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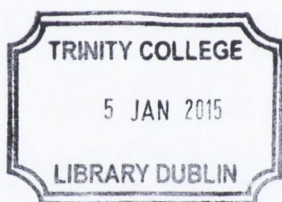
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Humanism and the Early Modern Essay

Darrell Jones



Thesis 10720

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Summary

This is a thesis about the emergence, establishment, and development of the early modern essay and the relationships of those processes to various forms of humanism. The essay is considered both as a conceptual entity, that is, a literary form or genre, and as a bibliographical sign, that is, a widely used title for printed books and pamphlets. Humanism is defined partly as the cultural promotion of classical and vernacular philology and civic engagement, and partly as the conviction that human agency and its attendant conditions were legitimate and essential objects of intellectual inquiry. The thesis finds that the origins of the essay were intimately related to traditional practices in humanist education, and that the early stages of the advancement of the essay directly contributed to the formulation and investigation of fundamental philosophical problems about human knowledge, human nature, and the place of humanity in the wider natural world.

Chapter 1, 'Interpreting the Essay: Florio and Montaigne', analyses in detail the most influential early English translation of the first printed book to feature the French word *essais* in its title. In each of its published forms, *Essais de Messire Michel de Montaigne* (1580; 1588; 1595) was a provisional representation of the variable relationships between reading and writing, contemplation and action, and an individual moral subject and the species to which he belonged. The version by John Florio that appeared as *The Essayes or Morall, Politike and Millitarie Discourses of Lo: Michaell de Montaigne* (1603) afforded its source a level of scholarly attention that was normally only granted to the texts of classical antiquity. Editorial and linguistic conflicts inevitably arose from Florio's humanist engagement with his author. However, in identifying Montaigne as an original and uniquely challenging writer, and in constructing for his work a critical apparatus that explicitly drew attention to his intellectual and pedagogical credentials, the translator and his colleagues significantly enhanced the already burgeoning reputation of a distinctive and purportedly archetypal essayist whose philosophical and aesthetic achievements were destined to remain inimitable.

In Chapters 2 and 3, attention turns to the major English successor to Montaigne: the essayist, politician, and legal and philosophical reformer, Francis Bacon. In biographical terms, the successive editions of Bacon's *Essayes* (1597; 1612; 1625) register the author's progress from the periphery to the centre and ultimately beyond the pale of courtly power and influence. During that time, Bacon used his *Essayes* in his repeatedly frustrated attempts to effect comprehensive natural philosophical reform for the benefit and in the service of the state. Chapter 2, 'The Advancement of the Essay I: Scepticism and Reform', considers Bacon's philosophical proposals as pragmatic solutions to sceptical problems that Montaigne, along with various other contemporaries, had raised. Chapter 3, 'The Advancement of the Essay II: The Nature of Character', describes the evolution of the contacts and exchanges between Bacon's investigations of the types of human character and the principles, values, and means of organization on which the success of his broader project would depend. Both chapters treat Bacon's *Essayes* as a series of exercises in the rhetoric and the psychology of knowledge whose general objective was to facilitate the advancement of an ethically productive society. Crucial to this objective were the distinctions that Bacon repeatedly drew between theological interpretations of the significance of phenomena and philosophical explanations of their nature, distinctions which were nevertheless directed and informed by the author's promotion of the role of Christian charity in the processes of mental and moral development.

Montaigne, Florio, and Bacon emerge as the central historical figures of the thesis. However, another part of its aim is to demonstrate something of the range and diversity of aesthetic tastes and philosophical positions that the early modern essay represents. Accordingly, all three chapters draw attention to the various roles played by relatively minor early modern essayists, including Sir William Cornwallis, Samuel Daniel, Richard Brathwaite, and John Stephens, in the formation, delineation, and ongoing expansion of the genre. Throughout, the thesis attempts both to establish and clarify contemporary understandings of the terms and practices that it considers, and to extend the range of legitimate and profitable objects of study in a field whose historical, cultural, and philosophical significances have yet to be fully understood.

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Finally, this thesis is dedicated to the memory of my dad, Peter W. Jones, who left this world behind him in August 2010. I miss him more than I can say.

Note on Editions and Typography

In negotiating and analysing John Florio's 1603 translation of Montaigne's *Essais*, I have continually relied on versions of the text by modern translators and editors. Three of these have been indispensable. The translation by M. A. Screech, *The Complete Essays* (London: Penguin, 1991; repr. 2003), brought into relief the emphases and anomalies of Florio's distinctive style. The textual variants recorded in the recent Pléiade edition, *Les Essais* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), along with the digital images of the 'Bordeaux Copy' available through the University of Chicago's online *Montaigne Project* [<http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/efts/ARTFL/projects/montaigne>] (2004-), enabled me to formulate working hypotheses about some of Florio's editorial decisions. Where appropriate, passages from Montaigne's French are cited and referenced according to the Pléiade edition.

Generally speaking, I have tried to be faithful in reproducing the spelling, punctuation, and typographical features of the texts from which I have quoted. There are, however, a number of exceptions to this rule. In dealing with unedited early modern texts, I have followed the example of *The Oxford Francis Bacon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996-) by modernizing the long early modern 's' and using italic characters to represent expansions of contractions. I have also removed hyphens denoting line and page breaks in both edited and unedited texts and modernized usage of 'i/j' and 'u/v' in titles of printed works. Finally, I have silently emended capital letters to the lower case when quotations from the beginning of sentences occur in the middle of sentences of my own.

Translations of Latin passages follow those provided by the editors of the relevant texts.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used for the major texts, editions, and websites to which this thesis refers.

- AL *OFB*, iv: *The Advancement of Learning*, ed. Michael Kiernan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000).
- DAS Francis Bacon, *Of the Advancement and Proficiency of Learning or the Partitions of Sciences*, tr. Gilbert Wats (Oxford, 1640).
- E12 *The Essaies of S^r Francis Bacon Knight, the Kings Solliciter Generall* (London, 1612).
- E25 Sir Francis Bacon, *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall*, ed. Michael Kiernan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).
- E97 Francis Bacon, *Essayes. Religious Meditations. Places of Perswasion and Disswasion* (London, 1597).
- ESTC *English Short Title Catalogue* [<http://estc.bl.uk>].
- F *The Essayes or Morall, Politike and Millitarie Discourses of Lo: Michaell de Montaigne*, tr. John Florio (London, 1603).
- IM *OFB*, xi: *The Instauration magna Part II: Novum organum and Associated Texts*, ed. Graham Rees with Maria Wakely (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004).
- M Michel de Montaigne, *Les Essais*, ed. Jean Balsamo, Michel Magnien, and Catherine Magnien-Simonin (Paris: Gallimard, 2007).
- ODNB *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); online edn. [<http://oxforddnb.com>] (2004-).
- OED *Oxford English Dictionary* [<http://oed.com>].

- OFB* *The Oxford Francis Bacon*, ed. Graham Rees and Lisa Jardine,
15 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996-).
- SEH* *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding, Robert Leslie
Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath, 14 vols. (London: Longman,
1861-79).

And how many stories have I glanced-at therein, that speake not a word,
which whosoever shall vnfolde, may from them draw infinit Essayes?

Michel de Montaigne, tr. John Florio (1603)

Introduction

Humanism and the Early Modern Essay

Introduction: what is an essay?

In 1603, in the dedication to Book II of *The Essayes or Morall, Politike and Millitarie Discourses of Lo: Michaell de Montaigne*, the Frenchman's translator, John Florio, made a bold assertion of his author's originality. 'Heere shines in him the greatest wit without example, without exception,' Florio wrote, 'deserving for his composition to be entituled, Sole-Maister of Essayes: whose maister-poynt is this, none was before him, who he might imitate; none hath come after him who could well imitate, or at most equall him: and a wonder it is, he therein should be perfectest, whereof he is first Authour' (F, sig. R3r).¹ Undoubtedly, Montaigne was a profound and pioneering writer whose influence as a student both of his own and of others' humanity is evident throughout the early modern period and beyond. However, the true nature of his historical achievement and contribution has proved difficult for modern scholars to determine. On the one hand, R. A. Sayce wrote of Montaigne that 'the title he chose for his book constitutes in itself one of his greatest claims to originality': as he observed, some time around 1578 the Frenchman became 'the first to use the word "essay" in its modern sense', so that 'the word as well as the thing is his own'; moreover, some of the author's contemporaries apparently found the concept of the essay 'disturbingly new'.² On the other hand, M. A. Screech has suggested that 'Montaigne's decision to write about himself merits not only the approval implied by the word "original" in English but the oddness implied by "original" in French', so

¹ Florio's description of Montaigne is an adaptation of the author's own description of Homer: see F, ll.36.431.

² R. A. Sayce, *The Essays of Montaigne: A Critical Exploration* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972), pp. 19-22. *Essais de Messire Michel de Montaigne* was first published in Bordeaux in 1580; revised and expanded editions were published in Paris in 1588 and posthumously in 1595.

that although ‘nobody in Western culture had ever done what Montaigne set out to do’, the author cannot straightforwardly be identified as the originator of a subsequently recognizable genre. According to Screech, in fact, ‘Montaigne did not write “essays” at all: ‘he wrote a volume called *Essais de Michel de Montaigne*, and we call them his *Essays* for convenience’.³ In the service of different arguments, both Screech and Sayce drew attention to the polysemic properties of the crucially operative word: *essais* could refer to the works or attempts of an apprentice, to assays of metals and to tests or trials of thoughts, or to the general or specific experiences and experiments that life in human society involves.

Disagreement about the generic significance of Montaigne’s title was similarly common among the earliest English writers to adopt it. In 1601, Sir William Cornwallis claimed to consider ‘neither *Plutarche’s* nor none of these aunient short manner of writings nor *Montaigne’s* nor such of this latter time to bee rightly tearmed Essayes; for though they be short, yet they are strong and able to endure the sharpest tryall’. For the twenty-one-year-old Cornwallis, the true essayists were minor writers such as himself, ‘but newly bound Prentise to the inquisition of knowledge’, who used ‘these papers as a Painter’s boy a board, that is trying to bring his hand and his fancie acquainted’.⁴ A decade or so later, an older and more ambitious writer, Francis Bacon, recorded a different perspective on the subject in a shelved dedication to the second edition of his *Essaies*. ‘The word is late,’ wrote Bacon, ‘but the thing is aunient. For *Senecaes* Epistles to *Lucilius*, yf you marke them well, are but *Essaies*,—That is dispersed Meditations, though conveyed in the forme of Epistles’ (E25, Appendix ii, p. 317).⁵ Evidently, by the early years of the seventeenth century an association of sorts had been

³ M. A. Screech, *Montaigne & Melancholy: The Wisdom of the Essays* (London: Duckworth, 1983), pp. 6 and 13.

⁴ Sir William Cornwallis, *Essayes* (London, 1600-1601), sig. [2G8]v.

⁵ The intended recipient of Bacon’s dedication, the young Prince Henry, Prince of Wales, died before the edition went to press in 1612. Bacon’s *Essayes* were first published along with his *Meditationes Sacrae* and *Of the Coulers of Good and Euill* in London in 1597; the third and final lifetime edition appeared in 1625.

established between Montaigne's approach to writing and that of certain classical authors: whereas Cornwallis drew a qualitative distinction between his first attempts and the masterpieces of his illustrious predecessors, Bacon identified an enduring philosophical tradition within which his essays or meditations deserved a place. At the same time, Montaigne's title was already being applied to a much wider range of publications than either Bacon or Cornwallis was prepared to suggest: as well as short pieces of personal or philosophical prose, the bibliographical category of the essay almost immediately included poems, translations, and extended treatises on topics from theology to travel.⁶ The prevailing uncertainty surrounding the novel designation was succinctly expressed by Thomas Tuke in both the title and the preface to his *New Essayes: Meditations, and Vowes* of 1614. 'Quarrell not with the name, if thou dislike not the nature', Tuke advised his readers. 'If thou dislike the name, call it what thou wilt.'⁷ In the years and decades that followed, as authors and booksellers learned to exploit the popular currency of the essay title, the heterogeneous genre that Montaigne had inadvertently named continued to become increasingly diverse.

The aim of this introduction is to formulate some questions about the nature and historical significance of the essay which the remainder of the thesis will investigate and attempt to answer. In order to do so, the introduction first provides an overview of the main traditions or schools of modern critical thought about the essay; it then constructs a theoretically and

⁶ Examples include King James VI of Scotland, *The Essayes of a Prentise, in the Divine Art of Poesie* (Edinburgh, 1584); Guillaume de Salluste Du Bartas, *The Second Weeke or Childhood of the World*, tr. Josuah Sylvester, including *An Essaie of the Second Weeke*, dedicated to Francis Bacon's brother, Anthony (London, 1598); J[ohn] C[ooke], *An Essaie in 52. English Epigrams* (London, [1604?]); Sir Thomas Palmer, *An Essay of the Meanes How to Make our Travailes, into Forraine Countries, the More Profitable and Honourable* (London, 1606); Nicholas Byfield, *The Signes or an Essay Concerning the Assurance of Gods Love, and Mans Salvation; Gathered Out of the Holy Scriptures* (London, 1614).

⁷ Thomas Tuke, *New Essayes: Meditations, and Vowes: Including in Them the Chiefe Duties of a Christian, Both for Faith, and Manners* (London, 1614), sig. [A6]r-v.

historiographically informed methodology by means of which the most relevant and crucial critical problems can be identified, explicated, and understood. The specific questions that the introduction ultimately produces are the preliminary results of these critical and methodological inquiries.

Critical perspectives

In 1926, Elbert Thompson suggested that two distinct approaches were possible to the history of the early modern essay. On the one hand, the likes of Bacon, Cornwallis, Owen Felltham, and John Hall identified 'brevity, informality, and amateurishness' as the 'criteria' of their chosen form, and 'for a long time this original conception of the essay prevailed'. On the other hand, the term eventually came to be used 'in a much broader sense', so that 'frequently toward the close of the [seventeenth] century, one finds titles such as [Daniel] Defoe's *Essay upon Projects* [London, 1697], [Joseph] Glanvil's *Essays upon Several Important Subjects in Philosophy and Religion* [London, 1676] and [Matthew Tindal's] *An Essay upon the Power of the Magistrate* [London, 1697]'. Furthermore, 'essays, so-called, were also written in verse as well as prose', so that 'the old criteria, brevity, informality, and self-gratification, no longer hold'. Settling on the first of his two approaches, Thompson proposed that 'one may restrict one's survey, as consistently as is possible, to those briefer pieces of prose that first passed as essays'.⁸ On the grounds, that is, that it was a recognized and acknowledged genre which could and did exist independently of the name, Thompson decided to devote his study to a comprehensive analysis of the sources, characteristics, and style of the seventeenth-century English essay.

Thompson's work remains a useful resource for scholars with an interest in the history of the early modern essay. Even so, the legitimacy of the approach

⁸ Elbert N. S. Thompson, *The Seventeenth-Century English Essay* (1926; repr. New York: Haskell House, 1967), pp. 8-9.

that he adopted does not necessarily entail or imply any lack of validity in the strategy that he rejected. Indeed, the potential value of a more nominalistic line of inquiry was briefly suggested by A. M. Boase in 1968 and compellingly demonstrated by Scott Black in 2006. Finding that the use of the essay title in early modern France and Britain in fact ‘presents a much wider variety than is commonly realized’, Boase drew attention to a series of particularly significant instances of its employment. First, he pointed out that ‘sixteenth- and earlier seventeenth-century usage seems to show a connection with poetry at least as much as with prose’: he cited *Les Essais poétiques de Guillaume du Peyrat* (Tours, 1593) and *The Poeticall Essayes of Sam. Danyel* (London, 1599) among his examples. Second, he observed that René Descartes referred to his early treatises on optics, meteorology, and geometry as his *Essais*, both in his personal correspondence and on the title page of the *Discours de la méthode* (Leyden, 1637) to which they were first appended. Third, Boase remarked that the ‘ever wider range of works’ that used the essay title after 1650 ‘tended to be religious or ethical in character’: he referred to William Master’s *Essayes and Observations Theological and Morall* (London, 1653) and Pierre Nicole’s *Essais de morale* (Paris, 1671) as illustrations. Finally, he showed that members of the early Royal Society such as Seth Ward, Robert Boyle, and John Locke saw fit to apply the name to some of their most influential philosophical and natural philosophical writings: Boyle’s *Certain Physiological Essays* (London, 1661) set something of a trend in this regard, while Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding* (London, 1690) continued to inform many of the most important intellectual debates until well into the eighteenth century.⁹ Whereas Boase drew few conclusions from his survey about the nature or character of the early modern essay, Black has elaborated from a comparable set of bibliographical data a broad ‘generic profile’ which closely associates the history of the essay with a dynamic history of continuously ‘adaptive’ reading. As he explains, ‘essays enable a practice of engagement through which, on the one hand, readers participate in their cultures, and, on

⁹ A. M. Boase, ‘The Early History of the *Essai* Title in France and Britain’, in J. C. Ireson, I. D. McFarlane, and Garnet Rees (eds.), *Studies in French Literature Presented to H. W. Lawton by Colleagues Pupils and Friends* (Manchester: Manchester University Press and New York: Barnes & Noble, 1968), pp. 67-73.

the other, cultures evolve through such myriad and unpredictable uses of the genre'.¹⁰

The inclusive and descriptive nature of Boase's and Black's researches is unusual. In one way or another, most modern critics and historians of the essay have adopted versions of Thompson's more restrictive and prescriptive approach. Positing the existence of an independent essay genre, they have attempted to define its essential nature by identifying and describing the formal and thematic preferences of practitioners whose works are regarded as typical. While many useful perspectives have been generated by this process, no consensus has yet been established about the true generic identity of the essay. Arguably the most crucial point of disagreement has been as much historical as critical: whereas some commentators have concurred with Florio's assertion that Montaigne was the inventor of the essay, others have accepted Bacon's argument that the genre existed for many centuries before the Frenchman first gave it a name. As long ago as 1913, the anthologist Ernest Rhys proposed a conservative solution to the problem: although Florio's translation of Montaigne's essays 'had the effect of setting up the form as a recognized *genre* in prose', medieval fragments by Geoffrey Chaucer and William Caxton show that English writers held 'a predisposition to the essay, long before there was any conscious and repeated use of the form itself'.¹¹ Since then, more radical suggestions about the origins of the essay have occasionally been advanced. In 1977, J. A. Cuddon stated in his *Dictionary of Literary Terms* that the essay 'was known to the Classical writers' and that 'the *Characters* of Theophrastus (3rd c. B.C.), *The Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius (2nd c. A.D.) and Seneca's *Epistle to Lucilius* (1st c. A.D.) all qualify for inclusion in this genre'.¹² More recently, John

¹⁰ Scott Black, *Of Essays and Reading in Early Modern Britain* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 7 and 10.

¹¹ Ernest Rhys and Lloyd Vaughan (eds.), *A Century of English Essays: From Caxton to Belloc* (1913; repr. London: Dent and New York: Dutton & Co., 1935), p. vii.

¹² J. A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* (London: Deutsch, 1977), p. 239.

Cuddon's view is to some extent corroborated by a number of modern editors and translators: Robin Campbell argued that 'Seneca if anyone is the founder of the Essay'

D'Agata has traced the invention of the form almost as far back as the invention of writing itself: the ancient Sumerian 'List of Ziusudra' is, he observes, 'the beginning of an alternative to nonfiction, the beginning of a form that's not propelled by information, but one compelled instead by individual expression – by inquiry, by opinion, by wonder, by doubt'; as such, he argues, this five thousand-year-old letter to no-one can legitimately be called 'the first essay in the world'.¹³

While some critics have attempted to define the essay as an attitude towards the practice of writing which is capable of manifesting itself at all times and in all places, others have identified it more or less precisely as an originally or distinctively early modern genre. In a study of Renaissance concepts of genre which was posthumously published in 1973, Rosalie Colie claimed that the essay did not become 'an officially noticed genre' until it was evaluated as such by Joseph Addison and Samuel Johnson in the eighteenth century.¹⁴ A few years later, Ted-Larry Pebworth disagreed, arguing that a 'distinguishable' essay genre 'emerged concurrently with the anti-Ciceronian movements in prose style in the late sixteenth century', and that it had been 'officially recognized' by the 1640s, when it was 'sanctioned for use as a grammar school and university exercise'.¹⁵ For Pebworth, the early English essay could not adequately be defined by its 'superficial characteristics' alone: instead, the 'essentially reflective' intention of the likes of Bacon, Cornwallis, Felltham, and Ben Jonson was to record 'a mind apparently roaming freely – using the devices of definition, partition, contrast, antithesis, illustration, and example,

in his edition of the Roman author's *Letters from a Stoic* (London: Penguin, 1969), pp. 20-21, while English-language selections from Plutarch's *Moralia* have been published as *Moral Essays*, tr. Rex Warner (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971) and *Essays*, tr. Robin Waterfield (London: Penguin, 1992).

¹³ John D'Agata (ed.), *The Lost Origins of the Essay* (Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf, 2009), p. 4.

¹⁴ Rosalie L. Colie, *The Resources of Kind: Genre-Theory in the Renaissance*, ed. Barbara K. Lewalski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 89.

¹⁵ Ted-Larry Pebworth, 'Not Being, but Passing: Defining the Early English Essay', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 10 (1977), 17-27 (pp. 17 and 20-21).

to be sure, but calling upon them as they naturally suggest themselves in a free association of ideas'.¹⁶ A closely related argument was made by Michael Hall in 1989. Drawing attention to the impact on early modern writers of contemporary advancements in astronomy and geography, Hall argued that works by Montaigne, Bacon, John Donne, and Sir Thomas Browne 'exhibit not only similar rhetorical strategies but also a common attitude, a spirit of exploration', so that 'in certain important respects the essay emerged in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries as a product of the Renaissance "idea" of discovery and in response to it'.¹⁷ More recently, George Douglas Atkins has succinctly summarized the fundamental historiographical convictions which most of those critics who have identified the essay as a specifically early modern invention have shared. 'Whatever the similarity between the prose of Seneca and Plutarch and that of Europeans a millennium and a half later,' he wrote, 'there was no direct link and certainly no ongoing tradition. Most important, nothing like the self-explorations of Montaigne had ever appeared. His "efforts," mere trials or attempts, were genuinely different, representing something new.' Moreover, 'in Montaigne's efforts, in Bacon's and in Cornwallis's, the essayist appears to be a product of the Renaissance. He maps the microcosm just as cartographers were beginning to chart the macrocosm, the latter efforts made possible by the voyages of the great explorers Columbus, Magellan, Cortez, de Gama, and others.'¹⁸ For Atkins, as for Colie, Peabworth, and Hall, Montaigne initiated a process of personal exploration and discovery which his English successors variously adapted to their particular interests and needs. In fact, the value of that process was recognized not only by essayists, but also by writers in other forms and genres to which 'essay-like' modes of discourse were considered appropriate. Citing the contemporary currency of the works of Montaigne and Cornwallis, James Shapiro has suggested that the revolutionary soliloquies

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

¹⁷ Michael L. Hall, 'The Emergence of the Essay and the Idea of Discovery', in Alexander J. Butrym (ed.), *Essays on the Essay: Redefining the Genre* (Athens, GA and London: University of Georgia Press, 1989), pp. 73-91 (p. 73).

¹⁸ G. Douglas Atkins, *Tracing the Essay: Through Experience to Truth* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2005), pp. 29 and 31-2.

that William Shakespeare wrote for *Hamlet* in 1599 were informed and inspired by the recent emergence of the personally subjective essay.¹⁹

Even within the group of scholars who have argued for the novelty or distinctiveness of the early modern essay, some have emphasized its resistance to generic descriptions and definitions which aim to be comprehensive or categorical. The central problem to which these scholars have repeatedly drawn attention is that the two most original and influential of all early modern essayists, Montaigne and Bacon, spent their lives producing works which seem profoundly at odds in terms of form, style, intention, and effect. In 1991, Kenneth Alan Hovey revisited the conclusions about the intellectual relationship between the two writers that had been established over sixty years earlier by Pierre Villey and Jacob Zeitlin.²⁰ As Hovey demonstrated, the fact that some such relationship existed is beyond doubt: there is 'indirect but clear' evidence that Bacon had personal knowledge of Montaigne through the Bordeaux connections of his older brother Anthony; more to the point, there were two occasions towards the end of his career on which Bacon explicitly, if somewhat disparagingly, made reference to Montaigne in print.²¹ Accordingly, whereas Villey and Zeitlin had sought, and failed to find, evidence that Bacon had tried to emulate Montaigne, Hovey looked instead for signs of a 'negative influence' which might explain the dissimilarities between the two essayists' productions. 'In fact,' he contended, 'careful examination of the 1625 *Essays* shows that Bacon formulated his own examples of essay writing to oppose the principles on which the French master grounded the novel form.' In particular, Hovey

¹⁹ James Shapiro, *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), pp. 327-38.

²⁰ Pierre Villey, *Montaigne et François Bacon* (1913; repr. Geneva: Slatkine, 1973); Jacob Zeitlin, 'The Development of Bacon's Essays – With Special Reference to the Question of Montaigne's Influence upon Them', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 27 (1928), 496-519.

²¹ Kenneth Alan Hovey, "'Mountaigny Saith Prettily": Bacon's French and the Essay', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 106 (1991), 71-82 (pp. 72-3). The citations in question occur in *DAS*, p. 407 and *E25*: 'Of Truth', pp. 8-9.

argued that Bacon considered Montaigne to be a philosophical 'extremist' whose sceptical views required moderation and modification, and that Bacon's lifetime ambition was to reconcile 'the traditional opposition between the active and the contemplative lives' which his predecessor had 'so strongly reinforced'.²² Another perspective on the problem was offered by John Lee in an article which appeared in 2000. Although he identified Seneca, Cicero, and Plutarch as antecedents and suggested that the Elizabethan soldier Thomas Churchyard was 'writing essays before the name', Lee maintained that 'in some ways, Bacon's and Montaigne's essays are different from those that come before and most of those that follow'. Both authors, he observed, employed humanist methods of textual analysis in the composition and revision of their works, and both 'discovered that writing sequences of essays, as opposed to single essays, allowed them to exploit the provisional nature of the essay in new ways'. Moreover, both Montaigne and Bacon were 'deeply concerned with the nature and status of human knowledge'; however, the Frenchman was far more sceptical than his successor about the possibility of identifying or recognizing objective truth. 'Where Bacon had used the essay as a mode of perception,' Lee concluded, 'Montaigne uses it as a mode of expression.'²³

Analyses such as those of Villey, Zeitlin, Hovey, and Lee have encouraged some critics to suggest that there existed two distinct modes or traditions of the early modern essay: one begun by Montaigne and continued by Cornwallis; the other instigated by Bacon and carried on by him as well. Fred Parker alluded to this principle in 2003 when he described Bacon's essays as having 'offered an alternative model' to the one that Montaigne had established, and the Frenchman's 'legacy' as having proved by far the more successful and enduring: 'in many of the essays that claim that title,' he observed, 'as well as in some that do not, Montaigne's presence is written

²² Ibid., pp. 72-3 and 79.

²³ John Lee, 'The English Renaissance Essay: Churchyard, Cornwallis, Florio's Montaigne and Bacon', in Michael Hattaway (ed.), *A Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 600-608 (pp. 601-2 and 607).

into the genre'; consequently, there was an 'implicit understanding' among seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writers as to what the essay did and did not involve. Citing prefaces, meditations, and polemics alongside poems, inquiries, and fictions, Parker argued that the commonly held conception was 'that an essay is not a set treatise but a work of literary creation, that it expresses evidence of the thinking self within the process of thinking, rather than an accumulation of thought or thoughts, and that it can thereby deal with a truth too subtle or too evasive to be accessible to direct rational inquiry or impersonal philosophical discourse'.²⁴ Montaigne's most recent biographer, Sarah Bakewell, has taken a comparable view of her subject's posthumous influence. Maintaining that 'the title is almost the only point of similarity' between Montaigne's and Bacon's essays, Bakewell suggests that 'in almost every case' it was from the Frenchman that seventeenth-century English essayists 'took their style of writing and thinking'. Apparently, 'very few English essays after the early seventeenth century were philosophically rigorous stabs of thought on important topics'. Instead, 'almost all were delightful rambles about nothing in particular', and Cornwallis's essays were 'typical' of this prevailing, familiar mode.²⁵ Unlike Parker, Bakewell seems to have derived her conclusions from a survey of early modern works whose titles include the word *Essays*. Given the results of Boase's and Black's inquiries, her findings must be considered incomplete.

While the historiographical validity of Bakewell's analysis appears questionable, her argument that early modern essays were rarely philosophically rigorous gains a certain amount of credit from the theoretical proposition that the essay is essentially non- or anti-scientific. Among Anglophone theorists, the currency of this hypothesis is directly attributable to the publication in 1974 and 1984 respectively of English translations of essays on the essay by Georg Lukács and Theodor Adorno. Lukács's epistolary preface 'On the Nature and Form of the Essay' was first published in

²⁴ Fred Parker, *Scepticism and Literature: An Essay on Pope, Hume, Sterne, and Johnson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 45-6.

²⁵ Sarah Bakewell, *How to Live: A Life of Montaigne in One Question and Twenty Attempts at an Answer* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2010), pp. 280-81.

Hungarian in 1910 and in German the following year. Addressed to the author's friend Leo Popper, it attempts to define the essay by differentiating it from the intellectual disciplines to which it seems to be most intimately related. On the one hand, Lukács described the critical essay '(almost purely symbolically and non-essentially)' as 'an art form'. On the other, he maintained that his concern for it was for 'something that remains untouched by the complete or approximate attainment of scientific goals'. As he explained, 'science affects us by its contents, art by its forms; science offers us facts and the relationships between facts, but art offers us souls and destinies': while there seems to be 'no replacement and no transition' between the two, the essay offers 'an entirely different kind of expression of the human temperament, which usually takes the form of writing about the arts', but which sometimes manages to address its questions 'directly to life itself'.²⁶ Naturally enough, Lukács considered Plato to be 'the greatest essayist who ever lived or wrote', and 'the life of Socrates' to be 'the typical life for the essay form'.²⁷ However, he also reserved special praise for 'the great *Sieur de Montaigne*', and offered a suggestion as to what the Frenchman might have been thinking 'when he gave his writings the wonderfully elegant and apt title of "Essays"'. For Lukács, 'the simple modesty of this word is an arrogant courtesy': the essayist not only acknowledges 'the eternal smallness of the most profound work of the intellect in face of life', but 'even emphasizes it with ironic modesty'.²⁸ Even so, if Plato and Montaigne were among 'the greatest essayists' in that 'their vision of life has transcended the sphere of science', achievements such as theirs remained the awe-inspiring exception rather than the general, mundane rule. In practice, Lukács lamented, 'the essay form has not yet, today, travelled the road to independence which its sister, poetry, covered long ago – the road of development from a primitive, undifferentiated unity with science, ethics and art'.²⁹

²⁶ Georg Lukács, *Soul and Form*, tr. Anna Bostock (London: Merlin, 1974), pp. 2-3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Although he vaguely referred to the courses of time and teleology, Lukács did not so much offer a history of the essay as a pragmatic diagnosis and a cure. In 'The Essay as Form', which first appeared in German in 1958, Adorno made a similar attempt. The influence of his predecessor is palpable throughout: Lukács's prefatory letter was quoted twice in Adorno's opening lines, and his verdicts on the essay and essayists were explicitly referred to, with varying degrees of approbation and censure, on at least three further separate occasions. Much could be said about the nature and significance of these interactions.³⁰ However, one aspect of the relationship demands particularly close attention. In his efforts to add detail and definition to Lukács's historical outline, Adorno made a series of deeply problematic, if not downright paradoxical, pronouncements. First, he suggested that 'since the time of Bacon, who was himself an essayist, empiricism – no less than rationalism – has been "method"' and that 'doubt about the unconditional priority of method was raised, in the actual process of thought, almost exclusively by the essay'.³¹ Refusing to allow Bacon's dual role as essayist and methodologist to become more than an ironic aside, Adorno proceeded instead to quote at length from Lukács's assessment of Montaigne. Second, Adorno remarked that 'the essay gently defies the ideals of *clara et distincta perceptio* and of absolute certainty' and that 'on the whole it could be interpreted as a protest against the four rules that Descartes' *Discourse on Method* sets up at the beginning of modern Western science and its theory'.³² He went on to rehearse and scrutinize three of the four Cartesian rules without so much as mentioning the *Essais de cette méthode* to which Descartes presented his *Discours* as an introduction. Finally, Adorno stated that 'historically the essay is related to rhetoric, which the scientific mentality, since Descartes and Bacon, has always wanted to do away with'.³³ In fact, Brian Vickers has shown

³⁰ See Peter Uwe Hohendahl, 'The Scholar, the Intellectual, and the Essay: Weber, Lukács, Adorno, and Postwar Germany', *German Quarterly*, 70 (1997), 217-32 (esp. pp. 219-25).

³¹ T. W. Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', tr. Bob Hullot-Kentor and Frederic Will, *New German Critique*, 32 (1984), 151-71 (p. 157).

³² *Ibid.*, p. 161.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

that Bacon assigned rhetoric 'a positively benign role in social life and individual psychology', while Stephen Gaukroger has demonstrated that classical theories of rhetoric fundamentally shaped and directed the development of Descartes's epistemology.³⁴

Since its translation into English, Adorno's has appeared to some critics to be a highly potent, extremely useful, and evidently irresistible version of events. In 1988, Graham Good adopted a 'historico-philosophical' approach to the essay which was, he said, 'derived largely from the texts of Lukács and Adorno', and in particular from their more or less conjectural accounts of the history of interdisciplinary relations: while he observed that 'Montaigne's critical or skeptical attitude to sources allies his writing with empirical science', and that 'Bacon, of course, was one of its founders', he nevertheless maintained that 'the essay did not become part of this new mode of learning, despite certain affinities'. According to Good's version of history, the essay form 'emerges during the reorganization of knowledge in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, but it is not actually incorporated into the "new philosophy" of the seventeenth century': apparently, the early modern essay represented both the expansive extent of human endeavour and the limits and limitations of 'what we now call "science"'. As in Adorno's work, Descartes functioned as a paradoxical index of the value and validity of the analysis: 'Descartes wanted a fresh start for knowledge,' wrote Good, 'but the essay starts afresh every time'.³⁵ A similar point was made by R. Lane Kauffmann in an essay on the essay which appeared the following year. 'Though Montaigne did not foresee the imminent triumph of scientific method,' argued Kauffmann, 'his own "unmethodical method", grounded in the somatic self, is already an implicit critique of instrumental reason': whereas Descartes thought, and therefore was, he explained, 'Montaigne

³⁴ Brian Vickers, 'The myth of Francis Bacon's "anti-humanism"', in Jill Kraye and M. W. F. Stone (eds.), *Humanism and Early Modern Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 135-58 (p. 152); Stephen Gaukroger, *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 115-24.

³⁵ Graham Good, *The Observing Self: Rediscovering the Essay* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. vii-viii and 3-4.

managed to think and to exist at the same time'. Like Good, Kauffmann drew extensively, though not uncritically, on the theories of Lukács and Adorno. And although he conceived of 'essaying' as 'an *extradisciplinary* mode of thought', he, too, advanced the tacit proposition that some *Essais*, such as those of Descartes, are less worthy of their title than others.³⁶

Methodology

In 2012, an anthology was published which goes some way towards beginning to make sense of the competing and possibly irreconcilable claims that have been made about the essay over the last four and a half centuries of its development. Carl Klaus and Ned Stuckey-French's *Essayists on the Essay* gathers together texts and excerpts by fifty authors from Montaigne, Cornwallis, and Bacon to the contemporary radio and video broadcasters John Bresland and Jeff Porter. While they acknowledge the existence of 'precursors of the essay' in classical European and ancient Asian cultures, the editors justify their selected point of origin by observing that Montaigne was not only 'the first essayist to reflect on the nature and form of the essay' but also 'its major progenitor, having named it and produced such an enduringly influential book of essays'.³⁷ In his introduction to the volume, Klaus remarks that 'essayists so often concur on a few crucial issues that their convergence suggests the key elements of a collective poetics'. Citing Montaigne, Addison, and Johnson along with more modern writers such as Adorno, E. B. White, and William H. Gass, he proposes a contrast with systematized forms of discourse, an emphasis on artistic discipline and coherence, and the representation of personalities and personas as elements of the form that its more reflective practitioners have consistently considered to be essential. If Klaus's survey seems to confirm rather than to question some of the

³⁶ R. Lane Kauffmann, 'The Skewed Path: Essaying as Unmethodical Method', in Butrym (ed.), *Essays on the Essay*, pp. 221-40 (pp. 225 and 238).

³⁷ Carl H. Klaus and Ned Stuckey-French (eds.), *Essayists on the Essay: Montaigne to Our Time* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2012), p. xii.

prevailing critical orthodoxies, it does so in the progressive recognition ‘that a methodology for understanding the essay is long overdue’.³⁸ Equally significantly, Stuckey-French’s bibliography includes dedications, prefaces, and chapters from writers whose positions in the history of the genre have rarely, if ever, received attention: alongside texts by Bacon, Cornwallis, Felltham, and Sir William Temple, his list of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century essays on the essay features introductions and addresses by Robert Boyle and his Royal Society colleague Joseph Glanvill.³⁹

By publishing their source book, Klaus and Stuckey-French hope to stimulate the kind of research that will contribute to the production of a collective poetics of the essay. The concerns of this thesis are complementary, rather than subordinate, to that objective. As well as investigating the ways and means by which the concept of the essay was constructed and maintained by its major early modern exponents, the thesis seeks to explore the roles that essayists played in the development of new perspectives and pursuits in contemporary literary and intellectual culture. In combining these aims, the thesis conceives of a range of early modern essays as what Warren Boutcher has referred to as ‘applied texts’. For Boutcher, an applied text is ‘the historically and culturally conditioned pattern of habitual perception and purposive reaction that can be inferred from copies of books when combined with other evidence’; its goal is to reveal ‘the social relations, occasions, and conventions shaping the producers’ patterns of intention in and the reader’s patterns of interaction with the book’. As well as looking ‘more contingent, more selective, more fashioned, and more directed’ than a purely aesthetic or merely adjunctive text, a successfully applied text ‘may reveal fractures, discontinuities, and incommensurabilities within a tradition held to have originated with a great work or a whole series of great works and to have achieved continuity by means of its long-standing critical *fortuna*’.⁴⁰ Since the

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. xv and xxvi.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 193-4.

⁴⁰ Warren Boutcher, ‘The Analysis of Culture Revisited: Pure Texts, Applied Texts, Literary Historicisms, Cultural Histories’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 64 (2003), 489-510 (p. 497).

essay title was the most immediate indicator by which writers and booksellers registered their intentions to engage with and respond to the emergence of the essay genre, this thesis begins with the author who first employed it as a direct description of the texts that he produced: although a poem entitled *Le Coup d'essai de François de Sagon* was published in Paris in 1537, no one before Montaigne in 1580 had used the autonomous word *Essais* in or as the name of a printed work. Moreover, since Florio's translation was the medium through which most contemporary English readers encountered and experienced Montaigne, his version of the Frenchman's *Essais* is the text on which the initial investigation centres.⁴¹ Indeed, as both a record and a crucial determinant of the author's early English reception, 'Florio's Montaigne' is a particularly instructive example of an applied text, as Boutcher himself has demonstrated in a series of chapters and articles.

In some of those studies, Boutcher has also articulated another historiographical concept which is helpful in establishing the cultural and intellectual context to which both Florio's Montaigne and the early modern essay in general can most usefully and meaningfully be said to belong. In the last twenty years, Boutcher's objective has been to develop an alternative to the classic model of Renaissance humanism that Paul Oskar Kristeller constructed between the 1940s and the 1970s. According to Kristeller, Renaissance humanism was originally 'a broad cultural and literary movement' whose educational priorities were largely restricted to the teaching of classical Latin, the study of classical rhetoric, and the practical training of classically literate and civically engaged professionals.⁴² Although Kristeller's synthesis adequately describes the literary, scholarly, and educational ideals of European Latinate culture in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, Boutcher argues that its relevance to the social and intellectual climate of later sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England is limited. Drawing attention to the emergence after the early Reformation of 'a

⁴¹ The contemporary currency of Florio's translation is attested by the appearance of a second edition in 1613 and a posthumous third edition in 1632.

⁴² Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources*, ed. Michael Mooney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), pp. 21-32 (p. 31).

new politics of print controversy', as well as to the increasingly 'eclectic' character of the educational programmes on offer both in academic and in noble household institutions, he suggests that a more pluralistic historiographical perspective is required in order to make sense of humanistic activity in the late Tudor and early Stuart periods.⁴³ Accordingly, Boutcher's research exploits bibliographic, archival, and more broadly contextual resources in order to explore 'the ground between university Latin and the European vernaculars, between the world of academe and the world of diplomacy and commerce, a cultural environment which was not only interdisciplinary but interlinguistic in a particular and highly consistent fashion'. Among other things, his work bears witness to the close relationship that existed in late sixteenth-century England and Europe 'between channels of international diplomacy, commercial exchange, international book distribution and polyglot humanistic culture and pedagogy'.⁴⁴

This thesis recognizes that the major contributors to the development of the early modern essay were active inhabitants of the cultural environment that Boutcher's work describes: Montaigne was both a diplomat and a theorist of education; Florio taught French and Italian to the daughter of a Member of Parliament; Bacon divided his time between his duties as a legal and political

⁴³ Warren Boutcher, 'Humanism and Literature in Late Tudor England: Translation, the Continental Book and the Case of Montaigne's *Essais*', in Jonathan Woolfson (ed.), *Reassessing Tudor Humanism* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 243–68 (pp. 245–6); see also 'Marginal Commentaries: The Cultural Transmission of Montaigne's *Essais* in Shakespeare's England', in Pierre Kapitaniak and Jean-Marie Maguin (eds.), *Montaigne et Shakespeare: vers un nouvel humanisme* (Paris: Société Française Shakespeare, 2003), pp. 13–27 and 'The Origins of Florio's Montaigne: "Of the Institution and Education of Children, to Madame Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford"', *Montaigne Studies*, 24 (2012), 7–32.

⁴⁴ Warren Boutcher, 'Vernacular humanism in the sixteenth century', in Jill Kraye (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 189–202 (pp. 190–91); see also 'Montaigne's Legacy', in Ullrich Langer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Montaigne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 27–52.

adviser and his plans to instigate radical reforms to current practices in philosophical inquiry. One corollary of this recognition is an appreciation of the influence on the early essayists' approaches to composition of the linguistic, rhetorical, and dialectical techniques that they learned in their formative years. As both writers and editors, Montaigne, Florio, and Bacon adopted late humanistic strategies of topical invention and annotation in which most of their contemporary readers would also have been comprehensively versed.⁴⁵ Equally, however, another consequence is an enhanced awareness of the idiosyncratic nature of individual histories of exposure and response to common humanistic traditions of the analysis and manipulation of texts.⁴⁶ Whereas Montaigne had the beams of his library painted with sceptical aphorisms of contemplation and withdrawal, the walls of Bacon's childhood home were inscribed with sentences offering practical advice on subjects including moral governance and engagement in public affairs.⁴⁷ More generally, those rooms at Montaigne and Gorhambury were aristocratic manifestations of the late humanistic commonplace books which provided students and readers with a flexible system of organization for their personal encounters with classical and vernacular texts.⁴⁸ The influence of commonplace books is easily discernible not only in the tendency of early modern essayists to illustrate their arguments with quotations from canonical authors, but also in the relative stability of the sets of moral categories from which many of them took the titles of their chapters: the topic of death, for example, was variously handled by Montaigne, Bacon, Thomas Tuke, and

⁴⁵ See William E. Engel, 'Aphorism, Anecdote, and Anamnesis in Montaigne and Bacon', *Montaigne Studies*, 1 (1989), 158-76; Peter Mack, 'Rhetoric and the Essay', *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 23 (1993), 41-9 and *Reading and Rhetoric in Montaigne and Shakespeare* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2010), ch. 1.

⁴⁶ See Black, *Of Essays and Reading*, ch. 1.

⁴⁷ See William N. West, 'Reading Rooms: Architecture and Agency in the Houses of Michel de Montaigne and Nicholas Bacon', *Comparative Literature*, 56 (2004), 111-129; Dominique Goy-Blanquet, 'Lord Keeper Bacon and the Writing on the Wall', *Law and Humanities*, 4 (2010), 211-228.

⁴⁸ See Peter Mack, 'Humanist rhetoric and dialectic', in Krayer (ed.), *Renaissance Humanism*, pp. 82-99 (p. 90).

Nicholas Breton;⁴⁹ that of fear by Montaigne, Cornwallis, Breton, and George Wither;⁵⁰ that of reputation by Bacon, Cornwallis, Robert Johnson, and 'D. T.'.⁵¹ Moreover, both Ann Blair and Ann Moss have shown that Bacon adapted traditionally humanist commonplace methods to the purposes of his natural historical and natural philosophical inquiries.⁵²

While it accepts the historiographical validity of Boutcher's alternative to Kristeller's classic model, this thesis employs a concept of humanism which is philosophically more inclusive than that which the work of either of those scholars constructs. David Cooper has identified the historical development of Renaissance humanism with a pair of complementary responses to the theological, epistemological, and ethical 'crisis' that was engendered by the thought of William of Ockham and his followers in fourteenth-century England and France. According to Cooper, 'Ockhamism' postulated an 'inscrutable', 'arbitrary', and 'sovereign' God whose will was unknowable and whose creation was contingent on accidents and relations that humans could not predict.⁵³ While some European Christians sought intellectual refuge in the 'aristotelianized theology' that dominated the universities, and while others found spiritual consolation in mysticism, there also emerged a diverse group

⁴⁹ F, I.19: '*That to Philosophie, is to learne how to die*', pp. 30-39; E12: '*Of Death*', pp. 6-11; Tuke, *New Essayes: 'Of Death*', pp. 275-7; Nicholas Breton, *Characters upon Essaies Morall, and Divine* (London, 1615): '*Death*', pp. 38-40.

⁵⁰ F, I.17: '*Of feare*', pp. 27-8; Cornwallis, *Essayes: 'Of Feare*', sigs. S3v-T3v; Breton, *Characters upon Essaies: 'Feare*', pp. 43-4; George Wither, *Abuses Stript, and Whipt. Or Satirical Essayes* (London, 1613): '*Of Feare*', pp. 84-91.

⁵¹ E97: '*Of Honour and reputation*', sigs. Cv-C2v; Cornwallis, *Essayes: 'Of Estimation and Reputation*', sigs. Qr-R3r; Robert Johnson, *Essaies, or Rather Imperfect Offers* (London, 1601): '*Of Reputation*', sigs. [G5]r-[H5]r; 'D. T.', *Essaies Politicke, and Morall* (London, 1608): '*Of Reputation*', sigs. Q3v-R3v.

⁵² Ann Blair, 'Humanist Methods in Natural Philosophy: the Commonplace Book', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 53 (1992), 541-51 (pp. 550-51); Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 270-72.

⁵³ David E. Cooper, *The Measure of Things: Humanism, Humility, and Mystery* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), pp. 26-30.

of thinkers who asserted the credentials of human agency, human history, and human methods of interpreting the natural world.⁵⁴ Some of these thinkers promoted a 'vital' response to the medieval crisis: by recovering the texts and reconstructing the values of ancient Greek and Roman civilization, humanist scholars encouraged interest in purposeful observation, practical knowledge, and social and artistic creativity. At the same time, others participated in a 'philosophical' reaction to the thesis of human ignorance: accepting that the objective truth about the universe was beyond individual comprehension, thinkers such as Francisco Sanchez and Pierre Gassendi pragmatically directed their inquiries to the apparent phenomena which they could hope to understand. Cooper suggests that Montaigne and Bacon were among those humanist authors whose writings combined 'self-assertion' with 'metaphysical modesty'.⁵⁵ As such, two of the major early modern essayists were also among the most profoundly influential of all contemporary theorists of human morality and knowledge. In his *History of Scepticism*, Richard Popkin observed that 'throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Montaigne was seen not as a transitional figure, or a man off the main roads of thought, but as the founder of an important intellectual movement that continued to plague philosophers in their quest for certainty'.⁵⁶ As for Bacon, Stephen Gaukroger has argued that his was 'the first systematic, comprehensive attempt to transform the early-modern philosopher from someone whose primary concern is with how to live morally into someone whose primary concern is with the understanding of and reshaping of natural processes'.⁵⁷ Indeed, Antonio Pérez-Ramos has shown that Bacon's radically humanistic 'scientific' principle of 'maker's knowledge' or *verum factum* was

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-5.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 40-50. Cooper borrows the phrases from Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, tr. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), p. 138 and Jacques Maritain, *True Humanism*, tr. M. Adamson (London: Centenary, 1938), p. 3.

⁵⁶ Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 56.

⁵⁷ Stephen Gaukroger, *Francis Bacon and the Transformation of Early-Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 5.

adapted and reinterpreted in various ways by important later philosophers including the essayists Robert Boyle and John Locke.⁵⁸

Just as this thesis adopts a philosophically inclusive concept of humanism, so too it advances a bibliographically inclusive understanding of the historical significance of the early modern essay. Having established as its point of origin the earliest use of the essay title, and having observed some of the ways in which the meaning of the term was contested by the writers who first appropriated it and contributed to its general acceptance, it follows as a principle of this thesis that any early modern publication in whose title the word 'essay' appears is a potential and legitimate object of inquiry. In recent years, the availability of electronic resources such as the British Library's online *English Short Title Catalogue* and the commercial website *Early English Books Online* has made it possible to conduct extensive bibliographical surveys on a small budget and in a relatively short space of time.⁵⁹ With the aid of those resources, a crucial phase of preliminary research for this thesis immediately yielded two significant results. The first is that early modern 'essay' titles were frequently accompanied by alternative, additional, or even rival designations. Typically, these served either to diminish or to enhance the authority of the essay by placing it in conjunction with other, more established, practices and genres. Whereas Robert Johnson modestly named his book *Essaies, or Rather Imperfect Offers*, Florio rendered his author's simple title as *The Essayes or Morall, Politike and Millitarie Discourses of Lo: Michaell de Montaigne*, and the third edition of Bacon's collection appeared as *Essayes or Counsells, Civill and Morall*. In cases such as these, the

⁵⁸ Antonio Pérez-Ramos, *Francis Bacon's Idea of Science and the Maker's Knowledge Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 167-86.

⁵⁹ These resources can be accessed at [<http://estc.bl.uk>] and [<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>]. On their histories, benefits, and shortcomings, and on the relationship between them, see Stephen Tabor, 'ESTC and the Bibliographical Community', *The Library*, 8 (2007), 367-86 and Ian Gadd, 'The Use and Misuse of *Early English Books Online*', *Literature Compass*, 6 (2009), 680-92. The online catalogue of the Bibliothèque nationale de France [catalogue.bnf.fr] has also been valuable in researching and constructing this thesis.

alternative titles of early modern essays represent carefully considered elucidations of the qualities, form, or content of the works in question. In other cases, however, the addition of supplementary titles appears to have been the direct result of commercial opportunism on the part of authors or booksellers. One striking example is John Robinson's *Observations Divine and Morall* ([Amsterdam], 1625), which quickly reappeared as *New Essayes or Observations Divine and Morall* ([London], 1628), with the word 'Essayes' printed in larger type than any other word on the title page. Within the next twenty-five years, posthumously published works by Sir Walter Raleigh and John Donne would retrospectively be designated as essays, and the denomination increasingly occupied the prominent position on title pages as the seventeenth century progressed.⁶⁰

The second significant result of the preliminary bibliographical research for this thesis is that the purportedly less orthodox uses of the essay title to which Elbert Thompson and A. M. Boase referred were neither anomalous nor particularly unusual. The concept of the poetical essay that Guillaume du Peyrat and Samuel Daniel helped to establish at the end of the sixteenth century endured throughout the seventeenth in works by Alexander Craig, Robert Aylett, and William Atwood.⁶¹ Similarly, religious and theological essays were produced by the likes of Richard Ward, Isaac Penington, and Bridgis Nanfan as well as by William Master and Joseph Glanvill.⁶² At the same time, philosophical problems of ontology and epistemology were tackled by

⁶⁰ Sir Walter Raleigh, *Judicious and Select Essayes and Observations* (London, 1650); John Donne, *Essayes in Divinity* (London, 1651).

⁶¹ *The Poeticall Essayes of Alexander Craige Scotobritane* (London, 1604); Robert Aylett, *The Song of Songs [...] With Certayne of the Brides Ornaments, viz. Poeticall Essayes upon a Divine Subject [...]* (London, 1621); William Atwood, *A Poetical Essay towards an Epitome of the Gospel of the Blessed Jesus* (London, 1678).

⁶² Richard Ward, *Theologicall Questions, Dogmaticall Observations, and Evangelicall Essays, upon the Gospel of Jesus Christ, According to St. Matthew* (London, 1640); Isaac Penington, *Divine Essayes or Considerations about Several Things in Religion* (London, 1654); Bridgis Nanfan, *Essays Divine and Moral* (London, 1680).

essayists such as Henry More, William Sprigg, and Timothy Nourse.⁶³ Finally, a multitude of anonymous essays were published towards the end of the period on politics.⁶⁴ Even so, it is worth resisting the temptation simply to classify particular instances of the early modern essay according to modern scholarly and disciplinary boundaries. From a theoretical perspective, there are good reasons why critics such as Kauffmann have regarded the essay as an inter- or extra-disciplinary mode of thought: throughout its history, exponents of the genre from Bacon to Adorno have contributed as much as any of their contemporaries to the critique of existing divisions of academic labour. And from an historiographical point of view, Adrian Johns has shown that successive early modern licensing laws established ‘categories of expertise’ which are incommensurable with modern conceptions of scholarly or academic identity: one parliamentary ordinance of 1643 named separate groups of licensers for divinity, law, ‘Physick and Chyrurgery’, heraldry, ‘Philosophy, History, Poetry, Morality, and Arts’, parliamentary printing, pamphlets, and ‘Mathematicks, Almanacks, and Prognostications’.⁶⁵ In this context, it may make more sense to consider the early modern essay as a pre-disciplinary genre, and to attend to trends in its bibliographical development which are historically more specific and distinct. Among those which may be worthy of sustained investigation are the relationship between the essay and the moral character; the use of the essay title for translations of classical and vernacular texts; the adoption of the essay form by members of the early

⁶³ Henry More, *Democritus Platonissans, or, an Essay upon the Infinity of Worlds Out of Platonick Principles* (Cambridge, 1646); William Sprigg, *Philosophicall Essayes With Brief Adviso's* (London, 1657); Timothy Nourse, *A Discourse upon the Nature and Faculties of Man, in Several Essayes: With Some Considerations upon the Occurrences of Humane Life* (London, 1686).

⁶⁴ Examples include *An Essay upon the Original and Designe of Magistracie or a Modest Vindication of the Late Proceedings in England by One Who Equally Hates Rebellion and Tyranny* (Edinburgh, 1689); *A Wish For Peace: Or, an Essay, for Removing the Present Differences about the Proceedings of Parliament* (Edinburgh, 1690); *An Essay upon the Government of the English Plantations on the Continent of America* (London, 1701).

⁶⁵ Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 239.

Royal Society; the employment of the essay for proposals to Parliament on constitutional, ecclesiastical, and economic issues; and the development of the essay as a vehicle for literary criticism. The limited historical scope of this thesis allows it to engage directly with only the first of those trends. However, it is to be hoped that its indirect analyses of the scholarly, natural philosophical, political, and aesthetic concerns of Montaigne, Florio, Bacon, and their contemporaries will demonstrate the potential of further historical inquiries into the flexible nature and changing significances of the early modern essay.

Questions and overviews

It is now possible to formulate a series of questions about the early modern essay to which the following chapters will attempt to provide some answers. The first of these concerns the early reception and representation of the work with which the history of the genre begins. In the dedication to Book II of Florio's Montaigne, the translator claimed that his author was both the original and the '*perfectest*' essayist (F, sig. R3r). Inevitably, neither epithet could accurately be applied to Florio's English text. But to what extent was Montaigne Florio's in early modern England? This is a multifaceted question, and there are a number of possible ways of approaching and trying to answer it. William Hamlin has recently stated that 'a small number of [English] writers and scholars', including Bacon, 'had previously studied Montaigne in French', but that 'few continued to do so after Florio's translation became available'.⁶⁶ This probably remained the case until Charles Cotton's very different version of the *Essais* was published in 1685.⁶⁷ Besides the question of currency,

⁶⁶ William M. Hamlin, *Montaigne's English Journey: Reading the Essays in Shakespeare's Day* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 13.

⁶⁷ Cotton's translation appeared as *The Essays of Michael Seigneur de Montaigne*, 3 vols. (London, 1685). On the linguistic and rhetorical differences between the two versions, see Louise Westling, 'Montaigne in English Dress from Florio to Cotton', *Pacific Coast Philology*, 13 (1978), 117-24.

however, other problems which demand investigation include the extent of Florio's autonomy in planning and producing his edition, the nature of his linguistic, formal, and generic mediation of his source texts, and the significance of his contribution to the enhancement of his author's reputation. These critical problems are tackled in Chapter 1, 'Interpreting the Essay: Florio and Montaigne'. The chapter also explores some of the philosophical and conceptual content of the volume that Florio and his editorial colleagues produced. One prominent theme of both the volume and the chapter is the critique of traditional practices in humanist education; another is the intellectual and moral value of studying and experiencing the self.

Some of the themes of the first chapter are further developed in Chapters 2 and 3. However, the focus of these chapters is another question about the nature of the early modern essay, one which has a long and sometimes controversial history in the critical reception of Montaigne's most important early modern successor. As well as being a lawyer and a career politician, Bacon was both an essayist and an advocate of philosophical reform. But what kind of relationship obtained between these various aspects of Bacon's intellectual output? Ronald Crane was the first modern scholar to pose this question, and the answers that he suggested nearly a century ago have often been debated: while some critics have agreed that Bacon intended his later essays to continue or fulfil his philosophical work, others have insisted that the two enterprises function according to completely independent, and even incommensurable, principles.⁶⁸ In recent decades, the scholarship of Michael

⁶⁸ See Ronald S. Crane, 'The Relation of Bacon's *Essays* to his Program for the Advancement of Learning' (1923), repr. in Brian Vickers (ed.), *Essential Articles for the Study of Francis Bacon* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1972), pp. 272-92; Stanley E. Fish, 'Georgics of the Mind: The Experience of Bacon's *Essays*', in *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1972); Lisa Jardine, *Francis Bacon: Discovery and the Art of Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), ch. 13; John C. Briggs, *Francis Bacon and the Rhetoric of Nature* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1989), 'Introduction' and ch. 5; Perez Zagorin, *Francis Bacon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), ch. 4.

Kiernan, Julian Martin, and Stephen Gaukroger has made it possible to approach the problem with a better understanding of the political, legal, and rhetorical contexts to which all of Bacon's major publications belong.⁶⁹ Chapter 2, 'The Advancement of the Essay I: Scepticism and Reform', considers the problem from the general perspective of Bacon's analyses of human sense and reason, while Chapter 3, 'The Advancement of the Essay II: The Nature of Character', addresses the extent to which Bacon's essays contributed to the philosophical investigation of the types and modes of human nature and behaviour. In both chapters, Bacon's approaches to the concepts and processes in question are placed in the context of those of his predecessor, Montaigne. Indeed, it is a principle of this thesis that some of Bacon's most progressive philosophical proposals can usefully be considered as pragmatic solutions to sceptical problems that Montaigne had previously raised.

All three of the following chapters offer partial answers to a third question about the history of the early modern essay. Although Bacon was undoubtedly Montaigne's most significant early modern successor, many other kinds of essays were also written and published in the fifty years after the original *Essais* appeared. So do these essays share any formal or intellectual characteristics with each other or with those of Montaigne and Bacon? Apart from those canonical authors, Cornwallis, 'D. T.', and Owen Felltham are the only early essayists to have received any amount of sustained critical attention for well over seventy years.⁷⁰ While Montaigne,

⁶⁹ See Michael Kiernan, 'The *Essayes* as Counsels', in *E25*, pp. xix-xxxi and 'Bacon and the British Solomon', in *AL*, pp. xxxviii-lvi; Julian Martin, *Francis Bacon, the State, and the Reform of Natural Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Gaukroger, *Bacon and the Transformation of Philosophy*, ch. 2.

⁷⁰ See Sir William Cornwallis, *Essayes*, ed. Don Cameron Allen (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1946); Daniel Tuvill, *Essays Politic and Moral and Essays Moral and Theological*, ed. John Leon Lievsay (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1971); Ted-Larry Pebworth, *Owen Felltham* (Boston: Twayne, 1976). Lievsay's attribution of the works of 'D. T.' to the Anglican clergyman Daniel Tuvill has recently

Florio, and Bacon naturally emerge as the central historical figures of this thesis, part of its aim is to demonstrate something of the range and diversity of aesthetic tastes and philosophical positions that the early modern essay represents. Accordingly, Chapter 1 briefly draws attention to the roles of Cornwallis and Robert Johnson in the establishment of an English essay genre, Chapter 2 identifies the differences between Bacon's analyses of sense and reason and those of Robert Mason and Richard Brathwaite, and Chapter 3 describes some alternative approaches to the concept of character in the work of John Stephens, Nicholas Breton, and Geffray Minshull. In fact, to investigate this question is to define even more precisely the nature of some of Montaigne's and Bacon's most distinctive contributions to the development of late humanistic philosophy: especially in Chapters 2 and 3, discussions of essays by the likes of Samuel Daniel and John Earle attest in various ways to the originality and progressiveness of the philosophical outlooks of those pioneering and profoundly influential authors.

Theorists and critics have often been concerned with the question of what an essay is. Whether or not that question has an intelligible answer, this thesis maintains that there is more to be gained by asking not simply what the early modern essay was, but what early modern essays were, or represented.

been contested: see Elizabeth Allen, 'Tuvill, Daniel (d. 1660)', in *ODNB* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/56861>] (2010), accessed 21 February 2014.

Chapter 1

Interpreting the Essay: Florio and Montaigne

Introduction: Florio's Montaigne

In a preface to his 1603 translation of *The Essayes or Morall, Politike and Millitarie Discourses of Lo: Michaell de Montaigne*, John Florio explained 'To the curteous Reader' the value of his art. Citing the opinion of his 'olde fellow Nolano' that it was 'from translation' that 'all Science had it's of-spring', Florio reported that 'even Philosophie, Grammar, Rhethorike, Logike, Arithmetike, Geometrie, Astronomy, Musike, and all the Mathematikes yet holde their name of the Greekes: and the Greekes drew their baptizing water from the conduit-pipes of the Egiptians, and they from the well-springs of the Hebrews or Chaldees' (F, sig. A5r).¹ For Florio, translation was an expression of the fundamental humanist principle that the progress of learning depended on and consisted in the derivation and renovation of texts. As such, it was more than just a philological procedure: it also represented a mode of existence, an intellectual and even a spiritual ideal. 'What doe the best then,' he asked his reader of the great philosophers and poets, 'but gleane after others harvest? borrow their colours, inherite their possessions? What doe they but translate? perhaps, vsurpe? at least, collect?' (F, sig. A5r).

Florio was quick to recognize the ethical implications of the kind of activity he was describing. 'If [it is done] with acknowledgement, it is well; if by stealth, it is too bad', he observed: 'in this, our conscience is our accuser; posteritie our iudge: in that our studie is our advocate, and you Readers our iurie.' Indeed, it was on the terms of this somewhat ambiguous moral code that Florio

¹ 'Nolano' was the Italian philosopher and heretic Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), with whom Florio spent two years in London in the 1580s in the service of the French ambassador: see Frances A. Yates, *John Florio: The Life of an Italian in Shakespeare's England* (1934; repr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 87-8.

mounted his only significant criticism of Montaigne. The Frenchman, he said, *'disclaimeth all memorie, authorities, or borrowing of the ancient or moderne; whereas in course of his discourse he seemes acquainted not onely with all, but no other but authours; and could out of question like Cyrus or Cæsar call any of his armie by his name and condition'*. Fortunately for Florio, a number of close friends and colleagues were at hand to help him in locating some of the many textual references that Montaigne had studiously neglected to provide. The remaining editorial frustrations notwithstanding, Florio insisted on a subtle but firm distinction between the provenance of his author's literary form and its philosophical and creative potential. That *'Essayes are but mens school-themes pieced together'* was, Florio implied, a reasonably accurate, if ultimately incomplete, definition; that *'al is in the choise & handling'* was his perceptive and highly suggestive qualification (F, sig. A5r-v).

In the humanist educational establishments of sixteenth-century Europe, the 'school-theme' was one of a number of staple classroom exercises in Latin and vernacular composition. The structure and range of the theme, as well as its relation to associated set-pieces such as the chreia, the commonplace, the thesis, and the oration, tended to vary according to the instructions of different textbooks and the preferences of individual teachers. In general, however, pupils were required to draw on the notes and commonplace books in which they entered excerpts from their reading in order to produce an argument about a given moral topic: maxims, anecdotes, descriptions, and illustrations would be selected from under relevant headings and arranged so as to amplify and vivify a specific virtue or vice.² Reflecting the broader concerns of humanist pedagogy, this carefully regulated and constructive approach to the teaching of reading and writing was intended to inculcate an

² See Don Paul Abbott, 'Rhetoric and Writing in Renaissance Europe and England', in James J. Murphy (ed.), *A Short History of Writing Instruction from Ancient Greece to Contemporary America*, third edition (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), pp. 148-71; Peter Mack, *Elizabethan Rhetoric: Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), ch. 1.

ethical sensibility and a set of civic and professional aptitudes by linguistic, textual, and rhetorical means.³

Undoubtedly, the humanist classroom and the habits that it instilled constitute an instructive and revealing context for the origins and early development of the essay. Although no notebook or commonplace book belonging to Montaigne has been discovered, the marks and annotations on items from his library provide clear and convincing evidence that he often read and thought by processes of selection and topical assimilation.⁴ Furthermore, it has been established ever since the pioneering researches of Pierre Villey that among Montaigne's bibliographical sources were a number of printed miscellanies which were widely used as supplements to, or replacements for, personal collections of commonplaces.⁵ It is thought that Montaigne's earliest *essais* began, around 1572, as simple accumulations of thematic materials drawn, more or less randomly and indiscriminately, from the pages of these popular volumes.⁶

³ Historians have disagreed about the benefits and consequences both of the wider theory and of the more local practices. For a range of views, see Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources*, ed. Michael Mooney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), pp. 21-32; George Huppert, *Public Schools in Renaissance France* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984), ch. 6; Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (London: Duckworth, 1986); Peter Mack, 'Rhetoric, ethics and reading in the Renaissance', *Renaissance Studies*, 19 (2005), 1-21.

⁴ See Francis Goyet, 'The Word "Commonplaces" in Montaigne', in Lynette Hunter (ed.), *Toward a Definition of Topos: Approaches to Analogical Reasoning* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 66-77; M. A. Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius: A Transcription and Study of the Manuscript, Notes and Pen-marks* (Geneva: Droz, 1998).

⁵ Pierre Villey, *Les Sources et l'évolution des Essais de Montaigne*, 2 vols. (1908; repr. New York: Franklin, 1968), i, pp. 251-2. Villey's list of 'Mélanges et Leçons' includes books by John Stobaeus, Valerius Maximus, Desiderius Erasmus, Ravius Textor, Theodor Zwinger, and Pedro de Mexia.

⁶ See Donald M. Frame, 'Considerations on the genesis of Montaigne's *Essais*', in I. D. McFarlane and Ian Maclean (eds.), *Montaigne: Essays in Memory of Richard Sayce*

At the same time, it is widely acknowledged that the scope and complexity of Montaigne's writing underwent vital transformations as he continued to read, compose, and revise. As his first publication of 1580 was followed by further, increasingly substantial editions, his *essais* became more expansive, more sophisticated, and more personal.⁷ Anticipating charges of extravagance and incoherence, Florio referred his author's critics 'to the ninth chapter of the third booke, folio 596' (F, sig. A5v), where Montaigne could be found accounting for and defending his literary idiosyncrasies. 'I vnderstand that the matter distinguisheth it selfe', the passage reads: 'It sufficiently declareth where it changeth, where it concludeth, where it beginneth and where it rejoyneeth; without enterlacings of words, joyning ligaments & binding seames, wrestled-in for the service of weake and vnattentive eares: and without glosing or expounding my selfe.' Evidently, it was not supposed to be easy to deal with this 'intricate confusion', but nor did its difficulty lie in 'mysterie', 'depth', or 'obscurity'. Above all, Montaigne wanted his chapters to detain their readers, to arrest and to hold their attention: 'I have betaken my selfe to frame them longer; as requiring proposition and assigned leasure. In such an occupation, he to whom you will not graunt one houre, you will allow him nothing.' While it may be that Montaigne was 'particularly tied and precizely vowed, to speake by halves, to speake confusedly, to speake discrepantly', there remained plenty to be gained from the open exhibition and observation of the individual: 'I labour to set forth vanitie and make sottishnesse to prevaile, if it bring me any pleasure. And without so nicely controuling them, I follow mine owne naturall inclinations' (F, III.9.596).

(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp. 1-12 (pp. 2-3).

⁷ The major lifetime editions were *Essais de Messire Michel de Montaigne, chevalier de l'ordre du Roy, & Gentil-homme ordinaire de sa chambre. Livre premier & second* (Bordeaux, 1580) and *Essais de Michel Seigneur de Montaigne; cinquiesme edition, augmentée d'un troiesime livre et de six cens additions aux deux premiers* (Paris, 1588). After the author's death in 1592, his *fille d'alliance*, Marie de Gournay, oversaw the publication of *Les Essais de Michel Seigneur de Montaigne, édition nouvelle trouvée après le décès de l'auteur, reveüe et augmentée par luy d'un tiers plus qu'aux précédentes impressions* (Paris, 1595).

Florio's preface shows him to have been a highly perceptive reader and student of Montaigne. As a scholar and a teacher of languages, the translator understood the educational practices by which his author's compositions were informed, while also recognizing the original and profoundly personal ways in which the longer and more complex of those compositions were constructed. Even so, Florio also brought to his role as translator late humanistic philological principles which inevitably brought his English version into conflict with its source. As editors, Florio and his colleagues imposed on Montaigne's inventively intertextual text the kind of system of bibliographical reference whose interpretative value the author had explicitly denied. Moreover, Florio's natural inclinations as a writer led him to produce an English text which was rhetorically more elaborate and lexically more abundant than the relatively plain original on which it was based. This chapter explores the nature and significance of these editorial and linguistic conflicts. In doing so, it identifies some of the critical differences between Montaigne's understanding of the form of his *Essais* and Florio's representation of the newly established genre to which he evidently considered those 'Essayes' to belong. Throughout, the chapter is concerned with the concepts of the essay that Florio's Montaigne made available to its readers, and in particular with the ways in which those concepts were related both to traditional practices in humanist education and to the intellectual and moral possibilities of a new kind of study: the study of the human self.

Authors and texts

Florio was by no means solely responsible for introducing Montaigne to an English audience. As Warren Boutcher has repeatedly pointed out, 'Montaigne's book was imported and translated as part of a noble household institution' in which 'a number of individuals' were involved.⁸ The Montaigne

⁸ Warren Boutcher, 'Humanism and Literature in Late Tudor England: Translation, the Continental Book and the Case of Montaigne's *Essais*', in Jonathan Woolfson (ed.), *Reassessing Tudor Humanism* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002),

project began when the statesman and scholar, Sir Edward Wotton, requested that Florio produce an English version of the Frenchman's chapter 'De l'institution des enfans'. Even then, however, the work might have gone no further had it not been for the instigation of another, much younger, member of the contemporary aristocracy. Florio was employed by the noble Harington family as a private language tutor to their eldest daughter, Lucy, the Countess of Bedford. In a dedicatory epistle to Lucy and her mother, Florio recalled his initial reluctance to fulfil the 'commaund' that she apparently had given him to complete the task he had started. 'Yet nor can you denie', he reminded her, 'nor I dissemble, how at first I pleaded this Authors tedious difficultie, my selfe-knowne insufficiencie, and others more leisurefull abilitie.' As her social inferior and intellectual superior, Florio was hardly in a position to 'refuse' what the Countess 'impos'd'. Fortunately, his noble pupil was willing to afford him both time and encouragement; crucially, she also recruited for him 'two deare friends' from within the household staff. The physician and tutor to John Harington, Theodore Diodati, helped with some of the more difficult cruxes in Montaigne's labyrinthine text, while the literary scholar and medical professor, Matthew Gwinne, undertook the Herculean labour of sourcing and translating the untraced quotations which were printed in italics on virtually every one of its pages (F, sigs. A2v-A3r).

Florio was only too grateful to acknowledge the assistance of 'these two supporters of knowledge and friendship' (F, sig. A3r). However, he alone accepted responsibility for the authenticity and accuracy of the material on which the three colleagues worked. In the closing passages of his preface, Florio alerted his readers to '*the falsenesse of the French prints*' and '*the diversities of copies, editions and volumes*', some of which he found to '*have more or lesse then others*'. As the product of Montaigne's continual processes of revision, such difficult problems demanded a coherent and consistent editorial solution. To begin with, Florio's practice had been contingent on his

pp. 243–68 (pp. 260–1); 'The Origins of Florio's Montaigne: "Of the Institution and Education of Children, to Madame Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford"', *Montaigne Studies*, 24 (2012), 7–32.

changing locality: in London, he said, he had followed some copies, '*and in the countrie others; now those in folio, now those in octavo*'. Eventually, he managed to reconcile and consolidate all of them in his '*last survey*' (F, sig. [A6]r).

Having briefly affirmed its ultimate unity, Florio drew no further attention to the composite and eclectic nature of the text that he so painstakingly established. Whereas modern critical editors use typographical signs to distinguish chronologically Montaigne's three major strata of cumulative composition, Florio presented his readers with an undifferentiated continuum in which the only obvious direction of development is linear.⁹ From the perspective of some of Montaigne's stated claims and wishes, this lack of editorial guidance was inevitably misleading. 'My purpose is,' wrote the author, 'to represent the progresse of my humours, that every part be seene or member distinguished, as it was produced. I would to God I had begunne sooner, and knew the tracke of my changes, and course of my variations' (F, II.37.435). In respect of some of his other contentions, however, his translator's unobtrusive silence seems entirely justified. 'My booke is alwayes one', Montaigne declared: 'except that according as the Printer goes about to renew it [sauf qu'à mesure, qu'on se met à le renouveler], that the buier depart not altogether empty-handed, I give my selfe lawe to adde thereto (as it is but vncoherent checkie, or ill ioyned in-laid-worke) some supernumeral embleme' (F, III.9.577; M, p. 1008). These additions, their author insisted, 'are but ouer-waights, which disgrace not the first forme, but giue some particular price vnto euery one of the succeeding, by an ambitious pettie subtilty'. And it was above all due to them 'that some transposition of chronology is thereto commixt: my reportes taking place according to their opportunity, and not euer according to their age' (F, III.9.577).

⁹ For discussion of the modern typographical convention and some of its implications, see Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 282-3 and Thomas Newkirk, 'Montaigne's Revisions', *Rhetoric Review*, 24 (2005), 298-315.

Florio's choice of the word 'Printer' to translate Montaigne's ambiguous pronoun 'on' is both instructive and remarkably judicious. Whereas scholars have generally explained Montaigne's additions by appealing to his developing understanding of the inextricable contingencies of existence and its representation, George Hoffmann has suggested that the scale and schedule of the author's augmentations were to some extent determined by the laws that governed the contemporary book trade and its practices. In sixteenth-century France, royal privileges asserted the exclusive right of publishers to print particular works usually for a period of between five and ten years, and they were rarely renewed upon expiry. In order to secure continued protection for their products, booksellers were compelled to submit to the authorities revised editions which were sufficiently expanded to constitute, and thereby attain the legal status of, new and separate works. Hoffmann points out that the appearance of Montaigne's extensively augmented 1588 edition coincided with the expiration of the privilege that had covered his original publication of 1580; furthermore, the title-pages of the 1588 and 1595 editions respectively declare the amount and the proportion of the new material that they contain. As a former magistrate, Montaigne may well have been as familiar as his publishers with the relevant legislation. Indeed, Hoffmann argues that the very concept of the essay, as 'an "attempt", or a work in progress', always presupposed a process of revision whose range and frequency were largely dictated by the terms and conditions of the contemporary privilege system. As he pertinently observes, Montaigne's use of the indeterminate 'on' to refer to the occasional renovators of his ostensibly uniform book was itself an authorial emendation: in the heavily annotated 'Bordeaux Copy' of his 1588 edition, as in Florio's translation, 'they' had initially been identified as 'les imprimeurs [the printers]'.¹⁰

¹⁰ George Hoffmann, *Montaigne's Career* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), ch. 5. The annotations in the 'Bordeaux Copy' represent Montaigne's latest set of revisions and additions to his text. They were posthumously incorporated into Marie de Gournay's 1595 edition of the *Essais*, to which Florio had access. A complete set of digital images of the 'Bordeaux Copy' is available through the University of Chicago's online *Montaigne Project* [<http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/efts/ARTFL/projects/montaigne>],

One of the most efficient means by which Montaigne was able to expand his book was to fill it with quotations from ancient and modern sources. Successful though it was, this composite approach to writing and publishing was not without its problems. As his reputation as an author grew, Montaigne increasingly became aware of his liability to some potentially damaging criticisms. 'As by some might be said of me', he acknowledged, 'that here I have but gathered a nosegay of strange floures, and have put nothing of mine vnto it, but the thred to binde them.' To an extent, Montaigne recognized the validity of such censures. 'I dayly charge my selfe the more beyond my proposition and first forme,' he conceded, 'vpon the fantasie of time, and through idleness. If it mis-seeme me, as I thinke it doth, it is no great matter; it may be profitable for some other.' Moreover, just as '*some aleadge Plato, and some mention Homer, that never saw them*', Montaigne likewise admitted to having 'taken diverse passages from others then in their spring'. In spite of this revelation, the author insisted on the deeply personal nature of his profoundly compound enterprise. Whereas other noble 'authors' delegated the work of scholarship to their 'learned and wise friends', contenting themselves merely 'to have cast the plotte and projected the desseigne', and then 'to have bound vp the fagot' of their 'vnknowne provisions', Montaigne alone could truly be called the owner and the maker of his book. At times, he even saw fit to extend his authorial propriety to the syntax and the substance of his borrowed texts: 'amongst so many', he wrote, '[I] am indeede glad to filch some one; disguising and altering the same to some new service. On hazard, to let men say, that it is for lacke of understanding it's natural vse, I give it some particular adressing of mine owne hand, to the end it may be so much lesse meerey strange' (F, III.12.629).

Montaigne's continual recourse to the words of classical and contemporary authors reflected a humanist education which was simultaneously traditional and progressive. Having been brought up, almost from birth, to speak exclusively Latin, the six-year-old Montaigne was sent by his father to the recently established Collège de Guyenne, which he attended until the age of

thirteen. Due to his remarkable linguistic proficiency, the young Montaigne was allowed 'to overskip some of the lower formes, and to be placed in the highest'; there, the supervision of a particularly understanding and accommodating tutor enabled him to follow a somewhat idiosyncratic curriculum. Looking back, Montaigne attributed to the indulgences of his 'very discrete maister' his escape from the lamentable 'hate and contempt of Bookes' which he claimed to have affected 'the greatest part of our Nobilitie' (F, I.25.84-6). Even so, as a pupil he would have been exposed to the same techniques of selection and topical analysis in which his classmates were endlessly drilled.¹¹ The result of this college training was that the collection and compilation of excerpts from texts formed a fundamental and enduring part of the rhetorical and dialectical strategies of Montaigne's authorial maturity. The 1580 version of his chapter 'De la Tristesse', which was among the first that he composed, contains illustrative lines of poetry from Ovid, Petrarch, and Catullus; the important early chapter 'Que Philosophes, c'est apprendre à mourir' begins with a paraphrase from Cicero and was originally structured around a series of citations from Lucretius and Horace; the undeveloped early chapter 'De la parsimonie des anciens' consists of a brief series of short anecdotes drawn from Valerius Maximus, Plutarch, and Seneca. As Peter Mack has compellingly demonstrated, the methods of composition that Montaigne learned at school continued to inform his approach to writing throughout his authorial career: even in his most advanced and elaborate chapters there pertained a structural 'logic of fragment and sequence' which was recognizable and readable as such by his similarly educated contemporaries.¹²

Nevertheless, Montaigne was a critic as well as a product of the humanist educational system. While he approved of its explicitly ethical and civic objectives, he found himself wondering 'whence it may proceede, that a minde rich in knowledge, and of so many things, becommeth thereby never

¹¹ See Zachary S. Schiffman, 'Montaigne and the Rise of Skepticism in Early Modern Europe: A Reappraisal', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 45 (1984), 499-516 (pp. 503-7).

¹² Peter Mack, *Reading and Rhetoric in Montaigne and Shakespeare* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2010), ch. 3.

livelier nor more quicke-sighted; and a grose-headed, and vulgare spirit, may without amendement, containe the discourse and judgement of the most excellent wits, the world ever produced' (F, I.24.60). Rejecting the contention that an excess of learning is actively harmful to the mind, Montaigne argued instead that the 'evill' of inanity with which schoolmasters were afflicted 'proceedeth from the bad course they take to follow sciences; and that respecting the manner we are instructed in them, it is no wonder if neither Schollers nor Maisters, howbeit they proove more learned, become no whit more sufficient'. Above all, Montaigne regretted that 'knowledge and learning' were valued so much more highly than 'judgement and vertue'. As a graduate of Guyenne, he was personally familiar with the methodological failings of the institutions at whose doors he laid the blame. 'Even as birds flutter and skip from field to field to pecke vp corne or any graine,' he remembered, 'and without tasting the same, carry it in their bills, therewith to feede their little ones; so doe our pedants gleane and picke learning from bookes, and never lodge it further then their lips, onely to degorge and cast-it to the wind' (F, I.24.62).

When Montaigne came to reread this chapter in the final years of his life, it struck him that certain elements of his critique could easily be perceived as hypocritical. 'It is strange', he conceded, 'how fitly sottishnesse takes holde of mine example. Is not that which I doe in the greatest parte of this composition, all one and selfe same thing?' After all, Montaigne's loosely topical and profoundly intertextual project had long served him, among other things, as a kind of surrogate commonplace book. 'I am ever here and there picking and culling,' he admitted, 'from this and that booke, the sentences that please me, not to keepe them (for I have no store-house to reserve them in) but to transport them into this: where, to say truth, they are no more mine, then in their first place'. The question of ownership was indeed crucial. For Montaigne, precisely whose were his picked and culled resources was never more important than the uses to which they were put. In order better to express his point, the author returned to the classics: '*Apud alios loqui didicerunt, non ipsi secum. Non est loquendum, sed gubernandum.*' And as if to advance his argument further, his English interpreters, Florio and Gwinne,

found the rendering of these sentences to be less of a problem than their marginal attribution. ‘*They have learned to speake with others, not with themselves*’, Gwinne accurately translated; ‘*speaking is not so requisite as governement*’ (F, I.24.62). Like many other ‘Places not noted’, these Latin excerpts were traced to their sources, in this case, incompletely, to Seneca’s *Epistulae morales*, only in a late preliminary insertion which is frequently lacking in extant first editions of Florio’s *Essayes* (F, sig. ¶12r).¹³ In fact, the first sentence is adapted from Cicero’s *Tusculanae disputationes* (M, p. 1388 n. 142.2).

To the extent that Montaigne’s failure to identify his sources was deliberate, Florio and Gwinne’s more scholarly approach was fundamentally at odds with the strategy of their author. At times, the translators may even have recognized themselves in some of Montaigne’s descriptions of inconsequential or nullifying pedantry. ‘Wee can talke and prate,’ he complained, ‘*Cicero sayeth thus, These are Platoes customes, These are the very words of Aristotle; but wat say we our selves? what doe we? what judge we? A Perot would say as much.*’ Empty enunciation notwithstanding, the boundaries of Florio and Gwinne’s scholarship were well enough observed to allow Montaigne’s more indirect allusions to remain edifyingly and productively untraced. Casting around for appropriate terms in which to present his alternative to contemporary compositional practices, the author settled on an alimentary analogy of ancient provenance and established popularity: ‘*what availles it vs to have our bellies full of meate,*’ he asked, ‘*if it be not digested? if it bee not transchanged in vs? except it nourish, augment and strengthen vs?*’ (F, I.24.62-3). As Florio and Gwinne would almost certainly have known, Seneca, and in particular the eighty-fourth of his moral letters, was again the most influential source of Montaigne’s chosen metaphor of literary production; they also would have been aware of the currency of such language in the treatises and manuals of humanist theorists

¹³ For a bibliographical description of the quire insertion, see the ESTC record of Florio’s 1603 edition [<http://estc.bl.uk/S111839>], accessed 13 July 2013.

and educators.¹⁴ Above all, however, they might have recognized that their author's assimilation of the commonplace in question not only exemplified its lesson, but also rendered it unidentifiable on the terms and conditions of their editorial policy.

Although it inevitably compromised a distinctive aspect of Montaigne's critique of humanism, the editorial strategy that Florio and Gwinne pursued was in some sense justified by their author. In a late reflection on the nature and identity of his book, Montaigne differentiated between two different kinds of 'borrowing'. On the one hand were the 'ornaments', which he chose either 'to beautifie and set foorth the invention' or to 'relate' what he was unable to 'expresse'. Somewhat dubiously, Montaigne claimed that 'almost all' of the sources of these direct quotations 'sufficiently name themselves without me' (F, II.10.236); according to Florio, their location cost the 'Scholler-like' Gwinne 'indefatigable paines', and in fact none but 'he could have quoted so divers Authors, and noted so severall places' (F, sig. A3r). On the other hand were the indirect allusions, commonplace analogies, and intertextual references by which Montaigne continually, playfully, and wilfully tested both his ideas and his audience. 'If in reasons, comparisons and arguments,' he wrote, 'I transplant any into my soile, or confound them with mine owne, I purposely conceale the Authour, thereby to bridle the rashnesse of these hastie censures, that are so headlong cast vpon all manner of compositions'. Florio and Gwinne declined to establish sources for this second group of borrowings, and the consistency of their policy is enough to suggest that sympathy with their author's intentions, rather than merely the difficulty of the task, was the primary motivation for their reticence. As Montaigne wrote of his critics: 'I will have them to give *Plutarch* a bobbe vpon mine owne lippes, and vex themselves in wronging *Seneca* in mee' (F, II.10.236). Critical audiences were well advised to approach such a duplicitous author with caution. By restricting their scholarly interventions to the obviously

¹⁴ See Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 105.

ornamental, Montaigne's English translators left their readers vulnerable to their author's enduring mastery of disguise.

Gwinne's work on Florio's volume represented a pioneering contribution to the scholarship of Montaigne: not until 1611 did a French edition of the *Essais* include references to the author's sources, and only in 1617 did his literary executor, Marie de Gournay, reluctantly agree to supply her publishers with both locations and translations for his quotations.¹⁵ As his early editors began to establish for his book a recognized and increasingly standardized critical apparatus, Montaigne's readers must have found it both easier and more appropriate to consider the range and extent of his engagement with, and reliance upon, other texts. If the impression of his originality was diminished in the process, the perception of his capacity and judiciousness stood to be enhanced. 'Yet have I not begged them,' wrote Montaigne of his borrowed materials, 'but at famous and very-wel-knowne gates: which though they were rich in themselves, did never please me, vnlesse they also came from rich and honourable handes, and that authority, concurre with reason' (F, II.17.378). In many respects, the value of Montaigne's intertextual enterprise consisted in such concurrences. And as a noble household teacher of languages and letters, it was part of Florio's function to elucidate and explicate them for his pupils. To relatively inexperienced readers such as Lucy, the young Countess of Bedford, and her brother, John Harington, Gwinne's annotations afforded lessons in 'knowledge and learning' of the sort that might substantiate and fix in the memory Montaigne's meandering variations on the themes of 'judgement and vertue'.

¹⁵ R. A. Sayce and David Maskell, *A Descriptive Bibliography of Montaigne's Essais, 1580-1700* (London: Bibliographical Society, 1983), pp. 66 and 83-4.

Language, form, and genre

By his own admission, Florio was not the first translator to have tried his hand at an English rendition of Montaigne. Apparently, '*seven or eight of great wit and worth*' had previously '*assayed, but found these Essayes no attempt for French apprentices or Littletonians*' (F, sig. [A6]r). Any one of these undertakings might be related to an entry in the *Stationers' Register*, dated 20 October 1595, which seems to refer to an abandoned, unpublished, or undiscovered rendering of '*The Essais of MICHAELL Lord of MOUNTENE*'.¹⁶ Equally, any of them could possibly be the partial version that Sir William Cornwallis productively encountered sometime around the turn of the seventeenth century. Cornwallis, the early English essayist who was most open in his admiration for Montaigne, had 'not bene so much beholding to the French as to see in his Originall', but had seen 'diuers of his peeces' translated and been reliably assured that the rendition was 'very well done'. Describing the 'stile' of the work as 'admitting as fewe Idle words as our language wil endure', Cornwallis concluded that Montaigne was 'well fitted in this newe garment', and that he 'speaks now good English'. He also filed an intriguing report on the intellectual abilities and physical appearance of the anonymous translator responsible: 'It is done by a fellowe lesse beholding to nature for his fortune then witte,' he wrote, 'yet lesser for his face then fortune; the truth is, hee lookes more like a good-fellowe, then a wise-man, and yet hee is wise, beyond either his fortune, or education'. As for Montaigne, Cornwallis perceptively observed that 'he speakes freely, and yet wisely, Censures, and determines many things Iudicially, and yet forceth you not to attention with a hem, & a spitting Exordium'. The Frenchman, that is, 'hath made Morrall Philosophy speake couragiously, and in steed of her gowne, giuen her an Armour; he hath put Pedanticall Schollerisme out of

¹⁶ Edward Arber (ed.), *A Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London; 1554-1640 A. D.*, 5 vols. (London: priv. print., 1875-7; Birmingham: priv. print., 1894), iii, p. 3b; cf. p. 59b.

countenance, and made manifest, that learning mingled with Nobilitie, shines most clearly'.¹⁷

Don Cameron Allen called the identity of Cornwallis's translator 'one of the mysteries of literary history'.¹⁸ As yet, it remains to be solved. Even so, Cornwallis's description of the verbal economy with which his acquaintance set about his work serves as a reminder of the opposite qualities that Florio brought to the same task. One of Montaigne's formative experiences as a writer was his translation, undertaken at the request of his father, of the fifteenth-century *Theologia naturalis* of Raymond Sebond: among other things, the project, which he completed in June 1568, confirmed Montaigne in the belief that 'words and language' are 'a merchandise so vulgar and so vile [si vulgaire & si vile] that the more of it a man has, the less, peradventure, he is worth'.¹⁹ Florio, a teacher of vernacular languages and an avowed philologist, saw things very differently. His formative experiences as a translator included his assembly, in the 1590s, of a pioneering lexicon entitled *A Worlde of Wordes, or Most Copious, and Exact Dictionarie in Italian and English*, a volume which made a virtue out of synonymy and verbal multiplicity: as far as Florio was concerned, 'it must needs be a pleasure' for his gentlemanly readers to see even 'so rich a toong' as the Italian 'out-vide by their mother-speech, as by the manie-folde Englishes of manie words in this is manifest'.²⁰ Indeed, *A Worlde of Wordes* arguably contributed as much to the

¹⁷ Sir William Cornwallis, *Essayes* (London, 1600-01), sigs. H3v-H4v. Cornwallis's *Essayes or Rather, Encomions, Prayses of Sadnesse: and of the Emperour Julian the Apostata* and *Essayes of Certaine Paradoxes* were posthumously published in London in 1616.

¹⁸ Sir William Cornwallis, *Essayes*, ed. Don Cameron Allen (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1946), p. 252 n. 42.17-39.

¹⁹ Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Works of Montaigne*, tr. Donald M. Frame (London: Hamish Hamilton, [1957]), p. 1056; *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Albert Thibaudet and Maurice Rat (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), p. 1361. Montaigne's version of Sebond's controversial treatise was published in Paris in 1569.

²⁰ John Florio, *A Worlde of Wordes, or Most Copious, and Exact Dictionarie in Italian and English* (London, 1598), sig. b1r-v.

development and expansion of English as it did to the promotion and encouragement in England of Italian language and culture: *OED* identifies Florio as its tenth most frequently cited source of first recorded appearances of words, and over three-quarters of his 1200 listed contributions are drawn from the two lifetime editions of his Anglo-Italian compilation.²¹

Montaigne's convictions about '*the vanitie of Wordes*' (F, I.51.165) endured in his mature compositions; equally, Florio's contrary persuasions persisted throughout his work on their translation. The effects of this rhetorical discrepancy could be both disconcerting and exhilarating: the combination of Florio's profuse and prolix tendencies with the plainer and more direct approach of his author has variously been described as errant, 'rich', 'magic', and reductive.²² Whichever way the relationship is defined, it is clear that Montaigne's occasional reflections on language and composition presented his translator with a set of stylistic guidelines which he was either technically ill-equipped or artistically unprepared to follow. In his writing as much as in his conversation, the Frenchman sought to cultivate 'a naturall, simple, and vnaffected speach', to whose brief list of attributes Florio could not resist adding one or two extra adjectives of his own. Apparently, it was 'a pithy, sinnowie, full, strong, compendious, and materiall speech [un parler succulent

²¹ For details, see [<http://www.oed.com/view/source/a2268?rskey=JZ29u6&result=78>], accessed 25 July 2013. *Queen Anna's New World of Words, or Dictionarie of the Italian and English Tongues, Collected, and Newly Much Augmented by John Florio* was published in London in 1611; a posthumous third edition, *Vocabolorio Italiano & Inglese, a Dictionary Italian & English*, was published by Giovanni Torriano in London in 1659.

²² Louise Westling, 'Montaigne in English Dress from Florio to Cotton', *Pacific Coast Philology*, 13 (1978), 117-24 (p. 122); John Lee, 'The English Renaissance Essay: Churchyard, Cornwallis, Florio's Montaigne and Bacon', in Michael Hattaway (ed.), *A Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 600-8 (p. 606); Sarah Bakewell, *How to Live: A Life of Montaigne in One Question and Twenty Attempts at an Answer* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2010), pp. 276-7; William M. Hamlin, *Montaigne's English Journey: Reading the Essays in Shakespeare's Day* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 74-5.

et nerveux, court et serré]’ that Montaigne was after: evidently, Florio’s personal version of a ‘pithy’ and ‘sinnowie’ aesthetic was much less ‘court et serré’ than his author’s; nor could his tone or register reasonably be described as ‘downe-right, Souldier-like’ (F, I.25.83; M, p. 178).

Florio’s irresistible will to verbosity is similarly legible in virtually every sentence, and certainly on every page, of his translation. Even Montaigne’s analyses of his principal linguistic models were susceptible to Florio’s predilection for expansion and amplification. Of Seneca and Plutarch, the Frenchman suggested that ‘their instruction is the prime and creame of Philosophie [la cresse de la philosophie], and presented with a plaine, vnaffected, and pertinent fashion [d’une simple façon et pertinente]’ (F, II.10.238-9; M, p. 433). In the ‘full and massie’ poetry of Virgil and Lucretius, he contended that ‘there is nothing forced, nothing wrested, nothing limping [il n’y a rien d’efforcé, rien de trainant]’, so that ‘all marcheth with like tenor [d’une pareille teneur]’. In cases such as these, it seems that Florio, unlike Montaigne, may have attached more importance to the musical connotations of ‘tenor’ or ‘teneur’ than to their senses of substance and significance. At any rate, for the translator, if not for his author, the ‘sinnowie, materiall and solide [nerveuse et solide]’ eloquence of the finest Latin poets ‘ravisheth most’ not only ‘the strongest wits [les plus forts esprits]’, but also ‘the wittiest conceits’ (F, III.5.524; M, pp. 915-16).

Florio’s concerns for the sound, the rhythm, and the polyvalence of his prose were not the only determining factors in his pursuit of lexical abundance. He also sought to enhance the authenticity of his translation by introducing ‘some *vnouth termes*’ derived from Montaigne’s French. Of the twelve such neologisms to which his preface particularly draws attention, *OED* credits him as providing the earliest documented evidence for ‘*conscientious*’, ‘*tarnish*’, and ‘*ammusing*’, as well as for specific senses of ‘*endeare*’, ‘*debauching*’, and ‘*emotion*’; of the remaining six, at least a further three seem to have been very recently adopted. As Florio was well aware, however, general acceptance of his francophonic inventions and adaptations was far from guaranteed: ‘if

you like them not, he instructed his reader, *'take [other terms] most commonly set by them to expound them, since there they were set to make such likely French words familiar with our English, which well may beare them'* (F, sig. A5v).

One interested party who had already registered his ambivalence was Montaigne. 'The managing and employment of good wittes,' he wrote, 'endearth and giveth grace [donne prix] vnto a tongue': on this assertion the Frenchman and his translator could agree. Even so, for Montaigne it was 'not so much innovating' that enhanced the value of a language 'as filling the same with more forcible and diuers seruices, wresting, straining and enfoulding it': the best classical minds, he contended, 'bring no wordes vnto it, but enrich their owne, waigh-downe and cram-in their signification and custome; teaching it vnwonted motions; but wisely and ingeniouslie'. Much less exemplary in this regard were the practices of 'our moderne French writers', whose 'miserable strained affectation of strange Inke-pot termes [d'estrangeté]' Montaigne found neither practical nor effective. To an extent, the contemporary preference for 'noueltie' and 'new farre-fetcht worde[s]' over their 'vsual' and more appropriate alternatives could be explained by 'some defect of fashion'. However, Montaigne had also had plenty of opportunity to discover the intrinsic deficiencies, as well as the natural qualities, of his native tongue. 'I finde it sufficiently plentio[u]s,' he wrote of the French language, 'but not sufficiently plyable and vigorous. It commonly faileth and shrinketh vnder a pithy and powerfull conception. If your march therein be farre extended, you often feele it droupe and languish vnder you'. In particularly problematic cases, Montaigne advocated importing well established, useful words from Latin or Greek; his personal vocabulary also accommodated both dialectal idioms and phrases from urban slang (F, III.5.524-5; M, p. 916).

Despite his reservations about its conceptual strength and endurance, Montaigne proved to be extremely adept at manipulating and augmenting his primary linguistic resource. Among the more or less quotidian terms whose

senses he helped to extend were *forme*, *patron*, and *tesmoigner*.²³ However, the word to which he added the most value was the one that he chose to attach to the title-page of his book. A number of meanings of *essay* were already available as Montaigne settled on his decision. Indeed, the most current senses registered themes that recur time and again throughout his work. One of these had to do with experience, and in particular with the kind of experience that might prove useful to those in search of moral guidance or advice. Another was concerned with apprenticeship: the phrase *coup d'essay* was commonly used to refer to a first attempt. To these established meanings, each of which accurately described an aspect of his concept of authorship, Montaigne added the related senses of testing, trial, examination, and experimentation, activities which were commonly denoted in older forms of French, and also in English, by the cognate verb and noun *assay*.²⁴ As an accomplished Latinist, Montaigne may well have been familiar with the derivation of these significations from the Late Latin *exagiare*, meaning 'to weigh', and its relative *exagium*, meaning 'a weighing'.²⁵ Indeed, one of the author's most prized personal emblems was 'an Imprese of a pair of ballances' bearing the sceptical motto 'What can I tell [Que sçay-je]?' (F, II.12.305; M, p. 557).

²³ M. A. Screech, *Montaigne & Melancholy: The Wisdom of the Essays* (London: Duckworth, 1983), pp. 101-2; Warren Boutcher, 'Montaigne's Legacy', in Ullrich Langer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Montaigne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 27-52 (p. 33); André Tournon, 'Justice and the law: on the reverse side of the *Essays*', *ibid.*, pp. 96-117 (pp. 108-9).

²⁴ R. A. Sayce, *The Essays of Montaigne: A Critical Exploration* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972), pp. 19-22; Screech, *Montaigne & Melancholy*, p. 13; Paul Robert, *Le Grand Robert de la langue française: dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la langue française*, second edition by Alain Rey, 9 vols. (Paris: Le Robert, 1985), art. 'essayer' and 'essai'; Edmond Huguet, *Dictionnaire de la langue française du seizième siècle*, 7 vols. (Paris: Didier, 1925-67), art. 'essay' and 'essayer'.

²⁵ *OED*, art. 'assay, v.' and 'assay, n.'; Alexander Souter, *A Glossary of Later Latin to 600 A. D.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), art. 'exagium'; R. E. Latham, D. R. Howlett, and R. K. Ashdowne (eds.), *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, 2 vols. (Oxford: British Academy, 1975-2013), art. 'exagium'.

All of these senses of *essay* were exploited by Montaigne, who had ‘assaid [je l’essaye]’ the balance between originality and memory ‘by the trial [par la preuve]’ of the storytelling of his friends (F, I.9.15; M, p. 56), and who evidently considered it ‘a well-pleasing thing, to see matters written by those, that have assaide how, and in what maner they ought to be directed and managed [qui ont essayé comme il les faut conduire]’ (F, II.10.242; M, p. 441). Moreover, all of the available and evolving senses combined when, in his later revisions and additions, Montaigne occasionally seemed to refer to his work by its title, and to his title as the name of a novel literary genre. Particularly instructive in this regard is a reflection on the reception of his book which was provoked by his earlier judgment on the vanity and verbosity of Cicero and Pliny the Younger. ‘Well I wot,’ wrote Montaigne, ‘that when I heare some give themselves to imitate the phrase of my Essayes, I would rather have them holde their peace: They doe not so much raise the words, as depresse the sense; so much the more sharpely, by how much more obliquely.’ As far as the author was concerned, his readers, and especially those among them who had the potential to become writers, would be far better served by attending to ‘the arguments or chiefe heades’ of which his chapters were compactly comprised: ‘how many stories have I glanced-at therein,’ he asked, ‘that speake not a word, which whosoever shall vnfolde, may from them draw infinit Essayes?’ (F, I.39.125).

As definite as Florio’s denominations appear, there is no evidence to suggest that Montaigne himself ever conceived of the essay as a proper noun. In fact, the typographical reification of the essay form began with the strategies and decisions of the author’s earliest editors. In the posthumous edition produced by Marie de Gournay in 1595, the first to be entitled *Les Essais*, rather than simply *Essais*, of Michel de Montaigne, many of the author’s apparent references to the name or genre of his work were emended to the initial upper case.²⁶ While the conditions of publication in early modern Europe

²⁶ It has not been possible to inspect a copy of the 1595 *Essais*. Instead, the conclusion is drawn from collations of relevant occurrences in M, which is based on Gournay’s edition and includes notes on textual variants, with digital images of the corresponding passages in the online ‘Bordeaux Copy’ [<http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/>

make it difficult definitively to attribute such changes to authors and editors, rather than to booksellers, printers, or anonymous compositors, the fact that these particular emendations survived two series of ink-corrections in Gournay's hand, and endured throughout her involvement in numerous subsequent editions, at least suggests that she must have approved of their establishment and continuation.²⁷ Either way, Montaigne's reluctance to make those changes himself appears significant. Although he claimed to have little time for the niceties of 'orthographie' and 'curious pointing [la punctuation]' (F, III.9.577; M, p. 1009), in his later years the author in fact became increasingly scrupulous about the spelling, punctuation, and typographical presentation of his work. The extensively annotated 'Bordeaux Copy' of his 1588 edition, to which he continued to make corrections and additions until the final weeks of his life, contains over six thousand carefully considered alterations to ostensibly accidental elements of his text.²⁸ As he read through and revised his published chapters, Montaigne reorganized sentences, expanded contractions, and deliberated over his uses of the upper and lower cases. And yet throughout this process, his various references to his *essais* not only remained intact, but also were accompanied by new references in similar style.

The modifications that Gournay oversaw conferred on Montaigne's form a level of objectivity which the author himself had always been reluctant to impose. Florio's translation, which was partly based on Gournay's edition (F, sig. A2r), went further still. In the absence of direct manuscript evidence, it is impossible to be certain of the extent to which Florio had control over the choices and decisions that the compositors and pressmen who worked on his volume had to make. However, having witnessed the recent adoption of his

[efts/ARTFL/projects/montaigne](#)], accessed 2 April 2014. For examples, see M, pp. 321, 889, and 985, and cf. 'Bordeaux Copy', fols. 125v, 370r, and 414r. M fails to note the variants of Gournay's 'Essais' in I.39, p. 255, but cf. 'Bordeaux Copy', fol. 104v.

²⁷ On Gournay's corrections, see Sayce and Maskell, *Descriptive Bibliography*, pp. 25-33. The 1609 Leyden and 1625 Paris printings of *Les Essais*, both of which are ultimately derived from Gournay's 1595 edition, retain the emendations in question.

²⁸ Hoffmann, *Montaigne's Career*, p. 124.

author's title not only by Sir William Cornwallis, but also by contemporary moral writers such as Francis Bacon and Robert Johnson, the translator may well have recognized an opportunity literally to capitalize on the newly developing trend.²⁹ One striking example relates to Montaigne's solitary employment of the phrase that referred in contemporary usage to the first attempt of an apprentice: 'May it please the gentle reader, to suffer this one part of Essay [ce coup d'essay] to runne on, and this third straine or addition of the rest of my pictures peeces' (F, III.9.576-7; M, p. 1008). Another concerns the author's suggestion in his final chapter 'De l'Experience' that his disparate collection of ramblings and reflections might, after all, have something worthwhile to offer: 'To conclude, all this galiemafrie which I huddle-vp here, is but a register of my lives-Essayes [des essais de ma vie]: which in regard of the internall health are sufficiently exemplar to take the instruction against the haire [à contrepoil; i.e. against the grain]' (F, III.13.642; M, p. 1126). At times, Florio even appears to have taken the liberty of retrospectively identifying earlier works and practices as instances or manifestations of the newly designated genre. Where Montaigne described an idiosyncratic aspect of his humanist education, Florio's version affirms its association with the much more highly evolved enterprise of his author's literary maturity: 'If for an Essay [par essay] they would give me a Theame [un theme], whereas the fashion in Colledges is, to give it in French, I had it in bad Latine, to reduce the same into good' (F, I.25.84; M, p. 180). Similarly, where Montaigne recalled his original intention to publish Etienne de La Boétie's *Discours de la servitude volontaire* as the centrepiece of his own collection, Florio's rendition elevated his author's description of his late friend's political polemic to the level of generic classification: apparently, the young La Boétie had written, 'by way of Essaie [par maniere d'essay], in honour of liberty against Tyrants' (F, I.27.90; M, p. 190).³⁰

²⁹ Bacon's *Essayes* were first published in 1597; Johnson's *Essaies, or Rather Imperfect Offers*, followed in 1601.

³⁰ La Boétie's controversial *Discours* was anonymously published in 1574 as *Le Contr'un ou de la servitude volontaire*.

Although Montaigne and Florio differed quite considerably in their rhetorical and stylistic preferences, and although the author's title had accumulated additional significances by the time his English interpreter came to publish his work, both writers evidently shared the conviction that the kind of language in which essays and their translations were written was incidental, rather than essential, to their identity. As Montaigne put it: 'Most of those that converse with me, speake like vnto these Essayes; but I knowe not whether they thinke alike' (F, I.25.84). For Montaigne, the undisputed master of the art of translation was Jacques Amyot, the Bishop of Auxerre, whose French renditions of Plutarch's *Bioi paralleloi* and *Moralia* were published in Paris in 1559 and 1572 respectively. Although he appreciated Amyot's 'naturall purity, and pure elegancy of the tongue', as well as 'his indefaticable constancy of so long and toyle-some a labor', Montaigne had insufficient 'skill of the Greeke' to ascertain with any certainty the accuracy of his constructions. Instead, his admiration consisted in his perception of the coherence and internal consistency of Amyot's work, the structural integrity of which seemed in itself to guarantee its truthfulness. 'I see through out all his translation a sense so closely-joynted, and so pithily-continued,' wrote Montaigne, 'that either he hath assuredly vnderstood and inned the very imagination, and true conceit of the Author, or having through a long and continuall conversation, lively planted in his mind a generall Idea of that of *Plutark*, he hath at least lent him nothing that doth belie him, or mis-seem him.' As remarkable as this achievement was, however, Montaigne regarded even more highly Amyot's taste and judiciousness in choosing 'so worthy a worke, and a booke so fit to the purpose, therwith to make so vnvaluable a present vnto his Country' (F, II.4.210-11). If Florio hoped to have matched Amyot in his knowledge and understanding of his author, the credit for the initial selection of his material nevertheless lay not with him, but with his patrons.

The 'choise-booke' of the world

Assuming that he started from the start when engaging in the work of translation, the passage that first faced Florio as he set about fulfilling Sir Edward Wotton's request was a prefatory disclaimer of studiously conscientious modesty. *'Of the institution and education of children'* begins with its author asserting his apparent lack of authority with respect to the subject of his title. 'I see better then any man else,' wrote Montaigne, 'that what I have set downe, is nought but the fond imaginations of him, who in his youth hath tasted nothing but the paring, and seene but the superficies of true learning: whereof hee hath retained but a generall and shapeless forme'. According to its owner, such an intellect, which comprehended 'a smacke of every thing in generall, but nothing to the purpose in particular', was 'after the French manner'. However, institutional failings were neither solely nor straightforwardly to blame. As Montaigne was quick to observe, individual appetites and aptitudes had to be taken into account. 'And concerning the naturall faculties that are in me,' he continued, '(whereof behold here an essay [dequoy c'est icy l'essay]) I perceive them to faint vnder their owne burthen; my conceites, and my judgement march but vncertaine, and as it were groaping, staggering, and stumbling at every rush' (F, I.25.67; M, p. 151).

Crucially, it was in terms of his natural eclecticism that Montaigne established his limited credentials both as an author and as a theorist of education. Whereas some writers 'botch vp all their works (as it is an easie matter in a common subiect, namely for the wiser sort) with ancient inventions, here and there hudled-vp together'; and whereas the more unjust and cowardly among them 'hide what they have filched from others' and attempt to pass it off as their own, Montaigne conceived of his source materials as arbitrary standards against which to test the range and extent of his understanding. 'I never spake of others,' he declared, 'but that I may the more speake of my selfe.' As for the educational value of his writings, Montaigne claimed to be neither a complete student nor a comprehensive guide. 'These are but my humours and opinions,' he maintained, 'and I deliver them but to showe what my conceite

is, and not what ought to be believed.' Insofar as he aimed simply to 'display' his transient self, Montaigne's kind of teaching was exemplary, in a neutral sense, rather than positively didactic, in character. 'I have no authoritie to purchase beliefe,' he insisted, 'neither do I desire it; knowing well that I am not sufficiently taught to instruct others' (F, I.25.68). Such introductory assertions of his inadequacy notwithstanding, Montaigne proceeded to fulfil the requests that he had evidently received from visitors for a more extensive discourse on the subject of his previous chapter, 'Du pedantisme'. He addressed the piece to his friend, Lady Diane de Foix, the Countess of Gurson, with the express intention that she should put its precepts into practice in the 'institution' of the child she was then expecting. Naturally enough, Montaigne hoped and assumed that it would be a boy (F, I.25.68-9).

Before he entered into the details of his educational programme, Montaigne provided his noble addressee with some general indications of its objectives. 'Madam,' he deferentially began, 'Learning joyned with true knowledge is an especiall and gracefull ornament, and an implement of wonderfull vse and consequence, namely in persons raised to that degree of fortune, wherein you are.' As conventionally flattering and exclusive as it might appear, Montaigne's observation was in fact an application of his most fundamental and enduring belief about the appropriate relationship between education and ethics. According to the author, 'learning hath not her owne true forme, nor can she make shew of her beauteous lineaments, if she fall into the hands of base and vile persons'. And the number of the undeserving might easily include established academics and qualified professionals whose credentials were typically regarded with respect. 'She is much more ready and fierce', wrote Montaigne of learning, 'to lend hir furtherance and direction in the conduct of a war, to attempt honorable actions, to command a people, to treat a peace with a prince or forraine nation, then she is to form an argument in Logick, to devise a Sillogisme, to canvase a case at the barre, or to prescribe a receipt of pills.' Having advised his 'noble Ladie' to this effect, Montaigne briefly reminded her of the learned achievements of her ancestors, the 'ancient and noble Earles of *Foix*', and of her uncle, '*Francis*

Lord of *Candale*, whose writings had apparently done much to enhance the reputation of the 'matchlesse qualitie' of her 'house' (F, I.25.69).

In the middle of this overture on learning and nobility, Florio inserted his only sustained addition to the texts that he translated. The interpolation takes the form of a lengthy paraphrase of a letter by Torquato Tasso, a writer whom Florio twice cited in his dedication to the ladies of the Harington household (F, sig. A3r-v), and whom he identified in the margin of another of Montaigne's chapters as the 'judicious' and 'ingenious' poet whose descent into irrational 'sottishnesse' the author emotively described (F, II.12.284). For both Florio and Montaigne, then, 'famous *Torquato Tasso*' was a figure of some significance. As such, Montaigne would almost certainly have approved of the sentiments that Tasso vicariously contributed to his chapter on education. 'Philosophie being a rich and noble Queene,' the passage reads, 'and knowing her owne worth, graciously smileth vpon, and lovingly embraceth Princes and noble men, if they become sutors to her, admitting them as her minions, and gently affording them all the favours she can'; conversely, 'if shee be wooed, and sued vnto by clownes, mechanicall fellowes, and such base kinde of people, she holds hir selfe disparaged and disgraced, as holding no proportion with them' (F, I.25.69). Warren Boutcher argues that Florio's inclusion of extraneous material from an author whose texts he often read with his noble pupils may have functioned as a surreptitious 'advertisement' for the kinds of intellectual service that he provided.³¹ Accordingly, the private tutor's paraphrase of Tasso ended with an appeal to the lessons of 'experience' on the success of certain approaches to philosophy, and on the inevitable failure of others. 'If a true Gentleman or nobleman followe hir with any attention and wooe hir with importunity,' it concludes, 'hee shall learne and knowe more of hir, and proove a better scholler in one yeere, then an vngentle, or base fellow shall in seaven, though he pursue hir never so attentively' (F, I.25.69).

Seamless as it was, it seems unlikely that Florio's intervention would have been noticed by many of his readers. Although it was accompanied in his

³¹ Boutcher, 'The Origins of Florio's Montaigne', pp. 13-14.

edition by marginal inverted commas, so too were other passages of extended, authentic, quotation.³² All the same, the initial conviction about the education of children to which Montaigne immediately turned was certainly pertinent to the interests of his translator. For Montaigne, as for Florio, it was vitally important that great care should be taken in the choice of a personal tutor. And since the proper goal of a noble education was 'rather to shape and institute an able and sufficient man, then a bare learned man', Montaigne preferred a teacher with 'wisdom, judgement, civill customes, and modest behaviour' to one with 'bare and meere litterall learning'. The author further desired of his tutor 'that in his charge he hold a new course'. This required him to adapt both the form and the content of his teaching to the particular interests and aptitudes of each individual pupil. Indeed, Montaigne argued that the effectiveness of the tutor's teaching could most accurately be assessed by demanding an account not only 'of the words contained in his lesson, but of the sense and substance thereof': as he explained, its 'profit' to the student should be judged 'not by the testimonie of his memorie, but by the witness of his life'. Rehearsing the alimentary commonplace to which he had resorted in the previous chapter, Montaigne again declared it to be 'a signe of cruditie and indigestion for a man to yeeld vp his meate, even as he swallowed the same: the stomacke hath not wrought his full operation, vnlesse it have changed forme, and altered fashion of that which was given him to boyle and decoct'. This time, however, the author followed his sources further in the analogical description of the process of composition. After relating his acquaintance with an Italian natural philosopher of staunch and unshakeable Aristotelian convictions, and after quoting from Dante and Seneca to the effect that scepticism and freedom, like truth and reason, are, or at least should be, 'common to all', Montaigne turned to a secondary similitude which had long since taken an even surer hold of the rhetorical and pedagogical imagination. Just as 'bees do heere and there sucke this, and cull that flower,' he wrote, 'but afterward they produce the honny, which is peculiarly their owne', so too a student 'may lawfully alter, transforme, and confound' the materials he has borrowed, in order 'to shape out of them a perfect peece of worke, altogether his owne' (F, I.25.70-1).

³² Ibid., p. 13 n. 13.

Montaigne's apian analogy had a long, and occasionally distinguished, history. Having been firmly established by Seneca in the eighty-fourth of his moral epistles, it was to some extent presupposed by the medieval readers and writers who compiled alphabetical florilegia, or flower-collections, from the works of classical and early Christian authors.³³ The tradition endured: in the fifteenth century, the pioneering Italian humanist, Guarino Guarini, recommended the practice to colleagues and pupils alike; in the sixteenth, the revised edition of one printed collection met with widespread commercial success when it was published under the title *Illustrium poetarum flores per Octavianum Mirandulam collecti, et a studioso quodam in locos communes nuper digesti, ac castigati*.³⁴ In principle, textual 'flowers' such as those gathered by Guarino and Mirandula could be encountered, processed, and rendered productive in the themes and orations of the students and readers who used them. In practice, however, bees could turn flower arrangers with remarkable ease and rapidity. A generation before Montaigne was born, the humanist educator and propagandist, Desiderius Erasmus, sought in a series of influential treatises to reform and reinvigorate the tradition. His *De ratione studii ac legendi interpretandique auctores* and *De duplici copia verborum ac rerum*, both of which were published in 1512, have been described by Ann Moss as representing 'something of a watershed' in the history of the commonplace book: together, they promoted a comprehensively rhetorical model of the acquisition of knowledge and the production of valid discourse. As for the author's *Ciceronianus* of 1528, Moss observes that 'Seneca's digestion simile rumbles through [it], accompanied by the humming of his bees (duly modulated to Erasmus's own key)': for Erasmus, as Moss puts it, 'what the writer acquires from the process of absorbing and compounding a diversity of authors is the power to express himself'.³⁵

³³ See Walter J. Ong, 'Commonplace Rhapsody: Ravisius Textor, Zwinger and Shakespeare', in R. R. Bolgar (ed.), *Classical Influences on European Culture A. D. 1500-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 91-126 (pp. 118-19).

³⁴ See Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books*, pp. 53-4 and 189-90.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 102 and 105.

Montaigne would certainly have agreed. However, whereas Erasmus's bee relies for his materials solely on flowers of a specifically textual nature, Montaigne intended his to set his sights much further and much more variously afield. The student might well incorporate and repossess the finest classical opinions, but the success of his compositions was 'always provided, his judgement, his travel, studie, and institution tend to nothing, but to frame the same perfect'. It was a telling condition, and what it told was that no classroom, library, or commonplace book could alone accommodate the range of materials appropriate to the cultivation of virtue. Conversely, in a 'Prentiship' devoted to 'exercise', 'practise', and observation, 'what action or object soever presents it-selfe vnto our eies, may serve-vs instead of a sufficient booke' (F, I.25.71). Montaigne's child was to be exposed to local and foreign customs and conversations, to alien environments and physical recreations, and to any and every experience that might be expected to instil in him 'an honest curiositie to search-out the nature and causes of all things' (F, I.25.73). Books, and in particular the concise and judicious biographical histories of Plutarch, remained an indispensable part of this education; however, its aims of enlightenment could only properly be fulfilled through 'the commerce of men, and by frequenting abroad in the world' (F, I.25.74).

Since his programme of education was specifically designed for the expected heir of an aristocratic family of fairly considerable means, it was reasonable that Montaigne should advocate a literal as well as a metaphorical broadening of the child's horizons: the alternative he sought to the exclusively textual orientation of humanist learning was restricted neither by classmates nor by classroom walls. Accordingly, rather than collecting commonplaces, Montaigne intended his student to accumulate and compile perspectives. 'This great vniverse', he wrote, '(which some multiply as *Species* vnder one *Genus*) is the true looking-glasse wherein we must looke, if we wil know whether we be of a good stamp, or in the right byase.' As he continued, he appealed to a commonplace metaphor of somewhat indeterminate bibliographical significance. 'I would have this worlds-frame to be my Schollers choise-booke [le livre de mon escolier]', the passage reads: 'So many strange humours, sundry sects, varying judgements, diverse opinions,

different lawes, and fantastical customs teach-vs to judge rightly of ours, and instruct our judgement to acknowledge his imperfections and naturall weaknesse, which is no easie an apprentiship' (F, I.25.75; M, p. 164).

As a translator, and later an apologist, of the *Theologia naturalis sive liber creaturarum* of Raymond Sebond (F, II.12.252-3), Montaigne was familiar with the analogy of the world with a book in which nature, and by extension culture, could be read. In Florio's rendering, however, the book of the world seems to be not only the scholar's book of choice, but also his book of choices, selections, and categorically recorded observations. Such an inflection came sanctioned by an authoritative tradition. For a century or more, humanist logicians such as Rudolph Agricola, Philip Melanchthon, and Johann Sturm had been developing profoundly influential theories of the naturally referential properties of the dialectical and rhetorical places.³⁶ In Melanchthon's view, as Ann Moss states it, topical sets or categories 'have objects of reference in the real world, before they are filled with texts from books', so that 'the headings in the student's commonplace-book are a key to chapters in the book of nature itself'.³⁷

One printed compendium which followed such principles, and upon which Montaigne evidently drew, was Theodor Zwinger's encyclopaedic, and hugely successful, *Theatrum vitae humanae*.³⁸ Consulting its analytical diagrams and

³⁶ See Lisa Jardine, 'Humanist logic', in Charles B. Schmitt and others (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 173-98; Peter Mack, *Renaissance Argument: Valla and Agricola in the Traditions of Rhetoric and Dialectic* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), ch. 7; Kees Meerhoff, 'The Significance of Philip Melanchthon's Rhetoric in the Renaissance', in Peter Mack (ed.), *Renaissance Rhetoric* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), pp. 46-62; Ann Moss, *Renaissance Truth and the Latin Language Turn* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), ch. 7.

³⁷ Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books*, pp. 120-1.

³⁸ See Villey, *Les Sources et l'évolution*, i, pp. 251-2; Ann Blair, 'Note Taking as an Art of Transmission', *Critical Inquiry*, 31 (2004), 85-107 (p. 101). The *Theatrum* was first published in Basel in 1565; it reached its fifth and largest edition in 1604.

following in its pages the logical and sequential arrangement of its topics, Montaigne would have discovered an order of natural commonplaces which its author considered as representative of the human microcosm and the universal macrocosm alike.³⁹ Even so, the actual contents of Zwinger's comprehensive commonplace book were entirely and ineradicably textual: Samuel Hartlib later surmised that Zwinger must initially have composed it by tearing out whole leaves from the books that were his sources.⁴⁰ In order truly to find his place and understand its conditions, Montaigne's noble student would have to supplement his reading and collecting with accounts and observations of his own. If Florio's choice of translation seemed to allude to a structural model, his author knew of a commonplace story which could be manipulated to exemplify his directive.

The meaning of 'Philosophie'

In Book V of his *Tusculanae disputationes*, Cicero related Heraclides of Pontus's account of the origin of an often contested term. In conversation with the visiting Pythagoras, Leon of Phlius was sufficiently impressed with the extent of his learning and eloquence to ask him 'to name the art in which he put most reliance'. Rejecting Leon's most basic assumption, 'Pythagoras said that for his part he had no acquaintance with any art, but was a philosopher [sed esse philosophum]'. Asked by his host to explain the meaning of the word, he 'replied that the life of man seemed to him to resemble the festival which was celebrated with most magnificent games before a concourse collected from the whole of Greece'. Whereas 'some men whose bodies had been trained sought to win the glorious distinction of a crown', and while 'others were attracted by the prospect of making gain by buying or selling', there was at the games a third group, 'and that quite the

³⁹See Ong, 'Commonplace Rhapsody', pp. 111-16; Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books*, pp. 195-7.

⁴⁰See Ann Blair, 'Reading Strategies for Coping with Information Overload ca. 1550-1700', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 64 (2003), 11-28 (p. 27).

best type of free-born men, who looked neither for applause nor gain, but came for the sake of the spectacle and closely watched what was done and how it was done'. Just as these spectators had access to a broader and more complete perspective, so too, for Pythagoras, there were in life 'a special few who, counting all else as nothing, closely scanned the nature of things'. These men were truly 'lovers of wisdom (for that is the meaning of the word philosopher [id est enim philosophos]); and just as at the games the men of truest breeding looked on without any self-seeking, so in life the contemplation and discovery of nature far surpassed all other pursuits'.⁴¹

Cicero's story contains at least four distinctly identifiable elements: the opening historical account, Pythagoras's similitude, its accompanying explanation, and the final moral maxim. Related though they are, each of these elements at one time or another led something of an independent existence in the print and commonplace culture of sixteenth-century Europe. As such, each could be interpreted in various ways. In his augmented version of Plutarch's *Apophthegmata*, first published in 1531, Erasmus concentrated on the explanatory part of Pythagoras's similitude, describing the contemplative life of the spectator, or philosopher, as one of unique personal tranquillity and enjoyment.⁴² In the collection of Ciceronian sentences compiled by the Guyenne tutor, Petrus Lagnerius, in the 1530s and 40s, the story was pared back to include only a briefly contextualized account of the invention and meaning of the name 'philosopher'.⁴³ Throughout the early modern period, the validity of Pythagoras's closing moral maxim was vigorously debated, with humanists and posthumanists from Thomas More to

⁴¹ Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, ed. and tr. J. E. King (London: Heinemann, 1927), pp. 430-3.

⁴² Desiderius Erasmus, *Apophthegmatum opus* (Paris, 1533), pp. 440-1.

⁴³ [Petrus Lagnerius (ed.)], *Sententiæ Ciceronis, Demosthenis, ac Terentii. Dogmata philosophica* (London, 1575), p. 373. Lagnerius's collection first appeared under the title *Marci Tullii Ciceronis sententiæ illustriores* (Paris, 1546): see Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books*, pp. 167-9.

Francis Bacon striving, in their various ways, to reconcile the traditional opposition between the active and the contemplative lives.⁴⁴

As a magistrate, a diplomat, and a mayor of Bordeaux who periodically retired from office in order to devote himself to reading, writing, and managing the family estate, Montaigne was ambivalent about the relative merits of these ostensibly distinct modes of existence. In *'Of Solitarinesse'*, he sought first to 'leave aparte this out-worne comparison, betweene a solitarie and an active life', and then to investigate and reformulate that very distinction (F, I.38.118). In *'Of Pedantisme'*, he described the ancient Persian and Spartan systems of education as 'excellent' on the grounds that they promoted 'assay of action [l'essay de l'action]' and 'an vncessant practise of well-doing' in the service of public virtue, government, and security (F, I.24.65-6; M, p. 148). In a pair of late additions to *'Of the institution and education of children'*, he turned to Cicero's story, placing a modified version of one of its elements at either end of a discussion of his general educational agenda. According to Warren Boutcher, Florio may initially have worked from a copy of Montaigne's 1588 edition before reconciling it at a later stage with Gournay's later, much fuller, text.⁴⁵ Given the content of his earlier interpolation from Tasso, it seems likely that the translator would have been especially interested in his author's choice and handling of the new philosophical material that the posthumous publication included. The passage as a whole rehearses and reaffirms some of Montaigne's most cogent criticisms of contemporary academic practices and institutions. Its treatment of Cicero's story in particular encapsulates his pragmatic approach to the principles of composition and contemplation; it also helps to establish his essentially beneficent vision of the meaning and pursuit of true philosophy.

⁴⁴ See James Hankins, 'Humanism and modern political thought', in Jill Kraye (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 118-41 (pp. 137-40); Stephen Gaukroger, *Francis Bacon and the Transformation of Early-Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 45-8.

⁴⁵ Boutcher, 'The Origins of Florio's Montaigne', pp. 22-3.

Montaigne's first use of Cicero's story immediately precedes a statement of one of his most firmly held convictions about education. 'Vnto examples may all the most profitable Discourses of Philosophie bee sorted,' he wrote, 'which ought to be the touch-stone of humane actions, and a rule to square them by'. In Montaigne's view, the role of education was to make philosophy accessible, and the role of philosophy in education was to render its lessons useful. Accordingly, while the nature of knowledge and ignorance should be the ultimate aim or 'scope of studie', Montaigne insisted that his pupil be schooled particularly in the meaning of virtue and vice. He should be taught, that is, 'what valour, what temperance, and what justice-is: what difference there is betweene ambition and avarice, bondage and freedome, subjection and liberty, by which marks a man may distinguish true and perfect contentment, and how farre-forth one ought to feare or apprehend death, grieffe, or shame'; he should also be encouraged to learn 'what wardes or springs move-vs', and to determine 'the causes of so many motions in-vs' (F, I.25.75). As a list of primarily moral topics and antitheses, Montaigne's syllabus might easily have been derived from the instructions of Erasmus and Melanchthon, or even from the otherwise diverse practices of Lagnerius and Zwinger, in the design and maintenance of commonplace books. As a series of broadly ethical heads and considerations, it also corresponds in a number of respects to the titles, themes, concerns, and enquiries of many of the author's own chapters. Indeed, Montaigne's general educational curriculum shared with his larger project a set of vital and profound objectives. As he wrote of his pupil: 'the first discourses, wherewith his conceit should be sprinkled, ought to bee those, that rule his manners, and direct his sense; which will both teach him to know himselfe, and how to live, and how to die-well' (F, I.25.76).

In a sense, it is hardly surprising that an author's personal interests and preoccupations should be reflected in his programme of education. And yet the holistic nature of Montaigne's approach to the philosophical existence is remarkable. As a preface to his syllabus of topics, he chose to insert a modified version of the similitude from Cicero's story. 'Our life (saide Pithagoras)', the passage begins, 'drawes-neare vnto the great and populous

assemblies of the Olympike games, wherein some, to get the glory, and to winne the goale of the games, exercise their bodies with all industrie; others, for greedinesse of gaine, bring thither marchandise to sell'. So far, Montaigne's is a reasonably faithful rehearsal. The revisions occur in his assessment of the relative superiority of Pythagoras's crucial third group, and in his analysis of the motives and objectives of its members: 'others there are', he wrote, '(and those be not the worst) that seeke after no other good, but to marke, how, wherefore, and to what end, all things are done: and to be spectators or observers of others mens lives and actions, that so they may the better judge and direct their owne' (F, I.25.75).

By diminishing slightly Pythagoras's estimation of the spectators in his similitude, and by adding to their aims and purposes reflection, circumspection, and resolution, Montaigne modestly advocated the kind of active contemplation of which his own essays and observations of himself and the world around him were an example. And yet neither the spectators in the story nor their implied modern counterparts were explicitly identified by Montaigne as philosophers. Having surveyed the current state of the art and found fundamental problems with the materials, methods, and outcomes of much contemporary teaching and research, the author had good reason to be cautious with his terminology. 'If we could restraine and adapt the appurtenances of our life to their right byase and naturall limites,' he suggested, 'we should finde the best parte of the sciences that now are in vse, cleane out of fashion with vs'; even in 'those that are most in vse,' he argued, 'there are certain by-wayes and deepe-flows most [un]profitable, which we should doe-well to leave, and according to the institution of *Socrates*, limite the course of our studies in those where profit is wanting.' Supporting his case with references to ancient astronomical theory, the instructions of a medieval grammarian, and the lexicon of modern scholastic logicians, Montaigne proposed that culpability lay with anyone and everyone who failed to value virtue and wisdom over learning; anyone, that is, who brought the name of philosophy into disrepute. 'It is a thing worthy consideration,' he wrote, 'to see what state things are brought vnto in this our age; and howe Philosophy, even to the wisest, and men of best vnderstanding, is but an idle, vaine and

fantasticall name, of small vse, and lesse worth, both in opinion and effect' (F, I.25.76).

According to Montaigne, pedants and theoretical dogmatists had done serious and potentially lasting damage to the reputation of the ideal in whose service they ostensibly laboured. The tasks of restoration and revitalization were immediately taken up by the author himself. First and foremost, he insisted that the love and pursuit of wisdom should begin at the earliest possible age and opportunity. 'They doe very ill,' he wrote of contemporary custodians of philosophy, 'that goe about to make-it seeme as it were inaccessible for children to come vnto, setting-it forth with a wrimpled, gastlie, and frowning visage'. In fact, he argued, 'there-is nothing more beauteous, nothing more delightfull, nothing more gamesome; and as I may say, nothing more fondly wanton: for she presenteth nothing to our eyes, and preacheth nothing to our eares, but sporte and pastime'. Playful and recreational though it was, the kind of philosophy that Montaigne described could hardly be called morally inconsequential or redundant. 'Shee aymeth at nothing but vertue', he declared: 'it is vertue shee seekes after; which as the schoole saieth, is not pitcht on top of an high, steepie, or inaccessible hill'; rather, 'shee keeps hir stand, and holds hir mansion, in a faire, flourishing, and pleasant plaine, whence as from an high watch Tower, she survaieth all things, to be subject vnto hir, to whome any man may with great facilitie come; if he but knowe the way or entrance to hir pallace' (F, I.25.76-7). It was the role of the tutor to teach those ways and entrances, and Montaigne expected the job to be made easier by the corresponding ease with which his 'new kinde of lesson' would be understood. For his new kind of pupil, 'the prize, the glory, & height of true vertue, consisteth in the facility, profit & pleasure of his exercises: so farre from difficultie, and encombrances, that children as well as men, the simple as soone as the wise, may come vnto hir' (F, I.25.77-8).

In Montaigne's view, true philosophy was not esoteric, but accessible: in practice, the delights of wisdom and virtue would be found not in the 'thornie quiddities of Logike', but in 'simple discourses' of temperance, fortitude, and

generosity of spirit, and in the active application of their precepts. Nor were the lessons of philosophy to be encountered only in the schoolroom or on the pages of books. As Montaigne knew from experience, they were also constantly and continually available in the objects, occasions, and circumstances of quotidian existence. The author was referring to his ideal 'scholler' when he wrote that 'a cabinet, a gardin, the table, the bed, a solitarines, a companie, morning and evening, and all hourse shall be alike vnto him, all places shall be a studie for him'. And yet he might easily have been describing an aspect of his own work which quickly became an established part of the early modern essay tradition. Alongside many of the familiar moral commonplaces, Montaigne included chapters on such mundane topics as clothes, sleep, solitude and company, smells, horses, and thumbs. A number of early English essayists followed his lead, with Sir William Cornwallis addressing the subjects of sleep, alehouses, and solitude and company, Francis Bacon discussing buildings and gardens, and both writers sharing their predecessor's conviction that 'Philosophie (as a former of judgements, and modeler of customes)' has 'the priviledge to entermedle hir selfe with all things, and in all places' (F, I.25.78-9).⁴⁶ For early modern essayists such as these, philosophy was not so much a body of knowledge to be learned, mastered, and professed, as an immanent, ubiquitous, and available force with the potential for moral improvement.

Montaigne's reticence about the identity of the spectators in Cicero's story can in part be explained by the necessity he perceived of restoring and revitalizing the contemporary reputation of philosophy. Having attempted to reinvigorate it by appealing to the principle of access and the procedures of active contemplation, the author sought to complete the task by insisting that true philosophy must also involve physical and cultural exercise and the capacity for contemplative action. 'Let him acquaint himselfe with all fashions', he wrote of his pupil, 'that he may be able to doe all things, and

⁴⁶ Cornwallis, *Essayes: 'Of Sleepe'*, sigs. Lr-L2v, *'Of Alehouses'*, sigs. [M5]v-[M7]r, *'Of Solitarinesse and Company'*, sigs. 2D3v-2E4r; E25: *'Of Building'*, pp. 135-8, *'Of Gardens'*, pp. 139-45.

love to doe none but those that are commendable': even 'in his debauching', the author would have his student 'out-go al his fellowes in vigor and constancie, and that he omitte not to doe evill, neither for want of strength or knowledge, but for lacke of will' (F, I.25.80). In Montaigne's holistic view of the relationship between education and philosophy, practical, ethical action was not the opposite of contemplation, but its corollary. 'Loe-here my lessons,' he wrote, 'wherin he that acteth them, profiteth more, then he that but knoweth them, whome if you see, you heare, and if you heare him, you see him.' In order to clinch his argument, Montaigne referred to 'some body in *Plato*' who strenuously denied 'that to Philosophie, be to learne many things, and to exercise the artes'; he then quoted, first directly, and then indirectly, from Cicero (F, I.25.81).

The first citation was eventually traced by Florio and Gwinne to Book IV of the Roman author's *Tusculanae disputationes*: the relevant place is recorded in their preliminary list of errors and omissions, and the bearing of the passage on Montaigne's agenda is simple and straightforward enough. '*Hanc amplissimam omnium artium bene vivendi disciplinam,*' it reads, '*vita magis quàm litteris persequuti sunt. This discipline of living well, which is the amplest of all other artes, they followed rather in their lives, then in their learning or writing.*' The case with the indirect allusion which followed was very different. According to the boundaries of Florio's editorial policy, it neither required nor received a textual location. Had it done so, it would have been seen to diverge from its source in a significant point of detail: 'Leo Prince of the Philiatians, enquiring of *Heraclides Ponticus*, what arte he professed, [he] answered. Sir, I professe neither arte nor science; but I am a Philosopher'. Oblique as it was, the relation of this modified Ciceronian anecdote to the similitude with which Montaigne prefaced his discussion of the nature and pursuit of philosophy would almost certainly have gone unnoticed by the less classically literate of his readers. For those who did recognize it, the author's reattribution to Heraclides of Pythagoras's neologic declaration would have represented further evidence of his advocacy of contemplative action. In Cicero's story, Pythagoras explained what he meant by the word 'philosopher' by comparing the role of the disinterested spectator to the life of the purely contemplative

observer. In Montaigne's deconstruction, assisted by Florio's editorial restraint, the individual elements have been isolated, altered, and detached from each other in the service of a different moral maxim. That 'the true mirror of our discourses, is the course of our lives' was the author's sententious conclusion (F, I.25.81). However accessible philosophy was made, that is, and however efficiently its lessons and objectives were learned, the value of contemplation could only be established by the acts that it encouraged and informed.

The study of the self

Aesthetically, rhetorically, and institutionally, the English *Essays* of Montaigne reflected and represented the interests and concerns not only of Florio and his editorial colleagues, but also of the noble patrons in whose households they lived and worked. As such, the book and its contents promoted a distinctive set of late humanistic values which in some respects obscured, and in others enhanced, the critical and progressive principles of its original author. Even so, the *Essays* remained a convincing and engaging portrait of a 'familiar and private' writer whose stated aim was to reveal his 'naturall forme' as fully and as explicitly as 'publike reverence' allowed (F, sig. [A6]v). Indeed, the relationships between public and private ethics, and between the active and the contemplative lives, were topics of considerable personal significance to Montaigne. His earliest essays began in retirement, as attempts to alleviate the 'melancholy humour' that afflicted his withdrawal from the world of civil affairs (F, I.8.14-15; II.8.222-3), and he revisited the theme at crucial junctures of some of his most advanced and seminal later chapters. As a child, the author had been predisposed to 'a certaine dull-languishing, and heaive slouthfulnesse', which had given his college tutors some cause for concern (F, I.25.86); as an adult, he found that 'libertie and idlenesse', his 'chiefe qualities', were indeed 'qualities diameterly contrarie' to those required of a public official or politician (F, III.9.594). As a writer and as a man, Montaigne had a number of role models among the poets,

philosophers, and military commanders of classical and contemporary civilization. Above all, however, he admired those who managed to strike the kind of healthy and productive balance that he tried to cultivate in himself. As he put it in his final chapter '*Of Experience*', '*Pythagoras* (say they) hath followed a Philosophie, all in contemplation: *Socrates* altogether in maners and in action: *Plato* hath found a mediocritie betweene both. But they say so by way of discourse[.] For, the true temperature is found in *Socrates*; & *Plato* is more *Socraticall* then *Pythagoricall*; and it becomes him best' (F, III.13.659).

Sometime around 1569 or 1570, Montaigne had a near-death experience. Having accidentally been thrown from his horse in a violent collision with a servant, he lost consciousness and was presumed dead by his companions for fully two hours. The incident had a profound and lasting effect on his thinking about life, death, and the nature of identity, and his later recollections of the episode marked a significant turning point in his developing understanding of his aims and objectives as an author. At the beginning of the resulting chapter, '*De l'exercitation*', or '*Of exercise or practise*', Montaigne drew attention to the impotence of 'Discourse and Instruction' with respect to the direction of 'action' and 'performance', arguing that it was necessary, 'over and besides that', to 'exercise and frame our minde, to the traine whereunto we will range-it: otherwise, when we shall be on the point of the effects, it will doubtles finde it selfe much engaged and impeached'. For Montaigne, the wisest and most impressive historical characters had invariably recognized the value of experience and taken it upon themselves to seek it out: 'amongst Philosophers,' he maintained, 'those that have willed to attaine to some greater excellence, have not been content, at home, and at rest, to expect the rigors of fortune, for feare she should surprise them vnexperienced, and find them novices, if she should chance to enter fight with them;' instead, they have 'gone to meete and front hir before, and witting-earnestly cast themselves to the triall of the hardest difficulties'. Even so, Montaigne knew that there was a limit to the wisdom that 'povertie', 'austeritie', and self-mutilation could provide. As he put it, 'to die, which is the greatest worke we have to doe, exercise can nothing availe vs thereunto': as far as death was concerned, 'we are all novices, and new to learne when we come vnto it'.

Although 'there have, in former times, beene found men so good husbands and thriftie of time, that even in death they have assayde [essayé] to taste and savour it; and bent their minde to observe and see, what manner of thing that passage of death was', still, by definition, 'none did ever yet come back againe to tell vs tidings of-it' (F, II.6.214-15; M, p. 389). Death, it would appear, was beyond the comprehension of experience.

One of the ancients who came closest to perceiving and reporting on death was Canius Julius, a first-century Roman nobleman who was sentenced to execution by the tyrannical emperor Caligula, and whose quintessentially Stoic responses to his fate were recorded by Seneca in his treatise *De tranquillitate animi*. From among the 'many marvelous evident assurances' that Seneca related of Canius's 'matchlesse resolution', Montaigne selected as an illustration of his argument a conversation between the nobleman and an anonymous companion who remained at his side until the end. As the fatal moment drew near, Canius was asked by his friend to describe the state of his soul and the thoughts that possessed his mind. 'I thought (answered he) to keep me readie and prepared with all my force, to-see whether in this instant of death, so short and so neere at hand, I might perceive some dislodging or distraction of the soule, and whether it will shew some feeling of hir sodaine departure'. As inevitably private as his final observations would be, Canius expressed his hope that his experiment would also have a social dimension and an ultimately moral application: 'if I apprehend or learne any thing of hir', he said of his passing soul, 'I may afterward, if I can, returne, and give advertisement thereof vnto my friends'. For Montaigne, as for Seneca, Canius's determination to continue to learn and teach under even such hostile conditions was the epitome of Stoic wisdom, virtue, and constancy. 'Loe-here a Philosopher,' the author declared, 'not onely vntil death, but even in death it selfe: what assurance was-it, and what fiercenes of courage, to will that his owne death should serve him as a lesson, and have leasure to thinke elsewhere in a matter of such consequence?' (F, II.6.215).

Canis found himself at the limit of exercising or practising death: neither Seneca nor any other author managed to provide an account of the fulfilment of the condemned nobleman's promise. In the absence of such a testimony, the anecdote of Canis's exemplary conduct and intentions appears also to have set a limit for Montaigne on the relevance and utility of commonplace tales in the face of so grave a topic. Although the six folio pages of which *'Of exercise or practise'* consists contain eleven ornamental quotations, including two from Tasso's *La Gerusalemme liberata* which Florio and Gwinne surprisingly failed to trace, no allusions, analogies, or intertextual references are assimilated, and no classical authors directly named or discussed, until the closing passages of the chapter. Instead, Montaigne set out to find knowledge of death in the experiences of his life which seemed to him most closely to resemble it. He remarked upon the ease with which 'we passe from waking to sleeping'; the lack of 'interest' with which 'we loose the knowledge of light, and of our selves'. He considered the cases of those who 'by some violent accident are falne into a faintnes of heart, and have lost all senses', observing that 'the instant or moment of the passage' is 'not to be feared', since 'we can have, nor sense, nor feeling without leasure'. He suggested that a condition of 'sound and perfect health' made the imagination of 'sickenesses' far more 'yrkesome and horrible' than they proved to be when eventually they attacked (F, II.6.215). Finally, he turned his attentions to the pivotal event of a few years before, when an equestrian collision with one of his labourers left him comatose on the ground and in serious danger of his life.

The circumstances surrounding Montaigne's fall differed significantly from those that attended his historical exemplars of experience. Whereas the greatest philosophers had actively sought out difficulties and trials from which to learn, and whereas Canis Julius had at least been granted time to formulate a strategy with which to approach his impending execution, Montaigne had merely been taking the air, 'for recreation-sake', in the relative safety of his estate, and 'vpon a very easie-going nagge', when 'a sudaine occasion' caught him unawares and unprepared. The 'peece of service' into which Montaigne and his untrained horse were unexpectedly pressed seems to have been related to the civil wars in which the surrounding

countryside was then embroiled; in any case, one of the author's men '(a-strong sturdie fellow)' responded to the emergency by mounting his 'yong strong-headed horse' and recklessly rushing ahead of his colleagues headlong into his master's path. Montaigne described his servant 'as a *Colossus* [comme un colosse]'; himself and his animal as 'both very little': inevitably, both were overthrown, and both fell to the ground with their 'heeles vpward'. As the author recalled, 'the nagge lay along astonied in one place, and I in a trance groveling on the ground ten or twelfe paces wide of him; my face all torne and brused, my sword which I had in my hand a good way from me, my girdle broken, with no more motion or sense in me then a stocke'. Montaigne declared that it was 'the onely swowning [le seul esvanouissement]' that he had felt before or since. And as they tried and failed to return him to his senses and began to carry him back home to his house, his companions feared the worst and naturally supposed him dead (F, II.6.216; M, p. 391).

Two hours into the journey, Montaigne finally began to stir. Set on his feet and bent forward, he repeatedly coughed up huge quantities of blood. He seemed 'to recover a little life', but the process was so slow and gradual that for a long time his 'chiefe senses were much more enclining to death then to life'. Montaigne's account of this liminal state is remarkable in a number of respects. He claimed that the memory of it had been 'deeply imprinted' in his mind, and that it revealed to him the 'visage and *Idea*' of death 'so lively and so naturally' that it had continued ever since 'in some sort' to 'reconcile' him to its reality. He reported that his returning vision was initially 'so dim, so weake and so troubled' that he could barely perceive the light, and that 'the functions of the soule', too, 'started vp and came in the same progresse as those of the body'. Noticing that he was covered in blood, his first thoughts were that he had fallen victim to one of the shots that he heard ringing out nearby, and that his fragile existence was on the verge of leaving his 'lippes-ends'. Nevertheless, Montaigne was far from being traumatized. Instead, he recalled closing his eyes in an attempt to let himself go, and attaining as he did so a unique tranquillity of the soul. His description of the experience is alluring, and its qualities were further enhanced by Florio's sibilant amplifications. 'It was an imagination swimming superficially in my minde,'

the passage reads, 'as weake and as tender as all the rest: but in truth, not onely exempted from displeasure, but rather comixt with that pleasant sweetenes [ceste douceur], which they feele that suffer themselves to fall into a soft-slumbring and sense-entrancing sleepe [qui se laissent glisser au sommeil]' (F, II.6.216-17; M, p. 392).

Accidental and unexpected though it was, Montaigne's brief residence on the threshold of extinction afforded him the opportunity to test an apparently unorthodox hypothesis concerning sensation, consciousness, and the nature of personal identity. 'It was even my conceite, against the opinion of many,' he wrote, 'yea & against that of *Stephanus la Boëtie*, that those whom we see, so overwhelmed, and faintly-drooping at the aproches of their end, or vtterly cast downe with the lingering tediousnes of their deseases'; those, that is, 'whom we heare throb and rattle, and send forth grones and gaspes, although wee gather some tokens from them, whereby it seemeth, they have yet some knowledge left, and certaine motions wee see them make with their body: I say, I have ever thought, they had their soule and body buried and asleepe' (F, II.6.217). The author's reference to La Boétie is instructive. About six or seven years before his fall, Montaigne had spent the best part of a week at his friend's bedside as he succumbed to the illness that prematurely killed him. He considered La Boétie's death to be exemplary, and he recorded his observations and their final conversations in a lengthy letter to his father. He recounted in detail his friend's last words of encouragement and advice to the people he loved the most, and mentioned only fleetingly the signs of distress and distraction that he showed as he passed away.⁴⁷ Montaigne's grief at his bereavement was acute and enduring, and his attempts to deal with it were part of his motivation as he drafted his earliest chapters.⁴⁸ Above all, he wanted to believe that La Boétie had not suffered unduly, and he did in fact believe that his friend had died a 'brave and fortunate' death: 'without going to the place where he pretended,' the author later wrote, he 'arived there

⁴⁷ Montaigne, *Complete Works*, pp. 1046-56; *Œuvres complètes*, pp. 1347-60.

⁴⁸ See Frame, 'Considerations on the genesis of Montaigne's *Essais*', pp. 1-2 and 6-8; Schiffman, 'Montaigne and the Rise of Skepticism', pp. 508-9.

more gloriously and worthily, than either his desire or hope aymed at. And by his fall fore-went [devança; i.e. surpassed] the power and name, whither by his course he aspired' (F, I.18.30; M, p. 82).

Inevitably, Montaigne's reflections on disease and mortality were informed by his memories of La Boétie's demise; his father and first child had also died of illness, and his brother of an apoplectic fit, within months of his own narrow escape.⁴⁹ 'As for my selfe,' the author maintained, 'I can imagine no state so intolerable nor condition so horrible, as to have a feelingly-afflicted soule, voide of meanes to disburthen and declare hir selfe'. Naturally enough, Montaigne found it reassuring to have 'proved by experience [essayé par effect]' the anaesthetic qualities of a severely deprived or partial consciousness, and to be left in 'no doubt' that his soporific hypothesis had indeed been 'well judged' (F, II.6.217; M, p. 394). He offered a series of general examples in further support of his claim: when falling, 'a naturall impulsion' causes us spontaneously to throw out our arms to break the impact; our hands automatically move to any area of our skin that seems to itch; the muscles of some animals continue to contract and convulse after death; there are certain 'partes' of men's bodies which often 'stirre, stand and lie downe againe' without the consent of their owners. According to Montaigne, 'these passions, which but exteriourly touch vs, can not properly be termed ours; For, to make them ours, a man must wholly be engaged vnto them: And the paines that our feete or handes feele whilest wee sleepe, are not ours'. He considered as similarly alien the responses and instructions that he gave to members of his household as his men returned him home from the scene of his accident. 'They came not from my selfe', he declared: 'They were but light effects, that my senses produced of themselves, as it were of custome. Whatever the soule did assist-it with, was but a dreame, being lightly touched, and onely sprinkled by the soft impression of the senses.' To have died then, Montaigne insisted, 'had beene a very happy death', one that his weakness of body and mind would have prevented him from feeling or

⁴⁹ See Donald M. Frame, *Montaigne: A Biography* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1965), pp. 112-14.

judging. Only a few hours later did he begin to suffer pain. 'I feele my bruises yet,' he wrote, 'and feare me shall doe while I live' (F, II.6.218).

By combining an intensely subjective account of his impressions of his near-death experience with general observations and appeals to common sense, Montaigne constructed a compelling case in support of his soporific hypothesis. Having recently been bereaved of so many important loved ones, the author must have felt only too keenly the weight of the burden of proof. One problem that remained was that not all of the impressions that Montaigne recorded were quite as subjective as he had initially led his readers to believe. 'I will not forget to tell you,' he eventually conceded, 'that the laste thing I could rightly fall into againe, was the remembrance of this accident, and I made my men many times to repeate me over and over againe, whither I was going, whence I came, and at what houre that chance befell me, before I could throughly conceive it.' To begin with, Montaigne's men sought to protect the labourer who had caused his fall by fabricating explanations and telling him 'flim flam tales'. The next day, however, as his memory returned, Montaigne found that he was able to reconstruct his perceptions at the very instant of the collision. He had seen his servant's horse at his heels, he said, and had taken himself for dead: 'me seemed it was a flashing or lightning,' he reported, 'that smote my soule with shaking, and that I came from another world' (F, II.6.218-19).

In the process of recovery, and surrounded by well-meaning yet wilfully unreliable witnesses, Montaigne recalled having been granted a momentary epiphany, a transcendental glimpse of the ineffable cosmos beyond. Another writer might have been enthralled by such a vision, but Montaigne wasted no time in returning to the more urgent business of the mundane. 'This discourse of so slight an accident,' he wrote, 'is but vaine and frivolous, were not the instructions I have drawne from thence, for my vse'. He cited Pliny's opinion that 'every man is a good discipline vnto himselfe, alwayes provided he be able to prie into himselfe', adding that 'this is not my doctrine, it is but my studie; And not another mans lesson, but mine owne'. In most of the editions

that Florio consulted, these were the sentiments with which the chapter on exercise concluded. In Gournay's posthumous publication, however, the translator discovered the inclusion of one of the most extensive and substantial reflections on his work that his author had ever produced. Simultaneously struck anew by the audacity and the modesty of his claims, Montaigne resumed his chapter by reminding his audience both of the limit and the extent of their value. 'What serves my turne,' he suggested, 'may happily serve another mans; otherwise I marre nothing, what I make vse of, is mine owne. And if I play the foole, it is at mine owne cost, and without any other bodies interest. For it is but a kinde of folly, that dies in me, and hath no traine' (F, II.6.219).

Until Montaigne did so, very few writers had chosen to write primarily about themselves. Although Saint Augustine had offered a portrait of his penitential soul, neither he nor any other author had studied his subjectivity on its own, natural, and unashamedly secular terms.⁵⁰ Moreover, although he stopped short of declaring his absolute originality, Montaigne was very much aware of the fact that he was breaking with an established tradition. 'We have notice but of two or three former ancients, that have trodden this path', he wrote; 'yet can we not say, whether altogether like vnto this of mine, for wee know but their names' (F, II.6.219). Soon enough, even the bare identities of those classical pioneers were erased.⁵¹ Indeed, for Montaigne to enter into such uncharted territory was as dangerous as well as a novel undertaking. 'It is a thornie and crabbed enterprise,' he declared, 'and more then it makes shew-of, to follow so strange and vagabond a path, as that of our spirit: To penetrate the shadie, and enter the thicke-covered depths of these internall winding cranks; To chuse so many, and settle so severall aires of his agitations'. His was indeed 'a new extraordinary amusing, that distracts vs from the common occupations of the world, yea and from the most recommended' (F, II.6.219).

⁵⁰ Screech, *Montaigne & Melancholy*, pp. 6-7.

⁵¹ Some of Montaigne's editors have occasionally suggested candidates; however, their conjectures are practically impossible to substantiate: see M, p. 1522 n. 396.2.

As ill advised as it evidently was, Montaigne considered his unflinching attention to his individual character to be the most distinctive aspect and the most essential element of his essay project. 'Many yeares are past', he explained, 'since I have no other aime, whereto my thoughts bend, but my selfe, and that I controle and study nothing but my selfe. And if I study any thing else, it is imediatly to place it vpon, or to say better, in my selfe.' According to the author, such a profoundly personal and provisional pursuit was both infinitely more valuable and demonstrably more productive than any merely academic discipline: 'me thinks I erre not,' he contended, 'as commonly men doe in other sciences, without all comparrison lesse profitable. I impart what I have learn't by this, although I greatly content not my selfe with the progresse I have made therein.' For Montaigne, *'there is no description so hard, nor so profitable, as is the description of a mans owne selfe'* (F, II.6.219). And if the italic font adopted by his printers bears any kind of witness to his priorities, it seems certain that Florio recognized as clearly as did his author the significance of his explicitly stated goal.

Conclusion

The concept of the essay that most clearly emerges from this chapter's exploration of Florio's Montaigne is defined by a series of relationships and negotiations with the principles and practices of humanism. Just as Montaigne's approach to composition was informed by his humanist education, so too Florio's methods of interpretation and elucidation were heavily reliant on traditionally humanist editorial and scholarly techniques. And just as the content of Montaigne's critiques of humanism at times appeared to be in conflict with their means of construction and expression, so too the form of Florio's annotations and explications exposed the extent to which his author was a product of the educational system that he opposed. Above all, however, both the provenance of Florio's translation and the dominant themes that endured within and throughout it promoted a more personal version of humanist education than the kind that the young

Montaigne had received and in later life attacked. In the dedicatory epistle to Book III of his edition, Florio briefly took issue with a passage in the chapter '*Of three commerces or societies*' in which Montaigne afforded ladies only '*small share of Rhetorique, Logique, Law*': by way of explanation, the translator observed of his author that a lady's '*tongue to him is Rhetorique, reason Logique, and commandement Law*' (F, sig. 2R2v; cf. III.3.495). In his final chapter '*Of Experience*', Montaigne himself went further in the subordination or assimilation of the academic disciplines to personal reflections, inquiries, and modes of behaviour. 'I studie my selfe more than any other subject', he wrote. 'It is my supernaturall Metaphisike, it is my naturall Philosophie' (F, III.13.638). As the next chapter will attempt to show, the possible relationships between the essay, the observer, metaphysics, and natural philosophy held even greater significance for another, very different, early modern essayist: Montaigne's successor, and Florio's contemporary, Francis Bacon.

Chapter 2

The Advancement of the Essay I: Scepticism and Reform

Introduction: Daniel and Bacon

In a commendatory poem printed among the preliminary texts to Florio's edition of the *Essayes* of Montaigne, the translator's brother-in-law, Samuel Daniel, paid tribute both to the pioneering spirit of the author and to the skill and dedication of his English interpreter.¹ Beginning with a rehearsal of the commonplace anxiety that '*the presse of writings*' and the production of '*too many bookes*' were the cause of uncertainty, confusion, scepticism, and oppression, Daniel suggested that the situation had become dangerous and that it therefore stood in urgent need of redress (F, sig. ¶r).² For the poet, the delightfully poised motions of the work to which his verses were attached represented a particularly appropriate and comprehensive solution. As well as being a selective accumulator and a critical assimilator of texts, '*this great Potentate, / This Prince Montaigne*', as Daniel entitled him, '*Hath more aduentur'd of his owne estate / Then euer man did of himselfe before*'; furthermore, Florio's '*studious care*' had ensured that his French author would no longer '*b'invassal'd to one Monarchie, / But dwell with all the better world of men / Whose spirits are all of one communitie*'. While he recognized that Montaigne was not the most straightforward or elegant of writers, Daniel nevertheless insisted that even the author's most hostile critics would admit that he '*Yeeldes most rich pieces and extracts of man; / Though in a troubled*

¹ Daniel's poem appears on the same quire insertion as Florio's list of unidentified places. On the relationship between the two writers, see Desmond O'Connor, 'Florio, John (1553-1625)', in *ODNB* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/9758>] (2008) and John Pitcher, 'Daniel, Samuel (1562/3-1619)', *ibid.* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7120>] (2004), both accessed 24 September 2013.

² For similar expressions of concern over the increasing 'multitude of books', see Ann Blair, 'Reading Strategies for Coping with Information Overload ca. 1550-1700', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 64 (2003), 11-28.

frame confus'dly set'. As such, the newly Anglophone Montaigne took pride of place in Daniel's vision of the ideal humanist library, to the extent that he described as 'vnblest' those 'who letters do professe / And have him not' (F, sig. ¶r-v).

Daniel was certainly well qualified to offer his opinion on Montaigne. A few years earlier, the Frenchman had been a major influence on the composition of *Musophilus: Containing a Generall Defence of Learning*, a lengthy colloquy on the theme of action and contemplation which first entered print in 1599 as the tortuous, prophetic centrepiece of *The Poeticall Essayes of Sam. Danyel*. The *Poeticall Essayes* was a composite edition, containing unsold copies of Daniel's historical epic, *The Civill Warres of England, Betweene the Two Houses of Lancaster and Yorke* (1595), revised versions of *The Tragedie of Cleopatra* (1594) and *The Complaint of Rosamond* (1592), and a pair of previously unpublished poems. *Musophilus*, the longer and more prominent of the two new pieces, has been described by John Pitcher as 'perhaps the single most important poem of Daniel's whole career', and as 'certainly the most innovative'.³ It takes the form of a dialogue between the eponymous, contemplative poet and his friend, the critical and pragmatic Philocosmus. In the opening exchanges, *Musophilus* is taken to task for wasting his time on 'an vngainefull arte' and for pursuing in vain 'that idle smoake of praise'; he responds by insisting that *Philocosmus* has lost sight of 'The wayes of right, which vertue doth descrie', and by suggesting that the pecuniary rewards of 'trauaile' and 'toile' are invariably tarnished and insecure.⁴ As the conversation proceeds, commonplace objections and conventional replies begin to give way to arguments and proposals of greater consequence and scope. In his final contribution, having identified the popular presses and the professional academies as sources of political controversy and economic discontentment, *Philocosmus* succinctly summarizes his position:

³ Pitcher, 'Daniel, Samuel (1562/3-1619)'. Also included in the edition was *A Letter from Octavia to Marcus Antonius*.

⁴ *The Poeticall Essayes of Sam. Danyel* (London, 1599): *Musophilus*, sigs. [A]r and Bv-B2r.

Men find that action is another thing
 Then what they in discoursing papers reade,
 The worlds affaires require in managing
 More arts then those wherin you Clearks proceed,
 Whilst timorous knowledge stands considering,
 Audacious ignorance hath done the deed.
 For who knowes most, the more he knows to doubt
 The least discourse is commonly most stout.⁵

Musophilus's response occupies the entire second half of Daniel's poem, and it deals directly with most of the problems that Philocosmus raised. However, rather than offering a final apology for his life of contemplation and withdrawal, Musophilus attempts an imaginative and prescient synthesis of his and his counterpart's values, aims, and qualities. If only meritocracy could be restored to the government and distribution of academic resources, he argues, the confidence to ask new questions and to seek alternative solutions would return:

Then would they onely labour to extend
 Their now vnsearching spirits beyond these bounds
 Of others powres, wherein they must be pend
 As if there were besides no other grounds:
 And set their bold *Plus vltra* far without
 The pillers of those *Axioms* age propounds.
 Discou'ring dayly more, and more about
 In that immense and boundlesse Ocean
 Of Natures riches, neuer yet found out
 Nor fore-clos'd, with the wit of any man.
 So far beyond the ordinarie course
 That other vnindustrious ages ran,
 That these more curious times they might deuorce
 From the opinion they are linckt vnto
 Of our disable and vnactiue force,

⁵ Ibid., sig. Dv.

To shew true knowledge can both speak and do:
 Arm'd for the sharpe, which in these dayes they finde,
 With all prouisions that belong thereto.
 That their experience may not come behind
 The times conceipt, but leading in their place
 May make men see the weapons of the mind
 Are states best strengths, and kingdoms chiefest grace[.]⁶

Through Musophilus, Daniel articulated his utopian vision of a reformed political economy which would encourage philosophical inquiry into the forces of nature and support academic research into their potential applications to national progress and power. Although the poet himself had neither the influence nor the will to begin the necessary work, one of his contemporary essayists did. Like Montaigne and Daniel, Francis Bacon was at times ambivalent about the relative merits of contemplation and action. His first collection of *Essayes*, which was published alongside two other works in 1597, was dedicated to his brother, Anthony, an habitually ill government intelligencer and a former acquaintance of Montaigne's: Bacon told him that 'I sometimes wish your infirmities translated vppon my selfe, that her Maiestie [Queen Elizabeth] mought haue the seruice of so actiue and able a mind, & I mought be with excuse confined to these contemplations & Studies for which I am fittest' (E97, sig. [A4]r).⁷ A few years later, in *The Advancement of Learning*, the seminal survey of the state of the intellectual arts which he addressed to the recently proclaimed King of Great Britain, James VI and I, Bacon clarified his position. 'But this is that, which will indeed dignifie and exalt knowledge', he wrote; 'if contemplation and action may be more neerely and straightly conioyned and vnited together, than they haue beene; a Coniunction like vnto that of the two highest Planets, *Saturne* the Planet of

⁶ Ibid., sig. [E4]r.

⁷ On the relationship between Anthony Bacon and Montaigne, see Kenneth Alan Hovey, "'Mountaigny Saith Prettily': Bacon's French and the Essay", *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 106 (1991), 71-82 (p. 72) and Alan Stewart, 'Bacon, Anthony (1558-1601)', in *ODNB* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/988>] (2008), accessed 25 September 2013.

rest and contemplation; and *Jupiter* the Planet of ciuile societie and action.’ As he explained, his concern with ‘vse and action’ was not merely with ‘the applying of knowledge to laker and profession’; nor was his intention that of Socrates: ‘to call Philosophy down from heauen to conuerse vpon the earth, that is, to leaue natural Philosophie aside, and to applye knowledge onely to manners, and policie’. Instead, Bacon asserted that ‘both heauen and earth doe conspire and contribute to the vse and benefite of man’, and that the common goal of ‘both Philosophies’ should therefore be ‘to separate and reiect vaine speculations, and whatsoever is emptie and voide, and to preserue and augment whatsoever is solide and fruitfull’. The ultimate objective of his proposed reforms to philosophical and natural philosophical inquiry, and of his repeated attempts to effect their adoption among his colleagues in government and his superiors at the royal court, was ‘that knowledge may not bee as a Curtezan for pleasure, & vanitie only, or as a bond-woman to acquire and gaine to her Masters vse, but as a Spouse, for generation, fruit, and comfort’ (*AL*, p. 32).

The nature of the relationship between Bacon’s *Essayes* and the project that he outlined in *The Advancement of Learning* has often been debated. In 1923, Ronald Crane drew attention to a number of thematic and stylistic correspondences between the texts, and argued that many of Bacon’s later *Essayes* were composed in ‘partial fulfilment’ of the moral and civil ‘desiderata’ that his *Advancement* had placed on contemporary intellectual agendas.⁸ In the last century, and particularly in the last fifty years, Crane’s thesis has been variously developed and refined. On the one hand, John Briggs has suggested that Bacon recognized the need ‘to justify his endeavor with didactic essays as well as scientific treatises’, and that in both kinds of publication ‘he ventured and disguised daring interpretations of established religion’.⁹ On the other, Perez Zagorin maintained that although Bacon’s

⁸ Ronald S. Crane, ‘The Relation of Bacon’s *Essays* to his Program for the Advancement of Learning’ (1923), repr. in Brian Vickers (ed.), *Essential Articles for the Study of Francis Bacon* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1972), pp. 272-92 (p. 274).

⁹ John C. Briggs, *Francis Bacon and the Rhetoric of Nature* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 248.

essays were intended ‘to supply gaps’ in ethical knowledge, his ‘moral and political reflections’ were things ‘independent of his natural philosophy’ which ‘must be understood in terms of their own principles’.¹⁰ This chapter approaches the problem from the broader perspective of the history of the early modern essay. In particular, it considers Bacon’s project for natural philosophical reform as a response to some of the sceptical arguments that had recently been propagated by Montaigne, and his essays as elenches, or cautions, against the theological and religious restrictions on systematic inquiry which other early essayists were often explicitly concerned to keep in place. Those arguments, responses, cautions, and restrictions will be analysed in detail later in the chapter. However, it will be useful to begin by returning to the tradition invoked by the title of Samuel Daniel’s 1599 collection, and briefly to outline the history of the association between poetry and the essay.

Poetical essays

The concept of the poetical essay did not originate with Daniel. As early as 1537, the French priest and author François Sagon entered into controversy with his compatriot Clément Marot by publishing a wilfully offensive poem entitled *Le Coup d’essai*; a few years later, a regulated tie-break was introduced to the annual poetic contests at the Floral Games of Toulouse which required the young contestants to compose, impromptu, an *essay*, or formal verse, on a given theme or refrain. Montaigne may have been studying law at the University of Toulouse at around this time: it has occasionally been suggested that the author knew the custom of the Games and that he may have had it in mind when he settled on a title for his book.¹¹ Be that as it may, poetry was enormously important to Montaigne: he claimed to ‘love it

¹⁰ Perez Zagorin, *Francis Bacon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 140 and 129.

¹¹ John C. Dawson, ‘A Suggestion as to the Source of Montaigne’s Title: “Essais”’, *Modern Language Notes*, 51 (1936), 223-6; Donald Frame, *Montaigne: A Biography* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1965), p. 184.

exceedingly', and to 'have some insight or knowledge in other mens Labours', even if he also admitted that 'in trueth I play the Novice when I set my hand vnto it', insisting that 'a man may play the foole every where else, but not in Poesie' (F, II.17.369). Indeed, it was due to his admiration and reverence both for the art and for its greatest practitioners, as well as to his own lack of expertise or competence, that the author continually turned to the words of the classical and modern poets in order to illustrate his arguments or to beautify his prose.

Nevertheless, in spite of his failings, or even because of them, Montaigne seemed at times to regard the production of poetry almost as an equivalent enterprise to the more novel creative process in which he was engaged. 'When I medled with making of verses', he recalled, '(and I neuer made any but in Latine) they euidently accused the Poet I came last from reading: And of my first Essayes, some taste a little of the stranger' (F, III.5.525). Later, as a more mature writer, he discovered in the dialogues of Plato and in the treatises of Plutarch a more freely licensed 'Poeticall' aesthetic to which he naturally and readily inclined. 'Oh God!' he exclaimed of Plutarch's *On the Daemon of Socrates*, 'what grace hath the variation, and what beautie these startings and nimble escapes; and then most, when they seeme to imply carelesnesse and casualtie'; likewise, in the case of his own work, 'it is the vnheedie and negligent reader, that looseth my subject, and not my selfe.' For Montaigne, poetry was not primarily defined by its form, cadence, or lexical register; instead, its identity consisted in its force, its intensity, and its inspiration to ecstasy. 'A thousand Poets labour and languish after the prose-maner,' he remarked, 'but the best antient prose, which I indifferently scatter here and there for verse, shineth every where, with a poeticall vigor and boldnesse, and representeth some aire or touch of it's fury'. In Montaigne's view, poetry, so defined, was fully deserving of 'the maistrie and preheminece given her in matters of speech': it was, he reported, both 'the first Philosophie' and 'the originall language of the Gods' (F, III.9.595-6).

Even as Montaigne wrote and revised these passages, a tradition was beginning to emerge. With King James VI of Scotland's *The Essayes of a Prentise, in the Divine Art of Poesie* (Edinburgh, 1584), Hiérosme d'Avost de Laval's *Essais*, or translations, of thirty of Petrarch's sonnets (Paris, 1584), and *Les Essais poétiques de Guillaume du Peyrat* (Tours, 1593), Montaigne's title assumed its position in contemporary French and Francophile lyric culture. Before long, with the publication of Daniel's volume, of Robert Chester's *Loves Martyr or, Rosalins Complaint* (London, 1601), to which were appended 'Poeticall Essaies' by William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and others, and of *The Poeticall Essayes of Alexander Craige Scotobritane* (London, 1604), the concept of the poetical essay became firmly established in England as well. Even so, sympathetic readers of Montaigne would have understood that there existed certain limits to the kinds of intellectual work that either poets or essayists could perform. Turning, in 'An Apologie of Raymond Sebond', from the problem of divine and spiritual knowledge to 'the knowledge of humane and naturall things', Montaigne accounted for the fundamental inadequacy of ancient and modern natural philosophical hypotheses by relating both their provenance and their measures of validity to the human predilection for aesthetics. 'Have I not seen this divine saying in *Plato*,' he asked, 'that nature is nothing but an ænigmaticall poesie? As a man might say, an overshadowed and darke picture, enter-shining with an infinite varietie of false lights, to exercise our conjectures'. Similarly, 'Philosophie is nothing else but a sophisticated poesie: whence have these ancient authors all their authorities, but from Poets? And the first were Poets themselves, and in their Arte treated the same. *Plato* is but a loose Poet. All high and more then humane Sciences are decked and enrobed with a Poeticall stile.' Comparing the poetics of natural philosophy to the artificial cosmetics used by plain women, Montaigne observed that in astronomy, 'as in all things else, Philosophie presenteth vnto vs, not that which is, or shee beleeveth, but what shee inventeth, as having most apparence, likelihood, or comelinesse' (F, II.12.310-11).¹²

¹² On the relationships between art, rhetoric, and early modern astronomical hypotheses, see Fernand Hallyn, *The Poetic Structure of the World: Copernicus and Kepler*, tr. Donald M. Leslie (New York: Zone, 1993).

For Montaigne, the strategies and mechanisms of philosophical speculation were at their most redundant, and potentially their most damaging, when directed towards the nature and construction of the human body and mind. ‘There is no more retrogradation, trepidation, augmentation, recoiling and violence in the starres and celestiall bodies,’ he wrote, ‘then they have fained and devised in this poore seely little body of man.’ Of particular concern to the author was the trope or theory identified by Florio as ‘*Microcosmos*, or little world [le petit monde]’, to which contemporary poets and philosophers often had recourse in their attempts to describe the relationships between humans and the heavenly spheres (F, II.12.311; M, p. 568). As both Florio and Montaigne were aware, the concept had a long, and occasionally distinguished, history: analogical inferences from the elements of the cosmos to the constitution of man, and from the form of the soul to the order of the universe, can be traced as far back as the Socratic dialogues of Plato and the physical theories of Aristotle. A host of later classical and medieval writers developed the tradition, so that by the sixteenth century the concept was being interpreted and applied in fields as diverse as theology, astrology, politics, and medicine.¹³ Montaigne was deeply sceptical both of the principle of the microcosmic approach and of the disconcerting and uncomfortable results that it often seemed to produce. ‘To accommodate the motions which they see in man,’ he wrote, ‘the diverse functions and faculties, that we feele in our selves; Into how many severall parts have they divided our soule? Into how many seats have they placed her? Into how many orders, stages, and stations have they divided this wretched man, beside the naturall and perceptible? and to how many distinct offices and vacation?’ As abhorrent and reprehensible as he found it, Montaigne nevertheless took comfort in his recognition of the ultimate impotence of such a crudely disjunctive

¹³ Leonard Barkan, *Nature's Work of Art: The Human Body as Image of the World* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975); John North, ‘Macrocosm, Microcosm, and Analogy’, University of Groningen Inaugural Lecture (2002) [<http://irs.ub.rug.nl/ppn/260535842>], accessed 27 September 2013; Monica Azzolini, ‘Reading Health in the Stars: Politics and Medical Astrology in Renaissance Milan’, in Günther Oestmann, H. Darrel Rutkin, and Kocku von Stuckrad (eds.), *Horoscopes and Public Spheres: Essays on the History of Astrology* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), pp. 183-205.

methodology of man. 'They cannot so order or rule him,' he observed, 'not in truth onely, but in imagination, but still some cadence or sound is discovered, which escapeth their architecture, bad as it is, and bocht together with a thousand false patches, and fantasticall peeces. And they have no reason to bee excused' (F, II.12.311).

If Montaigne hoped to have convinced his audience of the validity of his critique, the analogical practices of some of Florio's contemporaries suggest that his attempt was less than entirely successful. Few early essayists appeared to share Montaigne's hostility towards the facile sophistications of microcosmic thought. Indeed, in England around the turn of the seventeenth century the trope was quite commonly employed by exponents of the rapidly emerging genre. In his 1601 chapter '*Of Knowledge*', Montaigne's admirer, Sir William Cornwallis, elected to define man as '*a compendium of the world*', explaining that 'he hath a being with stones, he hath life with trees, he hath sense with beasts, he hath vnderstanding with Angels, which vnderstanding is the crowne whereby his principalitie ouer stones, trees, and beasts is knowne'. Accordingly, Cornwallis suggested that man should study 'himselfe' above all other topics, 'since in himselfe is all, and more then all other creatures or substances haue': for the author, the 'true glasse' of natural philosophical reflection reveals 'what we haue', while moral philosophy teaches us 'how to vse rightly what wee haue'.¹⁴ Robert Johnson's contemporary essay '*Of Wisedome*' opens with a similar argument. 'If wee will know, what wisedome is,' it begins, 'let vs lay aside the curious questions of Schoolemen, and such as are truelie Nominalles, and consider it in the frame of our Microcosme'. There, Johnson observed, 'are two eyes signifying foresight with pondering vpon the likelihoode of sucresse, two eares patientlie to admit the counsell of others, and not to bee carried away with self complacence: one hart for perseuering in an uniforme resolution, and two handes for quicke dispatching, and putting it in execution'. For Johnson, if not

¹⁴ Sir William Cornwallis, *Essayes* (London, 1600-1601), sig. Yr-v.

for Montaigne, 'this is wisdom, whereof there cannot be devised a more expressive Hieroglyphic, than the composition of our bodies'.¹⁵

Other essayists soon advanced alternative interpretations. In 1605, the poet John Davies followed up his earlier *Microcosmos: The Discovery of the Little World, with the Government Thereof* (Oxford, 1603) with a collection of 'Poeticall Essaies' in which he exploited a succession of metaphysical correspondences between the geography and cartography of his and his lover's bodies and the elements and powers of the atmospheric and planetary spheres: 'Glue mee (faire-Sweete)', wrote Davies, 'the *Mapp*, well coulored, / Of that same little *World*, your selfe, to see / Whether those *Zones* of hott *Loue*, and cold *Dreade* / Bee so extreame in you, as th'are in mee'.¹⁶ In a very different analogical mode, the brief account 'Of *Man*' that Thomas Tuke included in his *New Essayes* of 1614 describes its subject as 'a little world, a Map of all the world, the Lord of all inferiour creatures', before declaring that his sinfulness had turned this once virtuous creation into 'a world of misery, an ensample of imbecility, the spoyle of time, the image of inconstancy, the picture of vanity, and very mortality'.¹⁷ For a religious essayist such as Tuke, man's resemblance to the world at large was as much an indication of his moral and physical weakness as it was of his cosmic capacity or potential. Although the use of microcosmic metaphors and schemes was by no means particular to early modern essayists, it remains remarkable, given the availability and the vehemence of Montaigne's critique, that so many of his immediate successors should have had such ready recourse to the trope.¹⁸

¹⁵ Robert Johnson, *Essaies, or Rather Imperfect Offers* (London, 1601), sigs. [F6]v-[F7]r.

¹⁶ John Davies, *Wittes Pilgrimage, (by Poeticall Essaies) Through a World of Amorous Sonnets, Soule-Passions, and Other Passages, Divine, Philosophicall, Morall, Poeticall, and Politicall* (London, 1605), sig. [F3]r.

¹⁷ Thomas Tuke, *New Essayes: Meditations, and Vowes* (London, 1614), p. 243.

¹⁸ For a survey of some of the more sophisticated contemporary applications and analyses, including those by John Donne, Sir Thomas Browne, and Thomas Traherne, see Don Parry Norford, 'Microcosm and Macrocosm in Seventeenth-Century Literature', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 38 (1977), 409-28.

On the face of it, Francis Bacon's attitude towards microcosmic thought was much more closely in keeping with that of Montaigne: its arguments and analogies are absent from the author's *Essayes*, while his philosophical works, particularly *The Advancement of Learning*, occasionally analyse in detail its conceptual and practical flaws. Even so, the respective attacks by Montaigne and Bacon on the assumptions and applications of microcosmic theory occupy very different positions, and played radically divergent roles, in the seminal investigations into the nature of human knowledge that each of the two writers undertook. In Montaigne's case, the critique of microcosmic schemes, and of natural philosophical hypotheses in general, formed part of a much broader sceptical argument: in defending Raymond Sebond's *Theologia naturalis* against the charges of its detractors, the Frenchman set out to expose the limits of human reason and the fallacy of ostensibly objective criteria of rational knowledge and truth. Bacon's ultimate intentions could hardly have been further removed from those of his predecessor. Early in Book I of the *Advancement*, he pointedly glossed Solomon's microcosmic remark that God '*hath placed the world in Mans heart*' by explaining 'that God hath framed the minde of man as a mirrour, or glasse, capable of the Image of the vniuersall world, and ioyful to receiue the impression thereof, as the Eye ioyeth to receiue light': apparently, human perception was 'not onely delighted in beholding the varietie of things and vicissitude of times, but rayseed also to finde out and discern the ordinances and decrees which throughout all those Changes are infallibly obserued' (*AL*, p. 6). Bacon, that is, was supremely confident that accurate knowledge of the order of the universe was readily and immediately available to the receptive and reflective human mind.

As fundamentally different as their aspirations undoubtedly were, Montaigne and Bacon faced common human obstacles to the realization of their philosophical goals. Among the central tenets of Montaigne's '*Apologie*' were that 'mens opinions are received after ancient beliefes, by authoritie and vpon credit; as if it were a religion and a lawe', and that 'every one, the best he can, patcheth-vp and comforteth this received beliefe, with al the means his reason can afford him, which is an instrument very supple, plyable, and

yeelding to al shapes' (F, II.12.312). Bacon could not have agreed more. Later in Book I of the *Advancement*, he cited a catalogue of 'peccant humors', or historically popular errors, which had adversely affected the pursuit and development both of human and of natural knowledge (AL, p. 28). Among these was an 'Error' which he identified as having 'proceeded from too great a reuerence, and a kinde of adoration of the minde and vnderstanding of man: by meanes whereof,' he argued, 'men haue withdrawne themselues too much from the contemplation of Nature, and the obseruations of experience: and haue tumbled vp and downe in their owne reason and conceits'. Describing the proponents of these sophistries as 'Intellectuallists, which are notwithstanding commonly taken for the most sublime and diuine Philosophers', Bacon turned to Heraclitus for the 'iust censure' that '*Men sought truth in their owne little worlds*', or microcosms, '*and not in the great and common world*': as he explained, 'they disdain to spell, and so by degrees to read in the volume of Gods works, and contrarywise by continuall meditation and agitation of wit, doe vrge, and as it were inuocate their owne spirits, to diuine, and giue Oracles vnto them, whereby they are deseruedly deluded'. Related to this error was another one of similar kind and magnitude: 'that men haue vsed to infect their meditations, opinions, and doctrines with some conceits which they haue most admired, or some Sciences which they haue most applied; and giuen all things else a tincture according to them, vtterly vntrue and vnproper'. According to Bacon, ancient authorities such as Plato, Aristotle, and the Neoplatonists, as well as modern philosophers such as the alchemists and the contemporary magnetic theorist William Gilbert, had all been guilty of this mistake (AL, p. 30).

Classical and contemporary microcosmic models were susceptible to both of Bacon's charges, and on a number of occasions in Book II of the *Advancement* he attacked them more directly. In his discussion of Sebond's subject of 'DIVINE PHILOSOPHIE, or NATVRALL THEOLOGIE', which he defined as 'that knowledge or Rudiment of knowledge concerning GOD, which may be obtained by the contemplation of his Creatures', and which 'sufficeth to conuince Atheisme; but not to informe Religion', the author took issue with 'the Heathen opinion' that held 'the world to bee the Image of God, & Man to

be an extract or compendious Image of the world'. Observing that 'the Scriptures neuer vouch-safe to attribute to the world that honour as to bee the Image of God: But onely *The worke of his hands*', and that 'Neither do they speake of any other Image of God, but Man', Bacon maintained, along with Montaigne, that there were definite limits to the knowledge that natural theology or divine philosophy could produce. While 'the contemplation of Nature' could 'induce and inforce the acknowledgement of God' in 'his power, prouidence, and goodnesse', it could not 'induce any veritie, or perswasion concerning the points of Faith'. For Bacon, neither religion nor philosophy stood to gain 'by beeing commixt together': on the contrary, doing so 'vndoubtedly will make an Hereticall Religion; and an Imaginarie and fabulous Philosophie' (AL, pp. 78-9).

Bacon was similarly critical of the application of microcosmic theories in the field of medicine. 'The ancient opinion that *Man* was *Microcosmos*, an Abstract or Modell of the world,' he wrote, 'hath beene fantastically streyned by *Paracelsus*, and the Alchimists, as if there were to be found in *mans body* certaine correspondences, & parallels, which shold haue respect to all varieties of things, as starres, planets, minerals, which are extant in the great world' (AL, p. 96).¹⁹ For the author, there remained a general and reduced sense in which the theory could be accepted as true: if his dietary habits were considered, and if the 'infinite variations' of his physical activities and operations were also taken into account, 'it cannot be denied, but that the *bodie of Man* of all other things, is of the most compounded Masse'. Nevertheless, Bacon argued that it was precisely 'this variable composition of mans bodie' that 'made it as an Instrument easie to distemper', and that the inevitably '*coniectural*' nature of the medical arts which purported to

¹⁹ Paracelsus (Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim) (1493-1541) was a Swiss surgeon and physician whose philosophy of medicine was extremely influential in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For analysis of his microcosmic theories, and of their critique by Bacon and others, see Brian Vickers, 'Analogy versus identity: the rejection of occult symbolism, 1580-1680', in Vickers (ed.), *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 95-163 (pp. 126-49).

harmonize it 'hath made so much the more place to bee left for imposture'. Given this state of affairs, Bacon found it unsurprising that 'Witches, and old women, and Impostors' had traditionally competed so successfully with physicians. And yet if there was some 'little occasion' for patients to turn to the occult, it could not be ignored that contemporary medical practices were invariably hindered by 'a great deale of sloath and default'. In Bacon's view, unlike in Montaigne's, 'it is not the *insufficiency or incapacity of mans mind*; but it is the *remote standing or placing thereof*, that breedeth these Mazes and incomprehensions; for as the sence a far off, is full of mistaking, but is exact at hand, so is it of the vnderstanding'. Accordingly, the 'remedie' that the author proposed was 'not to quicken or strengthen the Organ, but to goe neerer to the obiect': were physicians to 'learne, and vse the true approaches and *Auenues* of Nature', they would find, as had Ovid in the case of love, that '*Mille Mali species, mille Salutis erunt* [For a thousand types of illness, there shall be a thousand types of cure]' (AL, pp. 97-8).

Like Montaigne, Bacon continually advocated the firm examination and rigorous testing of philosophical opinions as well as of cultural beliefs. In doing so, each writer was concerned not only with common standards of intellectual plausibility or social value, but also with the history and assumptions that lay behind popular concepts, and with the conditions under which they were produced. Even so, while both authors criticized models and hypotheses which some contemporary essayists adopted, there was a fundamental and crucial difference between the essentially sceptical attitude of Montaigne and the constructive and ultimately productive aspirations of Bacon. 'The reason that men doubt not much of things,' Montaigne suggested, 'is that common impressions are never thoroughly tride and sifted [on ne les essaye jamais], their ground is not sounded, nor where the fault and weakenes lyeth: Men onely debate and question of the branch, not of the tree' (F, II.12.312; M, p. 570). In his own poetical and idiosyncratic style, the Frenchman devoted much of his authorial career to setting a positive example in this regard. However, the philosophical ambitions of his English successor went much further. Of all the early essayists, it was undoubtedly Bacon, rather than Montaigne, who

undertook the most systematic and sustained investigation into the specific targets and potential outcomes of intellectual root-and-branch reform.

Sense and reason

In the decades immediately prior to the writing and publication of Bacon's *Advancement*, the strategies and tactics of ancient scepticism had made a return to positions of prominence in theological and philosophical debates. Montaigne was among the most influential proponents of the revival. The idiosyncratic blend of Pyrrhonian, Academic, and fideistic modes of scepticism which characterized the Frenchman's work has variously been attributed by scholars and critics to his natural predisposition to doubt, to the rhetorical structure of his humanist education, to his reading of Sextus Empiricus, and to his filial obligation to translate and defend a 'weak' and 'flimsy' book.²⁰ That book was the *Theologia naturalis* of Raymond Sebond, and Montaigne's 'Apologie' for its Christian author, written at the encouragement of his father, represents by far his most concentrated and sustained engagement in sceptical lines of attack. As a comprehensive and widely disseminated deconstruction of human claims to knowledge, the 'Apologie' also represented a significant challenge to Bacon's philosophical ambitions. Near the beginning of Book I of the *Advancement*, Bacon had conceded that there existed certain 'true bounds and limitations, whereby humane knowledge is confined and circumscribed', only to insist immediately that they did so 'without any such contracting or coarctation, but that it may comprehend all the vniuersall nature of thinges'. For the author, the three general restrictions

²⁰ M. A. Screech, *Montaigne & Melancholy: The Wisdom of the Essays* (London: Duckworth, 1983), p. 20; Zachary S. Schiffman, 'Montaigne and the Rise of Skepticism in Early Modern Europe: A Reappraisal', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 45 (1984), 499-516; Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), ch. 3; Warren Boutcher, 'Montaigne's Legacy', in Ullrich Langer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Montaigne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 27-52 (pp. 45-7).

or distinctions by which the human philosophical endeavour was defined were not strictly epistemological, but moral, social, and ontological. The first limitation referred to pride: *'That wee doe not so place our felicitie in knowledge, as wee forget our mortalitie'*. The second was concerned with emotional welfare: *'that we make application of our knowledge to giue our selues repose and contentment, and not distast or repining'*. The third, and most significant, comprehended both of these considerations, as well as being suggestive of many more: *'that we doe not presume by the contemplation of Nature, to attaine to the misteries of God'* (AL, p. 7).

In some ways, Bacon's third distinction was the most definitive and instrumental of his entire philosophical career. As such, he recognized that it *'deserueth to be a little stood vpon, and not to be lightly passed ouer'*. Turning for elucidation to a text *'by one of Platoes Schoole'*, the first-century Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria, Bacon reported *'That the sence of man caryeth a resemblance with the Sunne, which (as we see) openeth and reuealeth all the terrestriall Globe; but then againe it obscureth and concealeth the stars & celestiaall Globe: So doth the Sence discover naturall thinges, but it darkeneth and shutteth vp Diuine'*. For Bacon, Philo's words served as both a warning and a promise. On the one hand, he declared it to be *'an assured truth, and a conclusion of experience, that a little or superficial knowledge of Philosophie may encline the minde of Man to Atheisme'*: since the epistemic province of the senses was exclusively that of secondary causes, their operation always stood to obscure the higher cause of the divine. On the other hand, Bacon was equally certain that *'a further proceeding'* in philosophy *'doth bring the mind backe again to Religion'*: having first arrived at an accurate understanding of the nature of perceptible phenomena, to begin to recognize *'the dependance of causes, and the workes of prouidence'*, was to begin to appreciate, if not fully to understand, the divinely ordered, universal structure of existence. As such, the author strenuously denied that it was possible for anyone to *'bee too well studied in the Booke of Gods word, or in the Booke of Gods workes; Diuinitie or Philosophie;'* only provided that *'they apply both to Charitie, and not to swelling; to vse, and not to*

ostentation; and againe, that they doe not vnwisely mingle or confound these learnings together' (AL, pp. 8-9).²¹

Bacon's confidence in the fitness for its restricted purpose of human sensory perception was not always shared either in ancient or in modern philosophical traditions. Nevertheless, in his analysis of human reason in Book II of the *Advancement*, he eventually insisted that it was in fact well placed. At the outset of his discussion, the author described 'RATIONALL Knowledges' as 'the keyes of all other Arts; For as Aristotle sayth aptly and elegantly, *That the hand is the Instrument of Instruments; and the minde is the Fourme of Fourmes*: So these be truely said to be the Art of Arts' (AL, p. 107). Even so, Bacon maintained that the current state of the rational arts was corrupted by deficiency and error. In particular, he considered the orthodox forms of invention and induction to be 'vtterly vitious and incompetent', and the associated hegemony of syllogistic reasoning to be an institutionalized obstruction to the process, and the progress, of natural philosophical discovery. Bacon argued that these methodological flaws continued and compounded each other: since the language of the syllogism signified '*popular Notions of thinges*', and since those notions may well have been 'grossely and variably collected out of Particulars', the author asserted that 'It is not the laborious examination either of *Consequences of Arguments, or of the truth of Propositions*, that can euer correct that Errour; being (as the Phisitians speake) in the first digestion' (AL, pp. 109-10). Original error endured in syllogistic logic: once established, it could never be exposed or eradicated by verbal sophistication alone.

For Bacon, these long-standing methodological problems were closely related to the historical development of a distinctive mode, or modes, of classical thought. 'And therefore,' he wrote, 'it was not without cause, that so many excellent Philosophers became *Sceptiques* and *Academiques*, and denied any

²¹ For an account of the scriptural, patristic, and humanist contexts of Bacon's analysis of the limitations of knowledge, see Jeffrey Cordell, 'Baconian Apologetics: Knowledge and Charity in *The Advancement of Learning*', *Studies in Philology*, 108 (2011), 86-107.

certaintie of Knowledge, or Comprehension, and held opinion that the knowledge of man extended onely to Appearances, and Probabilities.' It was Bacon's strong suspicion that for many of the ancients, and especially for 'all those which excelled in Copie of speech', such doubt was simply the intellectual attitude 'which was fittest to giue glorie to their eloquence, and variable discourses: being rather like Progresses of pleasure, than lourneyes to an end'. However, the author was also well aware that there were plenty more for whom scepticism, in one or other of its available forms, was a sincerely and resolutely held position. According to Bacon, the 'cheefe Errour' of the sceptics was easy enough to define. 'They charged the deceite vppon THE SENCES', he wrote, 'which in my Iudgement (notwithstanding all their Cauillations) are verie sufficient to certifie and report truth': if the senses could not always be depended upon to establish facts 'immediately', they could certainly be encouraged to do so 'by comparison; by helpe of instrument; and by producing, and vrging such things, as are too subtile for the sence, to some effect comprehensible, by the sence, and other like assistance.' Rather than endlessly referring to the intrinsic unreliability of sensory perceptions which could, in principle, be rectified, Bacon contended that the sceptics 'ought to haue charged the deceit *vpon the weaknes of the intellectual powers, & vpon the maner of collecting, & concluding vpon the reports of the sences*'. As was the case with the senses themselves, these rational faculties and processes could and should be artificially aided and improved: 'no man,' observed Bacon, 'be he neuer so cunning or practised, can make a straight line or perfect circle by steadinesse of hand, which may bee easily done by helpe of a Ruler or Compasse' (AL, pp. 110-11).

If Bacon suspected Montaigne as well as his classical forebears of having adopted sceptical positions merely in the service of rhetorical eloquence or aesthetics, the Frenchman's copious discourses on the experiences of perceptual deception nevertheless contained arguments which had to be addressed. Montaigne's sceptical analysis in the '*Apologie*' of the foundations of human knowledge was based on his conviction that 'all knowledge is addressed into vs by the senses': that 'they are our maisters' and that 'Science begins by them & in them is resolved'. As he observed, 'we should knowe no

more than a stone, vnles we know, that there is, sound, smel, light, savor, measure, weight, softnes, hardnes, sharpnes, colour, smoothnes, breadth and depth'. Consequently, the senses should be considered to be 'the beginning and end of humane knowledge' (F, II.12.341). For Montaigne, the fact that the limits of epistemology could so readily be identified immediately raised an unresolvable problem. 'I see diuers creatures,' he wrote, 'that live an entire and perfect life, some without sight, and some without hearing; who knoweth whether wee also want either one, two, three, or many senses more?' Since the mind has no independent means by which 'to feele hir owne maladie, and perceive hir imperfection, if it be in any', it is entirely plausible that 'diuers effects of beasts, which exceede our capacitie, are produced by the facultie of some sense, that we want'; it is even possible that 'some of them, have by that meane a fuller and more perfect life then ours'. Having provided a series of examples of apparently instinctive animal behaviours whose sensory provenance was mysterious to humans, Montaigne hypothesized that our own sensory resources might yield only an incomplete or defective understanding of the world. 'We have by the consultation & concurrence of our five senses formed one Verity,' he wrote, 'whereas peradventure there was required the accord & consent of eight or ten senses, and their contribution, to attaine a perspicuous insight of hir, and see her in her true essence' (F, II.12.342-3).

The speculative possibility that humans might lack certain senses which other animals possess was only the first of Montaigne's arguments against the adequacy of human perception. His second was more analytic in character, and it involved the critique of reason as well as of sense. Like Bacon, Montaigne observed that 'those Sects which combate mans science, do principally combate the same by the vncertainty and feeblenes of our sences'. Moreover, he identified various historical attempts to resolve 'this extreame difficultie' as prolific and productive sources of philosophical 'fantazies', 'vntruths', and 'raving conceites' (F, II.12.343). For Montaigne, one of the most patently illogical of these dogmas was the ancient Epicurean directive, expounded by the Roman philosopher Lucretius in his poem *De rerum natura*, to account for apparently contradictory phenomena by invoking explanations

and adopting rational fictions which were known by their proponents to be false. To Montaigne, such advice was a 'desperate' and 'little-philosophicall counsell': to prefer the strategic constructions of 'vnreasonable, fond & mad reason', and indeed of 'all other remedies else how fantasticall soever they be', to the simple admission of our 'necessarie foolishnes', was insane. While the author was evidently in agreement with Lucretius that the 'senses must necessarily be the soveraigne maisters of [human] knowledge', he differed from the poet in his willingness to accept that 'they are vncertaine and falsifiable to all circumstaunces'. And whereas Lucretius had argued that a pragmatic enquirer was obliged to exploit the available resources of his rational 'obstinacie, temeritie and impudencie', Montaigne contended that such a position merely proved 'that there is no science' (F, II.12.344).

Like the ancient sceptics, Montaigne was well supplied with exemplary instances of the fallibility of immediate sensory perception. 'Touching the error and vncertainie of the senses operation,' he wrote, 'a man may store himselfe with as many examples as hee pleaseth, so ordinarie are the faults and deceits they vse towards vs' (F, II.12.344). Accordingly, the quotidian occurrences that he ventured to cite ranged from the behaviour of echoes and the inflammatory effects of music to the artificial allure of cosmetically enhanced faces. Among the author's more striking examples was an experimental suggestion which could almost have passed for a satirical recommendation of public policy: 'Let a Philosopher be put in a Cage made of small and thin-set yron-wyre, and hanged on the top of our Ladies Church steeple in *Paris*', he proposed; 'he shall, by evident reason, perceive that it is impossible hee should fall downe out of it; yet can he not chuse (except he have beene brought vp in the Trade of Tilers or Thatchers) but the sight of that exceeding height must needes dazle his sight, and amaze or turne his senses'. Similarly satirical, and still more penetrating, was Montaigne's response to the story of 'a worthy Philosopher' who 'pulled out his eies, that so he might discharge his soule of the debauching & diverting he received by them, and the better & more freely apply himselfe vnto philosophie': as the author observed, 'he should also have stopped his eares, which (as *Theophrastus* said) are the most dangerous instruments we have to receive

violent and sodaine impressions to trouble and alter vs, and should, in the end, have deprived himselfe of all his other senses, that is to say, both of his being, and life'. In this, as in many of his examples, Montaigne insisted on the mutual interdependence of sense and reason, body and mind. And the corollary of his insistence was that no human faculty could be singled out and blamed for the general limitations of the species: 'The very same cheating and cozening, that senses bring to our vnderstanding,' he wrote, 'themselves receive it in their turnes. Our minde doth likewise take revenge of it, they lie, they cog, they deceive one another avie. What we see and heare, being passionately transported by anger, we neither see or heare it as it is' (F, II.12.346).

Montaigne considered a number of further examples of physical conditions and emotional states whose capacity to alter the content of perception he had read about, heard about, or observed. And yet his ultimate purpose was not simply to catalogue potential sources of perceptual error; nor was it merely to insinuate or imply that those sources were more common and more widely distributed than a philosophical dogmatist would admit. Instead, the final word on the senses in Montaigne's '*Apologie*' amounted to an uncompromising refusal to draw an absolute distinction between the accidents and the essence of perception. 'Since the accidents of sicknesse, of madnesse, or of sleepe, make things appeare other vnto vs, then they seeme vnto the healthie, vnto the wise, and to the waking', wrote the author, 'is it not likely, that our right seate and naturall humours, have also wherewith to give a being vnto things, having reference vnto their condition, and to appropriate them to it selfe, as doe inordinate humours; and our health, as capable to give them his visage, as sicknesse?' It was a classically sceptical form of argument, and its epistemological consequences were severe. In the first place, 'our condition appropriating things vnto it selfe, and transforming them to it's owne humour: we know no more how things are in sooth and truth; For, *nothing comes vnto vs but falsified or altered by our senses*'. In the second, if 'either the compasse, the quadrant or the ruler are crooked: All proportions drawne by them, and all the buildings erected by their measure, are also necessarily defective and imperfect. The vncertaintie of our senses

yeelds whatever they produce, also vncertaine' (F, II.12.349). If the concept of accurate perception had been exposed as an impossibility, so too had that of objectively valid knowledge.

Like the ancient sceptics to whom Bacon would refer, Montaigne charged the deceits of perception upon the senses, and envisaged no possibility of rectification or repair. As he observed, 'to judge of the apparances that we receive of subjects, we had neede have a judicatorie instrument: to verifie this instrument, we should have demonstration; and to approuve demonstration, an instrument: thus are wee ever turning round'. Unlike Bacon's sceptics, however, Montaigne reserved a charge of equal magnitude for the rational faculties whose ostensible roles were to guide and to sort the fallible perceptions by which their logical processes were informed. 'Since the senses cannot determine our disputation,' he wrote, 'themselves being so full of vncertaintie, it must then be reason: And no reason can be established without another reason: then are we ever going backe vnto infinity.' Since the regressive mind can experience objects only by means of the senses, and since neither objects nor the senses can provide the mind with proofs or assurances of their mutual resemblance, Montaigne could only conclude that '*there is no constant existence, neither of our being, nor of the objects*': that 'we, and our judgement, and al mortal things els, do vncessantly rowle, turne and passe-away', and that 'nothing [can] be certainly established, nor of the one, nor of the other; both the judging and the judged being in continuall alteration and motion' (F, II.12.350). Given such an epistemologically impossible set of circumstances, the only human ambition whose value remained intact was the aspiration to 'divine Metamorphosis, or miraculous transformation', which Montaigne maintained was promised and held forth by the extraordinary and elevatory means of Christian faith (F, II.12.351).

Bacon had a name for the general area of sceptical argument that Montaigne's '*Apologie*' explored. In the *Advancement*, he followed Aristotle in describing the discovery of 'the more subtile fourmes of *Sophismes*, and *Illaqueations*, with their *redargutions*', as 'that which is tearmed ELENCHES',

before pointedly remarking that while ‘the [proper] vse of this Doctrine is for *Redargution*: yet it is manifest, the degenerate and corrupt vse is for *Caption* and *Contradiction*, which passeth for a great facultie, and no doubt, is of verie great aduantage’ (AL, pp. 114-15). According to Bacon’s formulation, the advantage that Montaigne had gained by advancing his sceptical elenches was to allow him to defend the form of natural theology that had been expounded by Raymond Sebond: by drawing attention to the various inadequacies of the human perceptual process, Montaigne had managed to identify faith as the essential and central component in Sebond’s philosophical method. Bacon’s approach to natural theology was similarly fideistic. However, at no stage did his orthodox deferment to scriptural and ecclesiastical authority entail or imply such a comprehensive denial of the human capacity to understand natural phenomena. Whereas Montaigne had promoted a radical scepticism largely by accumulating a heterogeneous collection of circumstantial instances of deception, Bacon strategically placed his ‘Doctrine of ELENCHES’ directly in the service of his systematic pursuit of natural knowledge (AL, p. 115).

Even so, paramount to Bacon’s doctrine was a similar observation to that which Montaigne had made about the intrinsic fallibility of human perception. Remarking that ‘the mind of Man is farre from the Nature of a cleare and equall glasse, wherein the beames of things should reflect according to their true incidence’, but that ‘it is rather like an enchanted glasse, full of superstition and Imposture, if it bee not deliuered and reduced’, the author cited two major types of ‘the false appearances, that are imposed vppon vs by the generall Nature of the minde’. In the first place, ‘*to the Nature of the Minde of all Men it is consonant for the Affirmatiue, or Actiue to affect, more than the negatiue or Priuatiue*’: it was for this reason that the gods were thanked and praised for isolated instances of miraculous salvation or for the delivery from impending death or disaster of the occasional, fortunate few. In the second place, ‘*the spirite of man, beeing of an equall and vnifourme substance, doth vsually suppose and faine in Nature a greater equalitie and vniformitie, than is in truth*’: to this assumption could be attributed the reductive elegance of astronomical models and the dubious symmetry of

physical and elemental hypotheses. Recalling Montaigne, Bacon went on to suggest that 'it is not credible, till it be opened, what a number of fictions and fantasies, the similitude of humane Actions, & Arts, together with the making of Man *Communis Mensura*, haue brought into natural Philosophie' (AL, p. 116). Indeed, the fallacy that man is the measure of all things was capable of expressing itself in virtually any field of spiritual or intellectual inquiry. As far as Bacon was concerned, the tendency of the ancient heretics and heathens to anthropomorphize their gods was essentially no different from modern attempts to aestheticize the configuration of the skies: 'if that great Worke-master had beene of an Humane disposition,' he wrote, 'hee would haue caste the starres into some pleasant and beautifull workes, and orders, like the frettes in the Roofes of Houses, whereas one can scarce finde a Posture in square, or triangle, or streight line amongst such an infinite number, so differing an Harmonie, there is betweene the spirite of Man, and the spirite of Nature' (AL, p. 117). For Bacon, as for Montaigne, to measure the world according to human standards and predilections was to falsify its structure and to misrepresent its scale.

The point at which the two writers diverged was the point at which each had to decide whether any form of corrective action could compensate for the intrinsic flaws in the human perceptual process. Having drawn attention to the extent to which both 'indiuiduall Nature and Custome' and language further exacerbate the difficulty of maintaining objectivity in observation and description, Bacon recognized with Montaigne 'that it is not possible to diuorce our selues from these fallacies and false appearances, because they are inseparable from our Nature and Condition of life'. However, whereas Montaigne considered the uncertainties of sense and reason to be not merely unavoidable but insurmountable, Bacon argued that 'the Caution of them (for all *Elenches* as was saide, are but Cautions) doth extreamely importe the true conducte of Humane Iudgement'; moreover, he concluded that in many particular cases of judgement the requisite '*Elenches* or *Cautions*' were 'altogether deficient' (AL, pp. 117-18). In the *Advancement*, Bacon went no further in the articulation and application of his doctrine. In his *Essayes*, he began to work towards supplying some of the deficiencies to which the

Advancement drew attention. In the volume of 1597 in which they originally appeared, Bacon's essays on the civil management and political manipulation of human ambitions, assumptions, and expectations were accompanied by religious meditations on themes such as the uses and kinds of imposture, and by a table of sophistic moral arguments and elenches which the author hoped would assist in the clarification and fortification of judgment.²² In the revised and expanded collection of *Essaies* which he published in 1612, Bacon set about merging these various elements together.

Essaies, or elenches

With Anthony Bacon having eventually succumbed to terminal illness early in 1601, Sir Francis, as his brother was now entitled, had to find a new dedicatee for his second edition of *Essaies*. Having also by now been appointed as King James's solicitor-general, the author initially planned to present his volume to the monarch's son and heir, Prince Henry, the young Prince of Wales, and in doing so to enhance his recently established credentials as a man of political as well as of philosophical capacity.²³ 'Having devided my life into the contemplative, and active parte,' he wrote in a draft dedication, 'I am desirous to give his M[ajesty], and yo^r H[ighness] of the fruites of both, simple thoughtes they be' (E25, Appendix ii, p. 317). In the event, Henry also died before the volume was ready for publication, and so Bacon turned instead to a surrogate sibling, his 'Loving Brother, S^r Iohn Constable Knight'. As he did so, Bacon remarked upon the evident popularity of the initial publication of his work.

²² On the common psychological and epistemological themes of the three texts included in Bacon's volume of 1597, see Stephen Gaukroger, *Francis Bacon and the Transformation of Early-Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 101-4.

²³ Bacon was knighted, along with 300 others, in July 1603; he gained his first crown office four years later: see Markku Peltonen, 'Bacon, Francis, Viscount St Alban (1561-1626)', in *ODNB* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/990>] (2007), accessed 8 April 2014.

'Looking amongst my papers this vacation,' he explained, 'I found others of the same Nature: which if I my selfe shall not suffer to be lost, it seemeth the World will not; by the often printing of the former' (E12, sig. A3r-v). The author was right to suggest that the demand for his work had proved consistent: in fact, the collection of texts in which his *Essayes* first appeared was printed at least six times between 1597 and 1612, the year in which their second edition was published.²⁴ With his audience well and truly established, and having recently become known in royal and political circles as a legal and natural philosophical reformer, Bacon afforded Constable a more nuanced view of the pleasures and pressures of private and public life than those which he had earlier offered his brother or had intended to offer Prince Henry. 'For as my businesse found rest in my contemplations,' he declared; 'so my contemplations euer found rest in your louing conference and iudgement' (E12, sig. [A4]r). In the *Essaies* themselves, political, philosophical, and theological concerns came into much closer contact than they had in any of Bacon's previously published works, occasionally converging in topical elenches on the assumptions and conditions under which judgment and society laboured.

The volume opens with '*Of Religion*': a bleak assessment of the effects of religious controversies on the social values and moral virtues which religion purported to promote. In an attempt to explain the relative peace and unity which the ancient heathens had enjoyed, Bacon observed that 'it is the true God that is the iealous God; and the Gods of the heathens were good fellowes'. However, he immediately insisted that the spiritual confidence of modern Christians must not be allowed to breed ethical or political complacency: 'the bonds of religious vnity, are so to be strengthened,' he maintained, 'as the bonds of humane society be not dissolved' (E12, pp. 1-2). Having briefly cited some of the brutal and murderous acts to have been

²⁴ The collection appeared twice in 1597 and once in 1598 under the imprint of Humfrey Hooper; it was then published in 1606 and twice more in 1612 by John Jaggard. For details, see the relevant *ESTC* records: [<http://estc.bl.uk/S90359>]; [<http://estc.bl.uk/S106417>]; [<http://estc.bl.uk/S122382>]; [<http://estc.bl.uk/S104434>]; [<http://estc.bl.uk/S124225>]; [<http://estc.bl.uk/S100353>], all accessed 8 April 2014.

committed in the name of religion both in classical and in contemporary Europe, including the failed Gunpowder Plot of November 1605, Bacon arrived at what appears to be the central crux of his essay. 'For it is better that Religion should deface mens vnderstanding,' he asserted, 'then their piety and charitie; retaining reason onely but as an *Engine*, and *Charriot driuer* of cruelty, and malice' (E12, pp. 3-4). Charging all those who would kill in the cause of faith with crimes of greater magnitude and severity than the pride of Lucifer and the sin against the Holy Ghost, Bacon called for the establishment against such 'blasphemie' of a united, humanist front. 'Therefore since these things are the common enemies of humane society', he wrote, '*Princes* by their power; *Churches* by their Decrees; and all learning, Christian, morall, of what soeuer sect, or opinion, by their *Mercurie* rod; ought to ioyne in the damning to Hell for euer, those facts, and their supports'. Finally, Bacon hoped and envisaged that in every religious counsel of the new moral order, 'that Counsell of the Apostle, would be prefixed, *Ira hominis non implet iustitiam Dei* [The anger of man does not fulfil the justice of God (James 1:20)]' (E12, pp. 5-6).

The apparent crux of Bacon's essay '*Of Religion*' was to some extent an expression of the urgency with which its theme of authorized cruelty had to be analysed and addressed. In the second essay of the collection, the implication that religious beliefs could indeed 'deface mens vnderstanding', as well as 'their piety and charitie', became a more explicit part of the author's argument. '*Of Death*' begins with the observation that 'Men feare death, as Children feare to goe in the darke: and as that naturall feare in Children is increased with tales; so is the other' (E12, p. 6). Having established this introductory comparison, Bacon immediately drew a distinction between 'the feare of death in contemplation of the cause of it, and the issue of it,' which he identified as properly 'religious', and 'the feare of it, for it selfe,' which he dismissed as 'weake'. Even so, the author was quick to point out that 'in religious meditations there is mixture of vanitie, and of superstition'. As his prime example, Bacon cited 'some of the *Friers* Bookes of Mortification', which apparently suggested 'that a man should thinke with himselfe, what the paine is, if he haue but his fingers end pressed, or tortured; and thereby

imagine what the paines of Death are, when the whole body is corrupted and dissolued' (E12, pp. 7-8). Michael Kiernan has shown that such morbid advice was indeed current: the Jesuit Robert Parsons, for example, had recommended comparable imaginative practices in *The First Booke of the Christian Exercise* in 1582 (E25, pp. 180-81 n. 10-14). Bacon was convinced that the macabre meditations of the friars were neither pertinent nor beneficial: just as Montaigne had come close to discovering in the aftermath of his equestrian accident, the author maintained that 'many times, Death passeth with lesse paine, then the torture of a limme', the reason being that 'the most vitall parts are not the quickest of sence' (E12, p. 8; cf. F, II.6.216-17). Accordingly, Bacon found it considerably more useful to think about death 'as a *Philosopher* or naturall man' than as a Christian. As such, he found that 'Grones, and Conuulsions, and a discoloured face, and friends weeping, and Blackes and obsequies, and the like, shew death terrible', but that history and observation repeatedly demonstrated that its terrifying trappings could be overcome (E12, p. 8). Despite the fact that he twice alluded to Seneca, Bacon was not simply an advocate of a Stoic resistance to death. 'Certainly', he declared, 'the *Stoikes* bestowed too much cost vpon death, and by their great preparations made it appeare more fearefull.' Of greater value, argued the author, was Juvenal's description of the end of life as one of the gifts of nature. 'It is as naturall to die, as to bee borne', he concluded; 'and to a little Infant perhaps, the one as painefull, as the other' (E12; pp. 10-11).

The lesson to be taken from the opening pair of essays in Bacon's volume of 1612 is that certain modes and applications of religious belief can and do have demonstrably adverse effects on society, on morality, and on the interpretation of natural phenomena. Later in the collection, a second pair of essays advanced a similar argument by proposing that not even the true religion is either necessary or sufficient to the cultivation of ethical values and the progress of natural philosophical discovery. The first of those essays, '*Of Atheisme*', functions in part by adding examples of classical physical hypotheses to a series of intertextual elements drawn from two of Bacon's earlier published works. Having begun by stating that he would 'rather beleeeue all the fables in the *Legend*, and the *Alcaron*, then that this vniuersall

frame is without a minde', the author rehearsed a natural theological argument that he had previously made in Book II of *The Advancement of Learning*: 'God neuer wrought myracle to conuince Atheists, because his ordinary works conuince them' (E12, p. 84; cf. AL, p. 78). He then proceeded to reformulate a defence of the pursuit of natural knowledge which had appeared both in the *Meditationes Sacræ* of 1597 and in Book I of the later *Advancement*: while he conceded that 'a little *Philosophie* inclineth mans minde to *Atheisme*,' Bacon maintained that sufficient 'depth in *Philosophie* bringeth men about to Religion' (E12, p. 85; cf. E97, sig. E2r, AL, pp. 8-9). In order to demonstrate that accusations of philosophical atheism could sometimes be premature, the author cited the atomic conjectures of 'the Schoole of *Leusippus*, and *Democritus*, and *Epicurus*'. As he observed, 'it is a thousand times more credible, that foure mutable Elements, and one immutable fifth Essence, duely and eternally placed, neede no God: then that an Army of infinite small portions or seeds vnplaced, should haue produced this order, and beauty, without a diuine Marshall' (E12, pp. 85-6).

At this point in the essay, the critical evaluation both of private and of public statements about belief becomes crucial. Adapting another argument from the *Meditationes Sacræ*, Bacon offered a searching analysis of the first line of Psalm 14: 'The foole hath said in his heart, there is no God'. Pointing out that 'it is not said, *The foole hath thought in his heart*', Bacon explained that the fool 'rather saith it by rote to himselfe, as that he would haue; then that hee can throughly beleeeue it, or bee perswaded of it': evidently, 'none denie there is a God, but those for whom it maketh, that there were no God' (E12, pp. 86-7; cf. E97, sigs. [D8]v-Er). Even so, Bacon insisted that caution had to be exercised in the consideration and arbitration of apparently converse cases. Once again, he turned for illustration to Epicurus, who was 'charged that he did but dissemble for his credits sake, when he affirmed there were blessed natures, but such as enjoyed themselues, without hauing respect to the government of the world'. Whereas the Greek philosopher's opponents claimed that 'he did temporize, though in secret, hee thought, there was no God', Bacon was convinced that he was 'traded', and that his seemingly expedient words were in fact 'noble and diuine': '*Non Deos vulgi negare*

profanum, sed vulgi opiniones Dijs applicare profanum [It is not profane to deny the gods of the vulgar, but it is profane to apply the opinions of the vulgar to the gods].’ According to Bacon, even ‘*Plato* could haue said no more’: although Epicurus ‘had the confidence to denie the administration; he had not the power to deny the nature’ (E12, pp. 87-8). Bacon drew the essay to a close with a series of orthodox moral objections to atheism. To deny God, he argued, is to ‘destroy mans nobilitie’, his ‘magnanimitie’, and his ‘courage’ (E12, pp. 89-90). Above all, ‘as *Atheisme* is in all respects hatefull: So in this, that it depriueth humane nature of the meanes to exalt it selfe aboue humane frailty’. In these respects, said the author, the religious culture of Rome was justly recognized as the most excellent and magnanimous of them all (E12, pp. 91-2).

Just as Bacon’s essay ‘*Of Death*’ developed his suggestion in ‘*Of Religion*’ that mistaken forms of faith could ‘deface mens vnderstanding’, so too his reference in ‘*Of Atheisme*’ to the Epicurean maxim about profanity was adopted as the basic principle of the next essay in his collection. ‘*Of Superstition*’ opens with the assertion that ‘it were better to haue no opinion of God at all; then such an opinion as is vnworthy of him; For the one is vnbeliefe, the other is *Contumely*; and certainly superstition is the reproch of Deitie’. For Bacon, faith in a god was not in itself holy; nor was any devotion to divinity necessarily requisite to an intelligent and ethical life. As he observed, ‘*Atheisme* leaues a Man to sense, to Philosophy, to naturall piety, to laws, to reputation, all which may bee guides vnto vertue, though Religion were not: but Superstition dismounts all these, and erecteth an absolute Tyranny in the minde of men’ (E12, pp. 93-4). As dangerous as it was, the private tyranny of the personal mind was far from Bacon’s only concern. Proceeding to point out that ‘*Atheisme* did neuer perturbe states; for it makes men wary of themselues, as looking no further’, the author referred to ‘the time of *Augustus Cæsar*, and our owne times in some Countries’, as examples of atheistic, and yet truly ‘*ciuill times*’. In contrast, he argued, ‘Superstition, hath bene the confusion and dissolution of many states: and bringeth in a new *Primum Mobile* that rauisheth al the spheres of gouernment’. For Bacon, the security of the state and the maintenance of social order had to be the

primary objectives of any analysis of religion and superstition, and the political signs of spiritual error were logical inversion and institutionalized duplicity. In the first place, 'the master of Superstition is the people: and in all superstition, wise men follow fooles; and arguments are fitted to practise, in a reuersed order'. In the second, 'there is no such Atheist, as an Hipocrite, or Impostor: and it is not possible, but where the general[it]y is superstitious, many of the leaders are Hipocrits' (E12, pp. 94-5). Having briefly outlined the respective causes of atheism and superstition, Bacon concluded with a pair of similitudes which were designed to emphasize the unnatural character and the degenerate tendencies of his theme. 'Superstition without his vaile is a deformed thing,' he wrote, 'for as it addeth deformity to an Ape, to be so like a man. So the similitude of superstition to *Religion*, makes it the more deformed. And as wholesome meate corrupteth to little wormes; so good formes and orders, corrupt into a number of pettie obseruances' (E12, pp. 96-7). For Bacon, superstition was a distorted, superficial, and decadent travesty of faith.

The effects of superstition briefly attracted further comment in another of Bacon's cautionary essays, '*Of Custome and Education*'. Discussing Niccolò Machiavelli's morally ambivalent discovery that 'nature, nor the ingagement of words are not so forcible as custome', the author cited as an exception to the rule the grim observation that 'Superstition is now so well aduanced, that men of the first blood, are as firme, as butchers by occvpatation: and votarie resolution is made equipollent to custome, euen in matter of blood'. Even so, Bacon concurred with Machiavelli that 'the predominancy of custome' is in most things 'euery where visible; in so much as a man would wonder, to heare men professe, protest, ingage, giue great words, and then doe iust, as they haue done before: as if they were dead Images & Engins moued only by the wheeles of custome' (E12, pp. 159-61).²⁵ As was the case in his analyses of the scope of sensory perception and the state of the rational arts, Bacon argued that custom had a unique role to play in the conditioning of human

²⁵ As Michael Kiernan points out, Bacon's reference is to Machiavelli's *Discorsi* (1531): see E25, p. 263 n. 7-14.

knowledge and actions, and that it should therefore be aided and improved wherever possible: 'since custome is the principal Magistrate of mans life', he wrote, 'let men by all meanes endeauour to obtaine good customes'. According to the author, such 'good customes' could most readily be acquired through '*Education*: which is nothing but an early custome'; however, Bacon was also at pains to emphasize the extent to which broader social and institutional practices could influence the development of human culture and ethics. 'But if the force of custome simple, and separate be great', he contended, 'the force of custome copulate & conioind, and in troupe, is far greater. For thear example teacheth; companie comforteth; æmulation quickeneth; glory raiseth; so as in such places the force of custome is in his exaltation' (E12, pp. 160-61). Even so, Bacon was equally concerned to point out that the power of custom and culture had its limits, and that it could be used, like religious convictions, for both good and ill: while 'the great multiplication of vertues vpon humane nature, resteth vpon societies well ordained, and disciplined', political institutions could at best be expected to 'nourish vertue grown', not to 'mende the seeds'. Worse still, Bacon's impression of the current state of political society was that of an unreformed and deluded institutional system operating according to a corrupted and inverted form of Machiavelli's famous principle of moral justification: 'the miserie is,' he observed, 'that the most effectuall meanes are now applied to the ends least to be desired' (E12, p. 162). For Bacon, as for Samuel Daniel, the success of any programme of educational and investigative reform was dependent on the will of the national government to promote and to maintain its moral and philosophical principles.²⁶

As a Christian, a natural philosopher, and a political reformer, Bacon consistently argued that spiritual and theological considerations should be prevented from exerting an undue influence on separate areas of intellectual inquiry: the Book of God's word and the Book of God's works may have entailed and in some sense incorporated each other, but neither text gained anything from the conflation or confounding of both; furthermore, it was the

²⁶ Cf. Daniel, *Musophilus*, sigs. E3v-[E4]r.

individual and collective responsibility of civil citizens to ensure that such confusion did not occur. As for his own texts and books, Bacon initially presented his *Essayes*, his *Meditationes Sacrae*, and his *Coulers of Good and Evill* as proximally related and yet independent works; later, in *The Advancement of Learning*, he repeatedly insisted on the value of establishing practical distinctions between natural and supernatural explanations of causes, and between various kinds and levels of interpretative perspective. By the time he came to publish his second edition of *Essaies*, the author had begun to consider their potential as topically composed and thematically comprehensive elenches against demonstrably repressive and unproductive modes of thought, many of which were either religious or superstitious in origin. If the magnitude of the task that Bacon had undertaken is suggested by the extent to which such modes of thought endured, that measure can be established in part by assessing the work of two contemporary essayists.

Reason, sense, and usury

In 1605, the year in which Bacon published *The Advancement of Learning*, Robert Mason's *Reasons Academie* also first appeared. In a dedication to Sir John Popham, Lord Chief Justice of England, Mason, who had been trained in the law, explained that his intention was to apply the arguments that he had made in his previous work, *Reasons Monarchie* (London, 1602), to the lives and moral sensibilities of legal and political professionals.²⁷ 'I am bold againe to become an humble Suter vnto your Lordships,' he explained to Popham, 'that you wil protect and further reasons true title, or rather true Reasons title for the dispearsing of her Rudiments, precepts, and directions, amongst her Schollers, for their better gouernment and order.'²⁸ In fact, Mason's treatise was ultimately directed towards the rational critique of an enduringly controversial economic custom with serious ethical and theological

²⁷ On Mason's legal training, see Maija Jansson, 'Mason, Robert (1579-1635)', in *ODNB* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/18288>] (2008), accessed 8 April 2014.

²⁸ Robert Mason, *Reasons Academie* (London, 1605), sig. A3r-v.

implications. Its specific concerns were more explicitly advertised when it was reprinted in 1609 as *A Mirrour for Merchants. With an Exact Table, to Discover the Excessive Taking of Usurie*. A decade or so later, in 1620, the work was printed for a third time under the alternative title *A New Post: With Sovereigne Salve to Cure the Worlds Madnes. Expressing himselfe in Sundrie Excellent Essayes or Wittie Discourses*. In accordance with the generic classification of the edition, Mason wrote a new preface in which he described the inquiries that followed as 'Essayes', while his first chapter 'Of Number' was newly designated as 'ESSAY I'.²⁹ Around the same time, another legally trained moral and religious writer, Richard Brathwaite, published his *Essaies upon the Five Senses*, the second of which, 'Of Hearing', dealt equally critically as Mason's *Essayes* with usury.³⁰ Whereas Bacon had responded to the scepticism of Montaigne by insisting upon the potential efficiency of a set of appropriately rectified sensory and rational resources, both Mason and Brathwaite advanced comprehensively theological interpretations of the nature of the human faculties and of the character and extent of their incapacities. In doing so, both essayists raised rational and scriptural objections to the practice of usury which Bacon would soon dismiss in his own assessment of the topic: a draft proposal for legislative reform which later reappeared, in a slightly modified version, in the final edition of his *Essaies*.

Robert Mason's analysis of the scope of human reason was founded on a set of basic convictions about the divinely ordered structure of the universe: in all three editions of the work that first appeared as *Reasons Academie*, the first three chapters, or essays, are entitled 'Of Number', 'Of place', and 'Of Time'. The central argument of the two opening chapters was that reason is incapable of comprehending anything greater than or equal to itself. Even so, Mason maintained that reason was manifestly capable of producing reliable

²⁹ Robert Mason, *A New Post: With Sovereigne Salve to Cure the Worlds Madnes. Expressing himselfe in Sundrie Excellent Essayes or Wittie Discourses* (London, 1620), sig. A3v and p. 1.

³⁰ On Brathwaite's legal training, see Julie Sanders, 'Brathwaite, Richard (1587/8-1673)', in *ODNB* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3290>] (2009), accessed 8 April 2014.

and useful knowledge of the inferior, physical world. 'By the powers & working of the minde,' he wrote, 'we contemplate, behold, discern, vnderstand, and iudge of things that are far remote from vs, & yet ouerselues neuer moue.' Evidently, 'the mind in this case doth not entermingle truth, nor participate with the nature, substance, nor condition of the thing it entereth into'. The only remaining explanation was that 'these things are of lesse condition, nature, & qualitie, then the reasonable soules that possesse these mindes'.³¹ For Mason, all things in creation had their number and their place, and their relative positions, if not their total quantity, could be known and described by the observing, rational mind.

That Mason's metaphysical analysis had physical consequences is demonstrated by his evaluation and reinterpretation of a loosely microcosmic theory of humanity. 'If / should speak at large', he wrote, 'of the infinite numbers of ioynts, sinews, arteries, muscles, vaines, organs, instruments, matter, and things, whereof a perfect man doth consist: beside his immortall soule, it would be as admirable, as the whole frame and hoste of heauen and earth, and all wherewith they are replenished.' However, should attention be turned to 'the reasonable and immortall soule, and minde of man,' with its 'qualities, affects, effects, condition, state, attribute, & faculties', it would be found to 'farre surmount all the creatures that euer God made'.³² These universal distinctions of intellectual capacity in turn had ethical repercussions, particularly when the unique human ability to perceive the passage of time was also taken into account. Observing in his next chapter that 'the worthy vnderstanding of number, place, and time, is onely known to man, and not to the other Creatures,' Mason explained that 'the spirituall, immateriall, and [im]mortall essence and vnderstanding of the reasonable soule' was 'created to endure when time shall be finished', and that it therefore 'hath power and facultie to discern betweene things commencing, and transitorie things, mortal, & immortal'. As such, he argued, the rational soul of man alone was furnished with the ability 'to discern, the vse, scope, end, & purpose of al

³¹ Mason, *A New Post*, pp. 10-11.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

these les worthy & meaner things'. Above all, it was equipped to conclude 'that in this number, place, & time, the Creator hath made sufficient substance, stufte and matter, to nourish, defend, and preserue the whole race of man-kind, w^eout any other artificiall or vnnaturall workings'. For Mason, anyone who pursued such 'vnnaturall meanes', even with a view to 'the benefit, reliefe, or sustentation of man[k]inde', was guilty of challenging, and of attempting to supplant, the divine: he 'goeth about as much as in him lieth, to reprove his creator for some defect or want: and to become himselfe in the nature of a God, to supply, succor, and make good that want, or defect'.³³

Having provided an account of the basic rational categories of number, place, and time, Mason went on to weigh and consider an extensive range of hypotheses and histories of human reason, many of which were drawn from classical and biblical sources, and some of which corresponded to arguments that had previously been made by other early and contemporary essayists. Most crucially, Mason shared with some of his more illustrious predecessors a concern with the problematic relationship between contemplation and action. Like Montaigne and Bacon, he appreciated that 'ther is great difference betweene the *Theoricke* & *Practicke* part of any thing: or between matter of bare imagination and conceipt, and matters of substance and truth: betweene words and actions'. As he observed, 'a man by contemplation may behold many thousand places in a moment, and set down a thousand proportions in his minde in shorte time: conceiue a iourney of ten thousand miles by Sea, with all the bowings and turnings: But come to action, and you shall finde another worke and labour to performe it'. In something like the spirit of Bacon and Daniel, Mason attempted to apply his insight to the critical analysis and political reform of one of the major social and economic problems of his time. Unlike his contemporaries, however, Mason was motivated by a profound theological and moral conservatism which seemed to entail an equally profound scepticism towards innovation, utopianism, and artificial methods of production: 'ther are sufficient things created to serue the turne of men,' he declared, 'in such liberall and plentiful sort, as they shal not need any new

³³ Ibid., pp. 25-7.

invention, to create or raise benefite by fantasie, imagination, or any new sought deuise, which wil deceiue like dreames: they are like witchcrafts & enchantments, seeming good, & yet in truth abhominable'. Among these apparitions was 'one maine & principal vsage' which either Mason or his original publisher chose to describe in the margin as 'the maine point against Nature'. That point was both the basic assumption and the central tenet of usury: 'that money should produce and increase money'.³⁴

Mason went on to advance a series of natural, legal, and mathematical arguments against both the concept and the contemporary practice of usury: the production and increase of money cannot derive from the nature of the metal; lenders typically abuse the fact that 'the Lawe is made onely against the taker'; the rate of interest is erroneously calculated 'onely by the rule of diuision: when it should haue been wrought, partly by diuision, and partly by addition'.³⁵ Some of these arguments are more cogent and persuasive than others. Ultimately, however, Mason's preoccupation with the 'reproachfull ignomie' of usury was an expression of his essential conviction that theology, morality, and reason should be perfectly and logically aligned. 'I the more insist vppon this for my sole example,' he maintained, 'because it is a matter so directly against nature: and sophisticatedly brought into the danger and ouerthrowe of mens estate: for all the world must confesse, that in this case, as hauing regard to matter of substance, nothing is enforced to produce some thing'.³⁶ Mason ended his critique by referring to a series of natural 'resemblances' and mechanical analogies, each of which was designed to prove to his audience that the current practice of usury was irrational, and therefore unethical. In the first place, he observed that since a farmer who sells his animals prematurely must accept a modest price, it was also reasonable that 'the lender shuld forbear his whole time before hee receiue his consideration, howsoeuer hee doth his principall'. In the second place, Mason pointed out that whereas a garment is made by cutting cloth with

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 76-8.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 78-87.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 80 and 90.

sheers, and a joint of meat divided between diners with a knife, 'the Lender at the end of one, 3. 6. or 9. moneths, hath not an essential *Diuisor* of twelue moneths, to warrant his diuision: And so diuiding substantiall mony by imaginarie time, doth erre in the ground of his Art'.³⁷ Finally, the author added the scriptural charge against usury that there are 'more then a hundreth expresse places of *commandement* forbidding it in the holy Bible: accusing the vsers thereof: & blessing those that forebeare and eschue it'. Having done so, Mason brought his analysis to a close by rehearsing his earlier assessment of the character of 'Queene *Reason*', and by summarizing the duties and responsibilities of her subjects or apprentices. 'And so to conclude,' he wrote, 'if euery man will be his owne Schoole-maister & instructor, which she desireth, her *Academie* will be wonderfull large: But principally, shee aduiseth the learning and instruction of her Creator, to be taught, followed, & put in practise'. By these means, Mason conjectured, 'the number of Gods Saints will be increased, his glory ad[va]nced, and his *Triumphant* kingdome replenished, with the company of holy and reasonable soules, after the sensitiue life is ended, which God grant, for his mercie'.³⁸

Not until the third time of publishing did Mason consider his chapters on the nature of reason and on the unnatural product of usury as essays. The fact that he was able to do so retrospectively indicates something of the increasing popularity, applicability, and diversity of the essay title. And yet it also suggests that uncertainty still endured with regard to the precise meaning or signification of the term. That uncertainty is evident in the prefatory epistle to Richard Brathwaite's *Essaies upon the Five Senses*, which he published along with 'a pithie one vpon *Detraction*' and 'sundry Christian *Resolues*' in the same year that Mason's *A New Post* appeared. Dedicating his work to Bacon's successor as attorney-general, Sir Henry Yelverton, Brathwaite somewhat hesitantly declared that '*here be certaine Essaies or Obseruations, or what you will, dilating vpon the fiue Senses*', before enigmatically remarking that '*many subjects*' had already been '*excellently composed, whose Title deriues their*

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 92 and 95-6.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 103-4.

essence from Essaies'. According to Brathwaite, the originality of his contribution to the genre lay in the restricted focus of his sensory theme: 'few', if any, of the productions of his predecessors were 'restrained to these Obiects, which the deuout Father termes those windowes which open to all vnbounded libertie; organs of weale or woe, happy if rightly tempered, sinister, if without limit'.³⁹ Indeed, the heading that was printed at the top of the first page of his opening essay 'Of Seeing' emphasized the values of logic and reason that Brathwaite claimed to have brought to his chosen topic: 'THESES,' it reads, 'OR Generall rules drawne by Art, from the line of Nature, tried by the touchstone of infallible experience, and applied as obseruances to these present times; hauing reference to the fiue Sences (proper subiects) to which they are restrained'.⁴⁰ In fact, the theological assumptions, scriptural traditions, and analogical strategies of Brathwaite's essays of the senses were equally as consistent, and even more clearly apparent, than those behind Mason's contemporary essays on the nature and abuses of reason.

The primary conceit around which Brathwaite's analysis was structured was that each of the physical senses had a spiritual analogue or correlative which was morally superior and yet vulnerable to misdirection. As he put it in the opening sentence of his essay 'Of Seeing', 'though the eye of my bodie allude to the eye of my soule, yet is the eye of my soule darkned by the eye of my bodie; where sence inclines to concupiscence, affection to affectation: and that part (the curious modell of the eye) which ought of it selfe to be a directrice to all other Sences, becomes the principall organ of error to the affections'. For Brathwaite, to see, hear, touch, taste, or smell was to be constantly exposed to the ubiquitous temptations of sin and spiritual error. Nevertheless, the author insisted that if discipline and integrity could only be maintained, the various and definitively human relationships between the senses and the soul might yet remain harmonious and mutually beneficial. In the case of sight, Brathwaite suggested 'that as the Sunne cheeres and

³⁹ Richard Brathwaite, *Essaies upon the Five Senses, with a Pithie One upon Detraction. Continued with Sundry Christian Resolves, Full of Passion and Devotion, Purposely Composed For the Zealously-Disposed* (London, 1620), sigs. A2v-A3r.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

renewes by his milde aspect, cleeres and purifies by his more piercing reflex; so the *eye* of the soule might cheere the bodie (if delected) renew her (if decayed) and purifie her maleuolent affections (if corrupted.)⁴¹ Conversely, in his essay '*Of Touching*', he observed that to be 'deprived of the spirituall vse of this Sence' was to be 'blinded with a terrestrial rest' to the weakness and the infirmity of physical 'composition'.⁴² Indeed, Brathwaite maintained throughout his work that the physical senses expressed themselves most freely and most emphatically when their desires were subjected to the rational direction of their spiritual uses or counterparts. In his fourth essay, he argued that taste should 'be directed by reason, and not by sence', before expressing his hope to be counted among those who 'haue found obstruction in the Sences corporall, but free passage in the Sences spirituall': those, that is, whose '*Taste* may distaste earth, relish heauen, & after her dissolution from earth, enjoy her mansion in heauen'.⁴³

Brathwaite's repeated insistence that the appetites of the physical senses should be guided by the reason of the soul rendered one of his essays particularly important to the general articulation of his theme. '*Of Hearing*' begins by defining its subject as 'the organ of vnderstanding' and by attributing the 'essence' of knowledge to 'the accent of the *ear*'. For Brathwaite, that is, the proper function of hearing was to operate in conjunction with memory and judgment in order 'to sound into the centre of the heart' and to 'supply it with good instructions'. While hearing was just as vulnerable as any of the other senses to the temptations and attractions of superficial and transient impressions, its close relationship with the intellectual faculties made it a crucial and indispensable part of the rational process of moral objectification. As the author explained, 'the *ear* is an edifying sence, conveying the fruit of either morall or diuine discourse to the imagination, and conferring with iudgment, whether that which it hath heard, seeme to deserue approbation.' Accordingly, 'a iudicious and impartiall *ear*

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 1-2 and 5.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 28-9.

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 49 and 55-6.

observes not so much who speaks, as what is spoken', and 'admires not the externall habit with the garish vulgar, but the force of reasons, with what likelihood produced'.⁴⁴ Having emphasized the moral importance of hearing and the potentially powerful consequences of its actions and effects, Brathwaite began a biographical narrative of his experiments with some of its various pleasures and uses. 'I haue thought long time with my selfe,' he wrote, 'how I should imploy this *Sence* best for my soules aduantage: wherein I tooke a suruey of all those subiects, to which this peculiar sence of *Hearing* was especiallest extended'. The author went on to report how he considered, and rejected, music, history, and the law, before eventually finding the rest that he sought in a suitably 'quiet harbour'.⁴⁵

According to Brathwaite, the process by which he attained this state of repose was defined and maintained by austerity, restraint, and denial. As he metaphorically recalled, the mundane harmonies of appetite, ambition, and avarice sounded 'harsh' to 'the *eare* of a diuinely-affected soule' which was resolutely aimed towards heaven. Having effectively identified the specific sense of hearing with the general worldly problems of affection and desire, the author proceeded with a critical analysis of the sins that he had managed to resist. In his discussion of pride, Brathwaite principally attacked the 'desire to reforme the workmanship of God' which was shamefully common among the human part of the creation.⁴⁶ On the subject of pleasure, he rehearsed his resolution to allow 'the *intellectual part*' of his spirit to be his ultimate ruler and judge.⁴⁷ Finally, the author turned to consider the 'meane & base' practice of usury, alluding as he did so to a range of biblical, classical, and legal censures of its murderous and 'odious' effects. As far as Brathwaite was concerned, it was 'more prophane, than allowed', to conclude on the grounds of its social impartiality that 'no profession merited more exemption than *Vsurie*'. As he pointedly observed, 'it taketh fast hold of Cities, Villages, Ports, and obscure Hamlets, and laies vnhallowed fist on persons of all qualitie, euen

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-8.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-15.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-18.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

from the Pere to the poore oyster-crying-wife'. With the relationship between his ostensibly sensory topic and his ethical and theological arguments having by this stage become somewhat tenuous, the author eventually brought his essay to a close with yet another variation on his primary structural conceit: 'my *ear* must be tuned to another note,' he concluded, 'that my edifying Sence may discharge her peculiar office, not to affect nouelties, or chuse varieties, but to dedicate her inward operation to the mindes comfort (to wit) the *Melodie of heauen*'.⁴⁸

Much more explicitly and consistently even than Mason, Brathwaite conflated the Book of God's works with the Book of God's word, and implored his zealous readers to do the same. Indeed, the kinds of arguments in which both essayists dealt belonged to the class of knowledge that Bacon sceptically identified in *The Advancement of Learning* as divine philosophy or natural theology. Throughout his career, Bacon devoted much of his philosophical writing, and many of his essays, to the vehement and sustained critique both of the foundations and the results of such dubious forms of religious interpretation. As an occasional analysis of a contentious moral and civil topic which evidently lent itself to their application, Bacon's late essay 'Of Usurie' provides a striking example of one of the ways in which he maintained and elaborated his opposition. The essay on usury began as 'a brief tractate of that subject', entitled 'Usury and the use thereof', sent by Bacon in a letter to Sir Edward Conway, King James's secretary of state, in April 1623 (SEH, xiv, pp. 414-19). A few days earlier, Bacon had asked Conway to deliver the document to the king for his personal consideration, but to conceal its authorship in the interests of an impartial hearing (SEH, xiv, p. 410). In the event, the new legislation that was passed the following year established a different rate of interest than the ones that Bacon had suggested. Nevertheless, Bacon obviously felt confident that both the ethics and the economics of his proposal were sound: two years after he submitted it to the king, he included a slightly edited version of his original tractate in a '*Newly enlarged*' edition of

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-7.

The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall, of Francis Lo. Verulam, Viscount St. Alban.

Bacon's essay 'Of Usurie' opens with a list of the 'Wittie Invectives' that had traditionally been made against the practice in question. All of these were commonplaces, and some of them had recently appeared in the essays of Mason and Brathwaite. Among his examples, Bacon cited the religious observation 'that the *Usurer* breaketh the First Law, that was made for Mankinde, after the Fall; which was, *In sudore Vultûs tui comedes Panem tuum* [In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat thy bread (Genesis 3:19)]; Not, *In sudore Vultûs alieni* [In the sweat of another's face]'. He also referred to the sectarian suggestion 'that *Usurers* should have Orange-tawney Bonnets, because they doe *Judaize*', and to the philosophical objection 'that it is against Nature, for *Money* to beget *Money*'. Rather than attempting to deny the validity of such arguments, Bacon simply pointed out 'that *Usury* is a *Concessum propter Duritiam Cordis* [Concession on account of hardness of heart (cf. Matthew 19)]: For since there must be Borrowing and Lending, and Men are so hard of Heart, as they will not lend freely, *Usury* must be permitted'. Finding that 'few have spoken of *Usury* usefully', Bacon initially suggested that 'it is good to set before us, the *Incommodities*, and *Commodities* of *Usury*; That the Good may be, either Weighed out, or Culled out; And warily to provide, that while we make forth, to that which is better, we meet not, with that which is worse' (E25, p. 125).

Bacon proceeded to identify seven disadvantages and three advantages of usury, the common themes of which were that money should be encouraged to circulate freely in order to facilitate trade, and that the inevitable consequence of individual ruin was general poverty throughout the state. As he explained, 'the Ballance, of *Commodities*, and *Discommodities* of *Usury*,' left two primary objectives to be 'Reconciled': on the one hand, 'that the *Tooth* of *Usurie* be grinded, that it bite not too much'; on the other, 'that there bee left open a Meanes, to invite Moneyed Men, to lend to the Merchants, for the Continuing and Quickning of Trade'. Bacon argued that the

only way to achieve such a reconciliation was to 'introduce, two severall *Sorts* of *Usury*; A *Lesse*, and a *Greater*'. Accordingly, his considered proposition was that a general rate of interest of five per cent should 'be proclaimed to be Free and Current' throughout the country, but that an indefinite number of 'Licensed Lenders' in 'Certaine Principall Cities and Townes of Merchandizing' should be allowed to offer their financial services on slightly more lucrative terms. To the anticipated objection 'that this doth, in a Sort, Authorize *Usury*, which before was, in some places, but Permissive', Bacon answered 'That it is better, to Mitigate *Usury* by *Declaration*, then to suffer it to Rage by *Connivence*' (E25, pp. 127-8). Ultimately, the aim of his proposal was a pragmatic and practical compromise: lenders as well as borrowers stood to gain from its adoption, and so too did the king and his government.

Whereas Mason considered the concept of usury to be fundamentally irrational, and while Brathwaite presented it as an abhorrent expression of a sensory appetite for wealth, Bacon recognized an opportunity to improve the conditions of an economic practice whose abolition was a social impossibility. By the time Bacon's essay 'Of Usurie' was published, the maximum rate of interest allowed by law had been reduced from ten to eight per cent, applicable across the board (E25, p. 269 n. 89-90). If the new legislation represented a small step in the right direction, it was tentative enough to convince Bacon that a properly informed public debate on the subject was still required. Even so, if the analysis of usury that he included in his final edition of *Essayes* was intended to advertise his abilities as a political counsellor, the author by then was concentrating his energies and resources on far more profound and momentous investigations. By 1620, and for most of his final years, Bacon's priorities as a researcher and a writer were to understand and attempt to assist the human faculties of sense and reason, and to demonstrate the benefits to humanity at large of radical philosophical reform.

The perception of truth

Near the beginning of Book II of *The Advancement of Learning*, Bacon described his aims and objectives as those of a preliminary surveyor of the current state of the arts of knowledge. 'I will now attempt to make a generall and faithfull perambulation of learning,' he wrote, 'with an inquiry what parts thereof lye fresh and wast, and not improued & conuerted by the Industrie of man; to the end that such a plotte made and recorded to memorie, may both minister light to anie publique designation: and also serue to excite voluntary endeuours'. At this early stage of his authorial career, Bacon's immediate philosophical ambitions were necessarily limited. As he remarked, 'my purpose is at this time, to note onely omissions and deficiencies; and not to make any redargution of Errors, or incomplete prosecutions: For it is one thing to set forth what ground lyeth vnmanured; and another thing to correct ill husbandry in that which is manured' (*AL*, p. 61). In the *Advancement*, it might be said, Bacon was temporarily and provisionally more concerned with reflective contemplation than with action.

Even at this stage, however, Bacon occasionally took the opportunity to indicate something of the content and the structure of the reformed natural philosophy that he had already begun in private to work towards. In his discussion of 'METAPHISICKE', the author asserted that 'the Inuention of Formes is of al other Parts of Knowledge the worthiest to bee sought', and maintained, apparently in the face of general opposition, that their laws and natures were 'Possible to bee found': dismissing as naive the Platonic aspiration 'to enquire *the forme* of a Lyon, of an Oake, of Gold: Nay of Water, of Aire', he declared that it was both more possible and more desirable 'to enquire *the formes* of Sence, of voluntary Motion, of Vegetation, of Colours, of Grautie and Leutie, of Densitie, of Tenuitie, of Heate, of Cold, & al other Natures and qualities, which like an *Alphabet* are not many, & of which the essences (vpheld by Matter) of all creatures do consist' (*AL*, pp. 83-4). Having argued that the success of such pioneering inquiries would depend upon the validity of their methods of investigation, and having gone on to criticize the

inductive and syllogistic practices of classical and contemporary logicians, Bacon proceeded to advertise his intention to publish, at an unspecified future date, a set of new, improved, and practical guidelines for success in natural philosophical investigations. 'This part of *Inuention*,' he wrote, 'concerning the *Inuention* of *Sciences*, I purpose (if God giue mee leaue) hereafter to propound: hauing digested it into two partes: whereof the one I tearme *Experientia literata* and the other *Interpretatio Naturæ*: The former, being but a degree and rudiment of the later.' Evidently, the work of corrective action that Bacon had ostensibly deferred was already at least partly underway: although he was reluctant to 'dwell too long [or] speake too great vpon a promise', he was prepared to lead his audience to expect that his promise would eventually be fulfilled (*AL*, p. 111).⁴⁹

Partial fulfilment finally arrived in 1620, the year in which Robert Mason's *A New Post* and Richard Brathwaite's *Essaies upon the Five Senses* both appeared. It did so in the form of the Latin *Novum organum*, the second part of Bacon's vast, unfinished, *Instauratio magna*, and the first of its projected six sections to be published. Book II of the *Novum organum*, which was itself incomplete, consisted of fifty-two often lengthy aphorisms which were designed to introduce the initial terms and procedures of Bacon's new

⁴⁹ Bacon began to develop his theory of forms and his logic of interpretation at around the same time as he started his work on the *Advancement*. Incomplete and unpublished drafts from this period are due to be collected in *OFB*, v: *Early Philosophical Writings to c. 1611*, ed. Rhodri Lewis, Sophie Weeks, and Daniel Andersson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, forthcoming); in the meantime, see SEH, iii and *OFB*, iv: *Philosophical Studies c. 1611-c. 1619*, ed. Graham Rees (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). For an account of Bacon's mature theory of forms, see Antonio Pérez-Ramos, *Francis Bacon's Idea of Science and the Maker's Knowledge Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); also 'Bacon's forms and the maker's knowledge tradition', in Markku Peltonen (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bacon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 99-120. On the distinction between *experientia literata*, or creative experimentation, and *interpretatio naturæ*, or the logic of 'true' induction, see Lisa Jardine, *Francis Bacon: Discovery and the Art of Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), ch. 7.

interpretative logic of natural experimentation and induction. The 130 aphorisms of Book I, along with the preliminary prefaces and plans to the *Instauratio magna* as a whole, were intended to prepare Bacon's audience to receive these lessons by analysing both the grounds and the flaws of various types of philosophical dogmatism and scepticism, and by recasting the author's earlier doctrine of elenches as a more comprehensive theory of the 'Idols [*Idola*]' which inevitably occupied and obstructed human minds. While the ultimate goal of Bacon's partial magnum opus was to instigate and initiate a practical programme of natural philosophical reform, the most fully realized and enduringly influential aspects of his enterprise were its prefatory critiques of existing methods of inquiry and its cautionary assessments of the epistemological conditions which any conceivable replacement methodology would have to take into account. Bacon's analyses of the weaknesses of unaided sense and reason draw on and develop some of the arguments that he had previously made in the *Advancement*. And just as his doctrine of elenches informed a number of the essays that he had included in his 1612 collection, so too the third edition of *Essayes* that he published in 1625 contained revisions and additions which occasionally bore witness to the reality of the idols of the mind.

In the general '*Præfatio*' to the *Instauratio magna*, Bacon drew attention to the fundamental difficulty of perceiving the truth about nature. 'Now to the human intellect reflecting on it,' he wrote, 'the fabric of the universe looks in its construction like a labyrinth, where we find everywhere so many blind alleys, such deceptions and misleading signs and such oblique and intricate convolutions and knots of nature.' Since the senses provide only an uncertain light, 'which sometimes flares up and at others dies down', and since the traditional and supposedly authoritative guides 'are themselves ensnared in the thickets', Bacon argued that a new kind of regulated assistance was required. Having lost faith 'both in the naked force of human judgement and even in chance success', and having decided that 'these difficulties cannot be overcome by any amount of genius or repeated gambling on the results of experience', the author proposed that 'our tracks must be guided by a clue,

and a sound policy must secure every step of the way right from the very perceptions of the senses' (*IM*, p. 19).

Bacon reported that he had made some progress in this task, and that he had done so by virtue of 'a true and legitimate abasement of the human spirit'. Whereas his predecessors had wrongly assumed that 'the discovery of arts' was 'nothing more than an intellectual exercise', and had therefore 'instantly summoned up their own spirits as to show them oracles', Bacon was intent on following a much more direct and objective system of interpretation. 'But I,' he wrote, 'engaging purely and unceasingly with things, do not abstract my intellect further from them than to allow (as with sight) their images and rays to come into focus; whence it happens that not much is left to the superior force of sheer wit.' Having insisted on the 'humility' and the transparency of his correlative methodologies of discovery and teaching, the author claimed that his new approach to nature offered a peaceful and productive resolution to a previously undetermined and destructive philosophical dispute. 'And in this way', he declared, 'I believe that I have solemnised a true, lawful and enduring marriage between the empirical and rational faculties (whose protracted and inauspicious divorce and mutual rejection has caused so much upset in the human family)' (*IM*, p. 21). He concluded his preface with a series of prayers and requests in which he rehearsed some of the arguments that he had made in the *Advancement* about the need to maintain the appropriate distinctions between the charitable pursuit of natural knowledge and the faithful acceptance of the mysteries of divinity and of the soul.

Following the general preface was the '*Distributio operis*', or '*Plan of the Work*', in which Bacon described in outline the contents of the six projected parts of the *Instauratio magna*. It was in the plan for the second part, the *Novum organum*, that Bacon first explicitly referred in print to his doctrine of the idols of the mind.⁵⁰ The premise of the doctrine was that the human senses and the human intellect or reason were similarly flawed, and that both

⁵⁰ Graham Rees provided a brief account of the development of the doctrine in Bacon's earlier unpublished writings: see *IM*, pp. lii-iii.

faculties therefore required artificial rectification and direction. As far as the senses were concerned, Bacon asserted with Montaigne that 'there are many things which escape the sense even when it is properly managed and not obstructed at all, because of the subtlety of the body as a whole, or the minuteness of its parts, or its distance from us, or its swiftness or slowness, or the object's familiarity, or other causes besides' (*IM*, p. 33; cf. *F*, II.12.342-3). Furthermore, he argued, 'even when the sense does get a grip on something, its hold is not terribly secure': as he had in the *Advancement*, the author insisted that 'the testimony and information of the sense is always made to the measure of man and not the universe; and it is a very great mistake to say that the sense is measure of things' (*IM*, p. 33; cf. *AL*, pp. 116-17). Now, Bacon explained that these defects could be eradicated by means of 'experiments designed specifically for the purpose, and thought out and applied with skill', the proposed aim being that 'the sense judges only the experiment whereas the experiment judges the thing'. Having advanced this solution, the author went so far as to describe himself as 'high priest of the sense (from which all natural knowledge should, unless we prefer madness, be derived), and learned interpreter of its oracles' (*IM*, p. 35). Notwithstanding his assumption of such grandiose titles, he immediately insisted that the production of raw experimental data, though crucial, was merely a preliminary phase in the overall pursuit of natural knowledge.

The interpretative work that still remained was the responsibility of the rational or intellectual faculty. Pointing out that it, too, had its flaws, Bacon wrote that 'men's minds are so marvellously beset that they altogether lack a clear and polished surface to focus the true rays of things', and that he was therefore 'obliged to find a remedy for this too'. In the first instance, the remedy required a more thorough and precise diagnosis. 'Now the *Idols* which occupy the mind', Bacon began, 'are either extrinsic or innate. The extrinsic have migrated into the minds of men either from the dogmas and sects of the philosophers or from misguided laws of demonstration. But the innate are rooted in the very nature of the intellect, which we know to be much more prone to error than the senses.' Unconvinced by its elevated status in traditional philosophical discourse, Bacon again maintained that the human

intellect was neither a pure nor a consistent source of knowledge: 'just as an uneven mirror bends the rays of things according to its own shape and section, so the mind when it is affected by things by way of the sense faithlessly implants and intermixes its own nature with the nature of things when sorting out and devising its notions'. For a moment, the author, like Montaigne, appeared to concede that he had raised an intractable problem: as he suggested, 'the first two classes of *Idol* can be rooted out with difficulty; the second not at all' (*IM*, p. 35; cf. *F*, II.12.349-50). In fact, however, Bacon envisaged a pair of related solutions by which the power of the idols could successfully be restrained.

The first solution was a version of the cautionary observation and description of elenches which Bacon had advised in the *Advancement* and exemplified in some of his essays. To begin with, he argued, 'all we can do is to point [the idols] out, and draw attention to and expose the mind's deceitful power, lest perhaps in extirpating old errors, the shoots of fresh ones immediately spring from that same corrupt complexion of the mind, with the result that we swap new errors for old instead of suppressing them all' (*IM*, p. 35; cf. *AL*, pp. 117-18). Much of Book I of the *Novum organum* was devoted to this process of exposure, as were some of the additions that Bacon made to the final edition of his *Essayes*. As for the unfinished Book II of the *Novum organum*, its primary objective would be to set out the directions for the author's second and apparently superior solution. 'But better still', he wrote, 'would it be to establish and fix it fairly and for good that the intellect cannot make judgements save by induction, i.e. induction in its legitimate form.' Bacon considered his new logic to be the ideal candidate for the role in question: from his position on the verge of total scepticism, he claimed to have constructed a procedure for the complete attainment of natural knowledge and for the progressive advancement of charitably productive works. 'When these have been explained,' he wrote of his solutions, 'and once I have made clear what may be assigned to the nature of things and what to the nature of the mind, I think that, with God's goodness showing the way, I shall have adorned and decked out the marriage bed of the mind and the universe.' Furthermore, he hoped and expected 'the promise of the wedding song' to be

'that from this union there spring helps for men and a line of discoveries which may to some degree subdue and mitigate their needs and miseries' (*IM*, pp. 35-7).

Having discussed the idols in the '*Distributio*' in general and collective terms, Bacon devoted a section of Book I of the *Novum organum* to a more extended analysis in which he identified and described their four individual classes or 'kinds': the first were '*Idols of the Tribe [Idols Tribûs]*'; the second *Idols of the Cave [Idola Specûs]*; the third *Idols of the Market [Idola Forio]*; the fourth *Idols of the Theatre [Idola Theatrî]*'. At the outset of his analysis, the author again suggested that 'the calling up of notions and axioms by true *Induction* is certainly a sovereign remedy for restraining the *Idols* and driving them off', and added that 'even just drawing attention to them' was also 'of great use': drawing on his account in the *Advancement* of the logical status of elenches, he explained that 'the doctrine of *Idols* stands in a similar relationship to the *Interpretation of Nature*, as the doctrine of Sophistical Refutations does to ordinary dialectic' (*IM*, p. 79; cf. *AL*, pp. 114-15). As such, it might also be expected that the doctrine of idols stands in a similar relationship to elements of Bacon's late *Essayes* as the doctrine of elenches did to some of the items that he included in his edition of 1612. In certain instances, this proves to be the case.

Bacon defined the '*Idols of the Tribe*' as those which 'are rooted in human nature itself and in the very tribe or race of men' (*IM*, p. 79). Of the seven aphorisms that he went on to dedicate to the specific false appearances to which these idols give rise, one in particular is closely related both to his discussion in the *Advancement* of the fallacies of the mind and to an essay that he later added to his final edition of 1625. Aphorism 46 begins with the statement that 'the human intellect takes the conceptions which have won its approval (by general acceptance, credit, or simple charm), and pulls everything else into line and agreement with them'. It continues with the explanation that 'although the abundance and strength of the contrary instances it encounters is greater, the intellect at enormous cost overlooks or

despises them, and dismisses and rejects them by making distinctions to keep the conceptions just mentioned intact'. As he had in the *Advancement*, Bacon cited as an example the religious tendency to acknowledge instances of apparently miraculous salvation while neglecting the considerably more numerous cases of evidently unanswered prayer (*IM*, p. 83; cf. *AL*, p. 116). Extrapolating and elaborating, the author now maintained that 'the same thing applies in pretty well all superstition, as in astrological judgements, in the interpretation of dreams, omens, divine retributions and things of that kind where men, charmed by suchlike vanities, notice predictions which come true but overlook and ignore the ones (though they are more common) which do not' (*IM*, pp. 83-5).

Bacon's late essay 'Of Prophecies' works towards a similar conclusion. It begins by establishing a practical distinction between various kinds of prophecy which the relevant aphorism in the *Novum organum* had suggested could be considered together. 'I meane not to speake of *Divine Prophecies*', wrote Bacon; 'Nor of Heathen Oracles; Nor of Naturall Predictions; But only of *Prophecies*, that have beene of certaine Memory, and from Hidden Causes' (*E25*, p. 112). Most of the essay is taken up with examples of this kind of prognostication, including some lines from Seneca's *Medea* which were traditionally held to be 'A *Prophecie* of the Discovery of *America*'; the first-century prediction 'That those that should come forth of *Judea*, should reigne over the World: which though it may be was meant of our *Saviour*, yet *Tacitus* expounds it of *Vespasian*'; and a popular Elizabethan verse which Bacon claimed not to understand, but which 'was generally conceived, to be meant of the Spanish Fleet, that came in 88.' (*E25*, pp. 112-14). To the extent that details about their provenance were known, Bacon maintained that the examples that he had chosen were all 'of certaine Credit'. As for their legitimacy as true prophecies, however, his judgment was 'that they ought all to be *Despised*; And ought to serve, but for Winter Talke, by the Fire side'. By way of clarification, the author wrote that 'when I say *Despised*, I meane it as for Beleeefe: For otherwise, the Spreading or Publishing of them, is in no sort to be *Despised*': as he observed, 'they have done much *Mischiefe*', so that 'many severe Lawes' had necessarily been 'made to suppress them'. In

conclusion, Bacon identified three general circumstances which had given 'Grace, and some Credit', to prophecies such as those under discussion. The first was a classic case of one of the fundamental operations of the idols of the tribe: 'that Men marke, when they hit, and never marke, when they misse: As they doe, generally, also of *Dreames*'. As for the remaining two, they were also indirectly related to the common human susceptibility to the allure of false appearances: 'that Probable Conjectures, or obscure Traditions, many times, turne themselves into *Prophecies*', and 'that almost all of them, being infinite in Number, have been Impostures, and by idle and craftie Braines, meerey contrived and faigned, after the Event Past' (E25, p. 114). Although Bacon's essay was explicitly concerned with social, political, and personal prophecies, its cautionary analysis of the psychology of belief is equally applicable to the pursuit of natural knowledge.

The second class of idols that Bacon discussed in the *Novum organum* were the '*Idols of the Cave*'. Explaining that these idols 'belong to the particular individual', and that 'everyone has (besides the vagaries of human nature in general) his own special cave or den which scatters and discolours the light of nature', the author argued that 'this comes either of his own unique and singular nature; or his education and association with others, or the books he reads and the several authorities of those whom he cultivates and admires, or the different impressions as they meet in the soul' (IM, p. 81). In the *Advancement*, Bacon had concluded his brief discussion of the errors and vain opinions of individual natures and customs by referring his readers to that 'peccant humour' of microcosmic intellectualism that Heraclitus had condemned. Again in the *Novum organum*, he maintained that 'the human spirit (as it is allotted to particular individuals) is evidently a variable thing, all muddled, and so to speak a creature of chance', before declaring it to have been 'well said by *Heraclitus* that men looked for the sciences in their own little worlds and not in the big wide world that is common to all' (IM, p. 81; cf. AL, pp. 117 and 30). He went on to observe that 'the greatest danger' was posed by the infatuation with 'particular sciences and reflections' in which an inordinate amount of time had been invested, and to suggest that 'anyone who contemplates the nature of things should distrust whatever ravishes and

possesses his intellect; and with such matters should be all the more careful to keep his intellect impartial and pure' (*IM*, pp. 89-93).

Bacon's analysis of the role of education in the dangerous development of the idols of the cave offers an enhanced perspective on an essay from his earlier collections which appeared in a slightly modified version in his edition of 1625. As the opening essay of his volume of 1597, 'Of Studies' had originally consisted of a series of aphoristic statements on the uses of scholarship and reading. Its most salient points were general and cautionary: that studies 'perfect *Nature*, and are perfected by experience', and that 'they teach not their owne vse, but that is a wisdom without them: and about them wonne by obseruation'. However, the essay ended with the more specific and positive advice that 'Histories make men wise, Poets wittie: the Mathematickes subtle, naturall Phylosophie deepe: Morall graue, Logicke and Rhetoricke able to contend' (*E97*, sigs. Bv-B2r). In the version of the essay that appeared in his 1612 collection, Bacon further emphasized the value of particular scholarly pursuits. As he observed, 'there is no stound or impediment in the wit, but may be wrought out by fit studies: like as diseases of the body may haue appropriate exercises': just as he found that 'Bowling is good for the Stone and Raines; Shooting for the longs & breast; gentle walking for the stomacke; riding for the head; and the like', so too he declared that 'if a mans wit be wandring, let him study the *Mathematiks*; if his wit be not apt to distinguish, or find difference, let him study the Schoolemen; if it bee not apt to beat ouer matters and to find out resemblances, let him study Lawyers cases'. Indeed, Bacon's general remedial principle was that 'euerie defect of the mind may haue a speciall receipt' (*E12*, pp. 173-4). The 1625 version retained this emphasis on the corrective value of studies, adding that mathematical demonstrations force a wit which is 'called away never so little' to 'begin again'; that 'the *Schoole-men*' are '*Cymini sectores* [splitters of cumin seeds]'; and that legal cases encourage the student 'to call up one Thing' and 'to Prove and Illustrate another' (*E25*, p. 154). However, the essay also contained an explanatory gloss on the maxim that studies 'perfect Nature, and are perfected by Experience: For Naturall Abilities, are like Naturall Plants, that need Proyning by *Study*: And *Studies* themselves, doe give forth

Directions too much at Large, except they be bounded in by experience' (E25, p. 153). Considered in the context of his analysis of the idols of the cave, the final version of Bacon's original essay 'Of Studies' insists more than ever before on the need both for scholarly pluralism and experiential variety.

In the *Advancement*, the last kind of general false appearances that Bacon identified were those 'that are imposed vpon vs by words, which are framed, and applyed according to the conceit, and capacities of the Vulgar sorte'; certainly, the author contended, 'wordes, as a *Tartars Bowe*, doe shoote back vppon the vnderstanding of the wisest, and mightily entangle, and peruert the Iudgement' (AL, p. 117). In the *Novum organum*, these linguistic fallacies reappeared as Bacon's third type or species of idols: he called them '*Idols of the Market* on account of men's commerce and partnerships' (IM, p. 81), and described them in Aphorism 59 as 'the greatest nuisances of the lot'.

Observing that 'the great and solemn disputes of learned men often end in controversies about words and names', Bacon suggested that 'it would be wiser (following the custom and practice of the mathematicians) to reduce these controversies to order by beginning with definitions' (IM, p. 93). In a number of his latest essays, the author did exactly that: 'Of Revenge', for example, opens with the statement that '*Revenge* is a kinde of Wilde Justice; which the more Mans Nature runs to, the more Law ought to weed it out' (E25, p. 16), while 'Of Simulation *And* Dissimulation' initially defines the second term of its title as 'but a faint kind of Policy, or Wisedome' (E25, p. 20). Nevertheless, Bacon also pointed out in Aphorism 59 that linguistic controversies relating to 'things natural and materiate' could not be remedied by definitions, 'because definitions are made up of words, and words beget words, so as it is necessary to go back to particular instances and their sequencing and order'. He promised to provide an account of the correct process in the second book of his work (IM, p. 93).

In Aphorism 60, Bacon distinguished between two different sorts of lexical idol: 'for they are either the names of things which do not exist (for just as there are objects which through inadvertence lack a name, so there are

names which through flights of fancy lack an object), or names of things which do exist but are muddled, ill-defined, and rashly and roughly abstracted from the facts'. As examples of the first sort, the author listed 'fortune, first mover, planetary orbs, the element of fire, and fictions of that kind whose origins lie in vain and deceitful theories' (*IM*, pp. 93-5). Of these, fortune featured most heavily as a topic in Bacon's major English works: he devoted a lengthy section of the *Advancement* to the precepts of the 'Architecture of fortune', or the means by which the politically ambitious might successfully further their careers (*AL*, pp. 163-79); similarly, the slightly modified version of his essay 'Of Fortune' which appeared in his 1625 collection concluded that the ease with which he lives and prospers is undoubtedly 'much, in a Mans Selfe' (*E25*, p. 124). A useful perspective on some of the other 'names of things which do not exist' is provided in the 1625 version of Bacon's essay 'Of Superstition'. In a late addition, the author recorded with approbation an observation reportedly made by certain members of the sixteenth-century Roman Catholic Council of Trent: '*That the Schoolemen were like Astronomers, which did faigne Eccentricks and Epicycles, and such Engines of Orbs, to save the Phenomena; though they knew, there were no such Things: And, in like manner, that the Schoolmen, had framed a Number of subtile and intricate Axiomes, and Theorems, to save the practise of the Church*' (*E25*, p. 55). Evidently, Bacon's first kind of lexical idol, that which imposes on the intellect signs devoid of referents, was a problem in natural philosophy and theological politics alike.

In the *Novum organum*, Bacon added a fourth type of idol to the three kinds of false appearance to which he had explicitly drawn attention in the *Advancement*. '*Idols of the Theatre*', he wrote, 'are not innate, nor do they get into the intellect by stealth but have clearly been promoted and given credit by theories fit for the stage and by misguided laws of demonstration' (*IM*, p. 95). By way of analysis, Bacon went on to distinguish between three families of false philosophers: 'the *Sophistical, Empirical, and Superstitious*'. Examples of the first two kinds were Aristotle, whose dialectical categories had 'corrupted natural philosophy', and the alchemists and William Gilbert, whose narrow obsessions with 'a handful of experiments' had yielded 'empty and

incredible' philosophies. Bacon reported that the third family demanded a more urgent contemporary response. 'But the corruption of philosophy arising from *Superstition*, and admixture of theology,' he wrote, 'is more widespread and does the greatest damage to whole philosophies or to their parts': it was 'fantastical, swollen, and almost poetical', he continued; above all, it was delusive (*IM*, pp. 99-101). Bacon's approach to this superstitious or theological kind of false philosophy was consistently critical across all of his major publications. Here, he cited as its proponents Pythagoras, Plato, and 'some of the moderns' who 'have in the height of folly so wallowed in this vanity that they have tried to build natural philosophy on the first chapter of Genesis, the Book of *Job* and other sacred writings, *seeking the living among the dead*' (*IM*, p. 103). Graham Rees suggested that Bacon's specific targets included Paracelsus and the Paracelsians (*IM*, pp. 518-19 n. H3v-H4r). More generally, his critique was an expression of an argument that he had previously made in the *Advancement* and by which a number of his earlier essays had been informed: that the 'unhealthy mixture of things divine and human begets not only fantastic philosophy but heretical religion' (*IM*, p. 103; cf. *AL*, p. 79, *E12*, *passim*). As he put it in a late addition to his essay on the topic, among 'the *Causes of Superstition*' was 'The taking an Aime at divine Matters by Human, which cannot but breed mixture of Imaginations' (*E25*, p. 55). He might also have pointed out that contemporary essayists such as Mason and Brathwaite had taken aim at human matters by divine.

Occasionally, then, Bacon included in his final edition of *Essayes* new material which was either directly or indirectly related to his analysis of the idols of the mind. In fact, the reality of the idols, and the paramount importance of exposing their power and influence, was established as a general theme of the collection in the previously unpublished essay with which it opened. 'Of Truth' begins with a question borrowed from the Gospel of Saint John: '*What is Truth; said jesting Pilate; And would not stay for an Answer*' (*E25*, p. 7; cf. John 18:38). It continues with a pointed critique of the ancient sceptics and academics to whom Bacon had previously referred both in the *Advancement* and throughout the *Instauratio magna*, as well as of the contemporary writers whom the author evidently considered to be their successors. 'Certainly there

be, that delight in Giddinesse', he wrote; 'And count it a Bondage, to fix a Beleeffe; Affecting Free-will in Thinking, as well as in Acting. And though the Sects of Philosophers of that Kinde be gone, yet there remaine certaine discoursing Wits, which are of the same veines, though there be not so much Bloud in them, as was in those of the Ancients' (E25, p. 7; cf. AL, pp. 110-11). Kenneth Alan Hovey argued that Montaigne was among the modern sceptics that Bacon had in mind, pointing out that when the author directly referred to the Frenchman later in the essay he did so in mildly disparaging terms: 'And therefore *Mountaigny* saith prettily, when he enquired the reason, why the word of the *Lie*, should be such a Disgrace, and such an Odious Charge? Saith he, *If it be well weighed, To say that a man lieth, is as much to say, as that he is brave towards God, and a Coward towards men.* For a *Lie* faces God, and shrinkes from Man' (E25, pp. 8-9; cf. F, II.18.386). As Hovey observed, Bacon's choice of the adverb 'prettily' was an indication 'that Montaigne is being cited for his rhetoric, his ability to express himself cleverly, rather than for his ability to think correctly'.⁵¹

In between his allusions to Montaigne, Bacon turned his attentions to the general psychology and morality of truth and lies in philosophy and theology. 'But it is not onely the Difficultie, and Labour, which Men take in finding out of *Truth*', he wrote; 'Nor againe, that when it is found, it imposeth upon mens Thoughts; that doth bring *Lies* in favour: But a naturall, though corrupt Love, of the *Lie* it selfe.' By way of explanation of this strangely paradoxical phenomenon, the author conjectured that 'This same *Truth*, is a Naked, and Open day light, that doth not shew, the Masques, and Mummeries, and Triumphs of the world, halfe so Stately, and daintily, as Candlelights'; that '*Truth* may perhaps come to the price of a Pearle, that sheweth best by day: But it will not rise, to the price of a Diamond, or Carbuncle, that sheweth best in varied lights'; and that 'a mixture of a *Lie* doth ever adde Pleasure'. Bacon even went so far as to suggest that such idolatrous misconceptions of the nature of things could sometimes be found to play a usefully palliative role in the constant human struggle with emotional disharmony and discontent.

⁵¹ Hovey, 'Bacon's French and the Essay', pp. 75-6.

'Doth any man doubt,' he asked, 'that if there were taken out of Mens Mindes, Vaine Opinions, Flattering Hopes, False valuations, Imaginations as one would, and the like; but it would leave the Mindes, of a Number of Men, poore shrunken Things; full of Melancholy, and Indisposition, and unpleasing to themselves?' (E25, p. 7).

Even so, Bacon was not prepared to condone the promotion of untruth simply on the grounds that it could alleviate stress and pain. As he insisted, 'it is not the *Lie*, that passeth through the Minde, but the *Lie* that sinketh in, and setleth in it, that doth the hurt' (E25, p. 7). Just as he had in the *Novum organum*, he advocated attending to the psychology of false appearances only as a preliminary and complementary process to the greater and more important task of the pursuit of objective truth. 'But howsoever these things are thus, in mens depraved Judgements, and Affections,' he wrote, 'yet *Truth*, which onely doth judge it selfe, teacheth, that the Inquirie of *Truth*, which is the Love-making, or Wooing of it; The knowledge of *Truth*, which is the Presence of it; and the Beleeve of *Truth*, which is the Enjoying of it; is the Sovereigne Good of humane Nature.' Whereas he had previously criticized the Paracelsians, and might also have criticized both Mason and Brathwaite, for basing their natural philosophy on the Scriptures, Bacon now drew from the opening chapters of Genesis a more general and profound lesson about the nature and the search of truth. 'The first Creature of God, in the workes of the Dayes, was the Light of the Sense', he wrote; 'The last, was the Light of Reason; And his Sabbath Worke, ever since, is the Illumination of his Spirit. First he breathed Light, upon the Face, of the Matter or Chaos; Then he breathed Light, into the Face of Man; and still he breatheth and inspireth Light, into the Face of his Chosen' (E25, p. 8; cf. *IM*, p. 103, Genesis 1-2). After quoting from Lucretius on the pleasure of truth in a similarly disparaging way as he did from Montaigne on lies, Bacon metaphorically declared it to be 'Heaven upon Earth, to have a Mans Minde move in Charitie, Rest in Providence, and Turne upon the Poles of *Truth*' (E25, p. 8). His conclusion was consistent with the ethical values of the project that he had introduced in the *Advancement* and outlined in the *Instauratio magna*. It also set the tone for

the occasional exposures of idolatrous false appearances which followed in the essays that it introduced.

Conclusion

Like Montaigne, Bacon entertained a distinctive form of scepticism about traditional claims and approaches to philosophical and natural philosophical knowledge. Unlike many of their contemporaries, both essayists were critical, and even hostile, towards certain kinds and uses of analogical argument, and in particular towards the supposed validity and value of microcosmic theories and schemes. Nevertheless, Bacon's position on scepticism in general was ultimately very different from that which his predecessor had advanced. Whereas Montaigne considered the human perceptual faculties to be intrinsically incapable of obtaining and verifying objectively accurate knowledge about the world, Bacon maintained that the elenches, false appearances, and idols that obstructed human perceptions could be isolated, identified, and exposed. Many of Bacon's essays contributed to these processes of intellectual caution and refutation, and the ways in which they did so distinguished them philosophically from the essays of some of his more credulous and dogmatic contemporaries. Even so, the relation of Bacon's essays to the more progressive and productive elements of his programme for philosophical reform can best be described as preparatory and indirect. In a letter to Father Fulgenzio Micanzio of Venice that he wrote some time in 1625, Bacon explicitly differentiated between his moral and political writings and his philosophical and natural historical works. Outlining his intentions for a proposed Latin edition of the major publications of his career, the author informed his correspondent that a volume including both his 'Historia' of Henry VII and his *Essayes, or Saggi Morali*, would follow the expanded version of his *Advancement*, the *De dignitate et augmentis scientiarum*, and precede his *Novum organum* and the rest of the *Instauratio magna*. However, he insisted that 'this volume is (as I said) interposed, not being a part of the "Instauration"' (SEH, xiv, pp. 531-3). The letter to Micanzio provides

conclusive evidence that Bacon did not conceive of his essays as part of his programme for philosophical and natural philosophical reform. Even so, questions remain to be asked and answered about the ways in which the two projects differed from each other, and from those of contemporary essayists. Some of the most significant of those questions are concerned with the investigation and representation of human nature and character. Those questions will be investigated in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

The Advancement of the Essay II: The Nature of Character

Introduction: 'Actiue Matter' and 'Actiue men'

In Book II of *The Advancement of Learning*, Bacon articulated a distinctively philosophical and progressive concept of social and civil morality. Observing that the traditional authorities on the subject had failed to identify 'the Rootes of Good and euill, and the Strings of those Rootes', the author proposed that 'there is fourmed in euery thing a double Nature of Good; the one, as euery thing is, a Totall or substantiue in it selfe; the other, as it is a parte or Member of a greater Bodye'. Bacon considered the second of these natures to be 'in degree the greater, and the worthier, because it tendeth to the conseruation of a more generall fourme'. Moreover, having demonstrated its application to physical entities such as iron, water, and '*Massie bodyes*', the author maintained that his double principle was 'much more engrauen vpon Man, if he degenerate not'. By way of evidence for his assertion, Bacon cited the intrinsic capacity of the properly moral subject to recognize and express the essential human virtues of duty, charity, and communion. With his primary moral axiom of involvement and contribution 'strongly planted', he proceeded to argue that it offered resolution to most of the controversies in which both classical and contemporary ethicists had been engaged (*AL*, pp. 136-7).

First and foremost, Bacon suggested, 'it decideth the question touching the preferment of the Contemplatiue or actiue life, and decideth it against *Aristotle*'. As he explained, 'all the reasons which he bringeth for the Contemplatiue, are priuate, and respecting the pleasure and dignity of a mans selfe, (in which respects no question the contemplatiue life hath the preemynence)'. Tellingly, Bacon chose to illustrate his argument by rehearsing the commonplace story of the origin of the word 'philosopher' which

Montaigne had earlier inserted in modified form in his chapter on the education of children. According to Bacon, Aristotle's position on the superiority of the life of contemplation was similar to that of Pythagoras, 'who being asked what he was, answered: *That if Hiero were euer at the Olimpian games, he knew the Manner, that some came to try their fortune for the prizes, and some cam as Merchants to vtter their commodities, and some came to make good cheere, and meete their friends, and som came to looke on, & that he was one of them that came to look on.*' Whereas Montaigne had diminished the value of pure contemplation by deconstructing and rearranging the elements of his borrowed story, Bacon was less equivocal and more emphatic in his opposition. 'But men must know,' he insisted, 'that in this Theater of Mans life, it is reserued onely for God and Angels to be lookers on' (AL, p. 137; cf. F, I.25.75 and 81).¹

Among other things, Bacon's concept of moral responsibility had important consequences for the theory and practice of authorship, and in particular of the authorship of essays. Having pointed out that private virtue could not be understood 'without some relation to Society', and that public duty depended for its effectiveness on 'an inwarde disposition', Bacon went on to register his interest in 'the respectiue or speciall duty of euery man in his profession vocation and place', knowledge of which he reported as 'rather dispersed then deficient'. Indeed, Bacon acknowledged the tradition of 'dispersed writing in this kind of Argument' to be the most appropriate and 'best'. As he suggested, it would be impossible for anyone to 'take vpon him to write of the proper duty, vertue, chalenge and right, of euery seuerall vocation profession, and place'. Accordingly, 'although sometimes a Looker on may see more then a gamester and there be a Prouerb more arrogant then sound *That the vale best discovereth the hill*: yet there is small doubt but that men can write best and most really & materially in their owne professions' (AL, pp. 142-3).

¹ In a later version of the story, Bacon again identified Pythagoras's interlocutor as Hiero, rather than as Leon of Phlius, but declined to register his disapproval of the philosopher's interpretation of his role: see *Apophthegmes New and Old. Collected by the Right Honourable, Francis Lo. Verulam, Viscount S^t. Alban* (London, 1625), pp. 271-3.

Bacon undoubtedly had his essays in mind as he considered the problem of how to contribute to public knowledge about special or respective duty. A few years later, he would define the exemplary '*Essaies*' of Seneca as 'dispersed Meditations, though conveyed in the forme of Epistles' (E25, Appendix ii, p. 317); moreover, although his early essay 'Of followers and friends' referred with approbation to the proverbs of the looker on and the gamester and the vale and the hill, it did so in the specific context of practical advice from a courtier with pretensions to political influence (E97, sig. [B5]v). Above all, the legitimacy of professional experience that Bacon brought to his ongoing essay project enhanced and bore out the wisdom of the conclusions about duty and knowledge that he drew in his discussion in the *Advancement*: 'that the writing of speculatiue men of Actiue Matter, for the most part doth seeme to men of Experience as Phormioes Argument of the warrs seemed to Hannibal, to be but dreames and dotage'; and that 'generally it were to be wished, (as that which wold make learning indeed solide & fruitful) that Actiue men woold or could become writers' (AL, p. 143). Bacon identified King James's *Basilikon Doron* (Edinburgh, 1599) as a prime example of such active writing; equally, some of the author's own later essays, such as '*Of the greatnesse of Kingdomes*', '*Of Plantations*', and '*Of Usurie*', directly engaged in contemporary issues of foreign, colonial, and economic policy.

As well as offering counsels and proposals on specific matters of civil business, part of the role of Bacon's active writer was to expose 'the frauds, cautels, impostures, & vices of euery profession', which the author claimed had traditionally been handled 'rather in a Satyre and Cinicaly, then seriously & wisely'. Citing Niccolò Machiavelli as one of those authors who had most usefully reported 'what men doe and not what they ought to do', Bacon argued with respect to this objective that 'it is not possible to ioyn serpentine wisdom with the Columbine Innocency, except men know exactly all the conditions of the *Serpent*, his basenesse and going vpon his bellye, his volubility, and lubricity, his enuy and stinge, and the rest, that is al fourmes and Natures of euill'. As he explained, 'an honest man can doe no good vpon those that are wicked to reclaime them, without the helpe of the knowledge of evil', so that 'except you can make them perceiue, that you know the

vtmost reaches of theyre owne corrupt opinions, they despise all morality' (AL, pp. 144-5).

In early essays and meditations such as 'Of Sutes', 'Of Negotiating', and 'De Columbina innocentia, & Serpentina prudentia', Bacon had begun to apply this principle to the analysis of sound governance and effective diplomacy. Later, in his 1612 essay '*Of Counsell*', he auditioned once again for the major public roles to which he continually aspired by proposing solutions to the problems and inconveniences that were most commonly associated with the employment of civil advisers. Above all, Bacon argued that 'it is in vain for *Princes* to take counsell concerning matters: if they take no counsell likewise concerning persons. For all matters are as dead images, and the life of the execution of affaires resteth in the good choise of persons.' Significantly, too, Bacon contended that it was insufficient 'to consult concerning persons, *secundum genera*, as in an *Idea*, or Mathematicall description, what kind of person should be; but in *indiuideo*: For the greatest errors, and the greatest iudgement are shewed in the choice of *Indiuiduals*'. Having by this stage served for a number of years as solicitor-general to the king, the essayist concluded with an elegant advertisement of his own credentials as an experienced political adviser: 'Bookes will speake plaine, when Councillors blanch. Therefore it is good to be conuersant in them, specially the books of such as themselues haue beene Actors vpon the Stage' (E12, pp. 67-9).

The importance that Bacon attached to his essay '*Of Counsell*' is inscribed in the title of his '*Newly enlarged*' third edition of 1625. Indeed, the version that appeared in *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall* contained a subtle revision which registered the author's developing understanding both of the nature and cultivation of an actively political morality and of the status and significance of the emerging essay genre. 'Neither is it enough', the altered passage reads, 'to consult concerning *Persons, Secundum genera*, as in an *Idea*, or *Mathematicall Description*, what the Kinde and Character of the *Person* should be; For the greatest Errors are committed, and the most Judgement is shewne, in the choice of *Indiuiduals*' (E25, p. 67). At first glance,

the addition of the word 'Character' may seem inconsequential. And yet the concept of character was profoundly important not only to Bacon, but also to a number of contemporary authors and essayists. In the *Advancement*, and in some of his earlier essays, Bacon assigned it a foundational role in his progressive philosophy of 'the REGIMENT or CVLTVRE OF THE MIND' (*AL*, p. 135). Within a few years, writers such as John Stephens, Nicholas Breton, and Geffray Minshull had begun to apply an alternative concept to various new modes of the essay genre. Later in his career, Bacon responded by qualifying his initial claims about character and by using his historical and natural historical works to pursue more radically his philosophical inquiries into instances of human nature and trends in human behaviour. This chapter describes the evolution of the relationship between the concept of character and the genre of the essay in the two decades after the *Advancement* first appeared. However, it begins with the first early modern essayist to have investigated that relationship and its consequences for philosophy and ethics: Michel de Montaigne.

Cato, Caesar, and Montaigne

Both before and after he became a student of himself, Montaigne was a student of the humanity and the characters of others. By analysing the actions of exemplary historical figures, and by observing the behaviour of his friends, servants, and acquaintances, the author gradually enhanced his appreciation of the motivations and influences to which particular personalities were susceptible. In part, Montaigne's interest in the concept of character derived from his recognition of its importance to the success of vital human endeavours. Like Bacon, he considered it to be crucial not only in ethics and politics, but also in social and scientific pursuits such as education and medicine: just as the tutor should be able to accommodate his lessons to 'many spirits of diverse formes and different humours' (*F*, I.25.70; cf. *E*12, pp. 173-4), so too the doctor 'ought to know', among other things, 'the sicke mans complexion, his temper, his humors, his inclinations, his actions, his thoughts

and his imaginations' (F, II.37.443; cf. E97, sig. Cr). More generally, however, Montaigne studied others explicitly in order to test and to improve his knowledge and understanding both of himself and of the book which represented him. Throughout his essays, and especially in his later revisions and additions, his analyses and observations informed a novel and increasingly profound elaboration of the direct yet complex relationships between his particular form of human existence and his idiosyncratic style of writing.

One of the chapters in which the early stages of Montaigne's process of analysis can most clearly be discerned is '*Of Cato the younger*'. For the author, as for many of his contemporaries, the Roman statesman Cato was among the most exemplary human beings ever to have lived and died. As such, reflection on his life, death, and reputation repeatedly led Montaigne to the consideration not only of virtue, but also of the motivations of those who sought to diminish the value of its most celebrated historical instances. At the beginning of his chapter on Cato, Montaigne set out to expose a fallacy which seemed to him to be present in practically every moral judgment that he heard. 'I am not possessed with this common error,' he wrote, 'to judge of others according to what I am my selfe. I am easie to beleeeve things differing from my selfe. Though I be engaged to one for-me, I do not tie the world vnto-it, as every man doth: And I beleeeve and conceive a thousand manners of life, contrary to the common sorte' (F, I.36.113). According to the author, one of the consequences of the general failure to recognize the true diversity in human 'conditions and principles' was a corresponding failure to appreciate, and properly to credit, 'the inimitable height of some heroicke mindes'. Whereas Bacon would maintain that the nature of virtue, if not the culture of the mind, had traditionally been 'excellently' described, Montaigne perceived his 'age' and 'climate' to be 'so dull and leaden, that not onely the execution, but the very imagination of vertue is farre to seeke, and seemes to be no other thing than a Colledge-supposition, and a gibrish-worde' (F, I.36.114; cf. AL, pp. 135-6). As one of those writers who was appropriately attuned both to the range of human character and to the scale of its worthiest manifestations, Montaigne considered it to be his responsibility further 'to

extoll and magnifie' the most exemplary lives and actions that history recorded: 'I would endeavour to charge these rare and choise-figures, selected by the consent of wise men, for the worldes example, as much, and as high, as my invention would give me leave with honour, in a plausible interpretation, and favourable circumstance'; after all, 'it is the part of honest-minded men to pourtray vertue, as faire as possible faire may-be' (F, I.36.114).

Montaigne had no doubt that Cato belonged in the highest moral category of all. 'This man was truly a patterne,' he wrote, 'whom nature chose to shew how farre humane vertue may reach, and mans constancie attaine-vnto.' Although he declined 'here to treate this rich argument', preferring simply to record the poetic judgments of Martial, Manilius, Lucan, Horace, and Virgil, the author would later return to his theme in the context of other topics (F, I.36.115). In '*Of sleeping*', he related a pair of anecdotes attesting to Cato's remarkable ability to sleep deeply and soundly at times of danger and uncertainty: as he concluded, 'the knowledge we have of this mans vnmatte-haughtie heart, by the rest of his life, may make vs judge with all securitie, that it onely proceeded from a spirit, so farre elevated above such accidents, that hee dained not so much as to trouble his minde with them, no more then with ordinary chances' (F, I.44.147). In his chapter '*Of Crueltie*', Montaigne went further still, suggesting that Cato's heroic suicide in the aftermath of the Roman Senate's military defeat by Julius Caesar was expressive of something more than merely 'the rules of the stoike sect' to which he adhered. 'There was,' the author surmised, 'in this mans vertue overmuch cheerefulnes, and youthfulnes to stay there. I verily beleeeve, he felt a kinde of pleasure and sensualitie in so noble an action, and that therein he more pleased himselfe, then in any other, he ever performed in his life.' Cato, that is, was not just a disciplined philosopher with unusual levels of constancy and resolve: above and beyond that, he was a man whose final, violent action revealed 'a kinde of vnspeakable joy in his minde'; moreover, that action was perfectly in keeping with the dignity and honour that he had showed throughout his life (F, II.11.244-5).

Another historical figure whose character evidently fascinated Montaigne was Cato's most enduring enemy, Julius Caesar. Montaigne devoted the majority of two consecutive chapters to a penetrating study of the eventual dictator's characteristic passions, qualities, and flaws. In the first of these, *'The History of Spurina'*, the author used the example of Caesar as a means to investigate the differences between appetites which affect both the body and the soul, such as love, and appetites which are purely in the mind, such as ambition. Citing 'the curious and exact care' that Caesar took over his physical appearance, and listing the long succession of women with whom he was reported to have had affairs, Montaigne quite reasonably deemed his subject to have been 'a man extreamelie addicted to all amorous licenciousnesse, and of a wanton-lascivious complexion'. Nevertheless, Montaigne argued that Caesar's 'other passion of ambition, wherewith he was infinitely infected, and much tainted', was by far the stronger force. 'His pleasures could never make him loose one minute of an houre,' he wrote, 'nor turne one step from the occasions, that might any way further his advancement'; indeed, Caesar's ruling passion 'did so sovereignly oversway all others, and possessed his minde with so vncontroled an authority, that she carryed him whither it list' (F, II.33.418-19). In both this and the following chapter, *'Observations concerning the meanes to warre after the maner of Iulius Cæsar'*, Montaigne was at pains to emphasize his subject's intellectual, moral, and military qualities as well as his defining flaw: Caesar was, the author argued, a man of great learning, eloquence, and courage; he was vigilant, diligent, and resolute, yet also affable, merciful, and scrupulous; at times, he inspired remarkable demonstrations of loyalty and devotion from his soldiers. Even so, Montaigne maintained that 'all these noble inclinations, rich gifts, worthy qualities, were altred, smothered and eclipsed by this furious passion of ambition'; he even concluded that Caesar's characteristic vice 'lost, and overthrew in him the fairest naturall and richest genuitie that ever was'. Whereas the suicide Cato was a hero to Montaigne and others, the author observed that the memory of his greatest rival was 'abhominable to all honest mindes, insomuch as by the ruine of his cuntry, and subversion of the mightiest State and most flourishing Common-wealth, that ever the worlde shall see, he went about to procure his glorie' (F, II.33.420).

Montaigne's considered judgments of the characters of Cato and Caesar amounted to an expression of moral and political values which many of his contemporaries shared. In addition, however, the author's studies resulted in two apparently conflicting interpretations of the nature of character itself. On the one hand, the fact that Caesar's essential character revealed itself in virtually everything he did allowed Montaigne to construct an argument about the quotidian uniformity of the soul. As he put it in his chapter '*Of Democritus and Heraclitus*', 'each motion sheweth and discovereth what we are. The very same minde of *Cæsar*, we see in directing, marshalling, and setting the battel of *Pharsalia*, is likewise seene to order, dispose, and contrive, idle, trifling and amorous devises': accordingly, just as 'we judge of a horse, not onely by seeing him ridden, and cunningly managed, but also by seeing him trot, or pace; yea, if we but looke vpon him as he stands in the stable', so too 'amongst the functions of the soule, some are but meane and base', and yet 'he that seeth hir march hir naturall and simple pace, doth peradventure observe hir best' (F, I.50.164). On the other hand, the fact that Cato's exemplary moral status was primarily due to his uniquely high levels of constancy and integrity suggested to Montaigne that most ordinary souls must be practically different in kind. In his chapter '*Of the inconstancie of our actions*', the author wrote of Cato's character that 'he that toucht but one step of it, hath touched all', and that 'it is an harmony of wel-according tunes and which cannot contradict it selfe', before asserting that 'with vs it is clean contrary, so many actions, so many particular judgements are there requir'd' (F, II.1.194). Indeed, Montaigne recognized in his own character clear evidence of the sort of inconstancy that his chapter attempted to account for and describe. 'All contrarieties are found in hir,' he wrote, 'according to some turne or remooving, and in some fashion or other. Shamefast, bashfull, insolent, chaste, luxurious, peevisch, pratling, silent, fond, doting, labourious, nice, delicate, ingenious, slowe, dull, froward, humorous, debonaire, wise, ignorant, false in wordes, true-speaking, both liberall, covetous, and prodigall' (F, II.1.195). Apparently, Montaigne was capable of manifesting all these qualities and more. And inevitably, accepting the validity of such a confused and confusing set of attributes eventually led him to question whether anything of any moral consequence could be said about his character at all. '*It*

is no parte of a well-grounded iudgement,' he concluded, *'simplie to iudge our selves by our exterior actions: A man must throughly sound himself, and dive into his hart, and there see by what wards or springs the motions stirre.'*

Although he maintained that this was 'a hazardous and high enterprise' with which relatively few people should 'medle', Montaigne considered himself to be well enough qualified to undertake the requisite investigations (F, II.1.197). While he attempted to do so throughout his later revisions and additions, some chapters more than others exhibit a particularly direct engagement with his theme.

One of those chapters is *'Of Repenting'*, in which Montaigne finally managed to produce an account of his personal moral identity whose principles could potentially be reapplied by any of his readers to themselves. In doing so, he also succeeded in resolving the apparent conflict between the alternative interpretations of the concept of character that he had earlier advanced and described. The chapter begins with a complex statement of Montaigne's aims as a humanist author which eloquently sums up much of what his essay project had taught him. 'Others fashion man,' he wrote, 'I repeate him; and represent a particulare one, but ill made; and whom were I to forme a new, he should be farre other then he is; but he is now made. And though the lines of my picture change and varie, yet loose they not themselues.' Observing that the earth, with its natural formations and its manufactured constructions, is constantly subject to change, Montaigne declared *'constancie it selfe'* to be *'nothing but a languishing and wauering dance'*. Accordingly, even the author's own 'object', himself, 'goeth so vnquietly and staggering, with a naturall drunkennesse', that his records of its movements could never be considered definitive. Montaigne's solution to this perpetual difficulty was intimately related to his progressive understanding of the form in which he articulated his thoughts. 'I describe not the essence,' he explained, 'but the passage; not a passage from one age to age, or as the people reckon, from seauen yeares to seauen but from day to day, from minute to minute.' Since his 'historie' had continually to be 'fitted to the present', it was inevitably 'sometimes contrarie' with respect to the themes and subjects that it handled. 'Howsoever,' wrote the author, 'I may perhaps gaine-say my selfe,

but truth (as *Demades* saide) I never gaine-say: Were my mind setled, I would not essaye [je ne m'essaierois pas], but resolute my selfe. It is still a prentise and a probacioner' (F, III.2.483; M, p. 845). The work of the true essayist, it appeared, could never, and should never, be complete.

Even so, by this stage Montaigne had made a certain amount of progress in the inquiries to which he had devoted so much of his time. In the first place, his enduring conviction that 'all morall Philosophie' could be equally well applied 'to a populare and priuate life, as to one of ritcher stuffe', encouraged him to assert with absolute confidence that '*euery man beareth the whole stampe of humane condition*' (F, III.2.483). As M. A. Screech has observed, 'if this assertion is not true, Montaigne's project collapses and the *Essays* make no sense. If it is true, it is arguably the most important sentence Montaigne ever wrote.'² By establishing a secure relationship between his life and the lives of others, the author ensured that even his most idiosyncratic opinions and impressions would have some kind of relevance to his readers. In the second place, Montaigne had become an undisputed expert in his chosen field of study. Among writers, he was 'the first' to have addressed himself to the world by his 'generall disposition; as *Michell de Montaigne*; not as a Grammarian, or a Poet, or a Lawyer'. As such, he occupied a unique position of disciplinary competence and authority: 'never man handled subject, he vnderstood or knew, better then I doe this I have vndertaken; being therein the cunningst man alive'; moreover, 'never man waded further into his matter, nor more distinctlie sifted the partes and dependences of it, nor arrived more exactlie and fully to the end he proposed vnto it'. The result of Montaigne's specialist knowledge and of his continual fidelity to his enterprise was a level of authorial integrity which he hoped would be appreciated by his audience. 'Here my booke and my selfe march together,' he wrote, 'and keepe one pace. Els where one may commend or condemne the worke, without the worke-man; here not: who toucheth one, toucheth the other.' Although he denied that there was any didactic aspect to his writing, claiming

² M. A. Screech, *Montaigne & Melancholy: The Wisdom of the Essays* (London: Duckworth, 1983), p. 106.

to 'teach not', but only to 'report', the author's exemplary negotiations with both the fixed and the transient elements of his character were undoubtedly a potential source of instruction for those who understood and accepted their novel premises (F, III.2.483-4).³

Part of the reason that Montaigne was so reluctant to establish himself as a teacher was that he rarely found cause to repent. Initially, he suggested that his general satisfaction with the state of his conscience was related to his conservative acceptance of an orthodox conception of morality. 'I account vice', he wrote, '(but each according to their measure) not onely those which reason disallowes, & nature condemnes, but such as mens opinion hath forged as falce & erroneious, if lawes and custome authorize the same.' On further reflection, however, Montaigne began to revise his understanding of the value of the contemporary moral economy. 'To ground the recompence of vertuous actions, vpon the approbation of others,' was, he decided, 'to vndertake a most vncertaine or troubled foundation, namely in an age so corrupt and times so ignorant, as this is: *the vulgar peoples good opinion is iniurious.*' Since even the moral judgments of his well-intentioned friends often failed to convince him of their validity, Montaigne proposed that a more reliable 'touchstone' or 'tribunall' should be sought out and established in their place. 'None but your self', he declared, 'knowes rightly whether you be demisse and cruell, or loyall & deuout. Others see you not, but ghesse you by vncertaine coniectures: They see not so much your nature, as your art.' For Montaigne, the difficulties of observing the motivations that lie behind human decisions were such that other people could never accurately assess the true moral rectitude of a given action (F, III.2.484). The author offered an apparently straightforward piece of advice: 'Adhere not then to their opinion, but hold vnto your owne'. Less simple were the implications and possible consequences that he immediately began to draw out of his directive: 'One may disauow and disclaime vices, that surprise vs, and whereto our passions transport vs: but those, which by long habite are rooted in a strong, and

³ See Peter Mack, 'Rhetoric, ethics and reading in the Renaissance', *Renaissance Studies*, 19 (2005), 1-21 (pp. 15-17).

anked in a powerfull will, are not subiect to contradiction'. Having defined repentance as '*a denying of our wil, and an opposition of our fantasies which diuerts vs here and there*', he even went so far as to observe that 'it makes some disauow his former vertue and continencie' (F, III.2.484-7).⁴ Evidently, repentance could at times be a dangerously misguided undertaking.

Montaigne argued that the surest way to guide repentance was to maintain an appropriate distinction between private and public morality. '*That is an exquisite life,*' he wrote, '*which euen in his owne priuate keepeth it selfe in awe and order.* Euery one may play the jugler, and represent an honest man vpon the stage; but within, and in his bosome, where all things are lawfull, where all is concealed; to keepe a due rule or formale decorum, that's the point' (F, III.2.487). Whereas public actions were inevitably conditioned by the opinions of others or by the pursuit of honour and glory, private virtue was seldom closely enough regarded to be rewarded or even adequately understood: 'To gaine a Battaile, performe an Ambassage, and gouerne a People,' the author conceded, 'are noble and worthy actions;' however, for a man 'to chide, laugh, sell, pay, loue[,] hate, and myldely and iustly to conuerse both with his owne and with himselfe; not to relent, and not gaine say himselfe, are things more rare, more difficult, and lesse remarkeable' (F, III.2.487). For Montaigne, the respective contingencies of public and private ethics rendered the simple moral scale on which actions were usually placed an unreliable indicator of the character of the actor in question: 'As vitious mindes are often encited to do well by some strange impulsion, so are vertuovs spirits mooued to do ill'. Accordingly, the author maintained that valid judgments of character could only be made when the subjects under investigation were comfortable, 'settled', and relaxed: 'when they are neare themselues, and as we say, at home, if at any time they be so; or when they are nearest vnto rest, and in their naturall seate' (F, III.2.488). While it was difficult, if not impossible, to make observations of others in such an environment, Montaigne was convinced that it was both practically possible

⁴ The pagination in this chapter is erroneous; references are to page numbers as they appear.

and morally imperative that everyone should arrive at a legitimate conclusion about himself. 'There is no man', he contended, '(if he listen to himselfe) that doth not discover in himselfe a peculiar forme of his, a swaieng forme, which wrestleth against the institution, and against the tempests of passions, which are contrarie vnto him' (F, III.2.488). Everyone, that is, had a character, or *forme maistresse*, and each individual had a personal responsibility to get to know it.⁵

Montaigne's description of his own 'swaieng' or master form goes a long way towards explaining the apparent contradiction in his earlier investigations of the characters of Cato and Caesar. 'As for me,' he wrote, 'I feele not my selfe much agitated by a shock; I commonly finde my selfe in mine owne place, as are sluggish and lumpish bodies. If I am not close and neare vnto my selfe, I am never farre-off: My debauches or excesses transport me not much. There is nothing extreame and strange: yet have I found fits and vigorous lusts' (F, III.2.488). Whereas others had only an obscure idea of the truly essential characteristics from which their passions and the pressures of living caused them to deviate, Montaigne recognized his occasional vices for what they were and managed to retain a consistent sense of the identity to which he would normally try to do justice. 'I have not many motions,' he declared, 'that hide themselues and slinke away from my reason, or which very neare are not guided by the consent of all my partes, without diuision, or intestine sedition: my iudgement hath the whole blame, or commendation; and the blame it hath once, it hath euer: for, almost from it's birth, it hath beene one, of the same inclination, course and force.' The result of Montaigne's insight into the general moral integrity of his character was an enhanced understanding of the province and the propriety of true repentance. 'Some sinnes there are outragious, violent and suddaine', he observed, and those are the sins for which it is legitimate and appropriate to repent. As for 'those other sinnes, so often reasumed, determined and aduised vppon, whether they be of complexion, or of profession and calling,' Montaigne found it impossible to conceive 'how they should so long be settled in one same courage, vnlesse the

⁵ Screech, *Montaigne & Melancholy*, pp. 101-2.

reason and conscience of the sinner were therevnto inwardly priuie and constantly willing'. Consequently, the author found it equally difficult to imagine how such an habitually determined sinner could find a reason or an occasion by which to repent. Those who claimed to do so, he said, may well 'make vs beleeeue, the[y] feele great remorse, and are inwardly much displeased with sinne;' typically, however, 'of amendment, correction, or intermission, they shew vs none' (F, III.2.489).

To achieve the levels of conformity to devotion that true repentance of habitual sins required would be to cultivate and continuously to maintain new ways of thinking and willing. Whether or not the necessary change was possible for others was open to debate. In Montaigne's case, at least, such a profound alteration could never have come from within. 'I may in generall wish to be other then I am', he wrote; 'I may condemne and mislike my vniuersall forme; I may beseech God to grant me an vndefiled reformation, and excuse my naturall weakenesse; but me seemeth I ought not to tearme this repentance, no more then the displeasure of being neyther Angel nor *Cato*' (F, III.2.489). The author's reference to his Roman hero is instructive: although Cato was proof that humans could achieve an extraordinary level of virtue, the exceptional nature of his life and death exposed the inconsistency by which the actions and inactions of mortals such as Montaigne were typically marked. Something similar could be said for Cato's great rival, Julius Caesar: although his extreme ambition made him an ideal candidate for a study of the effects of character, the bearing of comparable qualities on the lives of lesser men would normally be subtler and more difficult for observers to detect. As someone who had come to understand both the nature and the limited power of his master form or character, Montaigne was under no illusions about the extent of his capacity to perform virtuous and practically successful acts. 'When I consult with my age of my youthes proceedings,' he wrote, 'I finde that commonly, (according to my opinion) I managed them in order. This is all my resistance is able to performe. I flatter not my selfe: in like circumstances, I should euer be the same. It is not a spot, but a whole dye, that staynes me.' Having arrived at this conscientiously unrepentant conclusion, Montaigne retained little tolerance for those 'superficial, meane

and cerimonious' forms in which penitents usually engaged. 'It must touch me on all sides,' he insisted, 'before I can terme it repentance. It must pinch my entrailles, and afflict them as deeply and throughly, as God himselfe beholdes me' (F, III.2.490).

By studiously reflecting both on the enduring integrity of his judgment and on his continual susceptibility to modes of behaviour which failed adequately to express it, Montaigne developed an exemplary account of his character which was consistent with his earlier observations of identity, inconstancy, and morality. As significant as its achievement was, however, Montaigne's chapter '*Of Repenting*' was by no means his final word on the subject of personal ethics. Indeed, by the time he came to compose his final chapter '*Of Experience*', the author appeared to have become more confident in his ability to apply the principles of his investigations to the characters, attributes, and actions of other people. 'This long attention, I employ in considering my self', he wrote, 'enableth me also to judge indifferently of others: And there are few things whereof I speake more happily and excusably.' Whereas a fundamental tenet of his inquiry into repentance had been that observations of other characters were rarely either accurate or representative, Montaigne's argument in '*Of Experience*' was that the relevant skills and processes could always be learned. 'It often fortuneth me', he explained, 'to see and distinguish more exactly the conditions of my friends, than themselves do. I have astonied some by the pertinencie of mine owne description, and have warned him of himselfe. Because I have from mine infancy enured my selfe to view mine owne life in others lives; I have thereby acquired a studious complexion therein.' Even so, Montaigne's enhanced belief in the powers of observation remained limited. His intention, he said, was 'not to marshall or range this infinite varietie of so diverse and so distracted actions to certaine Genders and Chapters'; nor was it 'distinctly to distribute [his] parcels and divisions into formes and knowne regions'. Ultimately, Montaigne could only assign to others the monumental and seemingly impossible task of systematically analysing the various types of human character. 'I leave it to Artists,' he wrote, 'and I wot not whether in a matter so confused, so severall and so casuall, they shall come to an end, to range into sides, this infinite

diversitie of visages; and settle our inconstancie and place it in order' (F, III.13.640-41). Before long, Bacon would confidently register his intention to achieve precisely that.

Character, nature, and society

When Bacon turned in Book II of *The Advancement of Learning* from the discussion of the nature of good to the description of the culture of the mind, he did so in the knowledge that the concept of mental 'Husbandry' required a certain amount of preliminary explication. Among the philosophical and scriptural texts that he cited by way of introduction was a classical judgment on the man to whom Montaigne had referred as a 'patterne' of virtue and constancy: 'So saith *Cicero* in great Commendation of Cato the second, that he had applied himself to Philosophy. *Non ita disputandi Causa, sed ita viuendi* [Not thus for the sake of disputing, but for the sake of living]' (AL, p. 146; cf. F, I.36.115). Even so, Bacon's account of 'the Culture and Cure of the mynde of Man' began with an assertion of the value of philosophical analysis. Observing that the work of mental cultivation and improvement was 'limited and tied' by nature on the one hand and by fortune on the other, the author argued that it was possible 'to proceede by application' to 'a wise and industrious sufferinge' under these uncontrollable powers, and that 'the wisdom of Application resteth principally in the exact & distinct knowledge of the precedent state, or disposition, vnto which we do apply'. As he metaphorically explained, 'we cannot fit a garment, except wee first take measure of the Body' (AL, p. 147).

In accordance with these preliminary observations about the culture of the mind, Bacon declared that 'the first Article of this knowledge is to set downe Sound and true distributions and descriptions of the seuerall characters & tempers of mens Natures and dispositions', and that consideration should especially be given 'to those differences which are most radicall in being the

fountainys and Causes of the rest or most frequent in Concurrence or Commixture'. Although Aristotle had handled some of these distinctions in his accounts of 'the Mediocrities of vertues', Bacon pointed out that subtler or more general qualities such as '*Narrownes of mind*', 'longanimity' or forbearance, and 'good Nature, or ill Nature, benignity or Malignity', had been neglected by philosophical tradition. Moreover, the author expressed his surprise 'that this parte of knowledge touching the seuerall Characters of Natures and dispositions should bee omitted both in Morality and policy, considering it is of so great Ministry, and suppeditation to them both'. Indeed, Bacon found the situation all the more baffling given that many of the relevant divisions had already been identified in astrology, in records of papal conclaves, and in daily conversation. According to the author, resources such as these typically 'wandreth in wordes' and were 'not fixed in Enquiry'. As such, he maintained that 'the distinctions are found (many of them) but we conclude no precepts vpon them, wherein our faulte is the greater, because both History, Poesye, and daylie experience are as goodly fields where these obseruations grow': although 'wee make a few poesies, to hould in our hands,' they had yet to be brought 'to the confectionary, that Receits mought be made of them for vse of life' (*AL*, pp. 147-8).

Within a few years of the publication of the *Advancement*, Bacon had written brief Latin character studies of Julius and Augustus Caesar which may have been intended as direct contributions to the descriptive and distributive project that he had proposed. Like Montaigne, Bacon found that Julius Caesar had a mind which was 'in desires and affections turbulent, but in judgment and intellect very serene', and that 'in will and appetite he was one who never rested in what he had got, but ever pressed forward to things beyond'; furthermore, he argued that Augustus 'was certainly in strength of mind inferior to his uncle Julius, but in beauty and health of mind superior' (*SEH*, vi, pp. 341 and 347). However Bacon conceived of the relationship between the collective analysis of human character and his early character studies, the texts on the Caesars remained unpublished until 1658, when William Rawley

included them in an edition of the author's *Opuscula posthuma*.⁶ Long before then, however, the proposal in the *Advancement* had evidently had a minor impact on the development of the early modern essay. Bacon himself seems to have had it in mind when he composed his 1612 essay 'Of Goodnesse, and goodnes of Nature': having referred to the virtue in question as 'the character of the *Deitie*' (E12, p. 12), he proceeded to observe that 'there is in some men, euen in *nature*, a disposition towards it: as on the other side, there is a naturall malignity', the 'lighter sort' of which 'turneth but to a crossnesse, or frowardnesse, or aptnesse to oppose, or difficilnesse, or the like: but the deeper sorte, to enuie and meere mischief' (E12, pp. 16-17). Two years later, the essayist 'D. T.', who had drawn extensively on parts of the *Advancement* in a pair of previous collections, specifically alluded to the section on the analysis of character in the central chapter of his book, *The Dove, and the Serpent*. The argument of the chapter, entitled 'Of Negotiation in generall', was that the successful political negotiator 'must endeauour as much as in him lyeth, to haue a sound and perfect knowledge of the seuerall Characters and tempers of mens natures and dispositions', as well as of certain 'inherent' and 'accidentall' impressions which were the respective results of the influences of nature and fortune.⁷

This second set of categories was also derived from the *Advancement*. Immediately after his discussion of human characters and dispositions, Bacon had listed as objects of inquiry 'those impressions of Nature, which are imposed vpon the Mind by the Sex, by the Age, by the Region, by health, and sicknesse, by beauty and deformity, and the like,' along with those similar impressions 'which are caused by extern fortune: as Souerayngnty, Nobility,

⁶ Francis Bacon, *Opuscula varia posthuma, philosophica, civilia, et theologica*, ed. William Rawley (London, 1658), pp. 195-204.

⁷ 'D. T.', *The Dove, and the Serpent* (London, 1614), p. 53; see also *Essaies Politicke, and Morall* (London, 1608), *Essayes, Morall and Theologicall* (London, 1609), and John Leon Lievsay, 'Tuvill's Advancement of Bacon's Learning', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly*, 9 (1945), 11-31. The authorship of the three works signed 'D. T.' has recently been debated: see Elizabeth Allen, 'Tuvill, Daniel (d. 1660)', in *ODNB* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/56861>] (2010), accessed 21 February 2014.

obscure birth, ritches, want, Magistracye, priuatenesse, prosperity, aduersity, Constant fortune, variable fortune, rising per saltum, per gradus, and the like' (AL, pp. 148-9). Later, the author also referred to 'the diseases and infirmit[i]es of the mind, which ar no other then the perturbations & distempers of the affections' (AL, p. 149), and to such artificial means of affecting human behaviour as '*Custome[,] Exercise, Habit, Educacion, example, Imitation, Emulation, Company, Frinds, praise, Reproofe, exhortation, fame, lawes, Bookes, studyes*' (AL, pp. 150-51). Apparently, these secondary and tertiary impressions represented a more straightforward opportunity for the kind of investigation that an early modern essayist could undertake. Bacon had already included essays 'Of Studies', 'Of followers and friends', and 'Of Regiment of health' in his first edition of 1597. The topics of fame, company, and exercise were also tackled by contemporary essayists such as Sir William Cornwallis and Robert Johnson.⁸ Later, in his chapter on negotiation, 'D. T.' discussed the effects on political protagonists of youth, age, nobility, riches, and education. And as 'D. T.' was almost certainly well aware, Bacon's second edition of 1612 had contained essays on all of these topics and more.

Many of the essays in Bacon's second edition analyse relationships between character, morality, and the various internal and external impressions to which individuals in nature and society were exposed. Two of the essays in which the author most explicitly engaged with these themes were the consecutive and complementary '*Of Beauty*' and '*Of Deformity*'. The first essay, '*Of Beauty*', begins with an assertion about the appearance of virtue whose terms correspond to those which Bacon would later employ in a similar argument about the perception and recognition of truth: 'Vertue is like a rich stone, best plain set: and surely vertue is best set in a body that is comely though not of delicate features; and that hath rather dignity of presence, then beauty of aspect' (E12, pp. 141-2; cf. E25, p. 7). For Bacon, that is, physical beauty was a superficial distraction from the greater value of its moral

⁸ Sir William Cornwallis, *Essayes* (1600-1601): '*Of Fame*', sigs. [N5]r-[O2]r, '*Of Trappes for Fame*', sigs. V2r-[X7]r, '*Of Solitarinesse and Company*', sigs. 2D3v-2E4r; Robert Johnson, *Essaies, or Rather Imperfect Offers* (London, 1601): '*Of Exercise*', sigs. C2v-C3v.

counterpart, which revealed itself more fully and more clearly in graceful contrast with the less aesthetically striking of its possessors. In fact, however, this opening argument was immediately rendered practically irrelevant by the next pair of sentences that Bacon wrote: 'Neither is it almost seene, that verie beautiful persons are otherwise of great vertue; as if nature were rather busie not to erre, then in labour to produce excellency. And therefore they proue accomplished, but not of great spirit; and study rather behaiour then vertue' (E12, p. 142). Despite his reservations about its worth, Bacon showed himself to be a keen observer and a sensitive appreciator of some of the subtler qualities and attractions of human beauty: he found 'fauour', or friendly regard, to be more alluring than 'colour', and preferred 'decent and gracious motion' to both; he considered 'the best part of beauty' to be that 'which a picture cannot expresse', and criticized the artists Apelles and Albrecht Dürer for attending less to 'felicity' than to 'rule'; accordingly, he suggested that 'persons in yeeres seeme many times more amiable' than those in youth, and quoted a line from Euripides by way of illustration and support. Even so, the author concluded his essay by drawing attention both to the transience of physical beauty and to its morally disturbing effects. 'Beauty is as sommer fruits,' he wrote, 'which are easie to corrupt, and cannot last: and for the most part, it makes a dissolute youth, & an age a little out of countenance', even if occasionally it also proved capable of making 'vertues shine, and vices blush' (E12, pp. 142-5).

Bacon's essay '*Of Deformity*' was very much a companion piece to '*Of Beauty*', and it probed more deeply its predecessor's tentative speculations about the compensatory economy of nature. Whereas '*Of Beauty*' suggested that nature was concerned to maintain in its subjects an aggregate mediocrity of virtues and qualities, '*Of Deformity*' opened with the questionable observation that 'deformed persons are commonly euen with nature: for as Nature hath done ill by them, so doe they by nature, being for the most [part] (as the Scripture saith) void of naturall affection; and so they haue their reuenge of nature' (E12, p. 146).⁹ Such an hypothesis obviously had implications for the analysis

⁹ Michael Kiernan points out that Bacon's reference to Romans 1:31 and 2 Timothy 3 is

of character and its inherent modifications. On the one hand, Bacon proposed that 'there is a consent betweene the body and the minde, and where Nature erreth in the one; she ventuereth in the other'. On the other, he remarked that 'there is in man an election touching the frame of his minde, and a necessitie in the frame of his body', so that 'the starres of naturall inclination, are sometimes obscured by the sunne of discipline and vertue'. On balance of these competing forces, the author decided that 'it is good to consider of deformitiy, not as a signe, which is more deceiueable; but as a cause, which seldome faileth of the effect': as he explained, 'whosoeuer hath any thing fixed in his person, that doth induce contempt; hath also a perpetuall spurre in himselfe, to rescue and deliuer himself from scorne'. Consequently, 'all deformed persons are extreme bold: first, as in their owne defence, as being exposed to scorne; but in processe of time, by a generall habite'; accordingly, too, 'it stirreth in them industrie, and specially of this kinde, to watch and obserue the weaknesse of others, that they may haue somewhat to repay' (E12, pp. 146-8). Having briefly drawn attention to some of the ways in which their low estimation by superiors and competitors could work to their political advantage, Bacon argued that the will of the deformed 'to free themselues from scorne' necessarily expressed itself 'either by vertue, or malice', and concluded that they therefore 'prooue either the best of men, or the worst, or strangely mixed' (E12, p. 150).¹⁰

Together, Bacon's essays '*Of Beauty*' and '*Of Deformity*' suggest that physical impositions of nature can sometimes have such a profound effect on character as to render the analysis of that primary and essential category practically redundant. Whether or not the same could be said of the influences of society depended to a great extent on the quality, consistency, and longevity of the sources from which they came. In 1597, Bacon had

to 'a list of vices unrelated to deformity': see E25, p. 274 n. 5-6.

¹⁰ Thirteen years later, Bacon replaced his closing verdict with a more generous assessment of the moral and political capacities of the deformed: 'And therefore, let it not be Marvelled, if sometimes they prove Excellent Persons; As was *Agesilaus*, *Zanger* the Sonne of *Solyman*, *Æsop*e, *Gasca* President of Peru; And *Socrates* may goe likewise amongst them; with Others' (E25, p. 134).

concluded his essay 'Of followers and friends' with a pessimistic estimate of the frequency, at least in politics, of true companionship. 'There is little friendship in the worlde,' he wrote, 'and least of all betweene equals, which was wont to bee magnified. That that is, is betweene superiour and inferiour, whose fortunes may comprehend the one the other' (E97, sig. [B5]v).

Although that bleak assessment remained unchanged in the 1612 version of Bacon's essay, the new volume also contained a second essay 'Of Friendship' in which a much more positive outlook on the topic was conveyed. 'Of Friendship' opens with an aphoristic statement of the value of the social relationship in question: 'There is no greater desert or wildernes then to bee without true friends. For without friendship, society is but meeting.' The essay continues with a natural philosophical similitude about the primary emotional attributes or effects of friendly bonds: 'And as it is certaine, that in bodies inanimate, vnion strengthneth any naturall motion, and weakeneth any violent motion; So amongst men, friendship multiplieth ioies, and diuideth griefes' (E12, pp. 80-81). As immediately obvious as some of the benefits of this human union were, Bacon was concerned to inquire more directly into its potentially remedial influence on the more fundamental impressions of, and on, specific characters and tempers. Initially, he advised 'whosoeuer wanteth fortitude' to 'worshippe Friendship', explaining that 'the yoke of Friendship maketh the yoke of fortune more light'; he then criticized those who lived in 'perpetuall dissimulation' by describing 'hee that is all Fortune, and no Nature' as 'an exquisit Hierling'. Having done so, the author counselled his readers that to communicate with friends was to procure definite intellectual, psychological, and civil or political advantages: as he observed, 'it will vnfold thy vnderstanding; it will euaporate thy affections; it will prepare thy businesse' (E12, pp. 81-2). As a moral resource of demonstrable value to the culture and cure of the mind, Bacon argued that true friendship should be not only appreciated but also carefully and consistently maintained; indeed, he identified the 'want of true friends' as 'the reward of perfidious natures' and 'an imposition vpon great fortunes'. As for its improvement, however, Bacon insisted that 'perfection of friendship, is but a speculation', before concluding his essay with a moving definition of the simple generosity of spirit that being a true friend involves. 'It is friendship,' he wrote, 'when a man can say to

himselfe, I loue this man without respect of vtility. I am open hearted to him, I single him from the generality of those with whom I liue; I make him a portion of my owne wishes' (E12, pp. 82-4).

Bacon's essay '*Of Friendship*' elucidates the positive effects on character that a healthy social relationship can bring. However, another essay which first appeared in the author's second edition of 1612 carries warnings about the dangers posed by false or otherwise untrustworthy friends. '*Of Praise*' begins with a concise and apparently straightforward definition of its subject which is immediately followed by a crucial and potentially disturbing qualification: 'Praise is the reflection of vertue: but it is as the glasse, or bodie is, which giueth the reflection' (E12, p. 203). Having stated this problem, Bacon proceeded to identify two major sources of inaccurate moral reflection, before offering some general advice on the evaluation and interpretation of praise. The first source of false or misguided praise was 'the common people', whose reflection, said the author, 'rather followeth vaine persons, then vertuous'. As he explained, 'the common people vnderstand not many excellent vertues: the lowest vertues draw praise from them, the middle vertues worke in them astonishment, or admiration; but of the highest vertues they haue no sense or perceiuing at all' (E12, pp. 203-4). The second source was 'flattery', of which Bacon acknowledged three main types or kinds: the 'ordinary flatterer' directed his praise towards 'certaine common atributes, which may serue euery man'; the 'cunning flatterer' followed 'the Archflatterer, which is a mans selfe, & wherein a man thinketh best of himselfe, therein the flatterer will vphold him most'; lastly, the 'impudent flatterer' located the specific quality 'wherein a man is most conscient to himselfe, that he is most defectiue, and is most out of countenance in himselfe', before ironically assigning that quality to the object, or victim, of his misdirected praise (E12, pp. 205-6). If the praise of the common people was at worst an unwelcome distraction from the public recognition of true moral achievement and integrity, the praise of cunning and impudent flatterers was potentially much more sinister and damaging. Indeed, Bacon evidently considered praise in general to be more harmful than beneficial to the enhancement of character and to the culture and cure of the mind. Although

praises which 'come of good wishes and respects' might encourage their recipients to aspire to moral ideals, those which were thoughtlessly expressed could often have irreversible and unintentionally negative consequences. The author drew his essay to a close by quoting and glossing to this effect Proverbs 27:14: '*Salomon saith, Hee that praiseth his friend aloud, rising early, it shall bee to him no better then a curse. Too much magnifying of man or matter,*' that is, 'doth irritate contradiction, and procure enuie and scorne' (E12, pp. 206-8).

Whereas Bacon's essays '*Of Beauty*' and '*Of Deformity*' suggested that the vagaries of nature and their attendant effects could occasionally dominate character, his essays '*Of Friendship*' and '*Of Praise*' showed that the influences on character of life in human society were themselves contingent on multiple characters and effects. Even so, if further research on the nature of character was required, Bacon's essays were not, or at least not yet, the ideal medium through which to undertake it: although they identified certain tendencies or actions as characteristic of particular types of people, their methods of inquiry were no more 'fixed' in that direction than those of the scattered resources on which the *Advancement* had envisaged improving. In '[*Of*] *Wisdome for a mans selfe*', Bacon declared it to be 'the nature of extreme selfe-louers, as they will set an house on fire, and it were but to roste their egges' (E12, pp. 101-2). Similarly, in '*Of Seeming wise*', he found it to be 'a ridiculous thing, and fit for a *Satyre* to persons of iudgement,' to witness the 'shifts' and deceptions that moral 'formalists' use, and to see 'what perspectiues' they employ 'to make *Superficies* to seeme body, that hath depth and bulke' (E12, p. 120). In descriptions such as these, Bacon adopted broadly critical positions towards specific social types which had little in common either with Montaigne's investigative approaches to historical characters and personal ethics or with the author's own plans for a comprehensive inquiry into the 'most radicall' causes and 'most frequent' combinations of human natures and dispositions. If anything, in fact, the concept of character that Bacon's *Essaies* of 1612 exploited was more closely related to that which had recently been derived from the work of the ancient Greek philosopher Theophrastus by his early modern successor, Joseph Hall. Indeed, within a few years of the

publication of Bacon's volume, the traditional concept of the moral character had been combined and conflated with the emerging essay genre in a variety of novel, and occasionally progressive, ways.

Characters, essays, and nobility

Joseph Hall's *Characters of Vertues and Vices* was published four years before the second edition of Bacon's *Essaies*, in 1608. Its contents consisted of nine 'Characterismes of Vertues', including 'Of the Wise Man', 'Of the Humble man', and 'Of the Good Magistrate', along with fifteen 'Characterismes of Vices', such as 'The Hypocrite', 'The Vnconstant', 'The Flatterer', and 'The Presumptuous'. Each 'Booke' was prefaced by a 'Proæm' on virtue and vice in general, and the volume as a whole was introduced by 'A Premonition of the Title and Vse of Characters', in which Hall explained the ancient, hybrid provenance of the genre to which he considered his work to belong. Among 'the olde Heathens', Hall observed, moral philosophers had occupied the most authoritative and exalted positions in society: 'These were the Ouerseers of maners, Correctors of vices, Directors of liues, Doctors of vertue, which yet taught their people the body of their naturall Diuinitie, not after one maner'. Indeed, Hall identified three distinctive classical approaches to the transmission of ethical thought. Some, he said, 'spent themselues in deepe discourses of humane felicitie and the way to it in common; others thought best to applie the generall precepts of goodnesse or decencie, to particular conditions and persons'. Most pertinently, 'a third sort in a mean course betwixt the two other, and compounded of them both, bestowed their time in drawing out the true lineaments of euery vertue and vice, so liuely, that who saw the medals, might know the face: which Art they significantly termed Charactery'. Hall considered this third way to be the best: the works that its authors produced were, he said, 'so many speaking pictures, or liuing images, whereby the ruder multitude might euen by their sense learne to know vertue, and discerne what to detest'; as such, he doubted whether 'any course could be more likely to preuaile; for heerein the grosse conceit is led on with

pleasure, and informed while it feels nothing but delight'.¹¹ Consequently, Hall decided to adopt the form of 'that ancient Master of Moralitie', Theophrastus, as the most suitable vehicle for his Christian teachings about the knowledge of virtue and vice.¹² Theophrastus's *Characters* had been translated from Greek into Latin by Isaac Casaubon in 1592; within a few years, an English version which was largely derived from Casaubon's work would be published as *Theophrastus His Morall Characters: Or Description of Maners*.¹³

According to Hall, the purpose of the moral character was to cultivate virtue by combining abstract precepts with practical advice in ways which might be entertaining and persuasive to a general audience. Some contemporary essayists, including Bacon, evidently had similar objectives in mind, even if their methods of cultivating morality and applying ethical directives were sometimes very different both in their philosophical assumptions and in their forms. Since the character and the early modern essay often handled virtually identical moral topics, one useful way of investigating the relationship between the two genres is to analyse the approaches of their various exponents to the rhetorical structure and the dialectical content of common themes. Among the topics with which both Hall and Bacon dealt were friendship, superstition, vainglory, ambition, and envy.¹⁴ However, given its

¹¹ Joseph Hall, *Characters of Vertues and Vices* (London, 1608), sigs. A4r-[A5]v.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹³ See John Considine, 'Casaubon, Isaac (1559-1614)', in *ODNB* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4851>] (2004), accessed 2 March 2014; *Epictetus Manuall. Cebes Table. Theophrastus Characters*, tr. John Healey (London, 1616); Douglas Bush, 'Essays and Characters', in *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century 1600-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), pp. 192-219 (pp. 208-9).

¹⁴ Hall, *Characters*: 'The True Friend', pp. 45-50, 'The Superstitious', pp. 87-91, 'The Vaine-glorious', pp. 133-9, 'The Characterism of the Ambitious', pp. 153-60, 'The Enuious', pp. 167-73; E97: 'Of followers and friends', sigs. B4v-[B5]v; E12: 'Of Friendship', pp. 80-84, 'Of Superstition', pp. 93-7, 'Of Ambition', pp. 131-5, 'Of Vaine-glory', pp. 225-30; E25: 'Of Envy', pp. 27-31.

obvious relevance to contemporary debates about the physical and social nature of character and the active and contemplative lives, the moral concept of nobility represents a particularly pertinent example of a controversial subject with which a range of early modern writers dealt. In both Hall's character '*Of the Truly-Noble*' and the anonymous character of '*A noble Spirit*' which began to appear from 1614 in posthumous editions of Sir Thomas Overbury's poem *A Wife*, nobility was presented as a set of moral and intellectual attributes and aptitudes which were enhanced rather than determined by the privileges of elevated birth. In Bacon's essay '*Of Nobility*' and in the analysis by 'D. T.' of the various ways and means of political negotiation, problems of nobility which were either implied or overlooked in contemporary moral characters were explicitly identified and addressed. And in John Stephens's *Satyrical Essayes Characters and Others* of 1615, an investigative essay '*Of High Birth*' was accompanied by a moral character of '*A Compleate Man*' in which nobility was closely identified with humility and virtuous action. In all six of these texts, a fundamental distinction between the physical nobility of birth and the social nobility of moral intelligence and behaviour was either tacitly accepted, interrogated, or observed.

In the opening sentence of Hall's character '*Of the Truly-Noble*', independence of moral thought and action along with modesty in self-reflection were established as the essential attributes of the truly noble man. 'He stands not vpon what he borrowed of his Ancestours,' it reads, 'but thinks he must worke out his owne honor: and if he can not reach the vertue of them that gaue him outward glory by inheritance, he is more abashed of his impotencie, than transported with a great name.'¹⁵ For Hall, these two qualities were the foundational characteristics of nobility; as such, most of the other noble tendencies and honourable inclinations that the rest of his character describes can be considered as expressions or modifications of one or other of the pair. According to Hall, for example, the true nobleman cares less for 'pompe and frothie ostentation' than for 'the solid truth of Noblenesse'; consequently, his 'courtesie and sweet affabilitie' derive not from 'a base and seruile

¹⁵ Hall, *Characters*, p. 51.

popularitie, and desire of ambitious insinuation', but from 'a natie gentlenesse of disposition, and true value of himselfe'. Again, as a moral subject, the nobleman 'accounts his titles vaine, if hee be inferior to others in goodness: and thinks hee should be more strict, the more eminent he is; because hee is more obserued, and now his offences are become exemplar'; intellectually, too, 'he so studies as one that knowes ignorance can neither purchase honour, nor wield it; and that knowledge must both guide and grace him'.¹⁶ Throughout Hall's character, the vices and flaws that were commonly associated with nobility were acknowledged in a series of partially negative definitions of its virtues. The true nobleman, for instance, 'doth not so vse his followers, as if he thought they were made for nothing but his seruitude; whose felicitie were onlie to bee commanded and please: wearing them to the backe, and then either finding or framing excuses to discard them emptie; but vpon all opportunities lets them feele the sweetnesse of their owne seruiceablenesse and his bountie'. Similarly, the nobleman 'is more carefull to giue true honor to his Maker, than to receiue ciuill honour from men'. Having implicitly constructed a character of false as well as of true nobility, Hall concluded with an allusion to the ontological distinction about which many contemporary discussions of the subject turned: 'and shortly,' he wrote, the truly noble character 'so demeanes himselfe, as one that accounts the bodie of Nobilitie to consist in Blood, the soule in the eminence of Vertue'.¹⁷

A different perspective on the attributes of true nobility was provided in the anonymous character of '*A noble Spirit*' which was appended, along with twenty others, to the first posthumous edition of Sir Thomas Overbury's *A Wife*. In this delineation of the attributes of true nobility, intellectual independence was the dominant force to which moral humility remained remarkably and consistently subordinate. According to the author, the noble spirit 'hath surueyed and fortified his disposition, and converts all concurrents into experience, between which experience and his reason, there is a mariage; the issue are his actions'. In planning his actions, the nobleman 'circuits his

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 52-3.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 54-6.

intents, and seeth the end before he shoot'; in execution, 'men are the instruments of his Art, and there is no man without his vse: occasion entices him, none enticeth him; and he mooues by affection, not for affection'. Indeed, the extent of the nobleman's experience and the accuracy of his reason are such that he 'calls not the varietie of the world chances, for his meditation hath trauailed ouer them; and his eye mounted vpon his vnderstanding seeth them as things vnderneath'. Moreover, 'he licenseth not his weaknes, to weare fate, but knowing reason to be no idle gift of nature, he is the Steeres-man of his owne destinie'. Neither Montaigne nor Bacon would have ascribed to anyone such consummate control over fortune. Even so, the anonymous author's descriptions of the influences on others that his noble spirit could exert attest to his subject's extraordinary potential as a cultivator and a curer of minds. 'Vnto the societie of men hee is a *Sunne*,' wrote the author, 'whose clearenesse directs their steps in a regular motion: when he is more particular, hee is the wise-mans friend, the example of the indifferent, the medicine of the vicious.' Having lived a life of value and good effects, the noble spirit ultimately achieves a kind of immortality which is greater by far than the mere endurance of his blood or of his name: 'Thus time goeth not from him, but with him: and he feeles age more by the strength of his soule, than the weaknesse of his body: thus feeles he not paine, but esteemes all such things as frends that desire to file off his fetters, and helpe him out of prison'.¹⁸ In such an end, the noble spirit truly observes the ontological distinction between the physical nobility of blood and the moral or spiritual nobility of constant virtue.

Like Hall, the anonymous author of '*A noble Spirit*' conceived of true nobility as an abstract ideal to which morally and politically compromised subjects should aspire. In his essay '*Of Nobility*', Bacon considered the topic as a source of various discernible, and generally negative, influences on the characters and tempers of those to whom it applied. Bacon began his essay by comparing

¹⁸ *A Wife Now the Widdow of Sir Thomas Overburye. Being a Most Exquisite and Singular Poem of the Choice of a Wife. Whereunto Are Added Many Witty Characters, and Conceited Newes, Written by Himselfe and Other Learned Gentlemen His Friends* (London, 1614), sigs. E2v-E3r.

the reverence of seeing 'an ancient castle or building not in decay', or 'a faire timber tree sound & perfect', to the greater reverence of beholding 'an ancient Noble familie, which hath stood against the waues and weathers of time'. Even so, the author's concern was not so much to promote a superficial respect for the endurance of lineage as to interrogate further the ontological distinction to which both Hall and the Overbury author alluded in the closing passages of their characters. Observing that 'new Nobility is but the act of power', but that 'ancient Nobility is the act of time', Bacon maintained that 'the first raisers of *Fortunes* are commonly more vertuous, but lesse innocent, then their descendents': as he explained, 'there is rarely rising, but by a commixture of good and euil Arts', even if 'it is reason the memorie of their vertues remain to their posterities, and their faults die with themselues' (E12, pp. 33-4). Having exposed the mythical foundations of the concept of a purely virtuous nobility, Bacon proceeded to assign to nobles precisely the kind of vicious qualities that Hall had taken pains to eliminate from his definition of the truly noble man. Whereas Hall had identified independence and humility as the essential characteristics of his subject, Bacon contended that '*Nobilitie* of Birth commonly abateth industrie', and that 'hee that is not industrious, enuieth him that is', before pointing out that 'noble persons, cannot goe much higher', and that 'he that standeth at a stay when others rise, can hardly auoid motions of enuie' (E12, pp. 34-5). In spite of the flaws of its individual members, Bacon found the noble class to be an extremely valuable social and political resource. In the first place, since they were generally honoured and respected rather than envied by the common people, nobles could safely and strategically be 'maintained in that height, as the insolency of inferiours may be broken vpon them, before it come on too fast vpon the maiestie of *Kings*'. In the second, the more 'able men' among the nobility could often make highly effective instruments of state business: as the Overbury author would soon suggest, 'people naturally bend to them, as borne in some sort to command' (E12, p. 36).

The contemporary essayist 'D. T.' derived from Bacon both the principles and the categories of his analysis of negotiation. However, 'D. T.' also found that the impression of nobility encouraged other moral flaws and dispositions than

those which had been identified by his source. Whereas Bacon had identified indolence as a characteristic vice of the nobility, 'D. T.' argued that 'the composition of mens internall affections' is such 'that the nobler they grow, the more ambitious they become'. As he explained, 'there is none but desireth alwayes to adde somewhat to his first acquist, and to enlarge the heape by new supplyes, and fresh accumulations'; as such, '*Plus ultra* is the soule of all their Emblemes and deuises'. Initially, the noblemen to whom 'D. T.' referred appeared to be only distantly related to the listless malcontents that Bacon had described. In fact, however, their ambition was partly an expression of the same characteristic vice of envy that Bacon had previously considered as a consequence of noble indolence. 'D. T.' maintained that nobles 'loue not any should be praysed or commended but themselues, and are apt withall to traduce the worth and good deseruing of such as are like their Ancestors'. Moreover, he suggested that the cause of envy was another phenomenon of social perception to which his source had earlier attested: just as Bacon had observed that ancient acts of time generally inspired more reverence than recent acts of power, so too 'D. T.' pointed out that 'those things which haue beene wrought and effected long agone, are farre more honourable, and affoord more matter for ostentation, then those which were of late atchieued'; as a result, he said, nobles tended to regard 'the relation of them, should it passe without some contradiction, or embasement of their price', as an attempt to 'obscure and dimme the lustre of their owne'.¹⁹

From Hall, the Overbury author, Bacon, and 'D. T.', a composite account can be constructed of early modern perceptions of the most common virtues and vices of nobility. For better or worse, nobles inherited positions of honour which had been established for posterity as public rewards for the political achievements or social contributions of their forebears. Some nobles responded to their inheritances with humility by independently working to prepare themselves for the demands, responsibilities, and pressures of moral and political leadership. In others, the legacies of their predecessors inspired pride, an unwarranted sense of entitlement, and a perpetually envious

¹⁹ 'D. T.', *The Dove, and the Serpent*, p. 58.

disposition towards the reputations of their rivals and the social mobility of their inferiors. In addition to this composite account, a few preliminary observations can be made about the similarities and differences between the rhetorical and dialectical strategies of writers of characters and essayists. Although both types of author addressed similar moral topics, character-writers promoted ethical ideals of whose practical relevance essayists were apparently sceptical; furthermore, character-writers postulated the positive effects of adherence to, or emulation of, their models, whereas essayists were more interested in the retrospective analysis of relationships of moral causality. The validity of these observations about genre, as well as of the composite account of the moral status of nobility, can be tested by examining a pair of texts by a contemporary essayist and character-writer with an evident interest in the subject. John Stephens's *Satyrical Essayes Characters and Others* comprised three poetical essays on cowardliness, four essays in prose on high birth, disinheritance, poetry, and discontents, and a total of forty-three characters, divided into two books, including 'A Compleate Man', 'An honest Lawyer', 'An Atheist', and 'My Mistresse'. The front page of the volume featured an alternative title, *Accurate and Quick Descriptions, Fitted to the Life of Their Subjects*, along with an epigraph from Theophrastus. While the subtitle easily applied to Stephens's brief character of the 'complete' and morally noble man, the longest text in the collection, the essay 'Of High Birth', was in fact a sustained philosophical investigation into the nature, cultivation, and proper conduct of true nobility.

In the opening passages of his essay 'Of High Birth', Stephens approached the ontological distinction between physical and moral nobility from the perspective of another, prior distinction which had previously been handled by Montaigne. In his chapter 'Of the affection of fathers to their children', Montaigne had suggested that 'what we engender by the minde, the fruites of our courage, sufficiencie, or spirit, are brought forth by a farre more noble part, then the corporall, and are more, our owne' (F, II.8.232). Stephens fundamentally disagreed. Observing that 'things curiously made, differ as much from things begotten, as earth from liuing men, and artificiall bodies from mans issue', he argued that 'children may therefore challenge from their

parents more prerogative, then workmanship or mans *Invention*; for it participates with vs in being onely, but *they* in being ours: for things begotten be originally our own, but things created be ours at the second hand continually'. For Stephens, the constant dependence of 'matters of Science and manuell labour' on the precedents set and the assistance offered by others represented compelling evidence of 'the full necessity of being sociable', and especially of the 'pride' of those who 'say, they are not any way indebted; or that they bee their owne Supporters'.²⁰ More pertinently, the fact that children were unique in belonging absolutely and originally to their parents had critical implications for the crucial noble concept of inheritance. As Stephens observed, 'the *First Begotten*' typically 'supplies the office of a Substitute to discharge that which incumbers the parent', in much the same way as 'the office of a valiant warrior' was 'to take the first charge, giue the first assault, and (aboue all) to bee according to his name, truely forward in the high Atchieuements of honour: so forward, as for any of his Ranke to bee before, should bee thought a miserable basenesse'. Citing the Roman natural historian Pliny the Elder among his sources, the author further suggested that the defensive strategies of 'Elephants, when they trauaile by Troupes', provided 'a memorable precept to mans issue, that hee (if eldest) ought rather to protect, then caull with his inferiour relatives', and 'that they (because yongest) ought rather to submit, where his good counsell may assist, then be malignant or maintaine Faction'.²¹

The logic of Stephens's opening argument was clear enough: as their most precious and most complete possessions, noble heirs were rightly expected to represent their parents' will and to take responsibility for the safety and education of their siblings. Even so, the author was well aware that the process of human generation was susceptible to certain influences which lay beyond the limits of human control: God, for example, often withheld from heirs 'the Diuine Materials of Reason' simply in order 'to make man see the

²⁰ John Stephens, *Satyricall Essayes Characters and Others. Or Accurate and Quick Descriptions, Fitted to the Life of Their Subjects* (London, 1615), pp. 35-[37].

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-9.

true ORIGINALL, rather than Flesh should challenge any part; or Fathers thinke they bee the sole efficientes'. Indeed, the frequency with which wise men appeared to father fools evidently rendered it impossible that human intelligence could be a naturally hereditary characteristic: according to Stephens, 'cunning *Nature*, which principally and commonly works out each naturall mans existence by causes well known, *Matter, Forme, and Priuation*, is not able in things essentiall, to distribute any particle without Diuine prouidence'; as a result, 'the eldest naturally inherites nothing as by peculiar claime, but senselesse lineaments of body'.²² Interpreting the rudimentary status of the nascent human faculties as an incentive to moral improvement, Stephens observed that 'Nature affords timber, but workmanship the structure: the earth produces Ore, but Art the Siluer: *Nature* giues plants, *Knowledge* the vse'. Moreover, while he insisted that 'high blouds' were 'the fittest receptacles for high actions', he also recognized that 'men of vp-start Parentage may, in respect of braine, take place before Nobilitie, though their persons bee odious'. For Stephens, the physical nobility of blood was no guarantee of the moral nobility of intelligence, fortitude, and capacity. Nor was it a guarantee of social or political success. As he explained, 'our selues and parents, or instructors, be the secondary causes which protract or abbreuiate, enrich or impouerish, our owne destinies'; consequently, although the vagaries of fortune could variously be succumbed to or overcome, 'high birth' was 'so farre from priuiledge to exempt any from these, as it approches neere to miserie, when shame is vnpreuented; and makes destinie notorious'. If anything, in fact, Stephens found that physical nobility was often more of a hindrance than a help to the attainment and preservation of public power. As he observed, 'this Age of Innouation is fitter to behold one swimming to a remote shore, then to reuolue how happily the inhabitants be there delighted: fitter to see new actions, & actiue spirits *proceeding*, then the maintenance of honour *proceeded*: and fitter to behold one falling from a rocke, then from a stumbling mole-hill'.²³ If nothing else, politically active nobles had significantly more to lose than their common rivals.

²² Ibid., pp. 41-2.

²³ Ibid., pp. 43-6.

In order to maintain and strengthen their position in society, Stephens held it to be imperative that the nobility should rate highly in the estimation of the public. One way of ensuring that they did so, he suggested, was to cultivate further the superficial qualities with which they were particularly blessed: 'the ornaments of body, comliness, and behauiour' which might help them 'to command an Armie, or to preuaile with the multitudes'. More impressive was an alternative approach to public commendation which had been pioneered centuries earlier by the ancient Roman nobility, some of whom, Stephens recalled, had successfully solicited 'the patronage of Plebeians; accounting it the most honourable entrance, to exercise their efficacie of birth, by the protection of poore Clients, or otherwise illiterate Citizens: The frequencie of which custome made Nobilitie famous'. Indeed, Stephens considered the philanthropy of the ancient Roman nobles to be a model of the liberal and progressive values that he wished to see instilled in their modern counterparts. As he observed, 'it is the excellent signe of mans participation with Diuinitie, to discern and iudge of nature'; as such, 'the singular part of instruction among Noble pupils, and all that would become proficients,' should be 'to certifie, allay, and augment nature: which cannot bee by a restraint, but by giving free libertie to enioy all, that so the worst may bee removed; else by a colourable restraint of that which formerly was permitted'. In practice, to give 'free libertie' meant to educate noble children not 'by keeping them in couert from the worlds eye', but by safely exposing them at an early age to all kinds of virtue and vice, and by teaching them eventually to recognize for themselves the differences between the two.²⁴ Similar measures had been suggested by Montaigne in his chapter on the education of children and by Bacon in Book II of *The Advancement of Learning* (F, I.25.70-75; AL, pp. 144-5). And just as both of those authors promoted and undertook sustained philosophical inquiries into the various forms and dispositions of humanity, so too Stephens maintained that 'the study to discern Nature in Noble persons, should bee equivalent to their owne disquisition of nature in others; for seeing they ought by superintendence to

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 50-53.

ouer-looke man, they should be perfect in the Character of Man, bearing their best librarie about them'.²⁵

Some of the forty-three characters that Stephens included in his volume of *Accurate and Quick Descriptions* could possibly have been intended as contributions to just such a portable collection. As for the character of true nobility itself, a direct comparison can be made between the strategies that the author adopted in his essay 'Of High Birth' and in his character of 'A *Compleate Man*'. In the essay, Stephens drew on a range of classical natural historical sources in order to construct an extended 'Mythologie' or 'moralized comparison' between the noble prince and the lion, 'who is noted', he observed, 'to carry a most valiant head, and a Maiesticke countenance; intimating the apparant and invisible potencie of high spirits'.²⁶ In the character, Stephens's concern was not with the attribution to human rulers of leonine qualities such as courage, vigilance, power, and restraint, but with the delineation of the general noble virtues of humility, knowledge, capacity, and practical action. According to the author, the complete man 'holds it presumption to know, what should be *looked, or thought* vpon with wonder; and therefore rather then he will exceed, hee can be lesse then himselfe: accounting it more noble to imitate the fruitfull bough which stoopes vnder a pretious burthen; then applaud the tall eminence of a fruitlesse Birch-tree'. Likewise, 'his worthinesse to bee rewarded hee may conceale: but his desire to doe nobly, in a better kinde, his actions will not suffer to bee vnknowne; by which the world can iudge he deserues, and saue him from the scandall of a *Cunning Hypocrite*'. Moreover, 'if merites direct him in the way to honor, they do not leaue him in the way to honour; but are his best attendants to accompany his whole preferment'.²⁷ The complete man independently cultivates noble thoughts and actions, and he continues to do so whichever office or position he comes to hold.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 54-5.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 55-62.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 134-6.

Although they share a number of characteristics, the essential difference between Stephens's leonine prince and his complete man is yet another version of the ontological distinction between physical and moral nobility to which Hall had initially referred. Since those of high birth were relatively likely to inherit political power, it was critical that they should be well endowed with the distinctive qualities that leadership required. However, those qualities were supported and enhanced by a set of morally noble attributes to which a man of any class or condition could aspire. Whereas Stephens's essay investigated the specific philosophical and social problems of high birth, his character described the virtues of an ideal human whose ancestry and reputation are largely incidental to his nature. Stephens drew 'Of High Birth' to a close by reflecting on his own nature and character as an essayist. As he observed, 'I dare not become an Instructor, it appertaines to deepe Professours: Neither can I reprove, it may incurre the name of Malapert: I labour onely, to proue by demonstratiue reasons, which is bare Counsell'. While that description did not easily apply to Stephens's work as a writer of characters, the ultimate moral of his essay 'Of High Birth' was fundamentally the same as that of his character of 'A Compleate Man'. Citing Theophrastus in a marginal note, the author concluded his essay by observing that 'high births' will never 'aspire to hazardous downefals, if they esteeme honor as the reward of vertue, no vertue in it selfe'.²⁸ As for the complete man, 'as he liues, his capacitie is enlarged, though before it were sufficient for his other faculties: they be most numerous when himselfe is nothing: for being dead, hee is thought worthier then aliue: then hee departs to his aduancement'.²⁹

The conclusions about nobility and genre that are suggested by Stephens's essay 'Of High Birth' and his character of 'A Compleate Man' support those that can be drawn from the texts by Hall, Overbury, Bacon, and 'D. T.'. In their different ways, all of those authors recognized that high moral standards were expected of the nobility, but that individual nobles were neither invariably nor necessarily prepared to meet them; as such, most of them argued that

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 69-70.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

education was essential to the truly noble, and that true nobility enhances and augments, rather than determines, the virtues that it comprehends. Similarly, consistent distinctions can be observed between the rhetorical and dialectical approaches of the essayists and the character-writers to a series of closely related moral topics: the essay form seemed to encourage investigation, analysis, and scepticism towards ideals, while the character promoted moral abstractions, aspiration, and faith in the cultivation of good effects. Even so, the differences between the two genres were neither permanently established nor absolute. In 1618, Geffray Minshull drew on his personal experiences and observations as a prisoner in order to produce 'a handfull of Essayes, and few Characters', which he variously alternated and combined in a volume that he intended to deter his friends from entering into debt and becoming victims of 'Vsury and Extortion'.³⁰ Before that, Nicholas Breton's *Characters upon Essaies Morall, and Divine* personified and described a series of popular moral topics including wisdom, practice, valour, resolution, and truth. Breton's volume was prefaced by an unsolicited dedication 'To the Honorable, and my much worthy honored, truly learned, and Iudicious Knight, S^r Francis Bacon, his Ma^{ties} Attourney General', in which the author identified his contemporary as an exemplary pioneer in the scholarship and the understanding of virtue. 'Worthy Knight,' wrote Breton, 'I haue read of many Essaies, and a kinde of Charactering of them, by such, as when I looked into the forme, or nature of their writing, I haue beene of the conceit, that they were but Imitators of your breaking the ice to their inuentions; which, how short they fall of your worth, I had rather thinke then speake, though Truth neede not blush at her blame'.³¹ By this stage, Bacon's and Hall's approaches to the concept of morality had successfully and productively been merged. Within a few years, however, Bacon would take the opportunity to distinguish his philosophy of character from that which had been promoted by the revived Theophrastan tradition, and to articulate and exemplify the kinds of

³⁰ G[effray] M[inshull], *Essayes and Characters of a Prison and Prisoners* (London, 1618), sig. A3r.

³¹ Nicholas Breton, *Characters upon Essaies Morall, and Diuine* (London, 1615), sig. A3r-v.

fundamental research that could directly contribute to the knowledge of the culture of the mind.

Bacon's response

In the Latin expansion of *The Advancement of Learning* which appeared in 1623 as *De dignitate et augmentis scientiarum*, Bacon made some pointed additions to his earlier account of the distributive analysis of human character. Having reiterated that his purpose was not to 'speak of those common Proclivities to virtues and vices; or Perturbations and passions: but of those which are more intrinsique and radicall', the author cited Livy, Tacitus, Herodian, Philippe de Commynes, and Francesco Guicciardini as historians who had managed to include in their narratives of the 'Acts and Achievements' of emperors and kings 'something touching their natures and dispositions'. Significantly, too, Bacon argued 'that those *Characters* in the *Ethiques* (as it is with Historians, Poets, and in common speech,)' should not be considered 'as perfit politique Images, but rather as the first draughts and rude lineaments of those Images, which compounded and commixt, constitute any resemblances whatsoever; and how many and of what sort they may be; and how they are connext and subordinate one with another'. Whereas moral writers such as Theophrastus and Hall had posited pure abstractions of virtuous and vicious living, the intention behind Bacon's proposed analyses was 'that there may be made, as it were, an artificiall and accurate dissection of natures and dispositions; and a discovery of the secret inclinations of Individual tempers; and that from a knowledge thereof, precepts of cure may be more pertinently prescribed' (DAS, pp. 352-3). For Bacon, the genre of the moral character was of limited value to the philosophy of the culture of the mind. What were needed instead were historical and natural historical analyses of the types of character that actually existed and of the kinds of behaviour to which they were particularly disposed. In his major historical work of the 1620s, *The Historie of the Raigne of King Henry the Seventh*, Bacon included an example of the kind of historical

character study that the *De augmentis* proposed. Around the same time, the author also began to implement a programme of natural historical research whose principles had implications for the investigation of human nature and behaviour. These historical and natural historical approaches to the concept of human character informed a number of the essays that appeared in Bacon's third and final lifetime edition of 1625.

Bacon's *Historie* of Henry VII was published in 1622, the year before the *De augmentis* appeared. Its primary purpose was to provide an account of the acts and achievements of the fifteenth-century Tudor monarch who united the warring houses of Lancaster and York and subsequently established a dynasty which lasted until the accession to the English throne of James VI of Scotland in 1603. However, like the historians whose examples he cited in the *De augmentis*, Bacon conceived of his major historical work not just as a narrative of significant events, but also as an opportunity to explore the nature and disposition of 'a *Wise Man*, and an *Excellent King*', whose '*Times* were rough, and full of Mutations, and rare Accidents'. Indeed, although the frontispiece to his *Historie* included a biblical motto in which the heart of a king is described as 'inscrutable', the final pages of Bacon's text comprised a sustained analysis of Henry's temper and inclinations whose incisiveness surpassed that of his earlier studies of the characters of Julius and Augustus Caesar.³² The author began by drawing a distinction between his work on Henry's human and monarchical characteristics and the more abstract approaches to the concept of character that had been advanced by ethical writers such as Hall, the anonymous contributors to the Overbury volume, and Stephens. 'This King', wrote Bacon, '(to speake of him in termes equall to his deseruing) was one of the best sorte of Wonders; a wonder for Wise men. He had partes (both in his vertues; and his fortune) not so fitt for a Common-Place, as for obseruation.' Whereas the Theophrastan tradition generally constructed composite and artificially consistent characters, Bacon's

³² *OFB*, viii: *The Historie of the raigne of King Henry the seventh and other works of the 1620s*, ed. Michael Kiernan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012), pp. 3 and 620. As Kiernan points out, the biblical text is Proverbs 25:3: 'The heauens in height, and the earth in depenes, and the Kings heart can no man search out'.

observations presented his subject as a complex, even contradictory, ruler. An avowed pacificator, Henry was nevertheless 'valiant & actiue', knowing that 'the way to Peace, was not to seeme to be desirous to avoid Warres'. When faced with insurrection, the king 'had withall a strange kinde of interchanging of large, and inexpected Pardons, with seuerer Executions', which 'could not be imputed to any inconstancie, or inequallitie, but either to some reason (*which wee do not nowe know*), or to a Principle he had set vnto himselfe; that he would varie, and trie both waies, in turne'.³³ A further 'strang thing' was that although Henry was 'a darke Prince, and infinitely suspitious; and his times full of secret Conspiracies and troubles; yet in 24^{tie} yeares Reigne, he neuer put down or discomposed Counsellor or neare seruaunt; saue onely Stanley the Lord Chamberlaine'.³⁴

In at least one respect, Bacon considered Henry's apparent inscrutability to have been a sovereign and political virtue: although his subjects knew too little of him to love him, the king inspired in his people enough 'feare, and reverence', to compensate for this lack of affection. Even so, Bacon's task as an historian was to try to make sense of the character of a king who was 'sad, serious, and full of thoughtes, and secret obseruations', as well as of 'Apprehensions *and* Suspitions'. He concluded that in Henry, '*as in all men (and most of all in Kings) his Fortune wrought vpon his Nature, and his Nature vpon his Fortune*'. In particular, just as '*his Times being rather Prosperous, then Calme, had raised his Confidence by Successe, but almost marred his Nature by Troubles*', so too '*his Wisdome, by often euading from Perils, was turned rather into a Dexteritie to deliuer himselfe from Dangers, when they pressed him, then into a Prouidence to preuent and remooue them a farre of*'. Moreover, '*euene in Nature, the Sight of his Minde was like some Sights of Eyes; rather strong at hand, then to carrie a farre of*', so that '*his Witt increased vpon the Occasion; and so much the more, if the Occasion were sharpened by Danger*'.³⁵ Bacon's appraisal of Henry's character was

³³ Ibid., pp. 162-4.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 167.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 167-8.

extensively researched, perceptive, and occasionally speculative. As he put it in his dedication to the king's descendant, Prince Charles, the Prince of Wales, 'I haue not flattered him, but tooke him to life as well as I could, sitting so farre of, and hauing no better light'. In fact, Bacon's flattery was reserved for another king: the '*Liuing Patterne, Incomparable,*' of Charles's father, the reigning monarch, James I.³⁶ Indeed, Bacon's ongoing attempts to ingratiate and recommend himself to King James and his circle had recently taken on added urgency as a result of the author's removal, on criminal charges, from the highest political position that he would ever hold. Having been installed as lord chancellor in 1618, Bacon was impeached and convicted in 1621 for accepting bribes in Chancery. Although he was fined and briefly imprisoned, the most damaging elements of the sentence that he received were the orders that forbade him to sit in Parliament, hold public office, or even come within twelve miles of James's court.³⁷ These sanctions were later officially lifted; however, their effect on Bacon's ability to influence political proceedings was permanent. As such, his *Historie* of Henry VII and the volume of *Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall* that he dedicated to James's favourite, George Villiers, the Duke of Buckingham, in 1625, represent two of the author's latest attempts to regain access to the highest echelons of state power.³⁸

In a number of the additions and revisions that he included in his final edition of *Essayes*, Bacon took the opportunity to draw on and to advertise his *Historie* of Henry VII. Tellingly, almost all of these references or allusions were either directly or indirectly related to the concept of human character. One striking example is the development of the essay '*Of Empire*' which first appeared in Bacon's second edition of 1612. In the early version of the essay, the author was already concerned with the 'miserable state of minde' of rulers, and in particular with the relevance of the scriptural maxim '*That the*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³⁷ Markku Peltonen, 'Bacon, Francis, Viscount St Alban (1561-1626)', in *ODNB* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/990>] (2007), accessed 11 March 2014.

³⁸ See Michael Kiernan, 'Introduction', in *OFB*, viii, pp. xxi-lvi and 'The *Essayes* as *Counsels*', in *E25*, pp. xix-xxxi.

Kings heart is inscrutable' (E12, pp. 49-50). Accordingly, in the text that appeared in 1625, he recalled a lesson from his recent historiographical work about the importance to imperial stability of a class of subjects whose character and uses he had also previously described. 'I have noted it,' he wrote, 'in my History of King *Henry the Seventh, of England*, who depressed his *Nobility*; Whereupon, it came to passe, that his Times were full of Difficulties, and Troubles; For the *Nobility*, though they continued loyall unto him, yet did they not co-operate with him, in his Businesse.' As Bacon pointed out in both his *Historie* and his *Essayes*, the consequence for Henry was that 'he was faine to doe all things, himselfe' (E25, p. 62). Indeed, the independence and secrecy that the author had identified as a major part of the character of his royal subject also provided additional illustration for the next essay in both his 1612 and 1625 collections. Whereas the early version of the essay '*Of Counsell*' was unequivocally critical of the 'doctrine' of '*Cabanet counsels*' (E12, pp. 63-4), the late text added two arguments in its favour along with an observation about the character of its participants which appears to have been at least partly derived from Bacon's historiographical research. 'But then it must be a Prudent *King*,' the author suggested, 'such as is able to Grinde with a *Hand-mill*; And those *Inward Counsellours*, had need also, be Wise Men, and especially true and trusty to the Kings Ends; As it was with King *Henry the Seventh of England*, who in his greatest Businesse, imparted himselfe to none, except it were to *Morton*, and *Fox*' (E25, p. 65). A further observation about Henry's character was included in Bacon's late essay '*Of Suspicion*': 'There was not a more *Suspicious Man*,' the author wrote of the Tudor king, 'nor a more Stout' (E25, p. 102).

As well as these relatively direct correspondences, two further passages in the final edition of Bacon's *Essayes* enhance the perception that a connection between his late political intertexts and the concept of character had been firmly established in the author's mind. In the 1625 essay '*Of the true Greatnesse of Kingdomes and Estates*', Bacon referred to his *Historie* of Henry VII in relation to the forging of a powerful national 'Character' (E25, p. 93). And in the late essay '*Of Prophecies*', he alluded to a prediction which had already appeared in the closing lines of his earlier analysis of the Tudor

monarch's nature: '*Henry the Sixt of England, said of Henry the Seventh, when he was a Lad, and gave him Water; This is the Lad, that shall enjoy the Crowne, for which we strive*' (E25, p. 113). Even so, the historical approach to the investigation of character was by no means the only line of inquiry that Bacon pursued in his later essays. Using his dedication to Buckingham to distinguish between his various areas of intellectual endeavour, the author suggested another methodological perspective which also held significance for his studies of human nature and the culture of the mind. Explaining to Villiers his elevated status in his paratextual scheme of publications, Bacon reminded the Duke that he had already dedicated his *Instauratio magna* to King James and his '*Historie of HENRY the Seventh*', along with his '*Portions of Naturall History, to the Prince*' (E25, p. 5).

As far back as *The Advancement of Learning*, Bacon had identified natural history both as a part of history and as the foundation of natural philosophy. On the one hand, he found 'HISTORY of NATVRE' to be 'of three sorts: of NATVRE in COVRSE; of NATVRE ERRING, or VARYING; and of NATVRE ALTERED or wrought, that is HISTORY of CREATVRES, HISTORY of MARVAILES, and HISTORY of ARTS' (AL, p. 63). On the other, he maintained that 'knowledges are as PYRAMIDES, whereof HISTORY is the BASIS: So of NATVRAL PHILOSOPHY the BASIS is NATVRAL HISTORY: The STAGE next the BASIS is PHISICKE: The STAGE next the VERTICAL POINT is METAPHISICKE' (AL, p. 85). While the precise position of natural history within Bacon's classificatory systems continued to change, its status as a source of experimental knowledge became increasingly important to the author as his philosophical career progressed.³⁹ In 1620, he even interrupted the first instalment of his *Instauratio magna*, the *Novum organum*, in order to begin the process of natural historical instruction upon which the success of his new inductive logic would depend. Graham Rees stated that with the *Parasceve*, or preparative, to a natural and experimental history, and with the appended *Catalogus* of particular topics for research, 'Bacon's idea was to get natural history off his

³⁹ See Peter Anstey, 'Francis Bacon and the Classification of Natural History', *Early Science and Medicine*, 17 (2012), 11-31.

plate so that he would be left with a free hand to return to the business of finishing the work on the interpretation of nature' (*IM*, p. xcvi). In the event, however, natural history continued to be a priority throughout the final years of Bacon's life. While the *Novum organum* remained temporarily abandoned and incomplete, the author turned his attentions to the production and publication of specimen natural histories which he hoped would serve as exemplary guides for future generations of philosophers: his natural histories of wind and of life and death appeared in 1622 and 1623 respectively, while the natural historical miscellany *Sylva Sylvarum* followed posthumously in 1626.⁴⁰ Bacon's *Catalogus* also listed about 130 further titles for particular natural histories, including histories of comets, of quicksilver, of human reproduction, and of gardening. Indeed, around two-thirds of the listed entries belonged to 'the history of man', and some of those entries directly correspond to topics that the author handled in his essays (*IM*, pp. 479-85).

In Book II of the *Advancement*, Bacon had found the first sort of history of nature, the history of creatures, to be 'extant, and that in good perfection'. The other two, he contended, had been 'handled so weakely and vnprofitably' that he was 'moued to note them as deficient'. As far as the history of marvels was concerned, Bacon believed it to be useful both as a means of correcting 'the parcialitie of Axiomes, and Opinions: which are commonly framed onely vppon common and familiar examples', and as a source of knowledge about natural powers and tendencies which humans might learn to manipulate to their practical advantage: 'For it is no more, but by following, and as it were, hounding Nature in her wandrings, to bee able to leade her afterwarde to the same place againe' (*AL*, p. 63). As for the history of arts, Bacon maintained that quotidian endeavours such as agriculture and mechanics afforded

⁴⁰ Published and unpublished natural histories from this period are collected in *OFB*, xii: *The Instauration magna Part III: Historia Naturalis and Historia Vitae*, ed. Graham Rees with Maria Wakeley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007) and xiii: *The Instauration magna: Last Writings*, ed. Graham Rees (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000). *Sylva Sylvarum: Or A Naturall Historie* was published by Bacon's literary executor, William Rawley; the volume also contained the author's *New Atlantis: A Worke Unfinished* (London, 1626).

excellent opportunities for the investigation of nature which philosophical tradition had arrogantly neglected to exploit. Observing that 'it commeth often to passe, that meane and small things discover great, better then great can discover the small', and citing with approbation Aristotle's opinion '*that the nature of every thing is best seene in his smallest portions*', the author contended that 'the vse of HISTORIE MECHANICAL, is of all others the most radicall, and fundamentall towards Naturall Philosophie, such Naturall Philosophie, as shall not vanish in the fume of subtile, sublime, or delectable speculation, but such as shall bee operatiue to the endowment, and benefit of Mans life'. Indeed, Bacon was convinced that a properly constructed natural history of arts would 'not onely minister and suggest for the present, Many ingenious practizes in all trades, by a connexion and transferring of the obseruations of one Arte, to the vse of another', but also provide 'a more true, and reall illumination concerning Causes and Axiomes, then is hetherto attained'. In support of his claim, he offered a pair of similitudes which together expressed one of the most enduring philosophical principles of his career: 'For like as a Mans disposition is neuer well knowen, till hee be crossed, nor *Proteus* euer changed shapes, till hee was straightened and held fast: so the passages and variations of Nature cannot appeare so fully in the libertie of Nature, as in the trialls and vexations of Art' (AL, pp. 64-5).

Bacon had already affirmed the legitimacy of the first of these comparisons in his early essay 'Of Negotiating': as he observed, 'men discover themselues in trust, in passion, at vnwares & of necessitie, when they would haue somewhat donne, and cannot find an apt [pretext]' (E97, sig. C4v). In a later essay, '*Of Nature in Men*', he repeated substantially the same point: 'A mans nature is best perceiued in priuatnesse, for there is no affectation; in passion for that putteth a man out of his precepts; and in a new case, or experiment, for there custome leueth him' (E12, p. 155). As for the second comparison, its rehearsal in the *Parasceve* of 1620 demonstrated the extent to which Bacon's fundamental natural historical convictions remained intact. 'In short,' he wrote, 'the vexations of art are indeed like the chains and manacles of *Proteus* which betray the ultimate strivings and exertions of matter. For bodies will not be destroyed or annihilated but rather they will turn themselves into a

variety of forms. Therefore, even if this history seems mechanical and illiberal, we must stop being arrogant and superior, and devote our best efforts to it' (*IM*, p. 463). For Bacon, that is, inquiries into nature were most effectively pursued by artificial and experimental means, and a similar rule applied to the investigation of human nature and character.⁴¹ Indeed, he maintained in his late essay 'Of Boldnesse' that 'it is a Sport to see, when a *Bold Fellow* is out of Countenance; For that puts his Face, into a most Shruncken, and wooden Posture; As needes it must; For in Bashfulnesse, the Spirits doe a little goe and come; but with *Bold Men*, upon like occasion, they stand at a stay; Like a Stale at Chesse, where it is no Mate, but yet the Game cannot stirre'. Although Bacon considered 'this last' to be 'fitter for a Satyre, then for a serious Observation' (*E25*, p. 38), his principle of vexation evidently applied to the 'strivings and exertions' of humans as well as of other kinds of 'matter'.

Even so, the generic distinction that Bacon drew between his satirical essay 'Of Boldnesse' and the more objectively observational studies to which it appeared to allude remains instructive. While the *Parasceve* articulated an essential philosophical principle to which a number of Bacon's essays seemed to subscribe, it also set out a series of methodological directives which none of the author's essays were required to follow. Among the most significant of these were Bacon's recommendations for the clear and concise recording of natural historical observations and experimental results. In Aphorism 3, the author insisted that there should be 'no more of antiquities, citations and differing opinions of authorities, or of squabbles and controversies, and, in short, everything philological', and that 'everything to do with oratorical

⁴¹ On Bacon's rejection of the traditional distinction between natural and artificial objects and its consequences for his epistemology and ontology, see Antonio Pérez-Ramos, *Francis Bacon's Idea of Science and the Maker's Knowledge Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), ch. 5 and 'Bacon's forms and the maker's knowledge tradition', in Markku Peltonen (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bacon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 99-120 (esp. pp. 110-15); Horst Bredekamp, *The Lure of Antiquity and the Cult of the Machine: The Kunstkammer and the Evolution of Nature, Art, and Technology*, tr. Allison Brown (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1995), pp. 63-80.

embellishment, similitudes, the treasure-house of words, and suchlike emptinesses', should be removed. As he explained, 'no one collecting and storing materials for ship-building or the like bothers (as shops do) about arranging them nicely and displaying them attractively; rather his sole concern is that they are serviceable and good, and take up as little space as possible in the warehouse' (*IM*, p. 457). Similarly, Aphorism 8 was devoted to the problem of reliability in the accumulation of natural historical materials. Most significantly, Bacon recommended that instances and cases of 'doubtful reliability' should be identified as such, and that 'if the instance has more nobility, either because of its use or because a great deal depends on it, then certainly the author's name should be given,' along with a brief account of the provenance of the case in question, of the author's character, and of 'anything else like that which affects one's estimate of reliability' (*IM*, p. 467). As Graham Rees observed, despite their inevitably 'hybrid' and anticipatory nature, Bacon's late natural histories generally tended to follow the more crucial of these directives.⁴² As such, they evidently belong to a different genre from obviously rhetorical and dialectical works such as Bacon's essays. Indeed, as Lisa Jardine has pointed out, 'the fact that the essays use rhetorical devices at all precludes their contributing directly to the natural histories on which the inductive method is based'.⁴³ Nevertheless, it remains intriguing that a number of the titles of particular histories that Bacon listed in his *Catalogus* directly correspond to the titles of some of his essays. Items 77 and 78 on the list refer to 'History of feelings, like anger, love, diffidence, etc.' and to 'History of the intellectual faculties: thinking, fantasy, discourse, memory, etc.' (*IM*, p. 481). Although none of Bacon's essays can reasonably be considered as direct contributions to his natural historical programme, it is worth considering the extent to which his essays 'Of Discourse', 'Of Love', and 'Of Anger' played indirect or subordinate roles in the development of his natural philosophy.

⁴² Graham Rees, 'Introduction', in *OFB*, xii, pp. xlv-vi and lvii-viii and 'An Unpublished Manuscript by Francis Bacon: *Sylva Sylvarum* Drafts and Other Working Notes', *Annals of Science*, 38 (1981), 377-412 (pp. 386-93).

⁴³ Lisa Jardine, *Francis Bacon: Discovery and the Art of Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 227 n. 2.

As one of his earliest essays, 'Of Discourse' bears the least relation to Bacon's natural historical and natural philosophical projects. Even in its latest version, its concerns are generally critical and didactic rather than objectively descriptive or investigative. In the opening lines of the essay, Bacon judged the restriction of some conversationalists to 'certaine Common Places, and Theames,' to be a 'kinde of Poverty' which 'is for the most part Tedious, and when it is once perceived, Ridiculous'; later, he insisted by way of similitude that 'Speech of Touch towards Others, should be sparingly used: For *Discourse* ought to be as a Field, without coming home to any Man' (E25, pp. 103-5). 'Of Love' and 'Of Anger', which first appeared in Bacon's 1612 and 1625 editions respectively, are more clearly concerned with objective observation and with the discovery of natural predispositions and causes. In the late addition to 'Of Love' with which the revised version of the essay ends, Bacon's overwhelmingly negative diagnosis of the dangers and excesses of 'Amorous Affection' is balanced by a more positive appraisal of its potential social benefits: 'There is in Mans Nature, a secret Inclination, and Motion, towards *love* of others; which, if it be not spent, upon some one, or a few, doth naturally spread it selfe, towards many; and maketh men become Humane and Charitable' (E25, pp. 32-3). Similarly, while 'Of Anger' sets out to offer practical advice on coping with and containing the effects of the passion in question, it does so on the basis of a set of observations on the most common circumstances and causes of its occurrence. As far as the 'Naturall Inclination' towards anger was concerned, Bacon suggested that '*Anger* is certainly a kinde of Basenesse: As it appeares well, in the Weaknesse of those Subjects, in whom it reignes: Children, Women, Old Folkes, Sick Folkes'. As for 'the *Causes and Motives of Anger*', the author proposed that those who are 'too *Sensible of Hurt*', especially 'Tender and Delicate Persons, must needs be oft *Angry*'; that '*Contempt* is that which putteth an Edge upon *Anger*, as much, or more, then the *Hurt* it selfe'; and that 'Opinion of the Touch of a Mans *Reputation*, doth multiply and sharpen *Anger*' (E25, pp. 170-71). From the perspectives of form and genre, Bacon's late essays continued to have more in common with the characters and essays of the likes of Hall and Stephens than with the kinds of text that might have contributed to his programme of natural historical research. Nevertheless, some of Bacon's essays adopt

broadly natural historical and experimental approaches to the philosophy of human emotion and behaviour in which few contemporary essayists showed an interest. As such, they can be considered as responses to the recent emergence of the Theophrastan tradition of the moral character, and in particular to its increasing influence on the development of the essay genre.

Character and *caritas*

As important as the concept was to his political and ethical thought, Bacon's interest in character was neither exclusively civil nor purely and simply moral. Among other things, his *Essayes* were an exercise, or a series of exercises, in the rhetoric and the psychology of knowledge, and it was undoubtedly one of his intentions to cultivate and establish in his readers some of the principles, values, and means of organization which were appropriate to the advancement of a more actively productive and progressively charitable society. For Bacon, such an advancement was entirely contingent on the collection of accurate natural philosophical data. And the possibility of such a collection was in turn dependent on what Stephen Gaukroger has called 'the legitimization of natural philosophy' and 'the shaping of the natural philosopher'.⁴⁴ Consequently, Bacon required an intimate knowledge not only of the particular types of personality with whom he would have to deal in his attempts to place his project on government agendas, but also of the various kinds of human attributes and aptitudes on which the functionality and success of his new social order would depend. In his late blueprints and visions of thriving philosophical communities, the author imagined divisions of labour by which different kinds of investigator or researcher would contribute by performing distinct and specific roles. And in some of his later essays, he suggested that the nature of human character in general was informed by the concept of *caritas*, or Christian love, the same concept by which his

⁴⁴ Stephen Gaukroger, *Francis Bacon and the Transformation of Early-Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), ch. 3 and 4.

philosophy of the culture of the mind was guided, and towards which his programme of natural philosophical research was ultimately directed.

In the *'Praefatio'* to the *Novum organum*, Bacon took pains to distinguish his project for the interpretation of nature from the humanist traditions of rhetoric and dialectic which dominated early modern university education.⁴⁵ 'I do not want to get in the way of this received philosophy or others like it', he wrote, 'which nourish disputations, embellish discourse, and supply work for professors and short cuts to men of affairs.' Indeed, the author conceded that his new philosophy 'will be of very little use in these matters': as he explained, 'it does not lie ready to hand; it cannot be picked up in passing; it does not flatter the intellect with preconceptions; and does not descend to vulgar understanding except in its utility and effects'. Even so, Bacon's intention was not to deny that civic education had a value: after all, he devoted much of his career to legal and political work which required significant rhetorical and dialectical expertise. Instead, he suggested that it would be 'favourable and fortunate for both' if there were 'two sources and two dispensations of learning, and likewise two tribes or clans of thinkers or philosophers in no way hostile or set apart from each other but allied and bound by ties of mutual assistance' (*IM*, p. 57). While the first of these 'tribes' would be engaged in 'cultivating the sciences' by applying and refining established bodies of knowledge, the second would be charged with 'discovering them'. Bacon imagined that the majority of people would be 'better pleased by the former', either 'from haste or the concerns of civil life or because they lack the mental

⁴⁵ On the syllabus at sixteenth-century Cambridge, where Bacon studied between the ages of twelve and fourteen, see Lisa Jardine, 'The Place of Dialectic Teaching in Sixteenth-Century Cambridge', *Studies in the Renaissance*, 21 (1974), 31-62 and 'Humanism and the Sixteenth Century Cambridge Arts Course', *History of Education*, 4 (1975), 16-31; Peter Mack, *Elizabethan Rhetoric: Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), ch. 2; Victor Morgan and Christopher Brooke, *A History of the University of Cambridge, Vol. II: 1546-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 133-4 and 511-13. On Bacon's time as a student, see Lisa Jardine and Alan Stewart, *Hostage to Fortune: The Troubled Life of Francis Bacon* (London: Gollancz, 1998), pp. 34-6 and Peltonen, 'Bacon, Francis (1561-1626)'.

capacity to take in and embrace the latter': magnanimously, he wished these citizens every success in their activities, aspirations, and careers. As for the second group, Bacon identified 'any mortal men' who wished 'to penetrate further' and 'to conquer nature in operation' as the 'true sons of science', and invited them to help him 'to leave behind nature's entrance halls (trodden by countless feet), and at last throw open the doors to her inner sanctum'. By way of clarification and familiarization, the author named 'the one policy or way *Anticipation of the Mind*, the other the *Interpretation of Nature*' (IM, p. 59).

Bacon's distinction between anticipators of the mind and interpreters of nature was partly based on considerations of character: whereas some people were possessed of a driving ambition to know and understand the order of the universe, others were neither inclined nor equipped to become involved in such an intellectually demanding task. At the same time, the author's distinction was far from a complete analysis of the types of inquirer or investigator to whom his natural philosophical programme offered a role. In *De dignitate et augmentis scientiarum*, Bacon observed that 'when a man essayes all kind of *Experiments* without sequence or method that is a meere palpation; but when he proceeds by direction and order in *Experiments*, it is as if he were led by the hand; and this is it which we understand by *Literate Experience*'. According to the author, each of these types of discovery was also distinct from 'the *light it selfe*' of 'the third way', which 'is to be derived from the *Interpretation of Nature, or the New Organum*' (DAS, p. 226).⁴⁶ In fact, representatives of all three kinds later reappeared in Bacon's unfinished utopian narrative, the posthumously published *New Atlantis*, where they occupy various positions in the hierarchy of 'fellows' of the order or society known as 'Salomon's House'. Among the lower-ranked operatives at work in the institution are 'three that try new experiments, such as themselves think good', entitled 'Pioners or Miners'. Ranking above them are 'three that bend themselves, looking into the experiments of their fellows, and cast about how

⁴⁶ On the definition and application of '*Literate Experience*' or '*experientia literata*', see Jardine, *Francis Bacon*, ch. 7.

to draw out of them things of use and practice for man's life, and knowledge as well for works as for plain demonstration of causes, means of natural divinations, and the easy and clear discovery of the virtues and parts of bodies': these literate experimentalists are named 'Dowry-men or Benefactors'. After two more rounds of consultation, directive, execution, and report, the most exalted rank of philosophical investigators finally gets to work: 'Lastly, we have three that raise the former discoveries by experiments into greater observations, axioms, and aphorisms. These we call Interpreters of Nature.' The supporting cast in the *New Atlantis* also includes 'novices and apprentices', as well as 'a great number of servants and attendants, men and women' (SEH, iii, pp. 164-5). Bacon's utopian idea was that structured co-operation would ultimately produce more and greater achievements than even the most brilliantly successful independent research.

Some of the achievements on which Bacon and his utopian citizens evidently set their sights had potentially profound implications for the concepts of human nature and character. Appended to the unfinished narrative of *New Atlantis* was a list of thirty-three 'MAGNALIA NATURAE', or 'wonderful works of Nature, chiefly such as benefit mankind'. A number of these philosophical miracles suggested that certain human characteristics could be fundamentally altered or artificially enhanced. Alongside entries on the general human problems of age, disease, pain, and physical weakness, the list included articles such as 'The increasing and exalting of the intellectual parts', 'Exhilaration of the spirits, and putting them in good disposition', and 'Force of the imagination, either upon another body, or upon the body itself' (SEH, iii, pp. 167-8). The successful pursuit of works like these required the kind of philosophical expertise that so far existed only in Bacon's ambitions. Pending their realization, the author had consistently maintained that characters could be influenced and mental distempers eased by the judicious application of social cures and correctives. Moreover, he suggested that the most efficient and effective way of improving and transforming character was immediately available to all. In *The Advancement of Learning*, Bacon had concluded his analysis of the culture of the mind with 'the moste compendious and summarye' of all its precepts, and 'the most noble and effectual to the

reducing of the minde vnto vertue and good estate': supposing, he said, 'that a man set before him honest & Good ends, and againe that he bee resolute, Constant, and true vnto them; it will follow that hee shall Moulde himselfe into all vertue at once'. For Bacon, 'this is indeede like the worke of nature; whereas the other course, is like the worke of the hand': as he explained, when a man 'dedicateth & applyeth himselfe to *good ends*, loke what vertue soeuer the pursute and passage towards those ends doth commend vnto him, he is inuested of a precedent disposition to conforme himselfe thereunto'. Having illustrated his argument with quotations from Aristotle and Pliny, the author observed that such 'heathen & prophane passages' contained 'but a shadowe of that diuine state of mind, which Religion and the holy faith doth conduct men vnto; by imprinting vpon their soules *Charity* which is excellently called the bond of *Perfection*: bicause it comprehendeth & fastneth al vertues together' (AL, p. 154; cf. Colossians 3:14). Accordingly, he suggested that 'if a mans mind be truly inflamd with charity it doth work him sodainly into greter perfection then al the Doctrin of moralitye can doe, which is but a sophist in comparison of the other' (AL, pp. 154-5).

In the *Advancement*, Bacon explained the unique moral value of *caritas*, or Christian love, by appealing to a distinction drawn from the Greek philosopher Xenophon: 'all other affections though they raise the minde, yet they doe it by distorting, and vncomlinesse of extasies or excesses; but onely Loue doth exalt the mind, and neuerthelesse; at the same instant doth settle and *Compose* it'. Similarly, Bacon argued that charity stood alone among 'excellencyes' in that it 'admitteth noe *Excesse*': whereas Adam and the angels 'transgressed and fel' by aspiring to emulate God's knowledge and power, 'neyther Man nor Angell euer transgressed or shall transgresse' by striving to imitate the comprehensive charity of the Father, 'who makes his sun to rise on good and evil and sends rain on the just and unjust' (AL, p. 155; cf. Matthew 5:44-5). Bacon's account of the moral value of charity appeared substantially unchanged in the *De augmentis* (DAS, pp. 561-2). However, in both the 1612 and 1625 versions of his essay '*Of Goodnesse, and goodnes of Nature*', the author added a number of crucial qualifications. In the early text, Bacon suggested that '*Goodnesse* answers to the *Theological* vertue *Charity*, and

admits not excesse, but error' (E12, p. 12). As such, he advised his readers to 'seek the good of other men', but to 'be not in bondage to their faces or fancies: for that is but facility, and softnesse; which taketh an honest minde prisoner': for the author, the fact that God 'sendeth his raine, and maketh his sunne to shine vpon the iust, and uniuert', but 'doth not raine wealth, nor shine honour and vertues vpon men equally', exemplified the rule that 'common benefits are to bee communicate with all, but peculiar benefits with choise'. Having insisted that charitable acts should be appropriate to their particular recipients, Bacon further maintained that charitable dispensation should be guided as much by practical concerns for efficiency and sustainability as by humility and virtuous intentions. '*Sell all thou hast and giue it to the poore, and follow me*', was Christ's instruction to the rich young man; 'but sell not all thou hast, except thou come and follow me', was Bacon's pragmatic gloss: as he warned his readers, 'except thou haue a vocation, wherein thou maiest doe as much good with little meanes, as with great', the risk was that 'in feeding the stremes, thou driest the fountaine' (E12, pp. 14-16; cf. Mark 10:21 and Matthew 19:21).

In the later version of his essay '*Of Goodnesse And Goodnesse of Nature*', Bacon added another pertinent observation. '*The Inclination to Goodnesse,*' he wrote, 'is imprinted deeply in the Nature of Man: In so much, that if it issue not towards Men, it will take unto Other Living Creatures'. By way of evidence for his assertion, the author referred to contemporary reports that 'the Turks, a Cruell People', were prepared to stone children as punishment for harming animals: such acts provided proof that 'Errours, indeed, in this vertue of *Goodnesse*, or *Charity*, may be committed' (E25, p. 39). The late version of the essay also included a closing analysis of 'the Parts and Signes of *Goodnesse*'. According to Bacon, 'if a Man be Gracious, and Curteous to Strangers, it shewes, he is a Citizen of the World; And that his Heart, is no Island, cut off from other Lands; but a Continent, that joynes to them'. Similarly, 'if he be Compassionate, towards the Afflictions of others, it shewes that his Heart is like the noble Tree, that is wounded it selfe, when it gives the Balme'. Again, 'if he easily Pardons and Remits Offences, it shewes, that his Minde is planted above Injuries; So that he cannot be shot'. And 'if he be

Thankfull for small Benefits, it shewes, that he weighe Mens Mindes, and not their Trash'. Most importantly, Bacon maintained that if a man 'have *S^t. Pauls* Perfection, that he would wish to be an *Anathema* from *Christ*, for the Salvation of his Brethren, it shewes much of a Divine Nature, and a kinde of Conformity with *Christ* himselfe' (E25, pp. 40-41; cf. Romans 9:3). As a delineation of the ideal character of humanity, Bacon's description of the qualities of goodness more closely resembles the moral abstractions of Hall, the Overbury author, and Stephens than it does the historical and natural historical studies on which he had worked throughout the previous four or five years. In fact, all three approaches to the concept of character were available to Bacon as he composed and compiled his final collection of essays, and all three are represented in the only essay to appear in completely rewritten form in the edition that he eventually published in 1625.

In its latest articulation, Bacon's essay 'Of Frenship' elaborates on the naturally curative and restorative properties that its earlier version had attributed to the social relationship in question; it also draws on a range of historical resources, including histories by Tacitus and Philippe de Commynes, in order to demonstrate both the virtues and the potential dangers of close companionship in politics (E25, pp. 81-4; cf. E12, p. 82). However, the essay begins with a more general overview of the nature of humanity at large. Drawing attention to the combination of 'Truth and untruth' in a 'Speech' derived from Aristotle's *Politics*, Bacon questioned the wisdom of the opinion that 'Whosoever is delighted in solitude, is either a wilde Beast, or a God' (E25, pp. 80 and 227 n. 5-6). On the one hand, the author concurred 'that a Naturall and Secret Hatred, and Aversation towards Society, in any Man, hath somewhat of the Savage Beast'. On the other, he contended that 'it is most Untrue, that it should have any Character, at all, of the Divine Nature'. For Bacon, few people truly understood 'what *Solitude* is, and how farre it extendeth'. Nor was friendship conceivable without the Christian virtue of charity: alluding to Saint Paul, the author observed that 'a Crowd is not Company; And Faces are but a Gallery of Pictures; And talke but a *Tinckling Cymball*, where there is no *Love*' (E25, pp. 80-81; cf. 1 Corinthians 13:1). Early in his philosophical career, Bacon had identified charity as the 'correctiue

spice' which enabled mankind to avoid the dangers of pride and discontentment that had traditionally been associated with the pursuit of natural knowledge (*AL*, p. 7). Twenty years later, he managed to 'goe further' in the moral characterization of the uniquely sociable species to which he belonged. 'It is a meere, and miserable *Solitude*,' he wrote, 'to want true *Frends*; without which the World is but a Wildernesse: And even in this sense also of *Solitude*, whosoever in the Frame of his Nature and Affections, is unfit for *Frendship*, he taketh it of the Beast, and not from Humanity' (*E25*, p. 81). For Bacon, charity was the most potent precept in the philosophy of the culture of the mind. And in promoting it, his essays offered their readers rhetorical inducements and dialectical inductions to the advancement of an actively philosophical society.

Conclusion

When Bacon died in April 1626, he did so as the major English essayist of his generation. As he explained to the Duke of Buckingham in his dedication of the previous year, his *Essayes* had been the 'most Currant' of all his works, appealing as they did 'to Mens Businesse, and Bosomes'; as such, he expected 'that the Latine Volume of them, (being in the Universall Language) may last, as long as Bookes last' (*E25*, p. 5). In the event, over a decade would pass before the Latin translation to which Bacon referred would be published, as *Sermones fideles sive, interiora rerum*, in William Rawley's edition of the author's *Operum moralium et civilium* (London, 1638). By then, the Theophrastan tradition of moral character-writing to which Bacon had responded in the early 1620s had been well and truly established in the developing essay genre. In 1625, Alexander Garden published a collection of fifty poetical *Characters and Essayes* whose delineations of 'A worthie Noble-Man' and 'An Ignoble-Man' rehearsed a familiar theme: 'Nobilitie consistes not aye in Blood, / But in a personall, and practicke Good'.⁴⁷ Four years later,

⁴⁷ Alexander Garden, *Characters and Essayes* (Aberdeen, 1625). *ESTC* describes

one 'R. M.' prefaced a volume of sixteen prose *Characters, or Essayes*, with a 'caueatory *Epistle to the vnderstanding Reader*' in which he warned his audience to expect from his 'collections' neither deep insights nor incisive analyses: as he insisted, he had '*not searched deeply into any mans matters*', but only '*touched their manners, and perhaps started their humors*'.⁴⁸ One of the most enduringly successful contributions to the early modern Theophrastan tradition was John Earle's *Micro-cosmographie. Or, a Peece of the World Discovered; in Essayes and Characters*. First published in 1628, Earle's collection of fifty-four moral descriptions reached its fifth, enlarged, edition the following year, and its tenth in 1676. Referring as it does to the analogical concept of the microcosm that both Bacon and Montaigne had attacked, Earle's title seems to register the differences between the early pioneers of the essay genre and their more intellectually and ethically conservative successors. Even so, among the more exemplary inhabitants of Earle's microcosm was 'A *Contemplatiue Man*' whose credentials as a natural and moral philosopher might conceivably have met with Montaigne's and Bacon's approval. For Earle, a contemplative man 'is a Scholler in this great Vniuersity the World; and the same his Booke and Study'. As such, 'hee cloysters not his Meditations in the narrow darknesse of a Roome, but sends them abroad with his Eyes, and his Brayne trauels with his Feete'. Recognizing his virtues, 'Nature admits him as a partaker of her Sports, and asks his approbation as it were of her owne Workes and variety'. Having given it, 'he knits his obseruations together, and makes a Ladder of them all to climbe to God'.⁴⁹ Bacon's Latin essays audaciously promised their readers 'faithful descriptions of the interior of things'. While Earle's essays and characters were largely undeserving of that title, it may yet have applied to the practical inquiries of his actively contemplative man.

Garden's volume as 'a verse version' of Nicholas Breton's *Characters upon Essaies*: [<http://estc.bl.uk/S118826>]. In fact, it is a completely separate and independent work.

⁴⁸ 'R. M.', *Micrologia. Characters, or Essayes, of Persons, Trades, and Places, Offered to the City and Country* (London, 1629), sigs. A2r-A3v.

⁴⁹ [John Earle], *Micro-cosmographie. Or, a Peece of the World Discovered; in Essayes and Characters* (London, 1628), sigs. [H11]r-[H12]r.

Conclusion

The Early Modern Essay and Humanism

Introduction: findings

This thesis has investigated the emergence, establishment, and development of the early modern essay from its origins in the rhetorical and dialectical traditions of sixteenth-century humanism to its entry into positions of enduring prominence in seventeenth-century print and intellectual cultures. The major findings of the thesis are that John Florio and his editorial colleagues applied to the scholarship and translation of the *Essais* of Michel de Montaigne late humanistic techniques and practices which repeatedly brought their volume into conflict with its textual sources; that Francis Bacon's essays promoted and attempted to establish some of the intellectual and moral values on which the success of his programmes for philosophical and natural philosophical reform depended; and that early modern essays were usually concerned with the philosophical and ethical implications for humanity of traditional topics such as the opposition between the active and the contemplative lives, the microcosm, and the investigation and interpretation of nature, character, and the world or universe at large. These findings are based on extensive bibliographical research and on sustained engagement with early modern writers whose contributions to the development of humanist philosophy were profound. Nevertheless, all of them are related to ongoing historical and intellectual processes which remained subject to revision and reorientation throughout the period under inquiry and beyond.

The aim of this conclusion is to develop the findings of the three preceding chapters, and to suggest some possibilities for further investigation and research. In the first place, although the text known as 'Florio's Montaigne' remained current throughout most of the seventeenth century, the edition

that was published in 1603 did not. In fact, the impressions of Montaigne that the second and third editions of Florio's version made available were in some respects quite different from those that the translator and his associates had initially encouraged in their readers. In the second place, the similarities and differences between Bacon's essays and his other authorial endeavours are most easily defined in terms of their rhetorical, dialectical, and logical functions, many of which were specifically and exclusively appropriate to the particular genres to which he considered his texts to belong. While Bacon explicitly distinguished between the various forms of composition and inquiry that he exploited, he remained throughout his career a remarkably unified thinker whose essays functioned as occasional expressions of his comprehensively philosophical goals. Finally, the intellectual and moral conservatism of many of the more minor early modern essayists continued to inform the attitudes of their successors for decades after the deaths of Florio and Bacon. And yet the essay form was also adopted in the later seventeenth century by major pioneers of natural philosophical discovery whose theories and practices of experimental research radically altered the direction of European thought. The early modern essay was truly a provisional concept, and what it provided was a flexible form of expression in which the limits of human knowledge could be tested and hypotheses about its nature placed on trial.

Florio's Montaigne: 'Beyond a briefe *expression*'

The second edition of Florio's Montaigne was published a year after the second edition of Bacon's *Essaies*, in 1613. The new volume was much less obviously associated than its predecessor with Sir Edward Wotton and the Harington circle, at whose requests and instigations Florio and his colleague Matthew Gwinne had begun and continued their work. Whereas each book of the original translation had been prefaced by dedications and poems to Lucy, the Countess of Bedford, her mother, Anne, and other noblewomen known to or taught by the editors, its successor featured a single address and sonnet to

Florio's new patron, Queen Anne of Denmark, the wife of James I. Also included was a new, much briefer, preface 'To the Reader', in which Florio insisted that 'enough, if not too much, hath been sayd of this Translation', and claimed not to know whether the 'faults' that he and others had found 'in the first impression' had been 'now by the Printer corrected'. In fact, the only one of the original paratexts to survive was Samuel Daniel's eulogy to Florio and Montaigne, which was now followed by an anonymous sonnet 'Concerning the honor of bookes'.¹ As for the contribution of the publishers and printers, the second edition also contained an engraved portrait of Florio by William Hole and a table of the contents of each of the three books, while the 127 'Places not noted' that had been listed in an insertion to the original edition were duly integrated in the marginal annotations to the main text. Significantly, too, the paraphrase from Torquato Tasso that Florio had added to Montaigne's chapter on education now appeared not only beside quotation marks, but also within square brackets.² If Florio by this stage took less of an interest in the presentation and reception of his work, his most substantial interpolation into the arguments of his author at least stood a greater chance of being recognized, however ambivalently, as such.

By the time the third edition of his translation of Montaigne's *Essays* appeared in 1632, Florio was no longer in a position to take an interest in anything at all: having lived in poverty since the death of Queen Anne in 1619, he succumbed to the plague in 1625, at the age of seventy-two.³ With Florio's bookseller, the hugely influential Edward Blount, having also recently died, the new edition was published by Richard Royston, who was at the beginning of a successful, if occasionally controversial, career.⁴ Most of the paratexts appeared as they did

¹ Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*, tr. John Florio (London, 1613), sigs. A3r-[A4]r.

² *Ibid.*, p. 69.

³ Desmond O'Connor, 'Florio, John (1553-1625)', in *ODNB* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/9758>] (2008), accessed 21 March 2014.

⁴ See Gary Taylor, 'Blount, Edward (*bap.* 1562, *d.* in or before 1632)', in *ODNB* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/2686>] (2008); H. R. Tedder, 'Royston, Richard (1601-1686)', rev. William Proctor Williams, *ibid.* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24240>] (2004), both accessed 21 March 2014.

in the second edition of 1613. However, replacing the portrait of Florio was a new engraving by Martin Droeshout of a perspectival view through a series of neoclassical columns, archways, and towers. Accompanying the frontispiece was an anonymous poem '*To the Beholder of this Title*', which explained that the initial 'thought' had been to represent Montaigne's book as a great house whose rooms were furnished with topical emblems of all the rare treasures that it contained.

But walking through that *P[al]ace of Invention*
 (The better to accomplish our intention)
 Wee found unlookt for, scattred here and there,
 Such *Profits*, and such pleasures, ev'ry where,
 In such *Variety*, that, to but name
 Each one, would make a *Volume* of the same.
 For, in those *Angles*, and among those *Leaves*
 Whereon the rash *Beholders* eye perceives
 No shewes or promises, of such choice things,
 A diligent unfolder of them brings
 Concealed *Fruits* to light: Ev'n thus did we
 In such abundance, that they prove to bee
 Beyond a briefe *expression*, and have stop't
 Our purpose in presenting what wee hop'd.

According to the poet, who may have been Droeshout, Royston, or a hired hand, the decision was taken simply

To fixe the *Authors Title*, on the *Gate*,
 Annexed to his *Name*; presuming that
 Will give this following *Treatise* much more praise
 Then all the *Trophies* which our skill can raise.
 For, he that hath not heard of *Mountaine* yet

Is but a novice in the schooles of *wit*.⁵

Evidently, Florio's translation had been successful enough, and was still sufficiently current, that his author's name and title alone spoke volumes about the book that he had produced. As for Florio's name, it appeared nowhere on either the frontispiece or the title page of the first posthumous edition of his greatest and most enduring scholarly work.

One aspect of the new edition to which both its title page and its frontispiece did draw the beholder's attention was the addition of 'an Index of the principall matters and personages mentioned in this Booke'. The index was a selective attempt to do what the frontispiece could not: it offered the reader an extensive list of concepts, themes, and names, along with page numbers, by which to find and negotiate passages through the many topical mansions of Montaigne's text. While its references were partial and often sparse, the index provided points of entry into many of the author's most consistent and most personal concerns: 'Actives and contemplatives' directed the reader to a pertinent place in '*Of Solitarinesse*', but denoted every other discussion of the topic by '&c.'; the same three pages in '*Of Exercise or Practise*', '*Of giving the lie*', and '*Of Vanitie*' were listed under both 'Selfe study' and 'Study of our selves'; 'Kings', 'Lawes', 'Man', and 'Nature' each had multiple entries; the sole reference for 'Quotation of Authors' was the opening of the chapter on education. Elsewhere in the index, 'Cæsar' was represented by four separate places, 'Cato the yonger' by only one. As for Florio, his presence was inscribed in the entry for 'Ink pot termes', a phrase which had no equivalent in Montaigne's original, and although his personal contribution was not cited under 'To[r]quato Tasso', the nearby entries for 'Tutors for Children' picked up where his interpolation left off.⁶

⁵ *The Essayes or, Morall, Politike, and Militarie Discourses of Lord Michael de Montaigne, Knight of the Noble Order of Saint Michael, and One of the Gentlemen in Ordinary of the French Kings Chamber*, tr. John Florio (London, 1632), sig. [A6]v (bound at the beginning).

⁶ *Ibid.*, sigs. [3H5]r-[3I2]r.

The third edition of Florio's Montaigne was the last to be published before Charles Cotton's more prosaic rendition effectively superseded it in 1685.⁷ As such, it remained the most current English version of Montaigne's *Essais* for over half a century after its publication. In the preface to the reader that survived from 1613, Florio somewhat ironically suggested that 'too much', even then, had been said about his translation, which after all was a prolix and copious piece of work.⁸ Similarly, the additional commentaries in the 1632 edition together intimated that the truth about Montaigne lay beyond their collective expression: the new prefatory poem described the impossible task of representing or epitomizing his book, while the selective and partial index of places merely enhanced the impression that the only genuine topic of that book was the character of the man himself. Back in 1603, Florio had defended Montaigne's 'disioynted, broken and gadding stile' by referring directly to the author's stated purpose to follow his 'owne naturall inclinations' (F, sig. A5v and III.9.596). Within a few pages of the statement in question, Montaigne ended his chapter '*Of Vanitie*' with a profoundly sceptical rehearsal of the theme to which those natural inclinations led him more often than not. 'It was a paradoxall commandement,' he wrote, 'which the God of Delphos laide heretofore vpon vs; Saying: *View your selves within; know your selves; and keepe you to your selves*'. For Montaigne, the oracle's instruction was directed not only at the ignorance of humans, but also at their pride and vanity in presuming to know about things to which they could not relate. 'Except thy selfe, Oh man, (said that God)', he continued, 'every thing doth first seeke and studie it selfe, and according to it's neede hath limites to her travells, and bounds to her desires. There's not one so shallow, so empty, and so needy as thou art who embracest the whole world: Thou art the Scrutator without knowledge, the magistrate without jurisdiction: and when all is done, the vice of the play' (F, III.9.599-600).

⁷ *The Essays of Michael Seigneur de Montaigne*, tr. Charles Cotton, 3 vols. (London, 1685). Florio's translation would not be printed again until 1910.

⁸ *The Essayes or, Morall, Politike, and Militarie Discourses of Montaigne* (1632), sig. A3r.

Florio contributed an enormous amount to the early reception and scholarship of Montaigne. As such, he also played a major role in the development and establishment of the genre of the early modern essay. However, his most significant achievement, like that of Montaigne's hero, Jacques Amyot, was in bringing to the attention of a new set of readers an author whose eclectic and practical philosophy left a permanent impression on the culture into which it arrived. Even as it did so, solutions to the most serious philosophical problems that Montaigne had raised were being formulated and drafted by Florio's contemporary, Francis Bacon. And among those solutions, applying them and testing them out, were Bacon's *Essays*.

Bacon: 'Of Vicissitude of Things'

In Book II of *The Advancement of Learning*, Bacon presented a different interpretation of the instruction of the Delphic oracle from the one that Montaigne had proposed at the end of his chapter 'Of Vanitie'. By way of introduction to his analysis of 'HVMANE PHILOSOPHY or HVMANITIE', Bacon drew the attention of his readers to 'that knowledge, whereunto the ancient Oracle directeth vs, which is, *the knowledge of our selues: which deserueth the more accurate handling, by howe much it toucheth vs more neerely*'. Whereas Montaigne had found the oracle's injunction to be 'paradoxall', Bacon considered it to be merely complex. 'This knowledge', he wrote, 'as it is the end and Terme of Naturall Philosophy *in the intention of Man: So notwithstanding it is but a portion of Naturall Philosophy in the continent of Nature*'. Apparently, the fundamental and deceptively simple point was that humanity is involved in the world that it observes. And its corollary was that the place of humanity and its conditions of observation had to be taken into account in every philosophical investigation that its members undertook. Indeed, Bacon established it as 'a Rule, that all partitions of knowledges, be accepted rather for *lines & veines*, then for *sections and separations*: and that the continuance and entirenes of knowledge be preserued'. As he pointed out, 'the contrary hereof hath made particular Sciences, to become barren,

shallow, & erroneous: while they haue not bin Nourished and Maintained from the common fountaine' (*AL*, p. 93).

Unlike Montaigne, Bacon rarely wrote about his own nature or personality. In fact, the dedications to his first two collections of essays are among the very few places in his work in which he assigned himself a position in the distributions that he imagined making of the characters and dispositions of others. The evidence of those dedications suggests that Bacon considered his personal inclinations and particular talents to be best suited to a life of contemplation and study, but that his senses of duty and ambition led him to become increasingly heavily involved in an intensely active life of civil business, public service, and legal and political affairs (*E25*, Appendix i-iii, pp. 316-18). To a significant and remarkable extent, Bacon conceived of the active and contemplative lives as complementary. In the *Advancement*, in his *Essayes*, and throughout his philosophical writing, he promoted the claims of each on the terms and in the context of the other. And in his public career, he devoted much of his political capital and expertise to an ongoing campaign to secure government funding and state support for his programme of natural philosophical research. Even so, it remains the case that Bacon died far from the centres of political power and influence and with his philosophical ambitions unfulfilled. At times, he must have wondered whether he had truly followed his natural inclinations and whether his intellectual talents had been suitably and effectively deployed.

Towards the end of his life, Bacon included in *De dignitate et augmentis scientiarum* a pair of telling additions to the account that he had previously given in *The Advancement of Learning* of the architecture, or manufacture, of fortune. One of the two general precepts of the kind of civil wisdom under discussion concerned 'the *knowledge of our selves*': in the later version, Bacon observed that 'the Oracle, *Nosce Teipsum* [know thyself], is not only a rule of universall Prudence, but hath a speciall place in *Politiques*', in that 'a man ought to take an exact examination, and an impartiall view (not such as useth to be taken by one too much in love with himselfe) of his own abilities, virtues

and supports; as likewise of his own defects, Inhabilities, and Impediments' (DAS, pp. 407-8). For Bacon, repeated examinations of his attributes and deficiencies would allow the political negotiator to invest his moral and intellectual resources in the enterprises and interests that would be most likely to yield him a return. As the author explained, '*nothing is more politique, than to make the wheele of our mind concentrique and voluble with the wheeles of Fortune*' (DAS, p. 415). Accompanying the directive to self-knowledge, the other general precept of the architecture of fortune involved a corresponding and complementary knowledge of others. Part of this knowledge was the acquisition of 'the *Habit of a watchfull and present wit, so as in every conference and Action we may both promote the maine matter in hand, and yet observe other circumstances that may be incident upon the Bye*'. It was in his analysis of this part that Bacon included his second significant revision. 'And therefore they who are of such a heavy wit and narrow comprehension,' he wrote, 'as to overdoe one particular, and are wholly taken up with the businesse in hand; and doe not so much as thinke of any matters which intervене (a weaknesse that *Montaigne* confesses in himselfe) such indeed are the best instruments of Princes and of state; but faile in point of their own *Fortune*' (DAS, pp. 406-7).

Bacon's reference to Montaigne evidently related to the chapter '*Of profit and honestie*'. However, its representation of Montaigne's political self-knowledge was neither completely accurate nor entirely fair. Unlike Bacon, Montaigne had indeed admitted to a lack of interest in political intelligence for which he had no immediate use. 'I alwayes knew more then I would', he claimed, before registering his approval of the reply that Phillipides gave in Plutarch's *Moralia* when King Lysimachus asked him which of his regal possessions he would choose to share: '*Which and what you please (quoth he) so it be not your secrets*'. Even so, Montaigne considered his aversion towards sensitive and potentially useful information not so much as a political weakness, but more as a personal and ethical strength. 'For my part,' he wrote, 'I am content one tell me no more of his businesse then he will haue me know or deale in, nor desire I, that my knowledge exceede or restraine my word. If I must needes be the instrument of cozonage, it shall at least be with safety of my

conscience' (F, III.1.477). While he recognized that his 'proceedings' were 'somewhat dissonant' from contemporary political practices, Montaigne's primary concern lay not with contriving and advancing his public fortune, but with expressing and doing justice to his private moral character, to the description and assessment of which he had devoted so much of his retirement. As he observed, '*the way to truth is but one and simple; that of particular profit and benefit of affaires a man hath in charge, double, vneeven and accidentall*' (F, III.1.478).

Of course, Montaigne's lack of political curiosity could scarcely be said to apply to his reading, his writing, his scholarship, or his philosophy: throughout his essays, he continually expressed both his character and his state of mind precisely by allowing tangential arguments and incidental considerations to intervene in the business of the topics that he had in hand. As for Bacon, his will to knowledge of every available kind led him to pursue a remarkably diverse range of intellectual inquiries and researches: even before he became a published author, he wrote to his uncle, William Cecil, Lord Burghley, that 'I have taken all knowledge to be my province' (SEH viii, p. 109); much later, the posthumous volume containing his *Sylva Sylvarum* and *New Atlantis* also featured his list of 'MAGNALIA NATURAE', or 'wonderful works of Nature', which included such various entries as 'Making of new species', 'Instruments of destruction, as of war and poison', and 'Drawing of new foods out of substances not now in use' (SEH iii, pp. 167-8). In fact, Bacon's conception of knowledge was profoundly and consistently holistic both in the first and in the final instance. In the *Advancement*, he had prefaced his analyses of divine, natural, and human philosophy with a discussion of 'one vniuersal Science by the name of PHILOSOPHIA PRIMA, PRIMITIVE or SVMMARIE PHILOSOPHIE', which he described as 'the Maine and common way, before we come where the waies part, and deuide themselues'. As he explained, 'there is a meere and deepe silence, touching the Nature and operation of those *Common adiuncts* of things, as in Nature; and onely a resuming and repeating of the force and vse of them, in speeche or argument'; as such, his 'meaning touching this Originall or vniuersall Philosophie' was '*That it bee a Receptacle for all such profitable obseruations and Axioms, as fall not within the*

compasse of any of the speciall parts of Philosophie, or Sciences; but are more common, and of a higher stage' (AL, pp. 76-7). A few pages later, having progressed to the analysis of natural philosophy, Bacon identified 'METAPHISICKE' as the apex of the pyramid of natural knowledge, and described as 'excellent' the Platonic speculation 'That all things by scale did ascend to vnitie', before insisting that no 'Enmitie or repugnancie at all' obtained between physical and '*finall*' explanations of causes, provided they remained within their proper perspectives and limits. As he observed, just 'as in ciuill actions he is the greater and deeper pollitique, that can make other men the Instruments of his will and endes, and yet neuer acquaint them with his purpose', so too 'is the wisdom of God more admirable, when Nature intendeth one thing, and Prouidence draweth forth another; then if hee had communicated to particular Creatures and Motions the Characters and Impressions of his Prouidence' (AL, pp. 85-7).

Towards the end of his career, Bacon went to considerable lengths to elaborate and develop both his concept of metaphysic and his category of primary or summary philosophy. As an inquiry into the forms and causes of nature, his *Novum organum* posited that the capacity of humans to recreate natural effects would guarantee the philosophical legitimacy of the knowledge from which that ability derived. As Antonio Pérez-Ramos has put it, 'since Nature is postulated as always being the same and operating according to the same rules in every instance, there is no need to separate what Nature herself produces of her own accord and what man, as an evolving part of Nature, can bring about'.⁹ As for the universal science of 'Philosophia Prima', in the *De augmentis* Bacon listed a series of axioms whose truths remained intact across multiple intellectual disciplines. Some of these had already appeared in the *Advancement*: for example, Euclid's rule that 'if you add equals to unequals, the wholes will be unequal', applied both in mathematics and in justice, while Ovid's observation that 'everything changes, nothing perishes', was relevant

⁹ Antonio Pérez-Ramos, 'Bacon's forms and the maker's knowledge tradition', in Markku Peltonen (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bacon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 99-120 (p. 114).

to natural philosophy as well as to natural theology (*DAS*, pp. 133; cf. *AL*, pp. 77 and 277). Other axioms were new additions: the rule that 'whatever is preservative of a greater form is more powerful in action', for instance, was valid not only in natural philosophy, but also in politics and theology (*DAS*, p. [134]; cf. *SEH* iv, p. 338). As he had in the *Advancement*, Bacon insisted that his examples represented more than '*meere Similitudes* only, as men of narrow observation perchance may conceive', but in fact amounted to evidence of 'one and the very same footsteps, and seales of Nature, printed upon severall subjects or matters'. He also added 'an other Part of this, *Primitive P[h]ilosophy*', which was concerned with 'the *Accessory Conditions of Entities*, which we may call *Transcendents*; as *Multitude, Paucity, Similitude; Diversity; Possible, and Impossible; Entity; Non-Entity*; and the like'. Observing that true inquiries had yet to be made into the frequency of occurrences of natural phenomena, the status of plants and creatures which were 'interposed' between recognized species, and the hidden rules and properties of physical attraction, Bacon maintained that '*men have pursued Niceties of Termes, and not subtleties of things*', and that the primary philosophy should be directed towards 'a substantiall and solid inquiry of these *Transcendents, or Adventitious Conditions of Entities*, according to the *Lawes of Nature*, and not according to the *Laws of Words*' (*DAS*, pp. 135-6).

Bacon's distinction between '*meere Similitudes*' and the 'footsteps' of nature is obviously an important one in the interpretation of the relationship between his rhetorical and dialectical strategies and his philosophy. Brian Vickers has demonstrated the popularity of the similitude among early modern theorists of humanist style and eloquence: following the publication of Desiderius Erasmus's *De parabolis sive similibus* in 1514, a host of printed collections of ornamental tropes appeared in England towards the end of the sixteenth and at the beginning of the seventeenth centuries. However, while he also showed how contemporary rhetoricians such as George Puttenham invested the similitude with 'pedagogic', and even 'hermeneutical', properties, Vickers confessed to being baffled by Bacon's account of the axiomatic correspondences between the prospective contents of his primary or summary philosophy. 'Faced with this massive semi-mystical concept of

analogy as a creative force in the universe', he wrote, 'the literary student is forced to retreat'.¹⁰ One way of improving on Vickers's position is to analyse the status of some of the similitudes and analogies that appeared in Bacon's essays between moral and political topics on the one hand and observations of natural phenomena on the other. In his 1612 essay '*Of Fortune*', Bacon suggested that 'the way of fortune is like the milken way in the skie, which is a meeting, or knot of a number of small starres; not seene asunder, but giuing light together': as he explained, 'there are a number of little and scarce discerned vertues, or rather faculties and customes, that make men fortunate' (E12, pp. 165-6). As an illustration of the principle of the architecture of fortune, Bacon's comparison was both accessible and instructive, and yet it remained a purely rhetorical trope: as a mere similitude, it failed to offer an axiom that could be tested or a rule that could be generally applied. The same can be said of the late addition with which the final version of the author's essay '*Of Faction*' concluded: 'The Motions of *Factions*, under Kings, ought to be like the Motions (as the *Astronomers* speake) of the Inferiour Orbs; which may have their Proper Motions, but yet still, are quietly carried, by the Higher Motion, of *Primum Mobile*' (E25, p. 156).

A more likely contender for truly analogical status is a passage in Bacon's 1612 essay '[Of] *Wisdom for a mans selfe*'. According to the author, 'it is a poore Centre of a mans actions, *himselpe*. It is right earth. For that only stands fast vpon his owne centre: whereas all things that haue affinity with the heauens, moue vpon the centre of an other, which they benefit' (E12, pp. 98-9). Related as it was to Bacon's concepts of the double nature of good and the active life, the analogy amounted to a philosophical axiom of the value of community in both the natural and the ethical spheres (cf. *AL*, pp. 136-7). Similarly, in the late version of his essay '*Of Religion*', which appeared in his final edition as '*Of Unity in Religion*', Bacon observed that certain types or forms of ill effects

¹⁰ Brian Vickers, *Francis Bacon and Renaissance Prose* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 146-8 and 154. The collections of similitudes to which Vickers referred include Anthonie Fletcher, *Certaine Very Proper, and Most Profitable Similies* (London, 1595) and Robert Cawdray, *A Treasurie or Store-house of Similies* (London, 1600).

were both physically and institutionally more damaging than others: just 'as in the Naturall Body, a Wound or Solution of Continuity, is worse than a Corrupt Humor; So in the Spirituall' (E25, p. 12). In fact, something of the difference between illustrative similitudes and the footsteps, or analogies, of nature is discernible in one of the few passages from Bacon's early essay 'Of Friendship' to appear, in revised form, in his later treatment of the topic. Commenting on the capacity of friendship both to multiply joys and to divide griefs, the author initially argued that 'it is, in Truth of Operation upon a Mans Minde, of like vertue, as the *Alchymists* use to attribute to their Stone, for Mans Bodie; That it worketh all Contrary Effects, but still to the Good, and Benefit of Nature'. However, since the application of this first similitude was limited by the dubious philosophical legitimacy of its object, Bacon preferred the stronger analogy that he had proposed in his previous edition. 'But yet, without praying in Aid of *Alchymists*,' he wrote, 'there is a manifest Image of this, in the ordinarie course of Nature. For in Bodies, *Union* strengthneth and cherisheth any Naturall Action; And, on the other side, weakneth and dulleth any violent Impression: And euen so is it of Minds' (E25, pp. 83-4). Recalling the author's stated conviction that the study of humanity formed part of a much broader philosophy of nature (AL, p. 93), it appeared that the same axiom about union, actions, and violent impressions could be applied, in fact as well as in persuasion, both to human and to purely material relationships.

Similitudes and analogies between his civil, moral, and natural philosophical concerns are dispersed throughout Bacon's essays. However, one essay in particular is especially suggestive of the topical uses that the author made of the contents of his primary philosophy. 'Of Vicissitude of Things' appeared as the final essay in Bacon's final collection of 1625, and it dealt with arguably the most absolute condition of everything, and everyone, on earth. In the opening passages of the essay, Bacon observed that '*Matter*, is in a Perpetuall Flux, and never at a Stay', and that the destructions that were periodically wrought by '*Deluges*, and *Earth-quakes*', made it 'very probable' that the natives of the Americas 'are a Newer, or a Younger People, then the People of the Old World' (E25, p. 172). He also considered 'the *Vicissitudes* or *Mutations*, in the *Superiour Globe*': although he described them as 'no fit

Matter, for this present Argument', he speculated that the regular revolutions of '*Plato's great Yeare*' might have 'grosse' effects on the state of the world, and that the 'Respective Effects' of comets and cycles of weather were worthy of sustained investigation (E25, p. 173). The longer second part of the essay was concerned with changes and returns in human cultures and societies, and in particular with the causes and occasions of the rising of new religious sects and of observable trends in the locations, means, and manners of waging war. Among other things, Bacon suggested that licentiousness and opposition to authority made new sects popular and successful, 'that the *Northern Tract* of the World, is in Nature the more Martiall Region', and that 'In the *Declining Age* of a State, *Mechanicall Arts* and *Merchandize*' flourish ahead of arms and learning. Throughout the essay, Bacon implied that the vicissitudes both of natural and of human things were governed by a set of more or less obscure laws which philosophical inquiries might one day render legible. Until then, however, the author was content to conclude that 'it is not good, to looke too long, upon these turning Wheelles of *Vicissitude*, lest we become Giddy', and that 'the *Philology* of them' was 'but a Circle of Tales, and therefore not fit for this Writing' (E25, pp. 174-6). While he explicitly distanced its concerns from the specific details both of astronomical and of philological investigations, Bacon devoted his final essay to the general consideration of a universal phenomenon which usually revealed itself only within the limits of particular disciplinary perspectives. In doing so, he tacitly articulated one of the primary roles or functions of his *Essayes* as a topical testing ground for the social application of elements of his philosophical research.

Methods, trends, and developments

The essay has been described by Peter Mack as 'the most important new genre of the sixteenth century'. Although Bacon's, Daniel's, and Cornwallis's essays were in print by 1600, Mack was referring specifically to Montaigne, and in particular to his inventive applications of humanist techniques to the elaboration and analysis of moral themes. According to Mack, 'the form,

which Montaigne once claimed as the most notable thing about his essays, is generated by the combination of story plus comment and by topical invention [variously] applied to elements of earlier drafts'.¹¹ Undoubtedly, Montaigne learned a lot from his humanist education, even if he later claimed that it had taught him little of value: 'For at thirteen yeares of age, that I left the Colledge, I had read over the whole course of Philosophie (as they call it) [j'avois achevé mon cours (qu'ils appellent)] but with so small profit, that I can now make no accompt of it' (F, I.25.85; M, p. 182). In fact, the specific reference to 'Philosophie' was Florio's addition, and it registers the translator's appreciation of an aspect of Montaigne's character and authorship on which the essayist himself had repeatedly reflected elsewhere. In *'Of giving the lie'*, Montaigne claimed to have written 'a book consubstantiall to his Author', in that its essential components were the 'imagination', 'humors', and 'conceites' to which he was naturally and particularly disposed. As he explained, 'I have never studied to make a booke; Yet have I somewhat studied, because I had alreadie made it (if to nibble or pinch, by the head or feete, now one Authour, and then another be in any sorte to study) but nothing at al to forme my opinions: Yea being long since formed, to assist, to second and to serve them' (F, II.18.385). Florio knew as well as anyone that Montaigne was extremely well read. And yet he also understood that his author's erudition was a personal expression of his naturally philosophical inclinations. As M. A. Screech has put it, 'Montaigne was a man of rare originality – the kind of man who, if he had been a professional philosopher, could have turned the philosophy schools upside down'.¹²

In fact, neither Montaigne nor his successor Bacon was or ever became a professional philosopher. Even so, the two essayists shared both a thorough training in humanist techniques of rhetorical and dialectical composition and

¹¹ Peter Mack, 'Humanist rhetoric and dialectic', in Jill Krayer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 82-99 (pp. 95-6). For Montaigne's claim, see F, II.10.236.

¹² M. A. Screech, *Montaigne & Melancholy: The Wisdom of the Essays* (London: Duckworth, 1983), p. 1.

the conviction that those techniques were often susceptible to misdirection and abuse. In Book I of the *Advancement*, Bacon identified as one of the 'three vanities in Studies, whereby learning hath been most traduced', the kind of 'delicate learning, vaine Imaginations, vaine Altercations, & vain affectations' which he claimed to have followed from the classical researches of Martin Luther and the sixteenth-century Reformers. As he explained, 'these foure causes concurring, the admiration of ancient Authors, the hate of the Schoole-men, the exact studie of Languages: and the efficacie of Preaching did bring in an affectionate studie of eloquence, and copie of speech, which then began to flourish'. According to Bacon, this superficial concern with style 'grew speedily to an excesse'. As he eloquently observed, 'men began to hunt more after wordes, than matter, and more after the choisenesse of the Phrase, and the round and cleane composition of the sentence, and the sweet falling of the clauses, and the varying and illustration of their workes with tropes and figures', than the qualities that really counted: 'the weight of matter, worth of subiect, soundnesse of argument, life of inuention, or depth of iudgement' (*AL*, pp. 21-2). Bacon returned to the subject of rhetoric in Book II of the *Advancement*, where he described it as 'A Science excellent, and excellently well laboured' (*AL*, p. 127). Immediately beforehand, he had also analysed a number of other humanist strategies for the production and cultivation of effective discourse. On the subject of commonplace books, Bacon considered 'the Entrie of Common places, to bee a matter of great vse and essence in studying; as that which assureth copie of Inuention, and contracteth Iudgment to a strength', although he also maintained that none of the current methods was 'of any sufficient woorth, all of them carying meerey the face of a *Schoole*, and not of a *World*, and referring to vulgar matters, and Pedanticall Diuisions without all life, or respect to Action' (*AL*, p. 118). As for recent developments in humanist dialectic or logic, Bacon specifically attacked the purportedly universal method of deriving and discovering knowledge that had been popularized by the French humanist Petrus Ramus and his followers in the second half of the sixteenth century. For Bacon, the proposal for 'an *vniformitie of Methode* in *Multiformitie of Matter*' would 'reduce Learning to certaine emptie and barren Generalities',

while the tabular abstracts of arguments that Ramist logic introduced were a 'Canker' on the texts that they epitomized (*AL*, pp. 125-6).

As an avowed methodological pluralist, Bacon was not above exploiting even the most rudimentary of compositional resources: his late essay 'Of Boldnesse' opened with 'a triviall Grammar Schoole Text' on oratory and action which was nevertheless 'worthy a wise *Mans* Consideration' (*E25*, p. 37), while his new method of natural philosophical investigation has been shown by both Ann Blair and Ann Moss to derive from 'a method of natural commonplaces' whose topical aphorisms were intended to 'stimulate examination rather than belief'.¹³ An even greater methodological pluralism is evident in the early modern essay as a genre: whereas Sir William Cornwallis claimed to 'professe not method', and to be unwilling, as he put it, to 'chaine my selfe to the head of my Chapter', the contemporary essayist Sir Thomas Palmer strictly adhered to the schemes and partitions of Ramist logic that Bacon had rejected as repressive and reductive.¹⁴ In fact, almost all early essays can be considered as humanist compositions in that almost all of them exhibit the rhetorical and dialectical strategies of topical quotation, example, and division. While some essayists used these devices freely and informally, others, such as Robert Mason, Richard Brathwaite, and John Earle, sought to

¹³ Ann Blair, 'Humanist Methods in Natural Philosophy: the Commonplace Book', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 53 (1992), 541-51 (p. 550); Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 272.

¹⁴ Sir William Cornwallis, *Essayes* (London, 1600-1601), sig. [218]v; Sir Thomas Palmer, *An Essay of the Meanes How to Make Our Travailes, into Forraigne Countries, the More Profitable and Honourable* (London, 1606). The structure of Palmer's *Essay* was closely modelled on that of Theodor Zwinger's *Methodus Apodemica* (Basel, 1577), a systematic analysis of the art of travelling which was composed almost entirely of the branching tree diagrams favoured by Zwinger's friend and tutor, Ramus. On the relationship between Zwinger and Ramus, see Wolfgang Rother, 'Ramus and Ramism in Switzerland', in Mordechai Feingold, Joseph S. Friedman, and Wolfgang Rother (eds.), *The Influence of Petrus Ramus: Studies in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Philosophy and Sciences* (Basel: Schwabe, 2001), pp. 9-37.

impose on their subjects a level of logical or generic coherence which has not normally been associated with the apparently 'unmethodical method' of their chosen form.¹⁵ Indeed, the extent to which the essay had an identifiable structure or a recognizable definition was debated by theorists and practitioners throughout the seventeenth century. In 1665, the pedagogue Ralph Johnson defined the essay as 'a short discourse about vertue, vice, or other common-place', before distinguishing it from related genres such as the colloquy, the character, the theme, and the oration by means of six increasingly complex 'RULES for making it': 'Having chosen a Subject, express the nature of it in two or three short Definitions, or Descriptions'; 'Shew the severall causes, adjuncts, and effects of each sort or kinde'; 'In larger and compleat Essays (such as *Bacon's*, *Feltham's*, &c.) we must labour compendiously to express the whole nature of, with all observables about our subject'.¹⁶ Six years later, however, the essayist 'T. C.' contended that the French word *essay* 'admits of no positive definition', pointing out that 'neither their great *Essayist Montaigne*, nor the Lord *Bacon* our more incomparable writer in the same kind, hath thought it requisite to define the word, because it hath so little to do with the matter it handles; rather expressing a generality of knowledge, then oblig'd to any particular Science'. According to 'T. C.', 'in *Essayes* there is required instructions from Philosophy, History, and what else can be usefully expressed for other observations, and moralities of life, that in them a man may read an Epitomy of himself, and the world together'.¹⁷

¹⁵ R. Lane Kauffmann, 'The Skewed Path: Essaying as Unmethodical Method', in Alexander J. Butrym (ed.), *Essays on the Essay: Redefining the Genre* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1989), pp. 221-40.

¹⁶ Ralph Johnson, *The Scholars Guide from the Accidence to the University, or, Short, Plain, and Easie Rules for Performing All Manner of Exercise in the Grammar School* (London, 1665), pp. 13-14.

¹⁷ 'T. C.', *Essayes or Moral Discourses on Several Subjects* (London, 1671), pp. 1-2. 'T. C.' may or may not be Sir Thomas Culpeper the younger (1625/6-1697?), whose *Moral Discourses and Essayes, upon Severall Select Subjects*, was published in London in 1655. The two collections are incorrectly identified in Anita McConnell, 'Culpeper, Sir Thomas (1577/8-1662)', in *ODNB* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/68883>] (2004), accessed 26 March 2014.

By the time Johnson and 'T. C.' were writing, both the methodological pluralism and the thematic diversity of the essay had become even more pronounced than when Bacon and Florio were alive. While brief essays on traditional moral topics continued to be written and published, authors and booksellers also began to apply the essay title to translations of classical and vernacular poems and treatises, to political proposals for constitutional, ecclesiastical, and economic reform, and to studies in both poetry and prose of literary criticism and aesthetics.¹⁸ Alongside these continuing and emerging trends, one of the most significant later developments in the history of the early modern essay was the adoption of the form by members of the early Royal Society for philosophical and experimental inquiries into the physical, chemical, and physiological causes of natural and human phenomena. Although Montaigne was a progressive critic of contemporary natural philosophical theories, and while Bacon combined his writing of essays with natural historical and experimental research, the association between the essay and the nascent observations and practices of modern science can properly be said to have begun with Galileo Galilei's *Il Saggiatore*, or *The Assayer*, in 1623, and with René Descartes's *Essais* on optics, geometry, and meteorology in 1637. Even then, these scientific instances of the use of the essay title remained largely isolated until 1661, when Robert Boyle's *Certain Physiological Essays* was published in London. Boyle's volume was prefaced by 'A Proemial Essay' on 'Experimental Essays in General', in which the author set out a kind of literary manifesto for the recently chartered society to which he

¹⁸ Examples of each kind include Humphry Browne, *A Map of the Microcosme, or, a Morall Description of Man. Newly Compiled into Essayes* (London, 1642) and Samuel Person, *An Anatomical Lecture of Man. Or a Map of the Little World, Delineated in Essayes and Characters* (London, 1664); Étienne Molinier, *Essayes: Or, Morall and Political Discourses*, tr. William Tyrwhit (London, 1636) and John Evelyn, *An Essay on the First Book of T. Lucretius Carus De Rerum Natura* (London, 1656); Anon., *An Essay toward the Composing of Present Differences in Ecclesiasticks and Consequently in Civils* ([London?], 1650) and Henry Stubbe, *An Essay in Defence of the Good Old Cause, or a Discourse Concerning the Rise and Extent of the Power of the Civil Magistrate in Reference to Spiritual Affairs* (London, 1659); John Dryden, *Of Dramatick Poesie, an Essay* (London, 1668) and Wentworth Dillon, Earl of Roscommon, *An Essay on Translated Verse* (London, 1684).

belonged. As he explained, 'it has long seem'd to me none of the least impediments of the real advancement of true Natural Philosophy, that men have been so forward to write Systems of it, and have thought themselves oblig'd either to be altogether silent, or not to write lesse than an entire body of Physiology'; the unfortunate consequence was that original research 'which would have made an excellent and substantial Essay, passes but for a dull and empty Book'.¹⁹ Over the next three decades, Boyle developed both the theory and the practice of experimental writing in a series of essays on a wide variety of natural entities and phenomena, while many of his colleagues in the Royal Society also took up the title and applied it to an impressively broad range of natural historical, medical, linguistic, and sociological studies.²⁰

With Galileo, Descartes, and Boyle, the early modern essay truly advanced from the literary culture of late humanism in which it originated to the more broadly philosophical humanism from which modern scientific culture derives. As it did so, its exponents retained an appreciative awareness of the philosophical achievements of the major early practitioners of the genre: Montaigne's conception of subjectivity has been identified as a decisive

¹⁹ Robert Boyle, *Certain Physiological Essays, Written at Distant Times, and on Several Occasions* (London, 1661), pp. 3-4. For divergent analyses of Boyle's rhetorical devices, bibliographical strategies, and generic practices, see Steven Shapin, 'Pump and Circumstance: Robert Boyle's Literary Technology', *Social Studies of Science*, 14 (1984), 481-520 and Scott Black, *Of Essays and Reading in Early Modern Britain* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), ch. 3.

²⁰ Boyle's publications included *An Essay about the Origine & Virtues of Gems* (London, 1672), *Essays of the Strange Subtilty, Great Efficacy, Determinate Nature of Effluviiums* (London, 1673), and *Experiments and Considerations about the Porosity of Bodies, in Two Essays* (London, 1684). Among the works published by established and prospective members of the Royal Society in this period were Robert Plot, *The Natural History of Oxford-Shire, Being an Essay toward the Natural History of England* (Oxford, [1677]), William Simpson, *A Short Essay towards the History and Cure of Fevers, Particularly of this New Autumnal-Fever* (London, 1678), Francis Lodwick, *An Essay towards an Universal Alphabet* ([London, 1686]), and Sir William Petty, *Two Essays in Political Arithmetick, Concerning the People, Housing, Hospitals, &c. of London and Paris* (London, 1687).

influence both on Descartes's epistemology and on Boyle's experimentalism, while Bacon's status as a prophet of progress was established and enhanced by the early propagandists of the experimental society under whose auspices Boyle's essays, and those of his colleagues, were produced.²¹ At the same time, the adoption by natural philosophers of the essay form and title facilitated the simultaneous expression of two complementary kinds of modesty. On the one hand, Adrian Johns's study of the social epistemology of early modern print cultures has shown that 'the *aspiration* to authorship' became an increasingly difficult problem as more and more claims to knowledge left the presses, and that controversialists such as John Wilkins 'ingeniously appropriated the conventions of modesty' in an imaginative attempt to solve it. At the early stage of his career to which Johns referred, Wilkins was just beginning 'to articulate principles of authorship' which were recognizably 'characteristic of early experimental philosophy'.²² Within a few decades, Wilkins had chaired the inaugural meeting of the Royal Society, become a fellow, a secretary, and a council member of the group, and published *An Essay towards a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language* (London, 1668).²³ On the other hand, Richard Popkin showed that Wilkins, Boyle, and their colleague, Joseph Glanvill, formulated in their essays and other philosophical writings a 'theory of limited certitude' which allowed them 'to develop the natural sciences without sceptical fears and without making dogmatic claims that could be overturned'. This 'undogmatic semiscepticism' was a version, or a manifestation, of the 'metaphysical

²¹ See Stephen Gaukroger, *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 314-19; James Paradis, 'Montaigne, Boyle, and the Essay of Experience', in George Levine (ed.), *One Culture: Essays in Science and Literature* (Madison, WI and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), pp. 59-91; Thomas Sprat, *The History of the Royal-Society of London, for the Improving of Natural Knowledge* (London, 1667), sigs. B-[B3]v and E2r-v.

²² Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 52-4.

²³ See John Henry, 'Wilkins, John (1614-1672)', in *ODNB* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29421>] (2009), accessed 27 March 2014; Rhodri Lewis, *Language, Mind and Nature: Artificial Languages in England from Bacon to Locke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), ch. 5.

modesty' that David Cooper has argued was characteristic of certain modes and phases of later humanist thought.²⁴ For Boyle, Wilkins, and Glanvill, the essay represented the most appropriate literary vehicle in which to theorize and to pursue their modestly philosophical ambitions.

By the end of the seventeenth century, the essay signified many different things to many different writers, publishers, and readers. Modesty, or at least the conventions of modesty, were certainly among them. In 1691, the publisher of an English translation of a French mechanist medical text called *Essais d'anatomie* suggested that its combination of 'Modesty' and 'great Success' had 'favourably disposed the Reader for the word *Essayes*', before posing a tellingly rhetorical question about the provenance and contemporary currency of his author's title: 'Since those of the famous *Montaigne*, how many others have appeared in *Physick* and *Morality*, which have been the Admiration of all the Learned?'²⁵ A decade or so later, in the preface to his *Essay upon the Art of Love*, Silvester Jenks alluded both to the value and to the consequences of his considered condescension to the vogue. 'There are', he wrote, 'many Modish People in the World, who would blush to be seen with a Moral Discourse in their hands, for fear of looking like Bigots; and yet will read an Essay (tho' it be Moral) with as good a grace, as if it were enough to make them look like grave Philosophers, or Men of Sense'.²⁶ Taken together, these comments suggest one possible solution to an intriguing and enduring

²⁴ Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), ch. 13; David E. Cooper, *The Measure of Things: Humanism, Humility, and Mystery* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), pp. 48-50. Glanvill's published essays included *Scepsis Scientifica: Or, Confest Ignorance, the Way to Science; in an Essay of The Vanity of Dogmatizing, and Confident Opinion* (London, 1665), a reworking of his earlier *The Vanity of Dogmatizing* (London, 1661), and *Essays on Several Important Subjects in Philosophy and Religion* (London, 1676).

²⁵ [Dominique Beddevole], *Essayes of Anatomy in which the Construction of the Organs and Their Mechanical Operations are Clearly Explained According to the New Hypotheses* (Edinburgh, 1691), sigs. A4r-v.

²⁶ [Silvester Jenks], *An Essay upon the Art of Love, Containing an Exact Anatomy of Love and All the Other Passions which Attend It* ([London?], 1702), sig. A4v.

problem in early modern literary and intellectual history: the problem, as Rosalie Colie stated it in 1969, of John Locke's 'peculiar choice of the word *Essay* for the title of a philosophical discourse', the seminal *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding* (London, 1690). According to Colie, Locke 'chose to step down from the high chair of philosophy to ask his questions in an informal genre requiring an informal style', so that in his 'effort to laicize philosophy, his choice of title and mode were of major importance'.²⁷

Conventions of modesty notwithstanding, a number of critics have disagreed with Colie's argument that Locke's *Essay* is truly and distinctively an essay. However, like Colie, the critics in question have generally considered Locke's claim to his title from purely literary or aesthetic points of view. In 1977, Ted-Larry Pebworth was ambivalent in citing Ralph Johnson's pedagogical rules as 'paving the way for Locke twenty years later to call his rather exhaustive exploration of human understanding an essay'.²⁸ More recently, Graham Good openly objected to Colie's assertions, contending that Locke's text 'bears out the idea that the single overall design necessary to hold together a book-length prose work precludes the informal spontaneity of the essay', and that 'the demands made on the reader's concentration would also exceed the easy-going rhythm of most essays, as would even a much shorter piece of rigorous philosophical reasoning'.²⁹ Similarly, O. B. Hardison maintained that Locke's work might be 'called an "essay" on the basis of being an exploration of its subject', but that 'if so, any work of philosophy short of Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* can be called an essay', and that 'its proper title is obviously "discourse," maybe *Abhandlung*'.³⁰ Even Scott Black, whose study of

²⁷ Rosalie Colie, 'The essayist in his *Essay*', in John W. Yolton (ed.), *John Locke: Problems and Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 234-61 (pp. 238-9).

²⁸ Ted-Larry Pebworth, 'Not Being, but Passing: Defining the Early English Essay', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 10 (1977), 17-27 (p. 21).

²⁹ Graham Good, *The Observing Self: Rediscovering the Essay* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), p. xi.

³⁰ O. B. Hardison, Jr., 'Binding Proteus: An Essay on the Essay', in Butrym (ed.), *Essays on the Essay*, pp. 11-28 (p. 22).

the early modern essay is refreshingly and compellingly inclusive, readily admits that Locke's modestly titled *Essay* 'stretches the limits of the genre'.³¹

Among other things, this thesis has shown that the assumption on which most of these critical judgments are based is incorrect. In the work of Montaigne, Bacon, and many of their contemporaries, the early modern essay was not only concerned with traditional philosophical problems, but also explicitly critical of contemporary philosophical methods and progressively engaged in the process of philosophical reform. At the same time, the thesis has served to encourage the perception that Locke's *Essay* is in fact an essay in a much more precise sense than Good, Hardison, Pebworth, Black or even Colie was able to acknowledge. Like Montaigne, Locke was a philosophical student of himself. Like Bacon, he recognized the potential of natural history as a source of knowledge about human behaviour and thought.³² Moreover, while it has long been known that Locke was a physician, a friend of Boyle, and a member of the Royal Society, recent research on his medical and natural philosophical interests has begun to make clear the depth and extent of his commitment to the experimental philosophy and the innovative ways in which he applied and advanced its methods.³³ 'They will not suffer it to be an *Essay*', wrote Locke of his critics in the preface to his second edition.³⁴ The next stage of research

³¹ Black, *Of Essays and Reading*, p. 8.

³² At least two eighteenth-century commentators appreciated these aspects of Locke's philosophical approach. On his *Essay* as a natural history of the human soul or mind, see Voltaire, 'Of Mr. Locke', in *Letters Concerning the English Nation* (1733), ed. Nicholas Cronk (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 56 and Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759-67), ed. Ian Campbell Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 70.

³³ See Roger Woolhouse, *Locke: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), ch. 2; Stephen Gaukroger, 'The Role of Natural Philosophy in the Development of Locke's Empiricism', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 17 (2009), 55-83; Peter R. Anstey, *John Locke and Natural Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

³⁴ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 12.

into the history and significance of the early modern essay must endeavour to put right that wrong.

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