Guerrier or Glossateur? Montaigne's Monetary Metaphors

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*As measure of value, and as standard of price, money has two entirely distinct functions to perform.*¹

Even though history has returned to fashion with literary critics, both its role in understanding the texts of the past and its relationship to critical theory remain open to debate. I hope to contribute to the reintegration of history into literary studies by showing how monetary metaphors resonated for readers of the *Essais* with the changing courses of their daily lives. My aim is to reconstruct a historically accurate reading, to recapture some of the meanings we have lost because of our distance from late sixteenth-century Gascony.

On the one hand, any claim to a "historically accurate" reading admittedly raises the specter of the positivist readings from which literary critics have struggled so hard to free themselves. On the other, when Stephen Greenblatt began *Shakespearean Negotiations* with "the desire to speak with the dead," the text he studied surely speaks to (and from) a reality distinct from his own.² In the case of Montaigne, the *reality* in question is that of a *fictional* author and the relationship to his times which he *recounts* in the essays of his life.³ Greenblatt's desire was apparently not to speak with the great man alone, but with the dead, in the plural. Part of his project, then, was to decenter criticism, by opening it to some of the figures heretofore considered marginal, such as the actors and spectators of Shakespeare's plays or, for us, the readers of the *Essais*. In the final two years of work Montaigne put into the first edition of his book, he named four great ladies as his readers,⁴ but the most remarkable thing about the chapters where he does so is the closeness of their association to male gender.⁵

Montaigne was a landed male aristocrat, and the readers of his *Essais* were often figured as gentlemen just like himself.⁶ On other occasions, however, he seemed deliberately to deny his readers the comforting ability to assume their continued identity, as aristocrats or even as men.⁷ Walter

Weisskopf has found gender to be the central contradiction in classical economic thought; I shall argue here that gender was essential to Montaigne's own brand of decentering, and that embrace of this contradiction was central to his subversion of monologic discourse.⁸ In spite of revisions by new historicists like Samuel Kinser, I still subscribe to Mikhail Bakhtine's thesis that the first half of the sixteenth century showed an unprecedented mutual permeability on the part of popular and elite cultures that was closed off again by the second half of the century.⁹ My contention here is, in short, that Montaigne felt the pressure toward monologism, and used gender to resist.

This is not to make a proto-feminist of Montaigne! For all his interest in changes over time in the quality of life, his innovations were reserved for his undisputed area of expertise: the use of language to make such changes perceptible. The point here is that he sometimes used gender to shock his readers, by making the ways we encode it more obvious. One of the best-known chapters of the third book, for instance, is "De trois commerces" (III, iii): the "commerces" in question turn out to be the relationships we (male readers) have with male friends, women, and books. *Commerce* already had the meaning of relationships in classical Latin, and involved engaging in negotiation for its own sake, rather than for the circulation of alienated products (Lewis & Short, s.v.). Treating sex as a commercial relationship is unsettling, and leads to an examination first of the ability of language to divert in III, iv, then to the literary representation of sex in "Sur des vers de Virgile" (III, v). I do not think it a coincidence that *commerce*, *marchés*, *valeur*, and *prix* occur there almost three times as often as we would expect.

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The "Guerrier" of my title is taken from the writing of Georges Duby,¹⁰ and refers to James Supple's contention that Montaigne moved over the course of his writing career into the *noblesse d'épée*, while the "Glossateur" refers to his training for the *noblesse de robe* which André Tournon has identified as crucial to the development of his style from the very beginning.¹¹ Montaigne was caught between the two aristocracies: he had retired from a position in the burgeoning bureaucracy to farm and to write, an act that made concrete his refusal to settle into the position in the *noblesse de robe* for which his father had prepared him. He thus moved from the new aristocracy into the *noblesse d'épée*, a classic career move for *robin* families, but one he accomplished in his own lifetime instead of waiting for his son or grandson.

Did the shift from the new to the old aristocracy have any effect on Montaigne's writing? How could it fail to? The purpose of this study is not,

however, to discover the pre-existing historical reality which the *Essais* can then be taken to reveal. It is rather to suggest some of the historical realities which make themselves felt in the text, and which help account, simultaneously, for the difficulty we experience assigning the *Essais* to a *genre* and the pleasure we take from reading them.

We shall study Montaigne's comparison within the *Essais* of his language to money, because he came over the twenty years he spent writing the *Essais* to see both as subject to change over time. Critics have long recognized Montaigne's acceptance of the impermanence of language, but none have recognized a similar view of money. Prices skyrocketed from the time of the historical Montaigne's birth to his death (1533–1592) and continued to soar into the next century, as the value of the coin of the realm came under severe pressure.¹² The debasement of coinage or money during the historical Montaigne's writing career was paralleled by the appearance of Inca gold and silver in Europe.¹³ Many contemporaries were quick to see a cause and effect relationship, according to which the Spaniards had brought so much bullion back from Potosí that they were responsible for the collapse of European currencies.¹⁴ There was no denying the magnitude of the change, but the reasons for inflation or devaluation (depending on one's perspective) were the focus of heated debate.¹⁵ Most historians are now convinced, however, that other reasons for the debasement of coinage, of equal importance to the rise in the money supply, were population increase to levels unknown for centuries, and the sovereign's unending search for more revenue.¹⁶

The developments in agricultural practice and economic organization that were later to lay the foundations for the industrial revolution had just begun; their only effects by the end of the sixteenth century had been marginal increases in wealth for landlords and landed peasants.¹⁷ While the impact of this change was felt most keenly by the various strata of the peasantry, the ruling elites felt it as well, in their fortunes, in the duties expected of them, and in the very composition of their order.¹⁸ When literary critics are asked about the history of late sixteenth century France, they routinely mention the acute suffering from passing or warring armies.¹⁹ In general, though, Montaigne and his contemporaries saw their own time in the broader terms of a fall in the standard of living, and often ascribed this fall to the inability of the coin of the realm to buy what it used to.²⁰

The traditional feudal view of money was that it was a mere token, the value of which was fixed by the prince independently of the metal content of the coin.²¹ This Platonic view had already been countered by Aristotle, out of his conviction that money's most important function was to serve as

medium of exchange.²² The proto-Saussurean duality of money expressed in the epigraph has been obvious to “economists” at least since Aristotle; recognition of it was essential to the birth of economic analysis in the late Middle Ages.²³ The most important innovations of the sixteenth century were the normalization of negotiable paper by means of “created deposits” around the Mediterranean and, in the North, the recognition of the impact of variations in the total supply of money on its price.²⁴

The desire to fix the value of money, for instance by tying it to a referent that should hold it constant (such as the gold or silver to be found in coins), can now be seen as the desire to deny history.²⁵ Nothing stays the same, particularly social facts like money – or language.²⁶ The classic, feudal, solution was to make the value of money the prerogative of the sovereign, but that only exposed it to more direct manipulation when he saw more to gain from minting money than taxing commerce.²⁷ The value of money depends ultimately on agreement between buyer and seller, and is a function of their opinion of the value of the objects for which they exchange it as well as of the coin itself.²⁸ Money is therefore a medium through which relationships can find expression as well as a code in which elements of the relationship can be fixed for a time, and it has the capacity to move from medium to code and back again, depending on the (changing) needs of those involved in a transaction.²⁹ It is very like language again, except that language is not usually the object of guarantee (or manipulation) by a third party.³⁰ Perhaps, then, it is not entirely coincidental that it was after this spate of devaluation that the French monarchy undertook to guarantee language as well.³¹ Let us now examine the use of monetary metaphors in the *Essais*.

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Montaigne had written against the exchange of language for money in one of the first chapters to be written.³² The “Apologie de Raimond Sebond” is more categorical:

Mais à present (...) que nous recevons les arts par civile autorité et ordonnance, (...) on ne regarde plus ce que les monnoyes poisent et valent, mais chacun à son tour les regoit selon le pris que l’approbation commune et le cours leur donne. On ne plaide pas de l’alloy, mais de l’usage: ainsi se mettent également toutes choses. On reçoit la medecine comme la Geometrie, et les batelages, les echantemens, les liaisons, le commerce des esprits des trespassez, les prognostications, les domifications, et jusques à cette ridicule poursuite de la pierre philosophale, tout se met sans contredict. (II, xii, 559–560 A).

The comparison of money to language is more developed than in "Des prognostications," but it is woven so tightly into the texture of the argument that it would be easy not to notice it. What is at issue in this complaint about a new kind of regulation replacing the old, customary, one is the acceptance of words for things "sans contredit." Again as Tournon has shown, contradiction is essential to the search for truth as Montaigne understood it, since the way toward truth for him is continuously to juxtapose conflicting statements. Truth is difficult to pin down, of course; the closest we can come is by means of a sort of intellectual bargaining, forever renewed – a method more congenial to Montaigne's gifts as a writer and his experience as a *parlementaire* than an attempt to fix the relationship of signifier to signified in a transparent and changeless medium.³³ In his first edition of the *Essais*, written during the eight years before their publication, Montaigne had used the phrase *argent contant* in the sense of "good as gold" three times, twice in the "Apologie de Raimond Sebond" to suggest the temerity of philosophers, and once in defense of Plutarch's historical writing. In the "Apologie," Montaigne used the term to signify philosophical propositions or ideas which he had difficulty accepting, but which the "vulgaire" cited as authority in support of their arguments (II, xii, 511 A & 540 A). In the third case, he uses the phrase to signify an uncritical and unselfconscious view of language which he cannot believe Plutarch held (II, xxxii, 722-723 A). In other words, Montaigne used money in the first edition of the *Essais* to refer to false but widely held opinions, as if he were less prey than most of his contemporaries to nostalgia for the reliable currency remembered from their youth.

In one of the last chapters to be composed before the publication of the first edition, on the other hand, Montaigne wrote "Nostre verité de maintenant, ce n'est pas ce qui est, mais ce qui se persuade à autrui: comme nous appellons monnoye non celle qui est loyalle seulement, mais la fausse aussi qui a mise" (II, xviii, 666 A). Language has been reduced to being understood (accepted) not by virtue of the wishes of the speaker (roughly anticipating the labor theory of value) nor the listener (use value), but simply by its acceptance, or exchange value.³⁴ Particularly in comparison to the other monetary metaphors in the first two books (as first published), it is difficult not to see an element of regret here. This feeling is reinforced by the use of "loyal," which literally meant legal in late Latin (Lewis & Short) and kept that meaning into the seventeenth century in France (Bloch & Wartburg), but which nonetheless carries an unmistakable chivalric charge. Montaigne's qualifications as a member of the king's bureaucracy were impeccable, but he was determined to pass instead as a member of the landed gentry. The

contradiction between the class to which the historical author belonged at the outset of his writing career and the one which he sought to join may help account for some of the singular qualities of his prose, in particular for his uncompromising search for lucidity.³⁵ It may also help account for a tone of regret at the clearest statement yet of the new understanding of both money and language.

There is lively debate among late twentieth-century historians over who suffered the most from the inflation/devaluation of the second half of the sixteenth century. Those paid in constant sums, such as traditional aristocratic landlords who let their lands "à terme," lost money as the sums dropped in value.³⁶ Though they used a variety of strategies to maintain their position and status, they were at a disadvantage relative to those whose income was renegotiated frequently.³⁷ Since the latter often used their money to buy their way into the *noblesse d'épée*, their relative advantage was felt keenly by both parties. Again though, the intention here is not to show that the *Essais* were a defense of the material interests of Montaigne's "class," but rather to show the historically specific meanings which money held for sixteenth-century readers from different orders, as well as how Montaigne's own position between them enabled him to use these different meanings for his literary purposes.³⁸

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Perhaps his primary purpose in the Third Book was to show how language could still give pleasure, bereft as it was of a constant referent. It is tempting to present Montaigne as taking a kind of pleasure at the contingency of discourse so characteristic of Descartes, for instance. On the other hand, it might be less present-minded to see him as trying to preserve some of the openness to different discourses that set the world in which he grew up apart from the one he saw coming into place in the wake of the Council of Trent and Henry of Navarre's struggle (with the historical Montaigne's help) to seize control of his recalcitrant kingdom. The least I can say is that it has not been possible to find other monetary metaphors that express the same kind of regret as the one from "Du démentir" over the pervasive contingency of language and money.

"Sur des vers de Virgile" can best be taken as a simultaneous demonstration and deconstruction of the ability of language to give pleasure by indirection. In it Montaigne says several times in several ways, "le plaisir d'en compter (...) ne doit guere en douceur à celuy mesme de l'effect."³⁹ III, v was more than twice as long as any chapter yet, except for "L'Apologie de

Raimond Sebond;" it accounts for almost 60 pages in the PUF edition, out of a total of 1,100. Montaigne laid out here more forcefully than ever before the perils as well as the rewards in the use of language, and monetary metaphors occur several times.

Most of the words which leap to mind when we think of economics, like *argent, cours, change, échange, marchand (etc.), monnaie, négoce, and trafique*, do not occur an unusual number of times in the chapter, but four do. *Commerce* occurs 8 times out of a total of 59 in the *Essais*, *marché*, 9 out of 46, *valeur*, 9 out of 54, and *prix* (or *pris*, price), 19 times out of 139 (Leake). The frequent use of *commerce, marché* and *valeur* suggest an economic framework for "Sur des vers de Virgile,"⁴⁰ but it is the 19 uses of *prix* which prove it.⁴¹ The critical project of "Sur des vers de Virgile" was economic (Desan) both in the sense that the interchangeability of words and desires is called into question, and that the answer is sought with the help of mathematical representation. Constraints of space limit us to five monetary metaphors, three involving sexual pleasure and two devoted to language.

Montaigne remarks early in the chapter: "Je suis affamé de me faire connoistre; et ne me chaut à combien, pourveu que ce soit veritablement; ou pour dire mieux, je n'ay faim de rien, mais je crains mortellement d'estre pris en échange par ceux à qui il arrive de connoistre mon nom" (III, v 847 B). Here is the old bugaboo from the first chapters: the act of exchange is false in so far as it assumes perfect equivalence between the objects. Is communication ever possible, then?

Communication is so difficult in part because it does not convey thoughts accurately, but it is also difficult because it does: many thoughts are all but incommunicable, as Montaigne recognized at the outset (III, v, 847 B). Some opinions are expressed with such directness that this directness, and the inhibitions which it violates, finally become the subject of the discourse (III, v, 878). "Sur des vers de Virgile" is an extended problematization of the way we perceive and remember even the most intense pleasure, and money stands not only for the ways we create and exchange it, but also for the pleasure itself:

Le pris de la victoire se considere par la difficulté. Voulez-vous sçavoir quelle impression a faict en son coeur vostre servitude et vostre merite? Mesurez le à ses meurs. Telle peut donner plus qui ne donne pas tant. L'obligation du bien-faict se rapporte entierement à la volonté de celui qui donne. Les autres circonstances qui tombent au bien faire, sont muettes, mortes, et casuelles. Ce peu luy couste plus à donner, qu'à sa compaignie son tout. Si en quelque chose la rareté sert d'estimation, ce doit estre en cecy;

ne regardez pas combien peu c'est, mais combien peu l'ont. La valeur de la monnoye se change selon le coin et la merque du lieu (III, v, 862).

One of the most important innovations of the late scholastics (in economic matters) writing at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries was their recognition of the dual nature of price.⁴² This discovery was similar to that of the dual nature of money, and perhaps even more necessary for the birth of economics as a science.⁴³

If Montaigne had favored the labor theory of value, he would have argued for valuing the lady's favor in the light of the service of her suitor. Instead, our author comes down first for use-value: the lady estimates her courtier's worth (merite) for herself. If he remains curious about his worth, he may in turn calculate his exchange value from the currency given her favor all the other times she grants it. This marks a less virilocal (phallogocentric) discourse than has generally been noted in this chapter: the woman gives her estimate of her suitor by whether she makes love with him or not. Only then may he find out his worth by finding out how many equals he has.⁴⁴

The language moves from the courtly, to the legalistic, to the commercial, and finally the monetarist: what is the mintmark in question? The indelicate question with which the metaphor concludes is, where is this money minted? Desan is right to seize on this question ("Le 'lieu' de la femme est inventorié et catalogué avec précision dans 'Sur des vers de Virgile'" [p. 79].) though, even here, I can only agree in part. Though the woman's body is evoked in III, v, it is hardly catalogued with precision: indeed, much of the argument is for less explicit description. What we do find described in this chapter is the phallus (usually in Latin), and it is the object of ridicule and regret.⁴⁵

The next comparison of sex and male occupations also moves from the "guerrier" to a more startling conflation of sex, commerce and the law, and concludes with a more scandalous metaphor:

Regardons aussi que cette grande et violente aspreté d'obligation que nous leur enjoignons ne produise deux effects contraires à nostre fin: asçavoir qu'elle esguise les poursuivans et face les femmes plus faciles à se rendre: car, quand au premier point, montant le pris de la place, nous montons le pris et le desir de la conqueste. Seroit-ce pas Venus mesme qui eut ainsi finement haussé le chevet A sa marchandise par le maqueulage des loix, cognoissant combien c'est un sot desduit qui ne le feroit valoir par fantaisie et par cherté? En fin c'est tout chair de porc que la sauce diversifie, comme disoit l'hoste de Flaminus (III, v, 871 B).

At least since Moses Finley's *The Ancient Economy*, it has been a truism that the word 'economy', and therefore the discipline it signifies, was born of the same sort of consideration of the management of the resources of the society as a whole as was first applied to those of the classical family.⁴⁶ There is thus an historical relationship between economics as we understand it today and sex as the basis and bane of family life. Kurt Heinzelman argues, however, that there is no less a direct relationship between the creation of a literature to represent social life (economics) and the kind of desire with which literary critics are accustomed to deal, including Montaigne in "Sur des vers de Virgile."⁴⁷

Although he promised a full consideration of the dual nature of price, he starts with the effects on it of external constraints. Like Molina, Lessius, and most of their contemporaries, Montaigne places more faith in the customary price arrived at in the market in unfettered negotiations than in any decreed by the sovereign – or, in the context of the economy of desire, by *nous*, himself and the reader, here a *paterfamilias*. Making sex more difficult to obtain merely makes both men and women more eager to obtain it: if the demand for sexual gratification is constant, artificial constraints on supply would only increase its price. Since demand is not constant, in fact, artificial constraints work to increase it as well.

To the extent that one sees supply and demand as terms of an equation, and economic activity as capable of being represented mathematically, of course, reducing supply must inevitably increase demand. The most remarkable thing about these passages is that Montaigne offered us a glimpse of such a representation, even though he did not develop it consistently.

Heinzelman pointed out that the demand side of the equation has always been difficult to calculate with any precision, subject as it is to the vagaries of desire (p. 7). It is this characteristic, in fact, that makes economics an "imaginative event" (p.9): if money can fruitfully be compared to language, so can economics to literature. My contention here is that, by doing the first, Montaigne had taken a crucial step toward accomplishing the second. In this important respect, I am in agreement with Desan: "le discours social ne se conçoit et ne peut s'exprimer qu'à partir du discours économique naissant" (p. 61). Since economic discourse was in the process of being born in the late sixteenth century, it would have been quite surprising if Montaigne had tried to push these metaphors farther than he did: it would have made him an a-historical superman, "ahead of" his time. The point here is more limited: desire is considered in "Sur des vers de Virgile" as a social as well as a literary fact and is sometimes represented mathematically.

The conflation of sex with carnivalesque sausage, made desirable (appetizing) only by these same artificial constraints cited above, serves to evict heterosexual love from the lyrical Eden in which Gascon poets had left it half a millennium earlier.⁴⁸ The ennobling power of courtly love had of course been central to their poetry, so Montaigne's mixture of incompatible desires brings home more forcefully than ever the fundamental problem posed by "Sur des vers de Virgile:" the status, indeed the very identity of its readers.

Familiar with courtly love as a frequently earthy celebration of an unattainable beloved, the reader found through this chapter that this pursuit was no longer ennobling, until the end:

Or c'est un commerce qui a besoin de relation et de correspondance: les autres plaisirs que nous recevons se peuvent recognoistre par recompenses de nature diverse; mais cettuy-cy ne se paye que de mesme espece de monnoye. (...) Or cil na rien de genereux qui peut recevoir plaisir où il n'en donne point: c'est une vile ame, qui veut tout devoir, et qui se plaist de nourrir de la conference avec les personnes auxquelles il est en charge. Il n'y a beauté, ny grace, ny privauté si exquise, qu'un galant homme deult desirer à ce prix. Si elles ne nous peuvent faire du bien que par pitié, j'ayme bien plus cher ne vivre point, que de vivre d'aumosne (III, v, 894 B).

The metaphor is less fully worked out than the two earlier ones, for it depends less on considering the economy of desire than on comparing the workings of one economic system with those of another. The evocations of France's highly structured social order are more resonant than the examination of the reader's psychic economy.

Money had stood for the false opinions and empty pleasures we exchange, but the last pages hold out the possibility of a truly reciprocal exchange. This commerce is ennobling, moreover, in the very special sense that those who do not recognize and fulfill its obligations fall from the second estate to the third (or the first, the mendicant orders).

The interpolation from the 1595 edition which I left out of the passage changes its meaning, however: "En vérité, en ce desduit, le plaisir que je fay chatouille plus doucement mon imagination que celuy que je sens." The exchange is unequal: the physical pleasure the reader *himself* enjoys in sex is less intense than the vicarious one he feels from causing pleasure for his partner. Communication is only possible to the extent that we abandon the hope of equal exchange but, then, it can give greater pleasure than the transports of the flesh. Pleasure must be communicated without alienation in order to achieve its full value.⁴⁹ Even the most intense and personal ex-

perience resists our attempts to hoard it for our own use: like language or money, it has value only if shared – reciprocally, but not equally. Montaigne preferred Aristotle's view of money to Plato's, so it is probably not surprising that he holds the former's view of exchange as well, but it does suggest a lingering traditionalism we should bear in mind.⁵⁰ The fact that he could conceive of an economy of desire, in other words, does not mean that he could always put it in terms easy for us to recognize. This is why Schumpeter's term for contemporary economists like Lessius and Molina, "late scholastics," is so useful: it avoids the present-mindedness of terms like "mercantilist" – or capitalist.

Finally, Montaigne broadens his use of the monetary metaphor in another posthumous interpolation, this one slightly earlier in the chapter. It takes up his initial challenge ("Il faut rebrasser ce sot haillon qui couvre nos meurs" [III, v, 846 B]) to the use of language to hide truly scandalous behavior: "Ce sont ombrages de quoy nous nous plastrons et entrepayons; mais nous n'en payons pas, ainçois en rechargeons nostre debte envers ce grand juge qui trousse nos panneaux et haillons d'autour noz parties honteuses, et ne se feint point à nous veoir par tout, jusques à noz intimes et plus secretes ordures" (III, v, 888 C). Once again, the lower regions (Bakhtine) are under examination, though the image is more emphatically excremental than before. Montaigne had already claimed in defense of his blunt language in this chapter that "[qu'il se] recherche aux entrailles" (847 B), and he had already remarked "[C] et qu'on aye logé peslemesle nos delices et nos ordures ensemble." A detailed analysis of carnivalesque elements in the *Essais* would lead to at least another full length study, but it is worth noting in passing that he acknowledges simultaneously 1) how central lower bodily functions are to him and 2) how unpleasant they are to consider. Montaigne's carnivalesque is shocking, but it is not liberating in the way Rabelais' was; Montaigne uses other techniques, like the denial of identity, to encourage his readers to question themselves.

The monetary metaphor quoted above is a good example: exchange in the blocked, the Buyer refuses to consummate the transaction because of His judgment of the falseness of the currency in which it is being conducted. Language once again stands for the myriad ways we deceive each other, but not the ultimate...Magistrate. The switch to the final judge is anything but frivolous, for the first comparison of sex to money had appealed to the anti-commercial prejudices of his aristocratic readers, but several comparisons from the 1588 edition had attacked one of the most original and lasting creations of their culture, courtly love, and the posthumous one appeals

to a legal and commercial frame of reference to call into question much of what had gone before.

This returns us to the questions of the historically accurate reading, and the contradictions within the reader of "Sur des vers de Virgile," with which we began this study. Readers of the earlier chapters were often aspiring aristocrats just like Montaigne himself but, in the Third Book, the reader could no longer rely on an aristocratic, nor even a male identity. It is all but impossible for readers to hold consistently to their identities while continuing to read the *Essais*, but liberation from context is always hard-won and temporary, immediately resubmerged in the discourse and resubmitted to the questions of the perennial first reader(s).

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Money depreciated catastrophically over Montaigne's lifetime, particularly over the twenty years he spent on the *Essais*. For many *robin* contemporaries, this fall in the worth of their money was the sign of impermanence, the symptom of a generalized failure of their institutions to resist the winds of change. Many "guerriers" had already noted and condemned even more loudly the increasing willingness of their inferiors to take them to court, and both "guerriers" and "glossateurs" lamented the divorce of language from stable referents, as Montaigne himself did in several early chapters.

Had he wished to do so, however, Montaigne was uniquely trained to write in a constant language. Instead, he labored throughout the *Essais* to call into question the relationship between words, things, and desires. He strove above all to make language material, perceptible, for instance by comparing it to money. Five such comparisons in "Sur des vers de Virgile," three between sexual pleasure and language, preceded and followed by one of language to money, construct a fictional author less fixated on his own gratification than he had claimed.

What, then, can be gained from this mixture of disciplinary *genres* regarding the *Essais*? Suggestions for both historians and critics of the extent to which Montaigne took his metaphors from daily life as well as his incessant reading and, above all, how he used them to undermine monovalent readings of the *Essais*. Contemporaries lamented the unreliability of both money and language, but Montaigne compared them with apparent equanimity, with particular success in the important chapter on the power of language to divert.

It is of course possible that Montaigne's experience of his own uncertain status as the scion of a family in the process of moving from a position in the

king's bureaucracy to one in the traditional aristocracy of landed wealth and military power made it easy for him to see emptiness in the pretensions of each order to true nobility. It is also possible, however, that his experience of the difficulties inherent in the project of the *Essais*, the expression of changes over time in the quality of his daily life, made him suspicious of any claim to permanence.

Similarly, his experience of the ceaseless change suffered and enjoyed by language may have suggested to him the comparison with money, or the experience of the runaway inflation of the second half of the sixteenth century may have reminded him of the fate of language. We cannot, and must not, choose. Historians and critics must engage in more connected dialogue in order to make more than "documentary" sense of the texts on which they both depend.⁵¹ Only by doing so can either one fully understand the use to which such selfconscious writers as Montaigne tried to put the past in which they lived, the role they sought for language – in other words, their art.

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Notes

1. Marx, *Capital*, Vol I, I, iii, 1 (Emphasis in the original). I read earlier versions of this study at the University of Warwick (U.K.) in November, 1984 and at the Central Renaissance Conference in St. Louis in March, 1987, and worked on it at an NEH summer institute on "Montaigne and his Time" at Duke University in 1986. My thanks to Marcel Tetel and the other participants, as well as to the readers for *Renaissance & Reformation*, Susan Porter Benson, Christopher Betts, Grahame Castor, Kristen Neuschel, Camilla Nilles, Paula Presley, Nancy Lyman Roelker, Charlie Steen, Christopher Thompson, and my students in seminars on Montaigne for their help, though I am alone responsible for any errors of fact or interpretation that remain.
2. *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 1.
3. The word *Essais* captures the poetic density Montaigne sought for his prose. It came from the late Latin word for weighing coins, but Montaigne never used the noun in that sense. By the sixteenth century, it had come to mean testing a nobleman's food before he ate it, to ensure against poison, and Montaigne used it that way in the *Ephémérides* (No 27, for Henry de Navarre's first visit, on 19 December, 1584). In the *Essais*, however, it meant both a personal, moral essay and the prose he used to record it, just as compteur meant both to count and recount, or narrate. See p. 9 below.
4. In chapters dedicated to them: Diane de Foix (I, xxvi, 145 A); Diane de Grammont (I, xxix, 196 A); Louise d'Estissac (II, viii, 385 A); and Marguerite de Duras (II, xxxvii, 783 A). Cf. Cathleen M. Bauschatz' classic "Montaigne's Conception of Reading in the Context of Renaissance Poetics and Modern Criticism" in *The Reader in the Text*, ed. Suleiman & Crosman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 264–291. All

references to the *Essais* will be to *Les Essais de Montaigne*, ed. Pierre Villey et Verdun-L. Saulnier (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965 {or 1978, a reissue with the same pagination}). The system of notation will be the same one used by Leake, in which A refers to the editions of 1580 and 1582 comprising books one and two, B refers to the 1588 edition, and C refers (at least in principle) to Montaigne's manuscript additions to the 1588 edition.

5. I, xxvi was on the education of the male aristocrat ("Or, Madame, si j'avoy quelque suffisance en ce subject, je ne pourroi la mieux employer que d'en faire un present à ce petit homme qui vous menasse de faire tantost une belle sortie de chez vous (vous estes trop genereuse pour commencer autrement que par un masle) [I, xxvi, 148 A].") I, xxix was the centerpiece of the first book, the twenty-nine sonnets of Etienne de la Boétie, the only person with whom Montaigne could communicate and, of necessity for true communication, a man. II, viii was "De l'affection des pères aux enfans," and II, xxxvii, the last chapter of the original *Essais*, was "De la ressemblance des enfans aux peres."
6. See p. 12 below and I, xxxix, 241 A: "En cette-cy [the famous 'arriereboutique'] faut-il prendre nostre ordinaire entretien de nous à nous mesmes, et si privé que nulle accointance ou communication estrangiere y trouve place; discourir et rire comme sans femme, sans enfans et sans biens, sans train et sans valetz, afin que, quand l'occasion adviendra de leur perte, il ne nous soit pas nouveau de nous en passer."
7. See my "'Comme nous sommes': The *Essais*' Everyman," in the *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* LI (1989), 579–588.
8. *The Psychology of Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 145, cited by Kurt Heinzelman in his excellent *The Economics of the Imagination* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), p. 95.
9. See Kinser, *Rabelais' Carnival: Text, Context, Metatext* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), and Bakhtine's *Le marxisme et la philosophie du langage* (Paris: Editions de minuit, 1977) as well as the more famous *Rabelais*.
10. *Guerriers et paysans* and, more particularly, *Les trois ordres ou l'imaginaire du féodalisme* (Paris: Gallimard [Bibliothèque des histoires], 1979) because the latter presents the tripartite model (clergy/warriors/peasants [workers] as persisting to the end of the *ancien régime*.
11. James Supple, *Arms versus Letters: The Military and Literary Ideals in the 'Essais' of Montaigne* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984); and André Tournon, *Montaigne: La glose et l'essai* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1983). Their views are not necessarily contradictory, since Tournon wrote about the cultural base from which Montaigne undertook his extraordinary project, while Supple wrote about the social position into which he sought to move.
12. The Livre tournois lost a third of its silver between 1513 and 1577 (Micheline Baulant, "Pris et salaires à Paris au XVIe siècle" in *Annales E. S. C.* 31 [1976], 954–995, esp. p. 959. See also Daniel Hickey, *The Coming of French Absolutism: The Struggle for Tax Reform in the Province of Dauphiné, 1540–1640* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986).

13. Jean-Christophe Agnew recently pointed out that the "debasement" of money was itself a metaphor coined by English merchants and puritans alike to mark the transition from feudal regulation of exchange to an impersonal and open market across Europe (*Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750* [Cambridge {UK}: Cambridge University Press, 1986], pp. 48-49). While there is no question that French monarchs did actually reduce the gold and silver in coins in the late sixteenth century, it also seems very likely indeed that part of the popularity of the complaints on this score can be ascribed to the metaphor's ability to express writers' disapproval of the replacement of other kinds of obligation by monetary ones. In other words, the debasement of money was also the debasement by it.
14. See Jean Bodin, *Response au paradoxe de Monsieur de Malestroit, touchant l'encherissement de toutes choses, & le moyen d'y remédier* in *Ecrits notables sur la monnaie au XVI^e siècle: De Copernic à Davanzati*, éd. Jean-Yves le Branchu (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1934), I, 90-94, esp. the variant from the 1578 edition on p. 90.
15. and still are. Philippe Desan says, in his "Quand le discours social passe par le discours économique: Les *Essais* de Montaigne" in *Sociocriticism* IV (1988), 59-86: "L'afflux des métaux précieux provenant d'Amérique est incontestablement la cause principale de l'inflation galopante (p. 73)." (My thanks to professor Greenblatt for this reference.) As Baulant points out, the monetary explanation for the rise in prices was the first and, by virtue of its prominence, has been open to the most criticism.
16. See Montaigne's own complaint on the latter score, in a letter he wrote with the other "jurats" of Bordeaux to Henry III in 1583 (Montaigne, *Oeuvres Complètes*, éd. Thibaudet & Rat [Paris: Gallimard {Bibliothèque de la Pléiade}, 1962], p. 1349), and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Le Carnaval de Romans: De la Chandeleur au mercredi des cendres: 1579-1580* (Paris: Gallimard [Bibliothèque des histoires], 1979).
17. See Agnew; Baulant, pp. 954-995; Guy Bois, *Crise du féodalisme: Economie rurale et démographie en Normandie orientale du début du 14^e siècle au milieu du 16^e siècle* (Paris: Editions de l'école des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1981); and the debate between Bois and Ladurie in the *Annales*, E. S. C. XXXIV (1979) and *Past & Present* 78 (1978).
18. On the other hand, many peasants were still so far outside the money economy that fluctuations in the price of money had little effect on their daily lives. In France and in the Netherlands, in spite of intense investment in agriculture, money was used largely to save against taxes or capital purchases - in short, it was hoarded (See *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987], pp. 188-189) and Jan de Vries, *The Dutch Rural Economy in the Golden Age: 1500-1700* [New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1974], p. 222. Hoarding, by taking gold and silver out of circulation, also drove up their price.
19. See James B. Wood, "The Impact of the Wars of Religion: A View of France in 1581," in *The Sixteenth Century Journal* XV (1984), 131-168.
20. See Danielle Trudeau, "Langue et monnaie au 16^e siècle," *Stanford French Review* 7 (1983), 48-49; & Alain Guéry, "Les finances de la monarchie française sous l'Ancien Régime," *Annales E.S.C.* 33 (1978), 216-239.

21. Barry Gordon, *Economic Analysis Before Adam Smith: Hesiod to Lessius* (NY: Barnes & Noble, 1975), p. 165. Duby pointed out that the feudal system was a sort of anti-economy, opposed to any market exchange.
22. Joseph A. Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 55–63.
23. Schumpeter, and Gordon, pp. 213, 242, and 259. See also Marc Schell, *Money, Language and Thought: Literary and Philosophical Economies from the Medieval to the Modern Era* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1982), 18–19.
24. See Schumpeter, p. 78; Gordon, pp. 213–215; Peter Spufford, *Money and its use in medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 374; and Georges Duby & Robert Mandrou, *Histoire de la civilisation française* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1968), vol. I, p. 295.
25. Spufford finds, for instance, that the increase in silver for late fifteenth-century mints was financed by an increase in gold which lead to more of an increase in trade *IN* money *BY* it (p. 365). Immanuel Wallerstein suggests that, a century later, the principal effect of an even greater increase in the gold supply was to lower interest rates, even for the “paper money” (based on certificates of deposit) which was *not* made of gold (*The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* [NY, San Francisco, & London: Academic Press, 1974], 76–77).
26. This brings up, again, the problem of Montaigne’s reader: “J’escris mon livre à peu d’hommes et à peu d’années. Si ç’eust été une matiere de durée, il l’eust fallu commettre à un langage plus ferme” (III, ix, 982 B). Few were as well equipped as Montaigne to do so; so we may – indeed we must – take it that he chose the impermanence of late sixteenth-century French.
27. See Greenblatt, p. 42; and Bodin, pp. 143–144 (fol. m. 4V^o – n 1 R^o of the 1568 edition).
28. As both Cotgrave and Malestroit recognized (Cotgrave, “Toute chose se vend au pris de l’oeil: *All things are sold at the price the eye sets on them.*” and Malestroit, *Ecrits notables* p. 65 [*Les Paradoxes du Seigneur de Malestroit, Conseiller du Roi et Maistre Ordinaire de Ses Comptes, sur le fait des monnoyes présentez a sa maiesté, au mois de mars, MDLXVI* {Paris: Voscosan, 1566} fol C iiii R^o]). Note also the famous “La parole est moitié à celui qui parle, moitié à celui qui l’escoute” (III, xiii, 1088 B).
29. Including the sovereign who guarantees the coin. See Genevieve Vaughan, “Communication and exchange” in *Semiotica* 29 1/2 (1980), 113–143, esp. p. 125.
30. See Vaughan, “Communication and Exchange”, p. 140 “The semiotic utility of an investigation of this type depends upon the differences between language and exchange as much as upon their similarities; whether or not the non-arbitrariness of money depends upon its social and physicial character as a ‘real abstraction’ mediating commodities, is not a semiotically irrelevant question.”

31. See Timothy Reiss, "Montaigne and the Subject of Polity" in *Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts*, ed. Patricia Parker & David Quint (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 115–149, esp. p. 141.
32. "Des prognostications" (I, xi, 42A). Desan has found the *Essais* permeated with mercantile values, and sees Montaigne's discourse between aristocratic and bourgeois language. Again, I see it between two castes within the aristocracy. See p. 3 above & 7–9 below.
33. See Richard Waswo, *Language & Meaning in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 173–181; and Agnew, who shows that the "transparency of exchange" declined precisely as its liquidity increased, as its use became more widespread (pp. 43–49).
34. See also "Du démentir" (II, xviii, 667). Bodin would appear to have come to a similar realization, in spite of his insistence that money should be a law (see note 14 above and *Ecrits notables* p. 113 (fol g, 2 V^o of the 1568 edition). I cite Bodin less because I think his influence on Montaigne was decisive than as an articulate spokesman for *la mentalité robine*.
35. See my "The Historicity of the *Essais*: Montaigne's 'registre de durée,' and his 'contrerolle,'" in *Le Parcours des Essais: Montaigne 1588–1988* (Paris: Aux Amateurs de Livres, 1989), 211–224, esp. pp. 220–223.
36. The classic view of the economic collapse of the *noblesse d'épée* was proposed by Lucien Romier, *Le royaume de Catherine de Médicis: La France à la veille des guerres de religion* (Paris: Perrin, 1922) and revived by Davis Bitton, *The French Nobility in Crisis, 1560–1640* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969). See Mack Holt, "Attitudes of the French Nobility at the Estates-General of 1576" in *Sixteenth Century Journal* XVIII (1987), 489–504, esp. p. 500.
37. Those paid in kind, of course, did better than those paid in cash, as did those who rented to sharecroppers. See James Wood, *The Nobility of the Election of Bayeux: Continuity through Change, 1463–1666* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); Jonathan Dewald, *The Formation of a Provincial Nobility: The Magistrates of the Parlement of Rouen, 1499–1610* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); and, for a comprehensive review of the question, J.H.M. Salmon, "Storm over the Noblesse" in *Journal of Modern History* 53 (1981), 242–257.
38. Cf. Gérard Defaux, "Readings of Montaigne" in *Yale French Studies* 64 (1983), 73–92: "And whatever has been said, his text is in no way the locus of any ideological coherence; it is, on the contrary, the locus of liquidation of all ideologies (p. 92)." I am arguing rather that Montaigne sought to make ideology explicit, by making language perceptible.
39. III, v, 863 B. *Compter* meant raconter, of course, which is why Leake separated it from *compter* as to count, but the two meanings were associated for readers of the *Essais*.
40. Particularly since Montaigne uses *valeur* in both senses in the same sentence late in the chapter: "Ce qu'il trouve si juste en recommandation de la valeur militaire, ne le peut il pas estre aussi en recommandation de quelque autre valeur" (III, v, 896–7C).

41. Cotgrave also presents the dual nature of price in a historical context, showing an awareness less acute than Montaigne's of how the word came by its economic meaning: "*The price, rate; value; account, respect, estimation; worth of things; also, the prize, reward, or honneur got by, kept for, or due unto, the best deserver in a case, etc.,*"
42. For instance by differentiating between the legitimate or legal price fixed by the sovereign and the popular or natural price, arrived at by market forces in the absence of coercion. The latter must be allowed to vary, and can only be expressed as a range of values (Gordon on Leonard Lessius [1554–1623] p. 258).
43. See Schumpeter, pp. 98–99 and Louis Dumon, *From Mandeville to Marx: The Genesis and Triumph of Economic Ideology* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1977), pp. 200–201.
44. Though any transaction can be reversed for analysis: "Hence the result brought about by the circulation of commodities, namely, the replacing of one commodity by another, takes the appearance of having been affected not by means of the change of form of the commodities, but rather by the money acting as a medium of circulation, by an action that circulates commodities, to all appearances motionless in themselves, and transfers them from hands in which they are non-use-values, to hands in which they are use-values; and that in a direction constantly opposed to the direction of money" (Marx *Capital* Vol. I, I, iii, 2,b).
45. III, v, 878: "[B] Nous avons à l'avanture raison de nous blâmer de faire une si sottise production que l'homme; d'appeler l'action honteuse, et honteuses les parties qui y servent, [C] (asteure sont les miennes proprement honteuses et peneuses)." See also 886–7.
46. Understood as a household, including its slaves, by Xenophon in fourth century B.C. Athens (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973).
47. "If to the economist, the 'laws of nature' are *real*, then the way which affects human will must be *unreal* in the special sense that they express themselves by means of the imagination and manifest themselves in those fictive arrangements we call culture and society, arrangements which both are and are not subject to economic logic. If we began with wealth posited as 'the universal object of desire,' then we have progressed to the point where 'desire' itself must become the object of economic analysis (p. 85); the 'universal object of desire' in quotes came from John Stuart Mill's *Political Economy*). See also Desan, and Schumpeter, p. 98.
48. See also III, v, 881 B: "La cherté donne goust a la viande;" & 883 B "Quoy, si elle mange vostre pain à la sauce d'une plus agreable imagination?"
49. Cf. Greenblatt, p. 160, and Vaughan.
50. Gordon, p. 56–57; and page 5 above.
51. See LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1983), 340.