qu'elle produict ordinairement ses plus profondes resveries, plus folles et qui me plaisent le mieux, à l'improuveu et lors que je les cerche moins » (T-R, III:5, 854)

^{xli} (I:50, 266)

« Tout mouvement nous descouvre. » (T-R, I:50, 290)

^{xlii} (F, II:12, 553)

Et nous, et nostre jugement, et toutes choses mortelles, vont coulant et roulant sans cesse. Ainsin il ne se peut establir rien de certain de l'un à l'autre, et le jugeant et le jugé estans en continuelle mutation et branle. (T-R, II:12, 586)

^{xliii} (F, III:12, 989)

« commendant qu'ils entrassent. » (T-R, III:12, 1038)

^{xliv} (F, II:12, 516-517)

J'ay le pied si instable et si mal assis, je le trouve si aysé à croler et si prest au branle, et ma veuë si desreglée, que à jun je me sens autre qu'après le repas; si ma santé me rid et la clarté d'un beau jour, me voylà honneste homme; si j'ay un cor qui me presse l'orteil, me voylà renfroigné, mal plaisant et inaccessible. (T-R, II:12, 548-549)

^{xliv} (F, III:2, 740)

« Je ne peints pas l'estre. Je peints le passage » (T-R, III:2, 782)

^{xlvi} (F, III:9, 919)

« La vie est un mouvement materiel et corporel, action imparfaicte de sa propre essence, et desreglée; je m'emploie à la servir selon elle. » (T-R, III:9, 967)

^{xlvi} (S III:2, 907)

« Or les traits de ma peinture ne forvoyent point, quoy qu'ils se changent et diversifient. » (T-R, III:2, 782)

^{xlvi} (S, III:2, 907)

« Toutes choses y branlent sans cesse [...] et du branle public et du leur. » (T-R, III:2, 782)

^{xlix} (F, III:13, 1031)

Je ne suis excessivement desireux ny de salades ny de fruits, sauf les melons. Mon pere haïssoit toute sorte de sauces; je les aime toutes. Le trop manger m'empeche; mais, par sa qualité, je n'ay encore cognoissance bien certaine qu'aucune viande me nuise; comme aussi je ne remarque ny lune plaine ny basse, ny l'automne du printemps. Il y a des mouvemens en nous, inconstans et incogneus; car des refors, pour exemple, je les ay trouvez premierement commodes, depuis facheux, present de rechef commodes. En plusieurs choses je sens mon estomac et mon appetit aller ainsi diversifiant: j'ay rechangé du blanc au claret, et puis du claret au blanc. (T-R, III:13, 1082)

ⁱ (C, II:10)

Ma veuë s'y confond et s'y dissipe. Il faut que je le retire et que je l'y remette à secousses : tout ainsi que, pour juger du lustre de l'escarlatte, on nous ordonne de passer les yeux pardessus, en la parcourant à diverses veuës, soudaines, reprinses, et reiterées. (T-R, II:10, 389)

ⁱⁱ (S, III:2, 907-8)

« un branle plus languissant » (T-R, III:2, 782)

ⁱⁱⁱ (S, II:6, 424)

Et est un amusement nouveau et extraordinaire, qui nous retire des occupations communes du monde, ouy, et des plus recommandées. [...] Il n'est description pareille en difficulté à la description de soy-mesmes, ny certes en utilité. (T-R, II:6, 358)

^{liii} (F, III:11, 959)

« L'admiration est fondement de toute philosophie, l'inquisition le progrez, l'ignorance le bout. » (T-R, III:11, 1008)

^{liv} (S, III:11, 1165)

J'ayme ces mots, qui amollissent et moderent la temerité de nos propositions : A l'avanture, Aucunement, Quelque, On dict, Je pense, et semblables. Et si j'eusse eu à dresser des enfans, je leur eusse tant mis en la bouche cette façon de respondre, enquesteuse, non resolutive : « Qu'est-ce à dire? Je ne l'entends pas. Il pourroit estre. Est-il vray? » qu'ils eussent plustost gardé la forme d'apprentis à soixante ans que de représenter les docteurs à dix ans, comme ils font. (T-R, III:11, 1007)

^{lv} (F, III:13, 1044)

« Et au plus eslevé throne du monde, si ne sommes assis que sus nostre cul. »
(T-R, III:13, 1096)

^{lvi} (F, III:13, 1044)

« Si, avons nous beau monter sur des eschasses, car sur des eschasses encores faut-il marcher de nos jambes. » (T-R, III:13, 1096)

^{lvii} (F, II:12, 512)

Or il est vray-semblable que, si l'ame sçavoit quelque chose, elle se sçauroit premierement elle mesme; et, si elle sçavoit quelque chose hors d'elle, ce seroit son corps et son estuy, avant toute autre chose. [...] Nous nous sommes plus voisins que ne nous est la blancheur de la nege ou la pesanteur de la pierre. Si l'homme ne se connoit, comment connoit il ses fonctions et ses forces? (T-R, II:12, 543-544)

^{lviii} (F, III:13, 1044)

« veulent se mettre hors d'eux et eschapper à l'homme. » (T-R, III:13, 1096)

^{lix} (F, III:13, 1013)

« Et les Roys et les philosophes fientent, et les dames aussi. » (T-R, III:13, 1063)

^{lx} (F, II:6, 332-333)

Je m'estalle entier : c'est un *skeletos* où, d'une veuë, les veines, les muscles, les tendons paroissent, chaque piece en son siege. L'effect de la toux en produisoit une partie; l'effect de la palleur ou battement de coeur, un'autre, et douteusement. Ce ne sont mes gestes que j'escris, c'est moy, c'est mon essence. (T-R, II:6, 359)

^{lxi} (S, I:26, 185)

Ce n'est pas une ame, ce n'est pas un corps qu'on dresse: c'est un homme; il n'en faut pas faire à deux. (T-R, I:26, 164)

^{lxii} (S, II:18, 755)

« membre de ma vie » (T-R, II:18, 648)

^{lxiii} (F, III:13, 1012)

« Que mes yeux y tastent aussi, selon leur capacité. » (T-R, III:13, 1062)

^{lxiv} (F, I:26, 154)

Hæc demum sapiet dictio, quæ feriet (T-R, I:26, 171)

^{lxv} (F, II:17, 606)

Chacun regarde devant soy; moy, je regarde dedans moy : je n'ay affaire qu'à moy, je me considere sans cesse, je me contrerolle, je me goust. [...] moy je me roulle en moy mesme. (T-R, II:17, 641)

^{lxvi} (F, III:13, 1040)

je la veux estendre en pois; je veux arrester la promptitude de sa fuite par la promptitude de ma sesie, et par la vigueur de l'usage compenser la hastiveté de son escoulement; à mesure que la possession du vivre est plus courte, il me la faut rendre plus profonde et plus pleine. (T-R, III:13, 1092)

^{lxvii} (F, II:10, 361)

Je dy librement mon advis de toutes choses, voire et de celles qui surpassent à l'adventure ma suffisance, et que je ne tiens aucunement estre de ma jurisdiction. Ce que j'en opine, c'est aussi pour declarer la mesure de ma veuë, non la mesure des choses. (T-R, II:10, 389)

^{lxviii} (F, II:12, 546)

Qu'on jette une poutre entre ces deux tours, d'une grosseur telle qu'il nous la faut à nous promener dessus : il n'y a sagesse philosophique de si grande fermeté qui puisse nous donner courage d'y marcher comme nous ferions, si elle estoit à terre. (T-R, II:12, 579)

^{lxix} (S, I:26, 177)

Ce grand monde, que les uns multiplient encore comme especes sous un genre, c'est le miroüer où il nous faut regarder pour nous connoistre de bon biais. Somme, je veux que ce soit le livre de mon escholier. Tant d'humeurs, de sectes, de jugemens, d'opinions, de loix et de coustumes nous apprennent à juger sainement des nostres, et apprennent nostre jugement à reconnoistre son imperfection et sa naturelle foiblesse : qui n'est pas un legier apprentissage. (T-R, I:26, 157)

^{lxx} (S, I:8, 31)

Mais je trouve, [...] que au rebours, faisant le cheval eschappé, [mon esprit] [...] (T-R, III:8, 34)

CONCLUSION

The notions which I am propounding have no form and reach no conclusion. [...] I am seeking the truth, not laying it down.ⁱ

Throughout my doctoral work, I have never ceased to be surprised at how vividly Montaigne's *Essays* speak to humanistic psychotherapists, and at how little we have engaged with them. In this thesis, I have discovered and rediscovered ways in which the *Essays* should be a touchstone text for our discipline. My exploration of the *Essays* brings the experience of reading and writing in the humanities together with the experience of speaking and listening in therapy. I developed a closeness with this book from another time and place in ways that feel akin to the mysterious experience of mutual revelation in the consultation room. The more I read and write, the closer I feel to Montaigne's world, and the more I come to terms with how little I know. Reading and listening in the humanities is about making a place for difference in our world, rather than conquering it with theory. Things that are very alien to me about Montaigne's experience – for example, the time during which he lived, his intimate relationship with kings, or the fact that he had his very own tower – have brought him closer to me; they have become points of contact and places of exchange.

Through essaying, Montaigne came up against the limits of his reason and experience. Instead of reaching beyond these limits for a truth that he could possess, he came to know the pleasure of infinitely seeking truth in the presence of another: "[...] and I find myself more by encounter than by inquisition of my own judgement."ⁱⁱ As reader and writer, he continually revived ancient human questions by inscribing his personal questions within the

larger community of common human experience, always leaving room for other readers, like myself, to bring their own experiences to the table. What strikes me about essaying is that questions and answers form an infinitely renewable couple, and that this is a very different paradigm than that of the natural sciences. In science, questions are exhaustible. Once a question is answered, the couple dissipates, revealing a latent ultimate truth.

“Half ancient, half modern” (Levine, 2001, p. 21), Montaigne’s peculiar book sheds light on profound differences between the complementary cultures of humane learning and the natural sciences. The *Essays* help me to better distinguish between these separate yet intertwined strands of thought that underlie our discipline. I have come to understand that by sidelining the humanities in our education and daily lives, we have lost our bearing towards a human world. We are losing sight of a world that welcomes and guides us. The *Essays*’ hospitable gaze reminds me of the look that parents give their children. It is not a prying look, but a gleam of goodwill and contentment just to be in their presence. In this sense, the *Essays* serve as a critical counterweight to the alienating forward momentum of modern life that academic psychology both bows to and propagates.

My thesis is an invitation to therapists to come home to a conversation. I want to pique the interest of those students, including myself, who feel like something is missing in our increasingly depersonalized education. By picking up on Montaigne’s wide-ranging conversational beat and embodying the expectancy of his sidelong glances, I try to entice my “definite correspondent”ⁱⁱⁱⁱ along oblique paths into a new conversation about our discipline. My essays draw attention to and describe what is lost in academic psychology’s pinched view of life and learning: a recognizable human world. I hope to inspire therapy students to turn to the *Essays*, and also to other conversations – works of art, music, literature, religion, philosophy, history, and mythology – to better understand who we are and where we belong.

“And then, for whom do you write?”^{iv}

After many years of fulfilling scientific educational requirements, I encountered humanistic concerns during my psychotherapy practicum. For the first time, I was required to value and cultivate (in myself and in my patient) tolerance of uncertainty, self-reflection, and humility. It struck me as odd that most psychotherapy students only begin to really talk about these values at the outset of our internships, and often with no broader context than the consultation room. It seemed to me that we had to embody these ideas in practice with little relevant framework of thought or richness of meaning. When I searched for answers as to why I spent years receiving an apparently unbalanced education for a therapist, I found two general responses. The most common one was that as a scientist-practitioner, I now have the tools and skills to understand the scientific literature on any issue in psychotherapy and integrate it into my practice. For example, I can glean from the literature that psychotherapy research clearly supports humanistic values (Wampold, 2001) and, that more effective psychotherapists are better able to tolerate ambiguity (Lecomte *et al.*, 2004). I can measure and define “intolerance of uncertainty” (IU) (Birrell *et al.*, 2011).

However, when sitting face to face with a real person, expected to have a conversation, understanding tolerance of uncertainty as a measurable factor, and not also as a human value embedded in a long tradition, felt inadequate. Moreover, when sitting face to face with the “IU variable” glaring at me from my computer screen, daunting in its statistical significance, I felt demoralized. The variable certainly didn’t ask anything of me, nor could I of it. Powerless in the face of anonymous data, I wondered what technique or method could possibly help me to master it.

The second response that I received was that the idea of returning to the humanities in psychology is indeed gaining ground.¹ Although this good news is encouraging, it doesn’t

¹ For example, the recent special section of *The Humanistic Psychologist* (2012) is a *cri de coeur* to revive our ties to the humanities in response to the APA’s recommended plan to position psychology as a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) discipline.

change the reality that most psychology students are living. Our academic and social worlds are “inhospitable” to a humanist psychology. The efficient and productive paths that we must follow to get into graduate school, receive funding, and complete our degrees, leave little room for the liberal arts.² In fact, during my first psychology degree, Freud was only mentioned once in a passing remark.

My academic path began in human genetics and moved into experimental psychology. But my encounter with the *Essays* compelled me to take an oblique turn into the humanities. Discovering the *Essays* was a revelation and a homecoming. Finally, here was a world that spoke to me, and perhaps would speak to other students equally entrenched in the scientist-practitioner model. I was very fortunate to have stumbled upon the humanistic department at l'UQÀM, one of the few in North America that brings the humanities into psychotherapy education. I was even more fortunate to have found my director, Bernd Jager, who has a special interest in Renaissance humanism and whose profoundly humanist conception of psychotherapy is the wellspring of all of my work. My essays are aimed at students who are not so lucky. I have particular students in mind: friends who are intrigued by the humanities, who love literature and art, but who are caught up in the rat race of psychology doctoral programs. Most of us are drawn to psychology and psychotherapy by a desire to contemplate the human condition, or to plumb the mysteries of human relationships. Yet we have little choice but to enter scientist-practitioner programs if we want professional accreditation.

I sense a malaise in the ever-widening purview of scientific psychology to include such subjects as tolerance of uncertainty, presence or alliance. Looking at these questions within a scientific framework often seems to be a way to “legitimately”, albeit strenuously, pull us towards what we have lost, to an older conception of humanity, to older priorities. This movement speaks to a palpable thirst for something beyond operationalizable constructs, for something that “is obliterated by calculative frameworks unable to recognize the incalculable

² Of course, this problem is not only in psychology, but is part of a broader crisis in education and society in which the humanities have been cast aside in favour of the more “economically viable” disciplines.

character of our humanity” (Sipiora, 2012, p. 260). My intended reader’s ear is already pricked, alert to something different from mainstream psychotherapy research.

Writing as Invitation

What I have come to better understand through reading, writing and talking about the *Essays*, what has sustained me, and what I have tried to convey, is that at its heart the humanities are about not doing it alone. I think that this notion is itself an inspiration and a very tempting invitation, especially to those whose profession is to accompany others.

In the realm of the humanities, “you trust a conversation to guide your life” (Jager, personal communication, October, 2012). Long ago, Montaigne discovered that he wasn’t guided by ultimate truths but by intimate conversations. Psychotherapy is a contemporary space in which to recover this ancient way of seeing, understanding and being. Therapy is by and large convincing people that conversations are how we learn to manoeuvre in life. And student therapists need convincing too. In our academic world of techniques and outcome measures, it’s easy for students to feel like we aren’t *doing* enough in therapy. To move towards the humanities is learn to trust conversations, to tolerate the openness of conversation by having faith in human testimony rather than only in theories (even theories about conversation). The *Essays* help us to see that by articulating our fallibility and acknowledging the contestability of our views, we mandate plurality. For “he must first be friend and citizen before he can belong to himself in all his variety [...]” (Starobinski, 1985, p. 307). As friend and citizen, we invite the question, “and what do you think?”

Unlike a conversation, science hems you in. Your outlook is necessarily pre-determined; it comes fully formed. Science tells you what is worthwhile noticing. There is no need for the perspectives of friends or citizens because method demarcates the scope of the investigation.

A psychology that is situated only within the natural sciences gives rise to an ill-conceived notion of psychotherapy. Patients often come to therapy in search of knowledge that can fix all of their problems. They want to be in charge of their own life by acquiring information or technology that will make them immune to missteps (or taking oblique paths).

A student trained exclusively in the natural sciences risks perpetuating the patient's distress in a folie à deux: by collaborating in the modern illusion that knowledge can heal. Montaigne was not fooled by this illusion. He chided men of letters for being more concerned with justifying their knowledge as rational than questioning the worth or foundations of that knowledge:

while these men, through wanting to exalt themselves and swagger around with this learning that is floating on the surface of their brain, are perpetually getting confused and tangled up in their own feet. [...] They know Galen well, but the patient not at all.^v

In our modern world, as it was during the Wars of Religion, we dream of a theory that can repair the bonds between people. We want a good theory to understand the misery of the world. We seek an ineluctable logic, an established truth so that it will no longer be necessary to make sense. But theory and truth cannot substitute loving and relationships. Understanding involves suffering, *tolerating* the abyss between our selves, others and the world. Therapy helps us to tolerate the pain of this symbolic separation, once we give up the fantasy that we can be together without work.

Psychotherapy is really about coming to the understanding that our life is not governed by our consciousness, but by our friends and loves. It is about creating a relationship in which we can come to understand the world and how to live well within it. Together can we be confident that it is not necessary to know everything. A relationship where we stand together to face life has become very precious in modernity, and for this reason the humanities are critical to a therapist's education.

"Now we must not attach learning to the mind, we must incorporate it; we must not sprinkle, but dye."^{vi}

This thesis touches on a very different notion of education for therapists, one in which we see ourselves as inheritors of an ancient tradition, rather than part of the vanguard of the neurosciences. The original Greek form of humanist learning, *paideia*, had to do with the

raising and education of children. The humanist educator guided his charge through the difficult rite of passage from childhood to young adulthood, from the home to the polis. Cicero later translated the Greek *paideia* into the Latin *humanitas* to describe the education of a cultured man. Cicero's *humanitas* was revived by the Renaissance humanists, and lives on in the humanities of today. The common thread between *paideia*, *humanitas*, and the humanities is the understanding that learning involves a difficult and humanizing passage between incommensurate worlds, between adolescence and adulthood, between the home and the city, between the ancient world and Christendom. Humanist learning is about becoming more human, or as Montaigne would say, "well-formed" rather than "well-filled"^{vii}.

Following in the footsteps of our forebears, notably Prometheus, Socrates, Cicero and Montaigne, the therapist takes on the humanist role of accompanying his patient in a dialogue that guides the metaphorical coming together of two inhabited worlds, often the lonely experience of suffering and the richness of the common world. We become better guides by through meeting and engaging with the works of great writers, artists, poets, and philosophers. Our subject is encounter and conversation. Our work is an elucidation of the experience of being together, rather than only a refinement of intellect or technique.

"Open and in Full View, Born for Company and Friendship"^{viii}

Montaigne stepped out of his workaday life to avoid "not so much the press of people as the press of business". Yet from what was "formerly [...] the most useless part of the house"^{ix} – his infamous tower – he was able to open up to a festive world of dialogue by essaying his experience with remarkable candour. Pen in hand, he beckons the reader to come along with him, to approach the *Essays* with the same authenticity and openness (Spears, 1988, p. 317). Montaigne challenges therapists to step out of the consultation room and to break out of the mold of scientific writing and speaking, into a world of real dialogue. In North America, the therapists that we see in the public arena are largely expert solution providers. They tell us how to live, spout statistics, and dispatch dire warnings about the latest mental illness. Montaigne encourages us to take a stand in a different type of discourse: broader, open-ended

conversations about societal issues, politics, science, and art. Our unique access to so much diverse human experience enables us to make important contributions to cultural dialogue. I admire the English therapists Theodore Dalrymple and Susie Orbach, who bring their vast clinical experience and conversational ability into mainstream debates on all sorts of issues. Recall that it was in England that the essay first made its mark. Montaigne's radically personal voice was embraced by the 18th century coffeehouse culture of conversation. It can be argued that the British are the true heirs of the Montaignian essay form. There has always been more room for the distinctive voices of essayists and therapists in British culture than in our own. On this side of the pond, with few exceptions, psychologists have lost touch with the idea of being a cheeky alternative. Freud was forced into this position and ever since we have been trying to claw our way back to legitimacy, back into the tower.

In this thesis, I have tried to take up the *Essays*' challenge to participate in real dialogue, to step into the public square, "in full view", so to speak. Essaying the *Essays* was a chance to practice what I preached and to avoid an impersonal dissertation that risked collecting dust on the shelf. By publishing in academic journals, and presenting at conferences, I think that I have made some inroads into the public sphere. However, I'm not sure that I have stepped far enough out of my own humanistic tower to reach students in scientific psychology. I wonder whether publishing in humanistic psychology journals is largely preaching to the choir:

And unison is an altogether boring quality in discussion.^x

On the other hand, if I were to succeed in publishing in a scientific journal, would my intended readers actually have the time or inclination to meander with me through the circular dialectic of a 40-page essay, as opposed to quickly gleaning information from the abstract and results sections of articles? Psychology graduate students commonly write in teams to co-publish 5 or 6 scientific articles during their degree. They need to create and acquire massive amounts of information. This is a very different paradigm of writing and reading than that of the humanities. An academic journal may not be the most hospitable place to meet my reader.

To better take up Montaigne on his challenge, and to better reach my intended reader, but above all to pursue my endless enjoyment of the *Essays*, I propose to write a book. I want to revisit and renew the conversation that has emerged in this thesis in a form that better speaks to student therapists. *In Good Company: Psychotherapists and the Wine-Maker from Bordeaux*, will be a companion book of very short and plainspoken musings on diverse student therapist experiences and questions, observed in the light of Montaigne's "gay and sociable wisdom"^{xi}. I see it as a friend in book form, outside of the context of journals and textbooks.

In Good Company will aim to entice readers, to ease them into the Montaignian world of essaying and the humanities. I want the reader to leisurely sample the essays, to perhaps encounter unexpected moments of connection and reflection. Montaigne himself eased into essaying, both as a reader and as a writer. His early essays are quite spare and sometimes no more than a page long, which is fitting because he preferred leafing through books to studying them. In fact, he boasts that it has been twenty years since he spent more than an hour with a book. Later, as his own *Essays* start to come to life, he irreverently concedes that two hours might be more appropriate.

I take my inspiration from Irvin D. Yalom's (2002) exceptional book, *The Gift of Therapy: An Open Letter to a New Generation of Therapists and Their Patients*. This book is a miscellany of advice and personal reflections, gathered into 85 brief chapters, or mini-essays. Yalom compiled what he considers his most important and useful pieces of wisdom gleaned from 45 years as a clinician. His book doesn't follow "any particular system or order", but rather his "passion" and "enthusiasm" (p. xix). He describes his text as having "an episodic, lurching quality." (p. xx) We are clearly in Montaignian territory, although he makes no explicit reference to the *Essays*.

I keep *The Gift of Therapy* on hand at my office because I find it remarkably calming to leaf through it before going into a session. The chapters speak lucidly about simple yet profound issues such as shaking your patient's hand, how to be supportive, or the importance of taking notes after a session. Reading a chapter or two of this book gives me a bit of

practical knowledge to hold onto during the initial uncertain moments with my patient. However, the true gift of *The Gift of Therapy*, is the palpable presence of the author. Yalom credits the presence of Rilke looking over his shoulder as he wrote the book, spurring him on to achieve the “honesty, inclusiveness and generosity of spirit” (p. xix) of *Letters to a Young Poet*. He succeeds; I feel the experienced Yalom at my side. When I read *The Gift of Therapy*, I feel more connected to myself and open to others because presence is a feeling that I am most myself when I am not alone. This is a therapeutic frame of mind, which helps to prepare me for the give and take of the upcoming session.

Although Yalom wrote the canonical textbook on existential psychotherapy and has had an extensive scientific career, his ideas about psychotherapy have come to be most vividly expressed through his novels. *The Gift of Therapy* is yet another departure for his writing, one which brings to mind essayist Robert Dassaix’s (2010) quip: “Novels have sweep. Essays are so *small*. As each of us is small, of course, when all is said and done” (p. 36).

In Good Company will be an invitation for students to judge their own clinical experiences against the lived experience of our friend from Bordeaux. I want to bring out Montaigne’s distinctive voice and encourage therapists to find their own. Just as the therapist is a privileged witness of his patient’s relationships, I will be a sort of privileged reader of the *Essays*, someone who is already in mid-conversation with the *Essays* and invites another reader to join in.

In order to prepare this book, I would like to teach a seminar on the *Essays* to student therapists. I hope to enliven the conversation by bringing in their experiences, questions, comments and suggestions as students, therapists, readers and writers. I will also draw on questions and themes that have arisen or even surprised me during this thesis: What is psychotherapy? How do you learn to practice psychotherapy? How is plain speech important in therapy? What is the place of theory in a particular encounter with a patient? How do love and friendship come into play in therapy? Why is writing so difficult and what does this mean for therapists?

In Good Company will bring out the natural kinship between essaying and therapy, and give a sense of the profound relevance of Montaigne's writings for our practice. I hope to help readers situate and reflect on our therapeutic thinking. But most importantly, I would like readers to feel as I do, that the amicable presence of Montaigne stands with me, shoulder to shoulder.

The “presences” that guide our life are mostly of this symbolic variety. [...] the parting words of a good friend, the reactions of an old teacher to what we said on a particular occasion, all stay with us in a durable way so we see and hear them again at the right time when we have to make a particular decision or find ourselves at the crossroads for some other reason. (Jager, personal communication, January, 2013)

I have always considered *The Gift of Therapy* to be a Renaissance book. It combines the orderliness of a commonplace book with the free-wheeling nature of the *Essays*, pivoting between teaching and relating. Interestingly, while writing this conclusion, I reread Yalom's introduction and found that he got the idea for his book when he chanced upon an exhibit of books from Renaissance England. He was surprised that three of the top-ten were how-to books: lists of tips or advice. He was equally surprised by his sudden desire to write one himself. *The Gift of Therapy* fits into a humanist literary tradition which includes the *Essays*, and also many of the velum-bound volumes that Montaigne kept on his bookshelf. Among the most dog-eared were Plutarch's *Moralia*, Seneca's *Moral Letters*, and Erasmus's *Adagia*. These works embody the humanist idea “that books, like conversation be guided by and contribute to the liveliness and pleasure of social life.” (O'Neill, 1982, p. 190) I would like *In Good Company* to offer therapy students a glimpse into their humanist literary lineage and inspire them to mingle with people outside of psychology.

Our curricula is filled with busyness and progress. We run experiments, administrate labs, teach classes, participate in conferences, conduct assessments, see patients, attend supervision, and apply for grants. I want my book to be an oasis – a place of meeting, not of problem solving – an opportunity to reconnect with ourselves, and with others, in a conversation about things we have always talked about, with questions that have resonated

throughout the centuries, and always will.

Do not read, as children do, to amuse yourself, or like the ambitious, for the purpose of instruction. No, read in order to live. (Flaubert, 1857)³

³ (Letter to Mlle Chantepie, June 6 1857, as cited in Frame, 1940, p. 61)

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Notes

ⁱ (S, I:56, 355)

Je propose des fantasmes informes et irresolues, [...] non pour établir la vérité, mais pour la chercher. (T-R, I:56, 355)

ⁱⁱ (I:10, my own translation)

et [je] me trouve plus par rencontre que par l'inquisition de mon jugement.
(T-R, I:10, 41-42)

ⁱⁱⁱ (S, I:40, 283)

« un certain commerce » (T-R, I:40, 246)

^{iv} (F, II:17, 605)

« Et puis, pour qui écrivez vous? » (T-R, II:17, 640)

^v (F, I:25, 123)

ceux cy, pour se vouloir eslever et gendарmer de ce sçavoir qui nage en la superficie de leur cervelle, vont s'ambarrassant et enpestrant sans cesse. [...] Ils cognoissent bien Galien, mais nullement le malade. (T-R, I:25, 138)

^{vi} (F, I:25, 125)

« Or il ne faut pas attacher le sçavoir à l'ame, il l'y faut incorporer; il ne l'en faut pas arrouser, il l'en faut teindre; » (T-R, I:25, 139)

^{vii} (S, I:26, 168)

« bien faict », « bien pleine » (T-R, I:25, 149)

^{viii} (F, III:3, 758)

« tout au dehors et en evidence, nay à la société et à l'amitié » (T-R, III:3, 801)

^{ix} (C, III:3)

« C'estoit au temps passé le lieu plus inutile de ma maison. » (T-R:III:3, 806)

^x (F, III:8, 855)

Et l'unisson est qualité de tout ennuyeuse en la conference. (T-R, III:8, 900)

^{xi} (F, III:5, 778)

« J'ayme une sagesse gaye et civile » (T-R, III:5, 822), ou

« sagesse [...] gaye et sociale » (T-R, III:13, 1097)

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