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Jennifer Head

The 'gentlemanly' ideal as it appears in the *Essais* of Michel de Montaigne.

Abstract.

This thesis looks at an ideal of social intercourse, which obtained in France in the second half of the sixteenth century and which can be traced in Montaigne's *Essais*.

We begin by defining a number of terms employed in the thesis concerning contemporary social groups and moral concepts. There follows an investigation of the composition of the society in which Montaigne and his immediate forbears lived. We note the relative flexibility of the boundaries between noble and non-noble at the beginning of the century and the various means by which the latter sought to accede to positions of greater social prestige and financial privilege.

The importance of education as an element of social training is discussed with reference to the case of Montaigne and the influence of the Humanists on his experiences is traced through his father's handling of the matter. The insistence upon the moral benefits of a liberal education which emerges from this study, leads us to investigate the ideal of manners formulated in Baldassare Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier,* as this work is one of the most well-known conduct manuals of the period.

We then analyse the points of comparison between Castiglione and Montaigne, first taking the essay 'De la Praesumption' as a specific instance of Montaigne's awareness of the same code of manners as Castiglione. The final part of the thesis attempts to trace Montaigne's application of this code to practical situations and looks at areas of his behaviour such as dress, gesture and language for evidence of these rules of conduct. We note how the rules are interpreted by Montaigne, both in his public role as soldier, mayor of Bordeaux and lord of the family estate and in the private domain of his literary creation.

The 'gentlemanly' ideal as it appears in the Essais of Michel de Montaigne.

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Introduction.

This thesis will be concerned with a certain ideal of manners and social intercourse which emerges in the *Essais* of Michel de Montaigne. This ideal we have dubbed 'gentlemanly' for reasons which will be explained in the lexical analysis of chapter one.

That Montaigne was greatly preoccupied with manners and social intercourse in the writing of his essays is attributable to some extent to the age in which he lived. The last four decades of the sixteenth century in France were characterised by upheaval and change arising from a number of factors. Social, political and religious developments are all mirrored to a greater or lesser degree in the *Essais* of Montaigne and the notion of a predetermined pattern for behaviour appears in 'Du repentir' as a welcome, indeed essential antidote to this turmoil:

> (b) Nous autres principalement, qui vivons une vie privée qui n'est en montre qu'à nous, devons avoir estably un patron au dedans, auquel toucher nos actions, et, selon iceluy, nous caresser tantost, tantost nous chastier.[1] (III, 2 p 785.)

This passage insists not only on the necessity for a pattern which will define and guide the individual's behaviour, but also on its highly personal nature. The standard has to come from within and will not be explicit or evident to the outside world. The moral core which enables the individual to determine his position in relation to society, is described later in the same essay as 'la forme maistresse' and is directed neither by the influence of education, nor by the power of emotion but rather by the constants of his innate character:

> (b) il n'est personne, s'il s'escoute, qui ne descouvre en soy une forme sienne, une forme maistresse, qui luicte contre l'institution, et contre la tempeste des passions qui luy sont contraires. (III, 2 p 789.)

This thesis will attempt to trace the evidence of Montaigne's moral pattern, in the sense of the way he lives and its correspondence to an ethical code. We shall see that the sense of individuality he values so highly is in fact based on and has grown out of a sense of

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[1] All quotations will be taken from Montaigne, *Oeuvres Complètes*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, (Paris, 1962) and page references will be given immediately after the quotations. The three books of essays will be indicated by Roman capitals and the essays themselves by Arabic numerals. Following the precedent set by M. Villey, the letters (a), (b) and (c) will be used to designate the three editions of the *Essais* in 1580, 1588 and 1595 respectively.

community with his peers and a code of social behaviour which has its origin partly in Classical literature and partly in the Italian Renaissance.

* * *

The importance of manners in expressing the individual's social status in sixteenth-century Europe is described by Elias in *The History of Manners* :

> ...the problem of behaviour in society had obviously taken on such importance in this period that even people of extraordinary talent and renown did not disdain to concern themselves with it.[2]

Even Erasmus who held manners to be 'the grossest part of philosophy',wrote a work on civility for the instruction of the young, *De civilitate morum puerilium,* which became immensely popular, being first published in 1526 and running to 130 editions. Elias suggests that manners in fact form a bridge between public and personal perceptions of society and that the social function of the individual was the subject of considerable interest in the sixteenth century. Paraphrasing Erasmus he writes:

> In order to be really 'courteous' by the standards of 'civilité', one is to some extent obliged to observe, to look about oneself and pay attention to people and their motives.[3]

He argues that Erasmus was the first to combine a mediaeval tradition of unquestioned behavioural precepts with the study of Classical authors and the observation of contemporary habits, thus opening the way to a more individualistic code of manners. For example Erasmus follows the Platonic tradition of a correspondence between the outward appearance and the inner character of the individual; and he writes not exclusively for a social elite but in the belief that everyone can acquire good manners.[4] Moreover the popularity of his work on civility is a clear indication of the interest in social conduct at the time.

Behavioural precepts extend to physical deportment, which is also seen as an expression of the social status of the individual. Anna Bryson demonstrates this in her

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2 N. Elias, *The History of Manners,* 2 vols (New York, Urizen, 1978) Vol I p 73.

3 Elias, *The History of Manners,* p 77-8.

4 See also J. Revel, 'The Uses of Civility' in *A History of Private Life: Passions of the Renaissance,* edited by R. Chartier (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, 1989) Vol III pp 170-1.

essay on the gesture, demeanour and image of the gentleman in sixteenth and seventeenth century England. Instead of training a child specifically for certain occasions within the confines of the royal court, as late mediaeval 'books of courtesy' had done, sixteenth-century works on good manners also began to prescribe in great detail the relation of conduct to parts of the body, for guidance in all areas of daily life. Bryson traces a parallel trend in England to the popularity in France of books on good manners and describes the emergence of the concept of 'civility', as opposed to 'courtesy', to indicate the broadening scope of the context for social behaviour:

> (Such books) present an idealised social persona to be visualised and imitated, rather than specific rules for particular occasions.[5]

This holistic approach would allow the well-trained individual greater flexibility in a social context and it reflected the need for new, practical distinctions in the dominant social groups, when the normal institutions of authority were being undermined. Bryson goes on to suggest that as well as the expression of status, writings on conduct were also concerned with the representation of the individual's personality:

> ...the body was a text from which good and bad character could be read.[6]

Thus, Montaigne finds himself, in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, writing in the midst of a tradition of works on good manners. In view of the increasing attention paid to appearance, demeanour and gesture as a conscious act of social role-play and as an embodiment of inner characteristics, we are bound to consider Montaigne's observations in the *Essais* as one version and interpretation of the contemporary rules for social intercourse.

* * *

The allegedly personal nature of Montaigne's enterprise is highlighted from the outset in the Preface, which was appended to the first edition in 1580 and retained with only an alteration to the date for all editions published in his lifetime. Here he states that

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5 A. Bryson, 'The Rhetoric of Status: Gesture, Demeanour and the Image of the Gentleman in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England', in *Renaissance Bodies: The Human Figure in English Culture c. 1540-1660.* edited by L. Gent and N. Llewellyn (London, Reaktion Books, 1990) p 136-153 (p 142).

6 Bryson, 'The Rhetoric of Status' p 145.

he is not writing for a wide audience and refutes any idea that he might offer some sort of instruction to his readers. Instead we are drawn into the *Essais* on the understanding that the subject matter is 'si frivole et si vain' that it can only be of interest to Montaigne's small circle of acquaintance. The immediate message is that it will fill the 'loisir' of the casual reader only with superficial, albeit agreeable entertainment. Montaigne thus appears to suggest an individual and idiosyncratic approach to the questions discussed in his *Essais,* rather than a generalised and didactic one. However his awareness of the inevitably two-way process of human communication is underlined in his mention in the Preface of 'la reverence publique' and the idea that his writing should not shock his readers. Similarly, in our first quotation it is interesting to note that Montaigne includes by his use of the plural pronoun 'nous' a group of people who obviously share the same outlook on life and for whom the same pattern of behaviour would be relevant. If we examine the Preface in some detail it will become clear that he is writing for more than a small readership of family and friends and that there is a secondary level of meaning in this introductory passage.

Although he asserts in the opening sentence that the act of writing is made in good faith, there follow a number of polite phrases which Dorothy Coleman suggests owe more to the Horatian tradition of *recusatio* than to a straightforward declaration of intent.[7] In particular the protestation that he is unable to write anything of use to his reader or to his own glory is a typical example of the social convention of self-depreciation.[8] Coleman argues that this convention was adopted widely in the Renaissance by writers who were familiar with the same approach in Classical literature. It is frequently evident elsewhere in the *Essais*, coupled with the need nevertheless to justify his work. For example in 'Du dementir' Montaigne repeats the claim that he is writing only for a readership of intimates, before asserting the true value of writing in helping him define and thus discover himself:

> (c) Me peignant pour autruy, je me suis peint en moy de couleurs plus nettes que n'estoyent les miennes premieres. Je n'ay pas plus faict mon livre que mon livre m'a faict, livre consubstantiel à son autheur,... (II, 18 p 648.)

Again in 'Sur des vers de Virgile' he elaborates on the limitation of his subject and the rustic simplicity of his surroundings:

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7 D.G.Coleman, *The Gallo-Roman Muse* (Cambridge University Press, 1979) p 116.

8 Coleman, *The Gallo-Roman Muse*, p 123.

> (b) Pour ce mien dessein, il me vient aussi à propos d'escrire chez moy, en pays sauvage, où personne ne m'ayde ni me releve, où je ne hante communéement homme qui entende le latin de son patenostre, et de françois un peu moins. Je l'eusse faict meilleur ailleurs, mais l'ouvrage eust esté moins mien; et sa fin principale et perfection, c'est d'estre exactement mien. (III, 5 p 853.)

There is a neat paradox here between the wild isolation of the author's setting and the careful honing of the writing which results. We shall see that the tension between appearance and reality was a major preoccupation for writers on manners in the sixteenth century and shall focus on Baldassare Castiglione as one of the most well- known of these, whose approach Montaigne appears to emulate.

* * *

That Montaigne is being disingenuous about his literary skill can be demonstrated by a glance at the 'exemplaire de Bordeaux', the copy of his essays which he annotated by hand until his death in 1592. The extensive additions, crossings-out and marginalia testify to a man at pains to commit his thoughts to paper accurately; and the success of his enterprise is attested by the publication of the 1588 edition in Paris rather than Bordeaux and in a larger format.[9] Coleman points out that the success of his first editions may have caused him to revise his opinion on the size of his readership in a passage from the 1595 edition.[10] Yet again in the Preface he expresses the desire to be seen in as simple and straightforward a manner as possible and claims that his writing is devoid of artifice:

> (a) Je veus qu'on m'y voie en ma façon simple, naturelle et ordinaire, sans contantion et artifice: car c'est moy que je peins.

Even on the primary level of meaning there is a tension in this sentence between the author's concept of natural behaviour and his awareness of being watched. As soon as an onlooker is accepted, the protagonist must be conscious that his behaviour is being evaluated and therefore he should be the first to evaluate his performance before presenting it to others. The same consciousness of an audience and the desire to perform in a certain way are evident in 'De l'art de conferer'.In particular Montaigne uses the metaphor of the sport of hunting to emphasise the importance of manner. The huntsman

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9 R. A. Sayce, *The Essays of Montaigne: A Critical Exploration* (London,1972) p 11-13.

10 Coleman, *The Gallo-Roman Muse*, p 131.

may or may not catch his quarry, but his ventures should always be properly and even elegantly conducted:

> (b) Ce n'est pas à qui mettra dedans, mais à qui faira les plus belles courses. (III, 8 p 906.)

This passage expresses Montaigne's scepticism at man's ability to uncover the truth in any field of knowledge and suggests that whether one utters truth or falsehood, one should always remember the effect of one's presentation, for this is all one can really control:

> (b) Autant peut faire le sot celuy qui dict vray, que celuy qui dict faux: car nous sommes sur la maniere, non sur la matiere du dire. (III, 8 p 906.)

In other words it matters not so much what one says, as how one says it. The preoccupation with manner and the consequent opposition between nature and artifice is another theme which we shall trace from the work of Castiglione to that of Montaigne.

* * *

The very mention of a self-portrait in the Preface implies a process of self-assessment in relation to the rest of society, which in turn implies a degree of interaction with society. The individual cannot judge his character or behaviour in isolation and indeed Montaigne seems to revel in his 'condition singeresse et imitatrice'. In 'Sur des vers de Virgile' he describes how this is evident in his way of writing both verse and prose, in his way of speaking a different kind of French in Paris from that which he speaks at home in the country and in his way of involuntarily imitating those around him:

> (b) Qui que je regarde avec attention m'imprime facilement quelque chose du sien. Ce que je considere, je l'usurpe: une sotte contenance, une desplaisante grimace, une forme de parler ridicule. (III, 5 p 853.)

Although he insists that this behaviour is not consciously adopted, either for pleasure or through admiration, he admits that his fellow-men will inevitably influence and colour his expression both in speaking and in writing:

> (b) Et ce que j'auray pris à dire en battellant et en me moquant, je le diray lendemain serieusement. (III, 5 p 854.)

Having declared his respect for social constraints in the words 'la reverence

publique', Montaigne proceeds in the Preface to evoke a yearning for the liberty of man in his primitive state, where he could write with abandon, revealing himself 'tout entier, et tout nud'. This desire to strip himself of all social trappings points to the essentially moral focus of his writing and is echoed in 'De l'inequalité qui est entre nous', where again he tries to separate the material from the personal:

> (a) Pourquoy de mesmes n'estimons nous un homme par ce qui est sien? Il a un grand train, un beau palais, tant de credit, tant de rente: tout cela est autour de luy, non en luy. (I, 42 p 251.)

A man's character may be judged more accurately on the basis of his personal qualities than of his social position, which only serves to cloak the truth and even mislead the observer. If the reader concurs in this desire to focus on the moral qualities of the author, he must nevertheless base his opinion on some kind of evidence. The concluding sentence of the Preface throws him back on the printed word and if financial and material circumstances are to be set aside, he must look for physical and psychological characteristics to discern the true nature of his subject. Montaigne offers a clue to the best method of approaching such a task in 'Du dementir', when he speaks of the things he would like to have known about his ancestors:

> (a) Quel contentement me seroit ce d'ouir ainsi quelqu'un qui me recitast les meurs, le visage, la contenance, les parolles communes et les fortunes de mes ancestres! (II, 18 p 647.)

Here are the vehicles for the expression of character: habits, physical appearance, bearing, everyday conversation and the turn of events in their lives. Both material and moral aspects of a personality are included, but the interest is in what they tell him about the inner man. The aim is to interpret the signs in daily life that will indicate the individual's essential character. Montaigne goes on to suggest that much can be learnt simply by looking at the portraits or clothing of his ancestors, an idea which reflects the Platonic theory of a correspondence between internal qualities and external appearance. We shall see that this theory was widely adopted by writers of conduct manuals in the sixteenth century.[11]

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[11] J.R.Woodhouse, *Baldesar Castiglione: A Reassessment of 'The Courtier'*(Edinburgh, 1978) p 169-175.

*   *   *

Montaigne ends his Preface on a note of lighthearted dismissiveness, which is in direct contrast with the solemn sincerity of his opening phrase. At first sight he has set the emphasis of his work clearly in the moral field, but already there are indications of the social influences on his writing that he seeks to minimise. The same contradictions are evident throughout the essays themselves and we propose to investigate the extent to which Montaigne's social position and experience contributes towards them. This will help us to discern the various layers of meaning in his work and the degree to which he yielded to the conventions of his day and yet maintained his independence and originality.

It will be necessary first of all to define the terms indicating social status and moral qualities that are used in this thesis; our first chapter will deal with these definitions. We shall then investigate the historical context to the *Essais* in order to understand more fully the structure of the society in which Montaigne lived. Our third chapter will deal with the ideals of conduct which were prevalent in this society and Montaigne's own assessment of his case according to these criteria in 'De la praesumption'. Finally we shall look at practical examples of Montaigne's behaviour as they emerge from passages scattered throughout the *Essais* and examine the extent to which they correspond both to the general and to the author's avowed ideal.

Chapter One

Definitions.

In a study devoted to the influence of social factors upon the work of Montaigne, we must first investigate how the terms connected with the nobility, the most elevated and therefore most desirable social group, were understood in French and in English both in Montaigne's age and later. Thus the starting point for our lexical discussion is a consideration of the terms 'noble' and 'gentilhomme', which will explain why we have chosen the term 'gentlemanly' for our title.[1]

* * *

As a modern French definition of 'noble' Robert gives first of all a general sense which includes the areas of moral quality, physical aspect and figurative application, before giving as a second sense the social category and its members:

> Qui est élevé au-dessus des roturiers par sa naissance, par ses charges, ou par la faveur du prince et appartient, de ce fait, à une classe sociale privilégiée dans l'Etat.

'Gentilhomme' on the other hand has a much more restricted entry, indicating primarily a social application, and besides this only one moral sense which is referred to the English term 'gentleman':

> Homme noble de race, de naissance.

Where 'gentilhomme' is attributable only to nobles by virtue of heredity, the term 'noble'

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[1] In the ensuing discussion of lexical sources the following abbreviations will be used:

> Robert - Paul Robert, *Dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la langue française* (Paris 1953-64).
> O.E.D. - *Oxford English Dictionary,* 2nd. edition (Oxford 1989).
> Cotgrave - Randle Cotgrave, *A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues,* reproduced from the first edition (Columbia, 1968).
> La Porte - Maurice De La Porte, *Les Epithetes* (Paris, 1571).
> Miège - Guy Miège, *The Great French Dictionary* (London, 1688).
> Elyot - Thomas Elyot, *Dictionary,* Scolar Press edition (Menston, England, 1970).
> Florio - John Florio, *A Worlde of Wordes* (London, 1598).
> Littré - E. Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (Paris, 1873).
> *Concordance* - R.E.Leake, *Concordance des Essais de Montaigne* (Genève, 1981).
> Lewis and Short - C. Lewis and C. Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford, 1958).

takes in a wider group of people, including those who acquire noble status during their lifetime.

In contrast, the English term 'gentleman' is defined by the O.E.D. in the first instance as follows:

> a man of gentle birth or having the same heraldic status: properly, one who is entitled to bear arms, though not ranking among the nobility.

'Nobility' is defined on the other hand as:

> The quality, state or condition of being noble in respect of rank or birth,

thereby alluding to the aspect of heredity as its primary qualification and echoing the term 'noble de race' in French. Thus the terms 'noble' and 'gentleman' now have the reverse distinction of social status in English to the distinction between 'gentilhomme' and 'noble' in French. The difference between the two English terms is most simply identified by a comparison of their political status; that is to say, in England 'gentlemen' are represented in the House of Commons if they have no other title to add to their name. Only the titled aristocracy can claim a seat in the House of Lords. 'Gentleman' thus belongs in modern English to a secondary social level and would appear unsuitable as a description of Montaigne's social status, in view of his constant reference to the 'bien nés' as if he is one of their number. However we shall see that in sixteenth-century France there is considerable blurring of the social differentiation between the two groups and that a discussion of contemporary ideals of conduct is best conveyed in English by the term 'gentlemanly' rather than 'noble'.

* * *

If we turn now to sixteenth-century dictionaries, we shall see that 'noble' and 'gentilhomme' were considered interchangeable, at least by the compilers. Cotgrave translates 'Les Nobles' as follows:

> Gentlemen (of what ranke or qualitie soever) are stiled thus by the French, without any such distinction (between Noble and Gentle) as we make.

thereby suggesting the phenomenon of 'tacit ennoblement' described by Huppert in his

essay on the definition of elites in Renaissance France[2]. Huppert speaks of the need for a new term to distinguish between the established nobility and those who aspired to join their ranks through the purchase of royal offices or land:

> ...a class of people who are neither 'gentilshommes' nor bourgeois - that is, people who are not merchant-bourgeois, 'honorables hommes' on the one hand, and who do not appear in the catalogue of the nobility of the 'bailliage' on the other hand...[3]

He cites Charles Loyseau, a jurist who published a treatise on social orders in 1613, to illustrate the devaluation by this time of the term 'noble' in the eyes of the established nobility, who now preferred to style themselves 'ecuyer'.[4]

Nevertheless in 1688 Guy Miège still translates 'la noblesse' by both terms in a parallel value as 'the Nobilitie and Gentry' and in fact styles himself 'Gentleman' on the title-page of his dictionary. The same equivalence is evident much earlier in Thomas Elyot's dictionary of 1538 in the translation of the adjective 'generosus' as:

> of a gentyle or noble kinde.

This adjective derives etymologically from the Latin substantive 'genus', meaning 'birth, stock or race' and at this time has not yet acquired connotations of munificence or abundance. Again, if we look at the translation of 'genereux' in Cotgrave, the first meaning is given by the word-group 'noble, gentle, worthie, gallant', where the first two adjectives are synonymous.

Interestingly La Porte in 1571 gives a series of words for 'gentilhomme' and also for 'noblesse' but the singular substantive or adjective 'noble' is absent. The latter occurs in the group of epithets La Porte considers suitable for 'gentilhomme', but the collective noun 'noblesse' appears to be preferable as the indication of a group or class of noblemen. This would appear to bear out Huppert's point concerning the weakening in social value of the word 'noble'.

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2 G. Huppert, *Les Bourgeois Gentilshommes: An essay on the definition of elites in Renaissance France* (Chicago, 1977) p 7-8.

3 Huppert, *Les Bourgeois Gentilshommes*, p 18-19.

4 Huppert, *Les Bourgeois Gentilshommes,* p 10.

But these terms have a moral value as well as a social one. Before we go on to consider this moral content, it is necessary to define the term 'manners' and the related adjective 'moral'. For the purposes of this thesis, the term 'manners' will be used to include the original meaning of repeated action. The sense of general custom occurs first in the O.E.D.in the singular form 'manner':

> Customary mode of acting or behaviour, whether of an individual or of a community; habitual practice; usage, custom, fashion.

This definition dates from Middle English and is followed by an entry for the plural form 'manners' which introduces a notion of value attached to certain kinds of behaviour:

> The modes of life, customary rules of behaviour, conditions of society, prevailing in a people.

Once the notion of conforming to a general model is present, a judgement is also inevitable on whether the behaviour is acceptable or not. Hence the sixth entry in the O.E.D. which is the closest to our use of the term in this thesis:

> External behaviour in social intercourse, estimated as good or bad according to its degree of politeness or of conformity to the accepted standard of propriety.

The adjective 'moral' will also be used in this sense of acting in a way which is either right or wrong according to a predetermined standard. It is interesting to note that the first definition of 'moral' concerns personal character or disposition , so that the association between feelings and actions is demonstrated. The seventh entry clarifies this association:

> Pertaining to, affecting, or operating on the character or conduct, as distinguished from the intellectual or physical nature of human beings.

Thus the moral factors involved in a description of manners will for our purposes be based on the relationship between character and conduct, while social factors will describe such elements as the rank, wealth and authority of an individual. Both types of factor will govern the way an individual behaves. Montaigne's *Essais* allow the reader to examine the correlation between the two at least according to a written account of the author's principles, if not on the basis of first-hand experience.

* * *

The general equivalence of the moral connotations of 'noble' and 'gentilhomme' is our next point for consideration. It is because of the predominantly moral connotation of the modern English word in such popular usage as 'He's a real gentleman' that we have chosen 'gentlemanly' to describe Montaigne's approach to questions of conduct. Moreover, linguistically speaking, this term is also the most straightforward etymological translation available of the French term used by Montaigne to describe a single member of the social group for whom he was writing; for example:

> (b) A la verité, nos loix sont libres assez, et le pois de la souveraineté ne touche un gentilhomme François à peine deux fois en sa vie. (I, 42 p 257.)

Thirdly, 'gentlemanly' also appears more suitable than 'noble' for our title, in view of the O.E.D. definition of 'gentleman' as:

> a man of superior position in society, or having the habits of life indicative of this: often one whose means enable him to live in easy circumstances without engaging in trade, a man of money and leisure.

As we shall see, this description corresponds exactly to Montaigne's position, where the concepts of leisure and financial independence were important as an indication of his social status. Finally, while the term 'noble' in modern English also has a strong moral overtone, it was felt that it now referred only to a limited and exclusive social group. 'Gentlemanly' embraces a wider section of society and it is the changing nature of the social spectrum which we shall be considering, with reference to Montaigne's *Essais* and to the codes of conduct by which the elite sought to identify themselves.

To return to the equivalence of the terms 'gentilhomme' and 'noble' in the sixteenth-century, the third definition in the O.E.D. indicates the close association of both social and moral factors which still persists in the word 'gentleman':

> a man in whom gentle birth is accompanied by appropriate qualities and behaviour; hence in general, a man of chivalrous instincts and fine feelings.

There follows a quotation from a primer of 1553 which gives a contemporary view of the moral qualities inherent in the term:

> That as they be called gentle menne in name, so they maye shewe them selues in al theyr doinges gentle, curteous, louyng... unto theyr inferiours.

It is in this emphasis on manner that we can pick up traces of the English meaning 'gentle' in the word 'gentleman' and that we can perceive a relationship between behaviour and

social rank. The overtones of manner or method of behaving in the adjective 'gentil' again bear many similarities to those attached to the epithet 'noble'. In Cotgrave 'gentil' is translated variously as:

> gentle, tame; affable, courteous, gracious; kind, loving; (....) well-fashioned, well-behaved; gallant, noble.

'Noble' is translated as follows;

> noble, of a gentlemanlie race, of gentle bloud; also noble, generous, gentle of humour; worthie, gallant; excellent, famous.

Thus a consideration of the individual's personal qualities and behaviour might equally be involved in determining whether he may be called a gentleman/noble, besides the question of birth and rank. This combination of the social and moral in the concept of nobility is similarly present in Florio's 1598 translation of the Italian 'nobile' in his *Worlde of Wordes*:

> noble, excellent, famous, greatly known, a gentleman.

In fact the first epithet applicable to 'la noblesse' in La Porte is 'vertueuse', which in modern English and French has a uniquely moral sense. In considering the moral content of the notion of nobility, as expressed in both the sixteenth-century terms 'gentilhomme' and 'noble', we must look at the association between it and virtue that was fundamental to contemporary conceptions of behaviour.

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As Ellery Schalk explains in *From Valor to Pedigree,* the traditional view of nobility, or superior social status, expounded in Classical writings by such authors as Aristotle, Sallust and Seneca, was that it is determined by birth, a separate quality from virtue and that the two need not automatically coexist in the same person:[5]

> Virtue they have not bequeathed to them, nor could they; for it is the only thing that no man can give to another or receive from another.[6]

However Schalk suggests that the prevailing view of nobility in France up to 1560 was

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5 E. Schalk, *From Valor to Pedigree* (Princeton University Press, 1986) p 41-44.

6 Sallust, *The Jugurthine War*, translated by S.A. Hardford (Baltimore, 1963) p 120.

one based on function in equal measure with heredity, and that the holding of military power or position pre-empted questions of personality. He writes that until this time the nobility saw virtue as an expression of military prowess, which reinforced their social role as landed 'seigneurs' who bore arms.[7]

Indeed the mingling of the two notions of superior status and physical power has persisted in modern English. One definition of the term 'virtue' in the O.E.D. equates goodness with strength:

> The possession or display of manly qualities, manly excellence, manliness, valour.

The equation between virtue and valour is derived from the etymological relationship between 'vir' and 'virtus', where the attainment of manhood brings with it certain qualities that are masculine by association. The first definition of the word 'virtus' given by Lewis and Short is:

> manliness, manhood, i.e. the sum of all the corporeal or mental excellencies of man, strength, vigour, bravery, courage, aptness, capacity, worth, excellence, virtue, etc..

This conception of the ideal of virtue is echoed by Montaigne in 'Des recompenses d'honneur' and is based on a military expression of excellence.

> (a) Mais il est digne d'estre consideré que nostre nation donne à la vaillance le premier degré des vertus, comme son nom montre, qui vient de valeur; et que, à nostre usage, quand nous disons un homme qui vaut beaucoup, ou un homme de bien, au stile de nostre court et de nostre noblesse, ce n'est à dire autre chose qu'un vaillant homme, d'une façon pareille à la Romaine. (II, 7 p 363.)

His historical perspective here reveals a view of nobility arising through survival of the fittest and leaves little room for considerations of personality:

> (a) Il est vray semblable que la premiere vertu qui se soit fait paroistre entre les hommes et qui a donné advantage aux uns sur les autres, ça esté cette-cy, par laquelle les plus forts et courageux se sont rendus maistres des plus foibles,...
> (II, 7 p 363-4.)

However Schalk further suggests that with the onset of the Wars of Religion and the ensuing social instability, a military definition of superior social status became

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[7] Schalk, *From Valor to Pedigree*, p 37-39.

insufficient[8]. He demonstrates the revival of interest in the sixteenth century in the works of Sallust and Juvenal, who both reject the notion of nobility by birth and stress the importance of virtue[9]. This view is supported by Huppert's account of the swift expansion of the socially privileged to include those who would not have had access to military power because of their commercial origins and who sought a new justification of their position[10]. Indeed in the *Essais* there is also a definition of virtue as a goal to be aimed for in all walks of life, not only in the military field and not necessarily unpleasant to achieve:

> (c) Elle [la vraye vertu] aime la vie, elle aime la beauté et la gloire et la santé. Mais son office propre et particulier, c'est sçavoir user de ces biens là regléement, et les sçavoir perdre constamment. (I, 26 p 162.)

What matters now is an expression of virtue which depends on moral judgement rather than physical strength. We shall see that Montaigne represents the changing perception of the association between social status and moral attributes. Moreover the high incidence of the term 'vertu' in Montaigne's *Essais* is perhaps significant. It occurs 265 times as opposed to 'gentilhomme' and 'noble' which occur approximately 50 times each, according to Leake's *Concordance*. This would suggest a greater concern with moral qualities than with questions of social rank. As Anna Bryson has noted however, it was precisely through one's conduct that one could assert one's status and at the same time give expression to one's personal qualities.[11] It is the correlation of the social and moral aspects of Montaigne's conduct as they emerge from the *Essais* that will be examined in the light of the 'gentlemanly' ideal.[12]

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The fusion of moral and social aspects of conduct is also evident in the epithets used to describe conduct in the sixteenth century. It is present in Cotgrave's translation of the term 'civil':

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8 Schalk, *From Valor to Pedigree*, p 92-93.

9 Schalk, *From Valor to Pedigree*, p 43.

10 Huppert, *Les Bourgeois Gentilshommes*, p 86-90.

11 Bryson,'The Rhetoric of Status,' p 146.

12 Since we have discussed the context of the term 'gentlemanly', it will not be written in inverted commas for the remainder of this thesis.

civill, courteous, gentle, mannerlie;

This initial translation groups together terms concerned with the style of behaviour, but the third entry gives a socially-based definition:

towne-bred or, burguerlike;

This reinforces the distinction we have already noted between those who come from landed families and those of merchant and bourgeois origins. It suggests that those who are concerned with rules of behaviour are now drawn not only from the exclusive confines of the royal court, but from the broader setting of an urban environment. The related term 'civilité' has a third meaning which Cotgrave gives as:

quietnes of disposition and fashion.

This suggestion of restraint looks back to the definition of manners which we shall discuss in relation to the work of Castiglione at the beginning of the century. As noted in our introduction, the prescription of behaviour was confined until this time to specific actions on specific occasions. With Castiglione however we can discern a new preoccupation with manners as an expression of personal character, where social status is ideally accorded as much for moral reasons as for material ones, and is embodied in the concept of grace. The two poles of manner between which the individual had to choose a graceful path were 'affettazione' and 'sprezzatura' which contemporary French translators of *Il Libro del Cortegiano* give as 'la curiosité' and 'la nonchalance'. If we first consider 'la curiosité', Cotgrave translates this as:

curiositie, curiousnesse; daintinesse, nicenesse; affectation.

There is an obvious progression of degree in meaning here, which is reflected in the translation of 'curieux' as:

too, too diligent, more carefull than neede.

This sense of taking care as a manner of behaving is in fact the principal one attributed by Elyot in 1538 to 'curiosus':

curiouse, taken sometyme on the yll parte, where more dylygence is used, than is necessary or expedient; sometyme on the better parte, where we be very carefull and busy about thynges, concernynge eyther our selfes or other men.

In both negative and positive contexts, being curious involves conscious effort on the part

of the perpetrator. The sense of curiosity as affectation is evident in Elyot's translation of 'affectatio' as 'curyositie' and 'affectata oratio' as 'a curyouse fourme of speakynge'.

Similarly the group of epithets attributable to 'curiosité' for M. de La Porte are as follows:

> studieuse, affectée, nouvelle françoise, diligente, convoiteuse, femme, attentive, soigneuse, vaine, sotte, inutile, otieuse.

These give an interesting picture of the connotations of the term at the end of the sixteenth century, since five out of the twelve of these epithets denote the taking of care or the expenditure of effort. This meaning is still evident in 1688 when Miège gives as an example of 'curieux' the sentence:

> il est curieux en ses habits; he is curious in his dress.

The sense of enquiry involved in our twentieth-century understanding of the word is not involved here; its meaning must be related to manner.

If we now examine the opposite term which Castiglione offers as a new word - 'la sprezzatura' - we may gain a clearer perspective of the range of behaviour that was being expounded as desirable in the sixteenth century. The individual was exhorted to seek a way of behaving that would be judged graceful since it was neither too careful nor was it careless. Such a judgement would depend not only on the physical presentation and deportment of the individual, but also on his intellectual qualities, social skills and public role. There is a clear if somewhat intangible ideal expressed by Castiglione which holds the moral concept of graceful behaviour as the goal to which the social elite should aspire:

> Mais tournant a nostre propos, je dy qu'entre ceste grace excellante, & celle sottie insensee lon treuve encore ung moyen. Et peuvent ceulx qui ne sont de nature si parfaictement douez par soing et labeur, limer & r'abiller les imperfections naturelles en grande partie.[13]

Montaigne reveals an awareness of the same polarity in manner of behaviour when he gives 'la nonchalance' as the opposite of 'la curiosité' in 'A demain les affaires' (II, 4 p 345). Cotgrave translates this term as:

> carelesse, retchlesse, heedlesse; negligent, idle, secure.

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13 All quotations will be taken from the first French translation of Castiglione in B. Castiglione, *Le Courtisan*, translated by Colin (Lyon, 1538). This quotation is from Book I folio 23 verso.

Here again the second sense of idleness or lack of action reveals the intrinsic association between physical circumstance and moral attitude. The protagonist may be both morally unconcerned and physically uninvolved, so that actions are seen as the expression of feelings. The opposition between curiosity and nonchalance will form one of the criteria for our investigation of the gentlemanly ideal as perceived in Montaigne's *Essais*.

* * *

Another group of terms which merits examination in the light of changing social and moral perceptions is that associated with the court. By the beginning of the 1570's the term 'courtisan' is open to a whole list of epithets in La Porte's estimation, some of which are positive attributes, but the majority of which have negative connotations:

> aveugle, sourd, muet, brave, menteur, dameret, variable, effronté, gourmand, harpie, ambitieux, impudent, rusé, hypocrite, pipeur, voluptueux, ingrat, superbe, espondé de cour, flateur ou afflateur, masqué, vanteur, blandissant, importun, etc...

La Porte adds the revealing note that:

> ce mot qui est honnorable selon l'etymologie est maintenant si infame (...) que pour declarer un homme vitieux en supremelatif degré on l'appelle courtisan.

'Courtoisie' still retains a positive string of epithets, among them an indication of the link between civility and courtesy in the words 'civile, bourgeoise et urbaine' which remind us of Cotgrave's translation of 'civil'. But the fluctuation in meaning of terms associated with the highest institution of power, that is the royal court, is indicative of the social and moral instability prevailing at the time.

If the term 'courtisan' has already been devalued to this extent by 1571, it is perhaps not surprising that Montaigne should eschew frequent mention of the term 'gentilhomme'. Indeed this term was also being subverted for humorous and slang purposes as denoted in Cotgrave by 'gentilhomme de ville' which is translated as 'a gentleman of the first head, an upstart Gentleman'.

Moreover members of the highest social group did not always seek to conform to the behaviour expected of them. As Bryson remarks on similar developments in England:

> A great deal of colourful evidence of the roistering and thoroughly uncivil behaviour of young gentlemen on the loose, particularly in London, suggests that the response of the élite to ideals of gracefully controlled carriage and modesty of demeanour was less than complete.[14]

The same picture emerges from details in comments by Castiglione:

> Et si quelque foys il convient ung gentilhomme a celles leurs plaisanteries, & qu'il ne veuille point user de ces jeux d'asnes, & saulvaiges, ilz dient incontinent qu'il se tient pour trop saige, & grant seigneur, & qu'il n'est bon compaignon.[15]

The discrepancy between the ideal and the reality and the apparent rejection of rules and restraints could be interpreted as one more expression of social superiority. This approach is a possible consequence of Castiglione's advocacy of 'sprezzatura' and can also be traced in Montaigne's frequent irony of tone. We are faced with the paradox that one of the chief precepts in sixteenth-century etiquette was the avoidance of an over-zealous adherence to the rules.

* * *

The terminology associated with the social elite in sixteenth-century France can thus be seen to reflect the changes in its composition and in the value attributed to its moral precepts. La Porte gives us the measure of the devaluation of traditional institutions of authority and of the increasing emphasis on moral criteria to indicate social status. Our next chapter will investigate the social developments which gave rise to the confusion between 'gentilhomme' and 'noble'. We shall see that the terms in fact apply to two separate groups, but that it was in the interests of at least one group to maintain the confusion.

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14 Bryson, 'The Rhetoric of Status', p 152.

15 Castiglione, *Le Courtisan*, Bk II f 100 recto.

Chapter Two

The Historical Background.

In this chapter we shall consider those elements of the historical background to the *Essais* of Michel de Montaigne which may cast light on the author's relation to his society. His insistence on his noble status, his experience as a lawyer and his thorough grasp of Classical literature, while evident in frequent references in his work, are in fact all aspects of Montaigne's personal circumstances which might be surprising and contradictory to a sixteenth-century reader. If we begin by examining the composition of the society of Bordeaux in general and the relative positions of merchant, lawyer and noble in the social hierarchy, we shall better understand the contradictions inherent in Montaigne's position in particular. We shall then consider in some detail the essay devoted to the author's ideas on education, 'De l'institution des enfans', since it contains an interesting comparison between Montaigne's actual experience of the education system of his day and the education he feels is fitting for the son of a nobleman. This study will draw out the conflicting aims and interests of the various social groups of sixteenth-century Bordeaux and further clarify the importance that noble or gentlemanly status held for the members of that society. It will enable us to perceive Montaigne's conception of nobility in the contexts of time and place and show how this was to some extent influenced by developments outside his control.

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Although Montaigne is notoriously silent in the *Essais* on the subject of his family origins, there is sufficient archival material to document the source of his wealth as the fortune amassed by the efforts of his paternal great-grandfather Ramon Eyquem. It was only fifty-six years before his birth, in 1477, that Ramon had acquired the family seat of Saint-Michel-de-Montaigne at a distance of some thirty miles from Bordeaux[1]. Previously his forbears had grown rich in the wine and salt fish trades that flourished in the port. The fine wines produced in the Bordeaux region were destined for trade with

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1 R. Trinquet, *La Jeunesse de Montaigne* (Paris, 1972) p 45-51.

England and other Northern ports, and the empty ships were loaded for the return journey with salt or dried fish. Boutruche describes the social movement that was evident between such wealthy merchants as these and the more prestigious, but often impoverished nobility.

> Des filles qui sentaient le vin ou le poisson salé des boutiques paternelles étaient accueillies dans les familles de 'bon lignage' avec leurs dots et leurs espérances qui venaient, le cas échéant, au secours de beaux-parents désargentés. Elles-mêmes et surtout leurs descendants prenaient place dans la classe supérieure. Ou bien, un marchand se jetait dans les bras d'une 'demoiselle'.[2]

The desire to detach oneself from mercantile origins is hardly surprising given the very poor light in which merchants were viewed in moral works. Erasmus for example is in a long line of critics when he attacks the rapacious greed of the merchant classes in his satirical work *Encomium Moriae* at the beginning of the century:

> The most foolish and the meanest profession of all is that of merchants, since they seek the meanest goal by the meanest methods; even though they tell all manner of lies, perjure themselves, steal, cheat, deceive, still they think they outshine everyone else just because they wear gold rings on their fingers.[3]

He alludes to the merchants' love of property as well as money and their unscrupulous method of buying as much as they can amounts to little more than theft in his eyes:

> Elsewhere you can see some Pythagoreans who are so firmly committed to the principle that all goods should be held in common that they carry away whatever they find unwatched, just as nonchalantly as if they had inherited it.[4]

Erasmus goes on to attack scholars, theologians and lawyers in his satire, but there is evident contempt for those at the bottom of the social ladder whose only claim to a piece of land was a fat purse. Yet this was the quickest way to gain at least the outward appearance of noble status. The other rapid route to social elevation was by intermarriage; for the aspiring merchant there was the advantage of the title attached to the aristocratic family's land. And for the established noble there was the material consideration of fresh income to finance the estate.

However, such social movement was not always an improvement in the fortunes

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2 *Bordeaux de 1453 à 1715,* edited by R.Boutruche, in Higounet, ed., *Histoire de Bordeaux*, 6 vols, Vol IV (1966) p 84.

3 D. Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly,* translated by C. H. Miller (New Haven and London, 1979) p 77.

4 Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly*, p 77-78.

of the merchant: there was a price to pay for the increase in prestige in a parallel cessation of money-making activities, which often resulted in the deterioration of material comfort:

> Souvent l'entrée dans la noblesse fut précédée d'un long cheminement sur des avenues difficiles, et suivie de regrets. L'élévation sociale risquait d'avoir l'abaissement économique pour rançon. Combien de fortunes furent dilapidées par des oisifs à faire oublier leurs origines et à soutenir leur état![5]

And there remained a geographic distinction between recent arrivals or pretenders to noble rank and the older aristocracy:

> Bien qu'anoblis et pourvus de grands offices, ils restent attachés à leur ville, dont ils sont toujours bourgeois et citoyens. A la différence de la vieille noblesse fidèle à ses puissantes attaches rurales, ils continuèrent à résider dans leurs 'oustaus' de la Rousselle et de la Rue Neuve.[6]

The newcomers remained attached to their urban origins, whereas traditionally the aristocracy lived a life of leisure on their country estates, exempt from taxes, enjoying hunting rights and other privileges or pursuing a military career. The greatest families would also spend time in attendance at court, which was both the perceived summit of social success and the academy for suitable behaviour. Claude Chappuys describes the influence of court life as 'la fontaine de civilité':

> Et qui en boit il vomist bien soubdain
> Rusticité, et devient tout mondain.[7]

He is emphasising here the contrast between the uncouth behaviour of the nobleman who lives in rural isolation and the polished manners of the regular attendant at court. However the contempt in which the zealous pursuit of wealth was held often proved dangerous for the established aristocracy. The distribution of wealth was not necessarily in proportion to social standing. Riches went to those who actively pursued them, while the traditionally privileged relied on inherited income and royal bounty. As their expenditure in maintaining their lifestyle often outweighed the income from their estates or from royal bounty, they were obliged to avail themselves of a loan from a 'rentier'.[8]

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5 Boutruche, *Histoire de Bordeaux* , IV, p 86.

6 Boutruche, *Histoire de Bordeaux*, IV, p 168.

7 C. Chappuys, *Discours de la Court* (Paris,1543) sig. D iv.

8 Huppert, *Les bourgeois gentilshommes*, p 35.

This iniquitous system entitled the usurer to a fixed-sum annual repayment of his loan to be paid indefinitely, thus securing income for the already wealthy 'rentier' and in the long term impoverishing the noble further. Huppert cites the case of Thomas Bohier who arranges to lend the 'seigneur' of Chenonceaux about 4000 livres at the end of the fifteenth century, in return for an annual payment of 352 livres. By 1513 the property belongs to Bohier, as the original owner is unable to keep up the payments on an income of 450 livres per annum, and by 1517 it will be enhanced by the building of a splendid new château:

> The Bohier family's sprint towards the highest honors is short enough so that they can be remembered as bourgeois financiers. Their career is on a grand scale, like that of the other 'généraux des finances'. But we will find their complicated and almost gratuitous passion for ruining lords and peasants and collecting their lands repeated at all levels of the gentry.[9]

This development of the family's fortunes is indicative of a general tendency in the more successful merchant families of France to seek social ascension by the acquisition of land and property:

> More surely than any parchment letters patent, the ownership of seigneuries is said to lead away from the bourgeois condition. Under no circumstances does the purchase of a fief modify the new lord's status instantly. But, sooner or later, the fief will serve to back up the claim that one has 'lived nobly'[10].

Thus social boundaries between different groups of people were relatively flexible in sixteenth-century France and it was possible to acquire noble status either by royal decree or by consensus in the public eye. This goal was seen to be attainable as long as one had the requisite source of wealth, and would not only secure increased wealth through tax exemption, but also expand the individual's sphere of power and influence - a tempting opportunity for any successful and ambitious member of the common people.

In order to qualify as noble and thereby exempt from taxes, the aspiring commoner simply had find several witnesses who would be willing to testify that he 'lived nobly'. The lawyers who dealt with such testimonies were of course themselves from the same socially mobile background, so it was in their own interests to ease the

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9 Huppert, *Les bourgeois gentilshommes*, p 36.

10 Huppert, *Les bourgeois gentilshommes*, p 34.

client's path, as a contemporary underlines:

> Veu que les Juges les premiers se moqueront au bout de compte & les declareront Gentilshommes pour ce qu'eux-mesmes auront parens de mesme farine & seront aises de se preparer par la un degré pour usurper quelque jour.[11]

However such movement between groups was a very slow process. As Trinquet remarks, the ennoblement of a particular family depended as much on a general confusion of the memory with the passage of time, as on the complicity of the peer group[12]. In fact even those who had 'lived nobly' for three generations were only entitled to call themselves 'nobles de race'. It was necessary to maintain the change in status for a further generation at least before members of the family could be called 'gentilshommes'[13]. This epithet bore greater prestige and signified more than what Montaigne calls 'la commune noblesse' in the essay 'Des noms'.

New members of the nobility might seek to confirm their position by marrying into the aristocracy, but this would more probably be because the latter needed their financial assets rather than their company. Money remained the key to success in climbing the social ladder, but could not openly be acknowledged as such. Instead the bourgeois bought royal 'offices', such as 'baillis, prevosts, lieutenants generaux, advocats du roy ', which did not automatically entitle them to noble status, but which gave them administrative positions outside their commercial concerns and in direct relation to the monarchy[14]. If at the same time they could ensure tacit ennoblement through the collaboration of their peers, they could after all claim tax exemption in the same way as the established nobility and assert their noble status at least in the eyes of the law. Above all though, the ennobled sought acceptance of their new status as noble or gentlemen. This acceptance would come not just with the title and the estates, but also because the lifestyle of the new nobleman was perceived as being suitable[15]. This was something much more difficult to determine, both for observer and observed.

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11 E. Tabourot, *Les Bigarrures du seigneur des accords* (Rouen, 1591), p 36.

12 Trinquet, *La Jeunesse de Montaigne*, p 56.

13 By this convention Montaigne just qualifies as a 'gentilhomme', since he constitutes the fourth generation of his family to occupy the Château de Montaigne.

14 Huppert, *Les Bourgeois Gentilshommes*, p 8.

15 Huppert, *Les Bourgeois Gentilshommes*, p 18.

One of the biggest groups of wealthy citizens who aspired to noble status was of those in the legal profession. Although this occupation had more prestige than the crude money-handling involved in trade, it was still the butt of vicious satire by those who despised their pretensions to grandeur. This attitude towards the profession of lawyer and magistrate may be illustrated by the satirical *Dialogues* of the poet Jacques Tahureau, whose own family only became exempt from paying the 'taille', the commoners' tax, in 1549. A hint of sour grapes is discernible in his depiction of the arrogant magistrate sweeping along in his red robe, who has done nothing better than to cover three or four pages 'en lignes larges et mots allongés' in order to earn 'une poignee de carolus':

> Je te pourrai bien raconter d'autres ruzes et moyens que ces vaultours desguisés en robes longues ont inuentés pour ronger & décharner entierement iusques aus oz, & sucer iusques au plus profond des mouëlles ceus qu'ils ont une fois chargez, ne les lâchans iamais iusques à ce qu'ils les aient par un insatiable & ensanglanté rauissement devorés & engloutis, de telle sorte qu'il ne leur reste plus aucune substance.[16]

This however is not the general view of the wealthy urban families and the venom of this particular portrait is countered by Estienne Pasquier in a letter to his eldest son Théodore, which extols the profession of lawyer as the most honourable path open to him, while merely commercial status is not even countenanced:

> Et aussi qu'il me semble entre tous les etats n'y en avoir que trois, qui doivent estre singulierement solemnisez; celuy de Prescheur, de l'Advocat du Roy en un Parlement, & de L'Advocat des parties, comme ceux ausquels l'homme qui a du fonds peut faire demonstration publique de graces que Dieu a infuses en luy, plus qu'en nuls autres.[17]

The financial rewards of such a profession are also hinted at, as the Parisian lawyer ends this letter with a warning to his son not to depend on him for money. The qualification 'l'homme qui a du fonds' clearly shows that Pasquier sought social advancement on the basis of his wealth, both for himself and his sons. Money was a necessary prerequisite, but it had also continually to be earned. Despite being too proud of the family name to change it in favour of the title of his 'seigneurie' in Brie and despite his assertion of the

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[16] J. Tahureau, *Les Dialogues* (Paris, 1565) p 119.

[17] E. Pasquier, *Lettres* (Paris, 1586) f° 265 verso.

validity of the legal profession, Pasquier nevertheless obtained 'lettres de noblesse' in 1574 and was happy for his sons to marry into the aristocracy, to bear arms and to take titles. Thus it appears that a career in law was for many wealthy families in the non-noble classes another method by which they could ensure that their sons would continue their progress upwards in society.

But such an occupation demanded a high level of education and training from its participants. This factor may explain the rapid development of schools in the towns to give such students the grounding they would need in Greek and Latin to deal with legal documents. The 'Collège de la Trinité' in Lyon provides an interesting example of one such school, as it was first set up by the city council in conjunction with a religious brotherhood who were already running a school for the children of its members. The combination of church and municipal authority was not a happy one so that already in 1527 the city was constrained to found its own institution under the auspices of a humanist scholar who would meet the demands of the wealthy bourgeoisie for a thorough Classical education[18]. This consisted not only of a knowledge of the Classical languages, but also of a whole programme of learning in the Classical tradition. The quadrivium of music, arithmetic, geometry and astronomy represented the elementary scientific branches of learning, while the trivium of grammar, logic and rhetoric was concerned with the study of language.

This self-conscious attempt to furnish the mind as well as the body in imitation of the ancient authors who were being so eagerly rediscovered at the time, is explained by Greenblatt as a result of the aspiring bourgeoisie's awareness of its changing identity in sixteenth-century Europe[19]. If it was possible to move from one social group to another with relative ease, the upwardly mobile were also forced to examine their position with some objectivity and learn new roles accordingly. The moment one is aware of one's social status, one is obliged to present a public persona that corresponds to that self-image. The monarch of course provides the ultimate example of the public expression of social status and will set the tone for all ranks below him. Greenblatt describes Henry VIII's passion for dressing up and suggests that the love of theatre and spectacle in the English court reflects a general sense of illusion and artifice in social

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18 Huppert, *Les Bourgeois Gentilshommes*, p 59-63.

19 S.J. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-fashioning* (Chicago, 1980) p 6-9.

intercourse. The case of Sir Thomas More offers an interesting parallel with Montaigne in that both showed a propensity for theatrical role-play as young men, both trained as lawyers and both write from a standpoint of simultaneous engagement in and detachment from their respective societies. As such they are examples of a new social group which was seeking to define its role in relation to the traditional institutions of power that were the monarchy, the aristocracy and the Church[20]. Education was the means whereby the trappings of this new social role could be acquired, since wealth alone would not ensure acceptance at the highest levels of the social hierarchy. Huppert makes clear that the schools founded by the bourgeoisie were not closed to the children of poorer families, but that those of the rural nobility rarely joined them[21]. Schalk on the other hand suggests that the flourishing development of schools later in the century reflects the noble 'prise de conscience' and that the nobility saw education as the means of re-establishing their superiority, since the military function had been undermined by the civil dissension of the Wars of Religion[22]. This discrepancy in the use of the terms 'bourgeois' and 'noble' among twentieth-century historians to describe members of the same social group, (since newly ennobled and established nobility are mingled in Schalk's reference,) is an indication of the ambiguity which surrounded the definition of nobility in the first half of the sixteenth century. Then it was still possible to move from non-noble to noble status discreetly and easily, but Schalk argues that with the breakdown of the monarchy and the social chaos of the Religious Wars in the last four decades of the century, the nobility became increasingly aware of the need for a stronger demarcation between the two groups and movement between them became more difficult[23].

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It is at this point that the debate on the distinction between nobility by birth and nobility by strength of virtue becomes most pertinent. The quality of nobility was from ancient times conferred by one's ancestors and the personal attributes with which one

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20 Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-fashioning*, p 31-40.

21 Huppert, *Les Bourgeois Gentilshommes*, p 67-73.

22 Schalk, *From Valor to Pedigree*, p 86.

23 Schalk, *From Valor to Pedigree*, p 90-93.

was born were a separate matter. Schalk maintains that the gradual confusion of the terms 'noble' and 'virtuous' arises during the Italian Renaissance when such authors as Sallust and Juvenal were being re-read and is evident in Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*[24]. Here it is argued by one speaker that the greatest qualities may exist in people of humble origins and conversely that a noble-born individual may be quite corrupt in behaviour. However the clearest statement on nobility comes from the character of Ludovico da Canossa, who asserts that general opinion favours a virtuous noble above a virtuous non-noble[25]. Thus rank still plays an important part in attributing social status, so that if good qualities are evident in two individuals, then the one with noble rank automatically has the advantage. Although the two concepts of noble rank and noble character are clearly distinguished, Schalk argues that the moral implications of Castiglione's work, which was first translated into French in 1538, were not fully understood in France until the beginning of the seventeenth century and that the privileges of the noble state per se were not questioned[26]. Nevertheless the subject is expressly discussed by Montaigne in 'Sur des vers de Virgile' and the four case histories he cites to illustrate it persuade the reader that social rank is a matter of tradition and heritage not personal worth, while virtue, whatever form it may take, is one of merit and service to society:

> (b) La science, la force, la bonté, la beauté, la richesse, toutes autres qualitez, tombent en communication et en commerce; cette-cy (la noblesse) se consomme en soi, de nulle en-ploitte au service d'autruy. (III, 5, p 828.)

In fact by describing the extreme opposite to the contemporary instability of France's social structure in the case of the Indian caste system, Montaigne implies the dangers of too much rigidity in a society where everyone is imprisoned by their inherited status and no amount of valour, wealth or merit can enable the individual to increase his public standing. However if Montaigne would not like to see such a caste system in force in France, he recognises the stability it has brought to Indian society and leaves us to reflect whether merit actually does have to be publicly acknowledged:

> (c) et sont les parents obligez de dresser les enfans à la vacation des peres, precisement, et non à autre vacation, par où se maintient la distinction et

24 Schalk, *From Valor to Pedigree*, p 43-47.

25 Castiglione, *Le Courtisan*, Book 1 f24 verso.

26 Schalk, *From Valor to Pedigree*, p 51-54.

> constance de leur fortune. (III, 5, p 829.)

He, like Castiglione, concedes that where personal qualities are of equal merit in two individuals, rank must be accorded precedence as is the custom, but earlier in the same passage articulates the converse situation where rank should no longer be held superior to virtue:

> (b) La noblesse est une belle qualité, et introduite avec raison; mais d'autant que c'est une qualité dependant d'autruy et qui peut tomber en un homme vicieux et de neant, elle est en estimation bien loing au dessoubs de la vertu: (III, 5, p 827.)

By juxtaposing the case in France with that in India Montaigne suggests the problems with both and urges us to seek the ideal elsewhere. The reader must formulate his own definition of the qualities and conduct befitting the noble or gentleman, and of the resulting social system of values, by comparing and selecting what is good from these flawed but concrete examples. Through this discussion of the distinction between nobility and virtue Montaigne encourages us equally to distinguish between the social and moral factors affecting the question and makes clear that in his experience the moral aspect of personal conduct is what matters. Each individual should be free to aspire to a moral nobility independent of his social position, even if in practice it was customary to confuse the two. Whatever our conclusion, the aspiration to noble status was evidently of immense concern to French society in the last decades of the sixteenth century and in Montaigne we have at least the beginnings of a redefinition of social status according to moral as well as hereditary factors.

* * *

If we now consider Montaigne's own personal circumstances, his family background, education and career, within this wider setting of society in France from 1550 to 1600, we may see how he stands in relation to the general pattern and development of his historical environment. We shall see that the social and moral context in which Montaigne lives, not only forms the mould for his development from childhood, it also provides the very content of his writing and that the *Essais* form a meeting ground for elements of both the noble and the bourgeois ethos.

Montaigne began writing in a consciously literary form, however unpolished he

professes this form to be, at a relatively late stage in life. He had occupied a public role from the age of twenty-one in his capacity as lawyer and magistrate first at the 'cour des aides' in Périgueux, then at the 'parlement de Bordeaux'. This institution served to ensure the upholding of royal edicts in the city and in the province of Guyenne and necessitated considerable expertise in both Roman and customary law. It was not until 1571, when Montaigne was thirty-eight years of age, that he signalled his intention to retire from public office 'dans le sein des doctes vierges' in order to pay fitting tribute to his closest friend Etienne de La Boétie.

> ...Michel de Montaigne, voulant consacrer le souvenir de ce mutuel amour par un témoignage unique de sa reconnaissance, et ne pouvant le faire de manière qui l'exprimât mieux, a voué à cette mémoire ce studieux appareil dont il fait ses délices.[27]

This inscription was painted for Montaigne on the wall of the small ante-chamber to his library, as if to honour his new occupation and to make it official in the eyes of the world. But we have seen already that study was not the traditional occupation of a nobleman and thus a paradox in Montaigne's position is already apparent.

We have also seen how recent Montaigne's accession to the ranks of the nobility was. Yet in the essay entitled 'Des recompenses d'honneur' he makes a number of remarks that belie his own family's origins in the commercial pursuits of trade and law. He discusses the value and merit of the different honours awarded to 'des hommes rares et excellens' and precludes from this select band anyone who might seek material benefit from such honour. He dismisses merit in valets, messengers, dancing masters and those skilled in the art of speaking as worthy only of pecuniary reward and argues that orders of merit, such as the Ordre St. Michel which he received in 1571, are only devalued if awarded to large numbers of people. It is here that Montaigne makes his well-known assertion that the nobility in France is distinguished by its military tradition:

> (a) La forme propre, et seule, et essencielle de noblesse en France, c'est la vacation militaire. (II, 7, p 363.)

He concludes the essay with the opinion that nobility and valour are inextricably interwoven in the public imagination, perhaps because of the forces of history and legend, and implies that the bearing of arms to which he is entitled, places him firmly

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27 Montaigne, *Oeuvres Complètes*, p xvi-xvii.

among the established nobility, the 'gentilshommes'. However Michel's father Pierre was the first in the Eyquem family to adopt the title 'Seigneur de Montaigne' after the property acquired two generations previously; and Michel was the first to drop the name of Eyquem altogether. Moreover it is well documented that Michel maintained sufficient contact with the city of Bordeaux, source of the family's fortune, for the people to elect him mayor ten years after his retirement from public duties. Again the reader becomes aware of a conflict of evidence in this author who speaks openly of the differences between those who have noble status and those who seek it, since the position of mayor was traditionally given to a member of the military nobility[28]. Supple opines that Montaigne's mayorship arises because of his status as an established noble, but admits that trade was still carried out by his grandfather and great-grandfather, so that strictly speaking he does not qualify for this status[29]. It is perhaps impossible to determine whether Montaigne became mayor because he was held to be a true noble or because his judicial career and family connection with the city had fitted him for the post. What remains certain is that he had associations with both social groups, but that he only aligns himself explicitly with the more prestigious one of the established nobility.

He is heavily ironic in the chapter 'Des noms' when he speaks of the difficulty of recognising members of the aspiring families as they change their names:

> (b) Ils estoyent plusieurs assemblez pour la querelle d'un Seigneur contre un autre, lequel autre avoit à la verité quelque prerogative de titres et d'alliances, eslevées au-dessus de la commune noblesse. Sur le propos de cette prerogative chacun, cherchant à s'esgaler à luy, alleguoit, qui un'origine, qui un'autre, qui la ressemblance du nom, qui des armes, qui une vieille pancarte domestique; (I, 46, p 268.)

The very juxtaposition of 'commune' and 'noblesse' reveals the extent to which social traditions were being challenged and the epithet 'noble' had been devalued. The tacit assertion of Montaigne's own nobility is underlined by the subsequent description of his family crest:

> (b) Je porte d'azur semé de trefles d'or, à une pate de Lyon de mesme, armée de gueules, mise en face. (I, 46, p 268.)

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28 Trinquet, *La jeunesse de Montaigne*, p 520.

29 J. J. Supple, *Arms versus Letters: The Military and Literary Ideals in the 'Essais' of Montaigne* (Oxford, 1984) p 27-30.

Although he is frank enough to comment on the buying of noble insignia and to lament the disturbance of the social order which results, he is careful to omit any mention of his own family's acquisition of exactly the same prizes:

> (b) Quel privilege a cette figure pour demeurer particulierement en ma maison? Un gendre la transportera en une autre famille; quelque chetif acheteur en fera ses premiers armes: il n'est chose où il se rencontre plus de mutation et de confusion. (I, 46, p 268.)

Instead he harks back to an older ideal and emphasises the noble occupation of military activity as the origin of the right to bear arms:

> (a) ...quand nous disons un homme qui vaut beaucoup, ou un homme de bien, au stile de nostre court et de nostre noblesse, ce n'est à dire autre chose qu'un vaillant homme, d'une façon pareille à la Romaine. Car la generale appellation de vertu prend chez eux etymologie de la force. (II, 7, p 363.)

Nevertheless we may see in this formulation symptoms of a set of preoccupations not at all reminiscent of the old military 'noblesse' and much more typical of the new bourgeois ennobled. Montaigne may be unwilling to make any mention of the commercial activity that supported his family's rise in social standing, but his reference here to ancient patterns of behaviour reveals a familiarity with Classical studies acquired through something far from typical among the old noble families of the time, that is to say, a school education.

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The fundamental differences in ethos between the established nobility and the aspiring or recently accepted nobility are underlined in his essay 'De la coustume et de ne changer aisément une loy receüe', when he speaks of a fourth estate distinct from those estates of the Church, the Nobility and the People, but of the same social standing as the nobility:

> (a) ...lequel estat, ayant la charge des loix et souveraine authorité des biens et des vies, face un corps à part de celuy de la noblesse; (I, 23, p 116.)

He perceives two overlapping but conflicting codes of conduct for the contemporary gentleman. Either he follows the path of justice or that of valour. By a parallel development of the values that each code involves, Montaigne demonstrates that each

may be valid for its respective social group:

> (a) ceux-là ayent le gaing, ceux-cy l'honneur; ceux-là le sçavoir, ceux-cy la vertu; ceux-là la parole, ceux-cy l'action; ceux-là la justice, ceux-cy la vaillance; ceux-là la raison, ceux-cy la force;... (I, 23, p 116.)

Yet he also shows that there are elements from each code which might appeal to Montaigne and his peers. The diligent reader cannot be expected here to choose which set of values either he or Montaigne might prefer to live by; both consist of a positive, constructive series of ideals and yet both are mutually exclusive in that they refer to two distinct groups of people, that is to say, the magistrature and the aristocracy:

> (a) (qui s'adresse aux loix, pour avoir raison d'une offence faite à son honneur, il se deshonnore; et qui ne s'y adresse, il en est punie et chastié par les loix); (I, 23, p 117.)

This quotation, which is referring obliquely to the custom among the traditional nobility of settling arguments by duelling, indicates the conflict of duty which could be felt by someone in Montaigne's position. If one wished to be counted noble, one should obey the convention to defend one's name by the sword, but if one held the law of the land in high regard and had worked hard to reach one's present position, a duel was nothing more than a foolish gamble of all one had achieved.[30]

Montaigne has however previously coloured the issue of the two codes by attacking a system of justice which can be bought and which is expressed in a language the people cannot understand:

> (a) ...un peuple obligé à suivre des loix qu'il n'entendit onques, attaché en tous ses affaires domestiques, mariages, donations, testamens, ventes et achapts, à des regles qu'il ne peut sçavoir, n'estant escrites ny publiées en sa langue, et desquelles par necessité il luy faille acheter l'interpretation et l'usage. (I, 23, p 116.)

The list of legal affairs is detailed because Montaigne is speaking from practical experience as a lawyer. However in his *Essais* he repeatedly implies that he belongs not to the nobility of 'la robbe longue' but to that of 'la courte', that is to say, not the magistrature but the aristocracy. In other words we have here another example of the contradiction between what we know of Montaigne's life and what he writes in the

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[30] Huppert, *Les Bourgeois Gentilshommes*, p 99-102.

Essais.

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We must now examine Montaigne's own experience of and ideas on education, since the former will show that he did not follow a typical path for either the established nobility or the newly ennobled, but combined elements of both in his education. The latter will show the extent of his father's influence on his thinking and the mingling of the Humanist ethos and the Italian ideal of civility in his writing.

In 1529 Erasmus had published a short work on the education of children entitled 'De pueris statim ac liberaliter instituendis', which outlines ideas easily discernible in Montaigne's father's handling of the matter. Erasmus had spoken of the greatest responsibility of a father as being the cultivation of his son's intellectual and spiritual potential:

> To be a true father, you must take absolute control of your son's entire being; and your primary concern must be for that part of his character which distinguishes him from the animals and comes closest to reflecting the divine.[31]

The piece was written for public and oral delivery, but combines rhetorical concerns with the author's personal conviction that education cannot be achieved by rote-learning or by the threat of punishment and that instead the successful teacher will encourage his charges by games and rewards. Furthermore he conceived of education as an essentially moral training, which was not attained by the purely material provision of a comfortable home and social position:

> Such a father may ensure that his son suffers no physical harm and can perform his ordinary functions, yet at the same time he neglects the spirit , which is the driving force of all moral action.[32]

In his 'De recta pronuntiatione' of 1528 Erasmus describes the ideal curriculum for the education of the young and reveals as he does so current abuse of the schooling system among the ambitious:

> As it is, far too much energy goes into the subtleties of sophistic, and the most

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31 *Collected works of Erasmus*, edited by J. K. Sowards (Toronto, 1985) Vol XXVI p 299-300.

32 *Erasmus*, Vol XXVI p 302.

> necessary training of all gets treated as a mere incidental to be tasted rather than absorbed. Thereafter the boys are whisked away to take qualifications which carry greater prestige and out of which the masters stand to make greater financial gain.[33]

Montaigne will echo this sentiment six decades later and will also follow Erasmus in essence concerning the choice of subjects to be studied.

Instead of allowing material motives to dictate the programme of study, Erasmus urges a concentration on such basics as reading fluency, neat handwriting and a sound understanding of grammar. The importance of a personal tutor who can instil the correct moral and intellectual principles in his pupil is also a primary consideration. But the first subjects he recommends as the tools of a well-educated student are Latin and Greek: these were the vehicle for international communication on Classical texts, which could not be reliably discussed in the vernacular. He advocated Greek as a reading skill only, but envisaged Latin as the spoken medium for scholars of his day and 'De recta pronuntiatione' was an attempt to produce a satisfactory standard for this purpose. The imitation of the Ancients was the solution to all problems if only one had the means whereby to learn from them. Interestingly Erasmus felt that arithmetic, music, and astronomy need only be sampled, and medecine only studied in so far as it might be useful[34]. He accepts that dialectic and rhetoric should be studied but only to some extent, and suggests that geography come before these. In conclusion he is confident that any student can learn all these subjects in summary form and in an enjoyable fashion by the age of eighteen.

Montaigne's father, Pierre Eyquem, put his enthusiasm for these theories of Humanist education into practice with the upbringing of his eldest son and in order to make the study of the original Classical texts more accessible, resolved that Michel should speak Latin as his mother tongue. For this purpose he was given a German tutor who spoke no French and was addressed solely in Latin by all members of the household. The first six years of Montaigne's education may strike us as particularly indulgent and were indeed exceptional in their absence of punishment:

> (c) Car, entre autres choses, il avoit esté conseillé de me faire gouster la science et le devoir par une volonté non forcée et de mon propre desir, et d'eslever mon

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33 *Erasmus*, Vol XXVI p 380.

34 *Erasmus*, Vol XXVI p 387-388.

ame en toute douceur et liberté, sans rigueur et contrainte. (I, 26, p 174.)

However at this point Pierre Eyquem diverts from his original intention and compromises Erasmian principles by sending his son to school. Where Erasmus emphasises the importance of the relationship between teacher and pupil, Montaigne describes the failure of the 'college de Guyenne' to provide any such intellectual stimulus:

> (c)...le bon homme, ayant extreme peur de faillir en chose qu'il avoit tant à coeur, se laissa en fin emporter à l'opinion commune, qui suit tousjours ceux qui vont devant, comme les grües, et se rangea à la coustume, n'ayant plus autour de luy ceux qui luy avoient donné ces premieres institutions, qu'il avoit aportées d'Italie, et m'envoya, environ mes six ans, au college de Guienne, très-florissant pour lors, et le meilleur de France. (I, 26, p 174.)

In other words Pierre de Montaigne felt obliged to patronise one of the colleges set up by the newly-ennobled for their own kind. Montaigne admits it was the best available school at the time, but it still did not fulfill his expectations. He describes his good fortune in having a tutor who indulged his taste for Ovid, Virgil, Terence and Plautus, as well as the course of study he was supposed to be following, and suggests that a love of books was not the normal result of a college education, nor indeed a characteristic of the nobility in general:

> (a) S'il eut esté si fol de rompre ce train, j'estime que je n'eusse raporté du college que la haine des livres, comme fait quasi toute nostre noblesse.
> (I, 26, p 175.)

The reference to the nobility in this quotation is ingenious since it could be applied both to those social climbers who only attend school as an investment in their futures and to the socially secure who look forward only to a life of military service and attendance at court.

The reader is led to believe that Montaigne was exceptional in finishing his formal education with the desire to learn intact, and that the colleges were not entirely successful in equipping their charges with more than certificates of attendance. However Montaigne's experience of education indicates that his family had aspirations both to adopt the ancient Greek and Roman ideals being retranslated by Humanist scholars and admired at the court of François 1er, and on the other hand to support the system of schooling set up by the urban bourgeoisie. There are again elements of both codes of

nobility in these aspirations and Montaigne deliberately blurs the issue so that the reader accepts his social standing without question.

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The essay entitled 'De l'institution des enfans' was dedicated to Diane de Foix, Comtesse de Gurson, the daughter and wife of established noble families, and it describes the ideal education for a noble-born child to be conducted principally by a personal tutor rather than in the generalised setting of a school. In fact on several points Montaigne takes the opportunity to criticise what he perceives are the weaknesses of a school education and writes in a way that reinforces his personal association and identification with the traditional aristocracy. In this way he could be said to part company with Erasmus, since the latter did not limit his recommendations to any one social group. The impact of his 'De civilitate morum puerilium' of 1530 arose chiefly from the fact that a code of social behaviour was made accessible to all.[35] Equally Erasmus' educational writings were open to any who were so inclined.[36] Bearing in mind what we know of Montaigne's legal function at the marriage of this gentlewoman, his allusion to his suitability as educational adviser may appear contrastingly sycophantic in tone:

> (a) Car, ayant eu tant de part à la conduite de vostre mariage, j'ay quelque droit et interest à la grandeur et prosperité de tout ce qui en viendra, outre ce que l'ancienne possession que vous avez sur ma servitude m'oblige assez à desirer honneur, bien et advantage à tout ce qui vous touche. (I, 26, p 147.)

He compounds the flattery by the expectation that the child will be a boy and interestingly uses the term 'genereux', no doubt in reference to the system of heredity through the male heir. A true gentlewoman will produce an heir at the first attempt. Thus this essay will be concerned with the education of boys who are born into families of the highest social standing and who may consider their position as secure. In other words he is at pains to disassociate himself from the social climbers and although these may rank among his readers, he will emphasise the differences he has observed between

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35 J. Revel, '*The Uses of Civility*', in *A History of Private Life*, edited by Roger Chartier, Vol III (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, 1989) p 172.

36 *Erasmus*, Vol XXVI p 298.

the two groups through his approach to the question of learning.

Montaigne first qualifies his authority on the subject with the disclaimer that his writing will only reveal what he believes, not what must be believed:

> (a) Car aussi ce sont icy mes humeurs et opinions; je les donne pour ce qui est en ma creance, non pour ce qui est à croire. (I, 26, p 147.)

He goes on to state that as he perceives it, education is a crucial and fundamental matter:

> (a) ...la plus grande difficulté et importante de l'humaine science semble estre en cet endroit où il se traite de la nourriture et institution des enfans. (I, 26, p 147.)

However he then makes a distinction between education for persons of high birth and for people pursuing humbler professions:

> (a) Elle [la science] est bien plus fiere de préter ses moyens à conduire une guerre, à commander un peuple, à pratiquer l'amitié d'un prince ou d'une nation estrangiere, qu'à dresser un argument dialectique, ou à plaider un appel, ou ordonner une masse de pillules. (I, 26, p 148.)

His obvious contempt for the latter group of teachers, lawyers and doctors suggests that Montaigne no longer identifies with people who have to earn a living. The education he envisages is reserved for members of an elite who will apply their learning to their position as leaders of society rather than to individual careers. In any event, what he wishes to emphasise in the above quotation is the liberal value of education rather than the vocational opportunities it may afford.

He opens the chapter with a lengthy defence of his present pursuit of literary creation. Although he lists the subjects that composed the curriculum in his day, he hastily insists that he has merely scratched at their surface:

> (a) un peu de chaque chose, et rien du tout , à la Françoise. (I, 26, p 144.)

The real goal of his present study is the discovery of himself:

> (a) Je ne vise icy qu'à découvrir moy mesmes, (I, 26, p 147.)

This will be achieved through the exercise of his natural faculties:

> (a) Quant aux facultez naturelles qui sont en moy, dequoy c'est icy l'essay, je les sens flechir sous la charge. Mes conceptions et mon jugement ne marche qu'à tastons, chancelant, bronchant et chopant; (I, 26, p 145.)

Such humility is really part of an elaborate apology for his boldness in addressing such an important subject for a noble audience. But it also follows Erasmus' insistence on the moral and practical application of education. His disparagement of a school education reflects his insistence on the liberal nature of true learning. The criteria which evolve in the course of this essay for the qualification of an educated man seek to create a moral elite once it is understood that he is addressing a social elite. He begins by describing the social status of his audience very carefully, but will have guessed that his work would be read by old and new nobility alike. He is perhaps attempting to show the newly ennobled the final step towards the acceptance as true nobles that they crave and which will prove the confirmation of their social status.[37]

Following his father's enthusiasm for humanist principles, Montaigne takes for granted that a student must first gain a thorough acquaintance with Classical authors and begins the essay by mentioning Plutarch and Seneca as pre-eminent influences upon his own thought:

> (c) Je n'ay dressé commerce avec aucun livre solide, sinon Plutarque et Seneque, où je puyse comme les Danaïdes, remplissant et versant sans cesse.
> (I, 26, p 144.)

His respect for these authors is graphically illustrated by the metaphor of a trek through the countryside:

> (a) ...au bout d'un long et ennuyeux chemin, je vins à rencontrer une piece haute, riche et eslevée jusques aux nües. ...., c'estoit un precipice si droit et si coupé que, des six premieres paroles, je conneuz que je m'envolois en l'autre monde. De là je descouvris la fondriere d'où je venois, si basse et si profonde, que je n'eus onques plus le coeur de m'y ravaler. (I, 26, p 146.)

However it is not enough to borrow thoughts from these and other Classical authors. What Montaigne is looking for in the well-educated young man is 'quelque matiere de propos universel, sur quoy j'examine son jugement naturel.' Instead of the specialised study of individual subjects, he proposes the much more difficult task of forming his judgement on the basis not only of learning but also of experience.

This will be achieved by constant dialogue with a carefully chosen tutor who will draw out his charge's ideas and opinions as well as teaching him what he can:

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[37] Huppert, *Les Bourgeois Gentilshommes*, p 86.

> (a) On ne cesse de criailler à nos oreilles, comme qui verserait dans un antonnoir, et nostre charge ce n'est que redire ce qu'on nous a dict. Je voudrois qu'il corrigeast cette partie, et que, de belle arrivée, selon la portée de l'ame qu'il a en main, il commençast à la mettre sur la montre, luy faisant gouster les choses, les choisir et discerner d'elle mesme; quelquefois luy ouvrant chemin, quelquefois le luy laissant ouvrir. (I, 26 p 149.)

Again Montaigne is perhaps remembering his father's decision to hire a private tutor to supplement his son's schooling. It was only through this man's rapport with his charge that he could persuade him to continue the studies of which he was capable. Without his sensitivity to Montaigne's particular gifts and weaknesses, he might have produced no more than a well-trained but acquiescent servant of authority:

> (a) Qu'il luy face tout passer par l'estamine et ne loge rien en sa teste par simple authorité et à credit; les principes d'Aristote ne luy soyent principes, non plus que ceux des Stoiciens ou Epicuriens. Qu'on luy luy propose cette diversité de jugemens: il choisira s'il peut, sinon il en demeurera en doubte. (c) Il n'y a que les fols certains et resolus. (I, 26 p 150.)

In contrast Montaigne rails against the fearsome routine of school life which subjects boys to fourteen hours of study a day and the threat of vicious floggings if the master is displeased. This is reminiscent of Erasmus' criticism of schools earlier in the century and his argument that children are more likely to learn if they are rewarded for their efforts. Montaigne in similar vein mentions his father's order that he should learn Greek through playing word-games. Although the method was not successful in giving him a lasting grasp of the language he remains impressed with the pleasurable memory.

The overwhelming message conveyed by this essay is that education should be relevant to everyday life and that it should assist the individual in making decisions about all spheres of activity. There is a parallel with Erasmus' view of the moral purpose of education:

> There is no beast more savage and dangerous than a human being who is swept along by the passions of ambition, greed, anger, envy, extravagance and sensuality. Therefore a father who does not arrange for his son to receive the best education at the earliest age is neither a man himself nor has any fellowship with human nature.[38]

Erasmus considers intellectual development to be a way of dealing with the most

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[38] *Erasmus*, Vol XXVI p 305.

intimate personal feelings and experiences. Equally, Montaigne insists on the benefits of education in bringing greater wisdom as opposed to financial gain:

> (c) Le guain de nostre estude, c'est en estre devenu meilleur et plus sage. (I, 26 p 151.)

But he restricts his advice to those who will be able to concentrate on improving their understanding because their bodily needs are already catered for:

> (a) A un enfant de maison qui recherche les lettres, non pour le gaing (car une fin si abjecte est indigne de la grace et faveur des Muses, et puis elle regarde et depend d'autruy), ni tant pour les commoditez externes que pour les sienes propres, et pour s'en enrichir et parer au dedans,... (I, 26 p 148.)

Money is seen as a corrupting factor since it brings dependence on others and learning should be free from interested considerations. But Montaigne will no doubt have been aware that his readers could afford to put such considerations aside, at least for a time. Moreover their social standing would be considerably enhanced by being seen to do so. Education is subtly presented as the next step on the road to social esteem. Once the gentleman has accumulated enough wealth to assure his material well-being, he should turn to intellectual development to ensure the health of his moral outlook. But an automatic consequence of such an approach will be improved social standing.

For Montaigne the sign of an educated man is his ability to exercise his judgement independently and in accordance with certain principles gained through his intellectual training. The value of such Classical authors as Plutarch, Plato, Caesar, and Seneca is to represent diversity of opinion and to encourage the student to formulate his own. The insights Montaigne gives the reader in the course of the essay into his own education show that his case bears the hallmark of the humanist emphasis on a direct experience of Classical texts, a rejection of any systematic approach to learning and an awareness of the relation between education and behaviour. He underlines the inseparability of the individual's way of thinking from his way of acting and pithily argues that education should liberate:

> (c) Entre les arts liberaux, commençons par l'art qui nous faict libres. (I, 26 p 158.)

This remark expresses the gentlemanly aim of studying purely for self-improvement rather than for professional purposes, and at the same time neatly turns the cliché on its

head to suggest an independence of thought as opposed to obedience to conventional ideology. Although the emphasis is upon the moral principles which should guide the individual's behaviour, his social status will be reinforced by the same token, since material wealth will not provide such guidance. The theatrical creation of illusion through the acquisition of land, houses, clothes and all the other accoutrements of rank will not suffice to distinguish the true gentleman.

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We have seen in this chapter that Montaigne had experience of both traditional noble and bourgeois ideas in his schooling, in his legal career and in the bearing of arms. The theory of education he advances in 'De l'institution des enfans' shows how much he was influenced by his own experience, and how this in turn was carried out to some extent in accordance with principles found in Erasmus. The importance he attaches to social and moral superiority however bears a striking similarity to the theory of personal development outlined in Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier.* This work, which we shall consider in detail in the next chapter, also emphasises the relation between understanding and behaviour and attempts to define the qualities of a true gentleman. Montaigne has perhaps stressed the moral content of his educational programme in an effort to reinforce his own claim to nobility, since his social distinctions are not as clear-cut as he would wish. He is evidently concerned to express the importance he attaches to judgement and yet in doing so rejects the system of education set up by the urban rich, which served him so badly. What he seeks is rather a way of guiding his faculty for judgement and this is to be found in a discussion of manners, not of academic content.

Chapter Three

The Gentlemanly Ideal.

In the previous chapter we saw that Montaigne shared the preoccupation of his contemporaries with the behaviour befitting the social elite and that his essay addressing the subject of education was more concerned with manner than with content.The subject matter of moral philosophy is the study of manners, in the sense of human behaviour, and of the ideals to which humanity may aspire. Montaigne makes constant, if implicit, reference to such ideals and they are linked with his conception of his position in society. In this chapter, we shall consider possible sources of influence on the ideals of behaviour held by Montaigne and the way these are reflected in his *Essais*. We shall see that the notion of being a gentleman is central to his work and that within it are visible traces of the ideals set out in contemporary books on manners and in such Classical authors as Aristotle and Plato.

* * *

As instances of the dictates of moral philosophy are to be seen all around us, we shall expect Montaigne to find them first in the lives of individuals he knew. So we shall now briefly examine examples of the persons whose way of life and manners may have influenced his own, and the first of these is his father.

Although Montaigne was in fact fostered out as a baby, his father subsequently controlled his environment to the extent that all those around him should speak Latin, whatever their station. Equally innovative was his father's command that his son be woken by music, be untroubled by corporal punishment, and generally be indulged in his admittedly indolent ways:

> (c) j'estois parmy cela si poisant, mol et endormi, qu'on ne me pouvoit arracher de l'oisiveté, non pas pour me faire jouer. (I, 26 p 174.)

The example set for Montaigne by his father was the first practical demonstration of human conduct which he witnessed and regarded as authoritative. Perhaps because he was separated from his mother in infancy, he does not admit the same authority in her

and indeed suggests in 'De l'affection des peres aux enfans' that the instinctive bond one is commonly supposed to feel with one's mother is in fact based on scanty evidence. He illustrates this point precisely with the example of wet nurses who feel more affection for their charges than for their natural children.[1]

It is perhaps pertinent to remark that Montaigne was totally excluded from his father's first will, although being twenty-eight years of age and the eldest son. On the death of Pierre Eyquem in 1568 everything was left in the charge of his mother Antoinette de Louppes. Only in a second will was Montaigne made heir to the family property and even then provision was made for his mother in minute detail, as if it could not be expected of her son. Charpentier suggests that the antagonism Montaigne felt towards his mother is evident through her absence from the *Essais* and through the generalised remarks in this essay about the injustices he has observed in parents' relations with their children:[2]

> (a) Quant à moy, je trouve que c'est cruauté et injustice de ne les recevoir au partage et société de nos biens, et compaignons en l'intelligence de nos affaires domestiques quand ils en sont capables, et de ne retrancher et reserrer nos commoditez pour pourvoir aux leurs, puis que nous les avons engendrez à cet effect. (II, 8 p 367.)

Calder however argues that the arrangements made by Montaigne for settlement of his mother's dues and her separate accommodation were simply according to the customary law of Bordeaux and not drawn up specially for an individual case[3]. This would refute any accusations of practical vindictiveness against Montaigne and indeed he writes, again in general terms, of the children's duty to provide for their mothers' material comfort in their advancing years, in spite or perhaps because of their inherent weakness:

> (a) On leur doit donner largement dequoy maintenir leur estat selon la condition de leur maison et de leur aage, d'autant que la necessité et l'indigence est beaucoup plus mal seante et mal-aisée à supporter à elles qu'aux masles; il faut plustost en charger les enfans que la mere. (II, 8 p 377.)

In a later addition he advises adherence to the laws of the region in deciding the distribution of one's estate, and reveals great personal respect for property and the system

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1 Montaigne, *Essais,* II, 8 p 380.

2 F. Charpentier, 'L'absente des *Essais*:Quelques questions autour de l'Essai II:8' *B.S.A.M.* 6e sér., no. 17-18 (1984) p 7-16.

3 R. Calder, 'Montaigne and customary law', *B.H.R.* no. 47 (1985) p 79-85.

of justice.

It remains true nevertheless that his father has a far stronger presence in the *Essais* than his mother. Montaigne's evocation of the happy communication between father and heir seems tinged with personal memories and also regret that there is no son to take on Montaigne's estate:

> (a) ...ayant tousjours jugé que ce doit estre un grand contentement à un pere vieil, de mettre luy-mesme ses enfans en train du gouvernement de ses affaires,... (II, 8 p 372.)

Pierre Eyquem appears at first to have been a powerful role model for his son. Montaigne paints a verbal portrait of his father in 'De l'yvrongnerie' which is both pointed and admiring, and which convinces the reader that this person was closely observed by the author:

> (c) Je l'ai veu, par delà soixante ans , se moquer de noz alaigresses, se jetter avec sa robe fourrée sur un cheval, faire le tour de la table sur son pouce, ne monter guere en sa chambre sans s'eslancer trois ou quatre degrez à la fois.
> (II, 2 p 326.)

Pierre Eyquem's influence on Montaigne's education is noted in our second chapter, but the example of his own life also exerted obvious influence on Montaigne's aspirations. At the end of the portrait he speaks of the diary of his father's experiences in the Italian Wars, which were a worthy testing-ground for the skill in 'nobles exercices' he had admired earlier. Supple suggests that such an example will have encouraged the young Michel to aspire to follow in his father's military footsteps.[4] The qualities in his father which Montaigne describes as admirable were physical vigour, restraint in his language and dress, and a strong sense of honour and duty, notably in his relations with women and in the bearing of arms.However after his military career in Italy, Pierre Eyquem returned to take up a legal post as 'premier jurat' and mayor of Bordeaux. At the beginning of the sixteenth century there was no anomaly in doing so, since the office of mayor brought with it military responsibilities for the defence of the city.[5] Similarly the ownership of the 'terre noble de Montaigne' conferred an obligation of military service to the king. Father and son occupied positions of authority in both the legal and the military spheres of activity and apparently fulfilled their duties with merit.

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4 Supple, *Arms versus Letters*, p 4.

5 Supple, *Arms versus Letters*, p 47-48.

But the reflected glory of his father's premier position in the locality also cast a shadow. In 'De mesnager sa volonté' Montaigne remembers his father as an old man weighed down by the burden of public office:

> (b) Il me souvenoit de l'avoir veu vieil en mon enfance, l'ame cruellement agitée de cette tracasserie publique, oubliant le doux air de sa maison, où la faiblesse des ans l'avoit attaché long temps avant, et son mesnage et sa santé, et, en mesprisant certes sa vie qu'il y cuida perdre, engagé pour eux à des longs et penibles voyages. (III, 10 p 983.)

Such devotion to duty, although admirable, is then obliquely criticised as a sign of an unbalanced and unnatural approach to life:

> (b) Comme qui oublieroit de bien et saintement vivre, et penseroit estre quite de son devoir en y acheminant et dressant les autres, ce seroit un sot; tout de mesme, qui abandonne en son propre le sainement et gayement vivre pour en servir autruy, prent à mon gré un mauvais et desnaturé parti. (III, 10 p 984.)

Unlike the unquestioning admiration of Book II, 2, Montaigne here adopts a position of independent retrospection. He does not extol his father's example, and remarks instead upon the error of judgement people in his father's position can make.

* * *

Another powerful influence on Montaigne's attitude to social intercourse arose through his friendship with Etienne de la Boétie, whom Montaigne met at the age of twenty-five as a colleague in the Bordeaux high court. La Boétie's rigorous education in the Classics, his enthusiasm for books and his literary efforts in translating Plutarch and Xenophon as well as composing verse, quickly drew Montaigne into a profound affection for this man, which is described in 'De l'amitié'. The extent of their mutual understanding is to Montaigne complete and his friend's sudden death in 1563 leaves him despairing that he will ever again be able to find such a companion:

> (a) Nous estions à moitié de tout; il me semble que je luy desrobe sa part,
> (I, 28 p 192.)

With La Boétie it was as if two minds became one, so that there was no need for any secrecy between them:

> (c) Le secret que j'ay juré ne deceller à nul autre, je le puis, sans parjure,

communiquer à celuy qui n'est pas autre; c'est moy. (I, 28 p 190.)

With all other acquaintances there will be some restraint in Montaigne's manner, which he expresses by the image of a horse's reins:

> (b) Il faut marcher en ces autres amitiez la bride à la main, avec prudence et precaution; (I, 28 p 188.)

We can see here the beginnings of an 'arrière-boutique', a private inner world into which Montaigne alone can retreat and from which he must venture as if masked, every time he has to interact with his fellow-men. This essay makes clear that only La Boétie would have been able to share his innermost thoughts and that only with him was there no need for disguise or self-conscious performance.

Further examples of persons who may have helped to mould Montaigne's ideas on acceptable conduct are to be found when he recounts several anecdotes from his military experiences. His military career is only haphazardly charted in the *Essais*, but it is clear that the bearing of arms was for him an essential part of a nobleman's training. As Supple remarks, of a total of a hundred and seven essays only thirteen make no mention of military matters at all.[6] The essay 'Des armes des Parthes' paints a vivid picture of the confusion in contemporary warfare, as noblemen call, too late, to their valets for their armour or alternatively, are unable to move for the weight of it. The use of the first person 'nous' indicates his sense of involvement here and suggests he is speaking from personal experience:

> (a) Car il semble, à la verité, à voir le poix des nostres et leur espesseur, que nous ne cherchons qu'à nous deffendre; (c) et en sommes plus chargez que couvers. (II, 9 p 384.)

With the benefit of this practical insight into the problems of military life, the essay 'Divers evenemens de mesme conseil' gives us several examples of Montaigne's conviction that someone in a position of authority and privilege also has to fulfill certain obligations and that these might be difficult and dangerous to execute:

> (b) Rien de noble ne se faict sans hazard. (I, 24 p 128.)

In a military context this will involve maintaining an air of composure which will

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6 Supple, *Arms versus Letters*, p 5.

persuade one's followers that all is well. The first example concerns François, Duc de Guise who is depicted pardoning a would-be assassin, even though his enemies succeeded in killing him shortly afterwards. Montaigne argues that in a world where events cannot be predicted with any certainty, it is better to act with honour and justice, since all that remains after death is one's reputation:

> (a)...le plus seur, quand autre consideration ne nous y convieroit, est, à mon advis, de se rejetter au parti où il y a plus d'honnesteté et de justice; (I, 24 p 127.)

In contrast, this essay describes an incident Montaigne witnessed as a child in which an unnamed nobleman in an unnamed city died at the hands of an unruly mob for want of a bold and honourable demeanour:

> (b) et estime que une gracieuse severité, avec un commandement militaire plein de securité, de confiance, convenable à son rang et à la dignité de son charge, luy eust mieux succédé, au moins avec plus d'honneur et de bien-seance. (I, 24 p 130.)

The need to hide personal emotions beneath a mask of calm assurance is reinforced by an incident later in his life when, as mayor of Bordeaux for the second term, Montaigne is aware of a challenge to his authority. He refers only vaguely to the risk of attack from a rival for the post of mayor and emphasises instead the value of a steadfast, confident exterior while reviewing his possibly treacherous troops:

> (b) Le mien [conseil] fut, qu'on evitast sur tout de donner aucun tesmoignage de ce doubte, et qu'on s'y trouvast et meslast parmy les files, la teste droicte et le visage ouvert,... (I, 24 p 130.)

As he remarks, the unhesitating use of gunpowder salutes served to unite his men and persuade them that everything was under control:

> (b) Cela servit de gratification envers ces troupes suspectes, et engendra dés lors en avant une mutuelle et utile confience. (I, 24 p 130.)

* * *

If we turn now to literary sources of influence on Montaigne's ideal of behaviour, the most explicit point of reference is the essay entitled 'Des plus excellens hommes'. His especial admiration is reserved for Epaminondas, and it rests on the

latter's moral reputation:

> (a) Car en cette partie, qui seule doit estre principalement considerée, (c) qui seule marque veritablement quels nous sommes, et laquelle je contrepoise seule à toutes les autres ensemble, (a) il ne cede à aucun philosophe, non pas à Socrates mesme. (II, 36 p 735.)

It is Epaminondas' morals or way of living and behaving that reveal his true identity, more than any show of military prowess, scholarly excellence or skilful rhetoric, - although Montaigne includes all these as aspects of his character. This emphasis on morals as a prime factor in his assessment of worth or merit in an individual is reflected in an early essay where Montaigne describes his own thorough training in contemporary French rules of behaviour:

> (c) C'est, au demeurant, une très utile science que la science de l'entregent. Elle est, comme la grace et la beauté, conciliatrice des premiers abords de la societé et familiarité; et par consequent nous ouvre la porte à nous instruire par les exemples d'autruy, et à exploiter et produire nostre exemple, s'il a quelque chose d' instruisant et communicable. (I, 14 p 49.)

The reference to the notions of grace and beauty, associated to the process of instruction, echoes the fundamental aim of Baldassare Castiglione's *Libro del Cortegiano*. This work, first published in 1528, most clearly enunciated the ideal of social behaviour for those who lived in court circles in sixteenth-century Italy. It was translated into French in 1538 and into English in 1561, with many subsequent editions in all three languages to testify to its popularity.

The Book of the Courtier was written at the same time as Machiavelli's *Prince,* which concerned those whose power extends further than their individual welfare and which laid the foundations of modern political science. As the various principalities of Italy sought to assert themselves against the traditional dominance of Pope and Emperor, Machiavelli proposed the establishment of a national militia for the protection of a powerful leader. His patriotic fervour blinded him however to moral considerations and encouraged instead the ruthless pursuit of political goals. Equally mindful of political upheaval, Castiglione, on the other hand, was writing essentially about the personal development of those who wished to succeed in the context of life at court. He takes the ideal of courtly behaviour as his subject and purports to express the opinions of a group of nobles gathered at the Duke of Urbino's palace.

If we now examine *The Book of the Courtier* it will become clear from a

comparison with certain of Montaigne's *Essais*, notably 'De la praesumption', that he is describing himself according to criteria which replicate those used by Castiglione, despite the fact that he makes only two overt references to him in the whole of his work. Woodhouse suggests that the educational ideals of fifteenth-century Italy are so bound up with general social, political and economic preoccupations that Castiglione's opinions coincided closely with the ideas of the Renaissance humanists, although he might not acknowledge his contemporary sources.[7] In the same way Montaigne's awareness of the contemporary consensus on social conduct may explain the absence of more specific acknowledgement of Castiglione's influence. His first reference uses *Le Courtisan* on the subject of riding mules (I, 48 p 281.) and the second on the desirable standard of the nobleman's size and physical aspect:

> (c) Le *Courtisan* a bien raison de vouloir, pour ce gentilhomme qu'il dresse, une taille commune plus tost que tout'autre, et de refuser pour luy toute estrangeté qui le face montrer au doigt. (II, 17 p 623.)

As is evident from the above quotation Montaigne regarded *The Book of the Courtier* as a handbook for the training of noblemen of the highest order, using the term 'gentilhomme' to distinguish them from 'la commune noblesse'. Interestingly he also uses the term 'dresser' once more, indicating that moral education necessitated as much rigour as any other training. In other words he accepted the existence of rules for social conduct, even if we shall see later that these rules were open to interpretation. On closer reading of Castiglione's work we are left with a clear impression of the rules pertaining in Italian court society as well as the problems facing the aspiring courtier. We shall see that his courtier has comparatively little freedom to exercise his judgement and that the highest expression of courtly behaviour consists in creating the illusion of ease in a specific social context. While Montaigne is also acutely conscious of the social stage and his public image, he applies the same criteria as Castiglione only to his own case, in isolation from the rest of society. The contrasting security of his social position allows him to evaluate and interpret the rules with a far greater degree of freedom, but this difference does not obscure the fact that the rules are similar for the two authors and that both strive to maintain a public appearance which will cover their private thoughts and feelings.

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7 Woodhouse, *Castiglione*, p 42.

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Castiglione sets his book within a very carefully delineated framework by describing precisely the motivation for the debate he is recording, the people taking part and the manner in which the debate is to be conducted. From the first it is clear that the opinions proffered on good courtiership come from a variety of individuals and not only the author. Moreover the same person may feel differently at different times:

> Car non seullement, il peult sembler a vous une chose, & a moy une aultre:mais aussi a moymesmes peult sembler tantost une chose, & tantost une aultre.[8]

Far from holding a didactic monologue, Castiglione is seeking to express the opinions of a well-defined group of people at a particular time and place in history. As an observer of manners he does not hesitate to set the less than desirable realities of a situation in glaring contrast with the ideal being discussed:

> & apres quant ilz sont a table se gettent au visaige les potaiges, les saulces, les gelées, & puis rient, & qui plus scait faire de telles galanteries est prisé entre eulx pour meilleur & plus gentil Courtisan.[9]

By illustrating the pitfalls of the courtier's existence within the framework of an evening's entertainment Castiglione is the better able to combine theory and practice in a way which will amuse as well as persuade his readers. He is following his own advice to avoid a sombre, self-righteous tone, when he has the Lady Emilia suggest that the whole debate will be so much more enjoyable if the company can argue and make fun of various courtiers' ideas, than if one authoritative figure were to preach theory to them all. The implication is that none of the courtiers will have all the answers but that they might arrive at a successful definition of the ideal through a joint effort.

Castiglione's native city Mantua was renowned as a centre for humanist scholars such as Pier Paolo Vergerio who were rediscovering Classical authors such as Quintilian and Cicero as a source of ideas on education and morals.[10] The influence of their work is evident particularly in the image of the circle and its centre in *The Book of the Courtier*:

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[8] Castiglione, *Le Courtisan*, Bk I f 22 recto-verso.

[9] Castiglione, *Le Courtisan*, Bk II f 99 verso-100 recto.

[10] Woodhouse, *Castiglione*, p 38.

> Car sicomme il est difficile trouver le point du centre en ung rond, qui est le meillieu, pareillement est difficile trouver le point de la vertu assise au meillieu des deux extremitez vicieuses, dont l'une git en trop, l'autreau peu.[11]

This derives ultimately from the passage in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in which he uses the same image when he is expounding the theory of the mean:

> For this reason it is a difficult business to be good; because in any given case it is difficult to find the mid-point - for instance, not everyone can find the centre of a circle; only the man who knows how.[12]

Aristotle is concerned with a theory of virtue:

> ...then human excellence will be the disposition that makes one a good man and causes him to perform his function well.[13]

Although he points out that different individuals will find different solutions to questions of conduct:

> In this way, then, every knowledgeable person avoids excess and deficiency, but looks for the mean and chooses it - not the mean of the thing, but the mean relative to us.[14]

he insists upon the universally valid aim of a happy medium between too much and too little:

> But to have these feelings at the right times on the right grounds towards the right people for the right motive and in the right way is to feel them to an intermediate, that is to the best, degree; and this is the mark of virtue.[15]

As we noted in our introduction, the attribute which forms the principal ideal of *The Book of the Courtier* is that of grace, an attribute which may be a natural gift to a certain extent, but which may also be acquired and increased through human endeavour. The influence of Aristotle's definition of virtue upon this ideal is evident in the description of grace as not only a physical quality but also as a moral value. The courtier's manners will reflect both his education and social training, and his moral character. Count Ludovico of Canossa leads the debate with his definition of this grace:

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11 Castiglione, *Le Courtisan*, Bk IV f 31 recto-verso.

12 Aristotle, *Ethics*, translated by J.A.K. Thompson (London, 1976) p 108-9.

13 Aristotle, *Ethics*, p 100.

14 Aristotle, *Ethics*, p 100.

15 Aristotle, *Ethics*, p 101.

> ...je treuve une reigle tresuniverselle, qui me semble servir quant a ce point, en toutes les choses humaines que lon faict, ou que lon dict plus que nulle autre, c'est de fuyr le plus que lon peult comme une tresapre perilleuse roche, l'affectation; & pour dire, peult estre, une parolle neufve, d'user en toutes choses d'une certaine nonchallance, qui cache l'artifice, & qui monstre ce que lon faict comme s'il estoit venu sans peine & quasi sans y penser.[16]

Similarly it is the contrast between affectation and its opposite notion, nonchalance, which informs much of Montaigne's approach to social behaviour, and which provides a line of comparison between the *Essais* and *The Book of the Courtier*. On the question of social conduct, each has the quality of judgement or discretion as its ideal centre, between the two extremes of caring too much or not caring at all about one's public persona.

Castiglione speaks of the fine line between curiosity, in the sense of taking too much care, and carelessness, which can both lead to social failure if the mean is overstepped:

> & pource qu'il passe certaines limites de mediocryté, celle nonchallance est affectée & luy siet mal: & une chose, qui droictement vient au contraire de ce qu'il avoit presupposé: c'est assavoir de cacher l'artifice.[17]

This general principle is illustrated by a series of examples which show that it is not enough to acquire a skill; the height of courtliness lies in the presentation of that skill in a manner which will give pleasure to one's audience, without offending or being ridiculous:

> Quant nostre messire Pierre Paul danse a sa facon avecques ses petitz sautelletz & ses jambes r'acoursies sur la poincte des piedz, sans remuer la teste comme s'il estoit tout de boys si ententivement, que certes il semble qu'il voyse comptant ses pas, qui est l'oeil si aveugle qui ne voye en cella la mauvaise grace de son affectation,...[18]

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It is here that the distinction between personal achievement and public display is first mentioned. If the courtier wishes to be graceful he must actually seek to deceive

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16 Castiglione, *Le Courtisan*, Bk I f 34 recto.

17 Castiglione, *Le Courtisan*, Bk I f 35 recto.

18 Castiglione, *Le Courtisan*, Bk I f 34 verso.

his audience by giving an appearance of ease and suggesting he is capable of far more:

> Car es entendemens des assistans, il imprime une opinion, que celluy qui bien faict si aiseement, faiche beaucoup plus que ce qu'il faict, & que s'il mectoit soing, ou peine en ce qu'il faict, il le pourroit faire beaucoup mieulx,...

From the debate in the first book on the physical and intellectual accomplishments to which the courtier should aspire, Castiglione proceeds in the second to discuss the techniques for display of such accomplishments. In the first book it emerges that the gentleman should be born into a noble house, be blessed with physical beauty and be trained to bear arms, since his first duty is to serve his prince. There ensues considerable debate on the relative merits of valour and learning and the consensus emerges that they both deserve a place in the courtier's training. Within the scope of learning is included the ability to speak and write well in the vernacular, and to read Latin and Greek, so that the best of those ancient civilisations may be set as good examples to follow. A knowledge of and training in music, painting, and sculpture are also recommended, as well as being able to take part in the traditional courtly pastimes of dancing, jousting and athletic contests.

This programme follows the traditional pattern for Italian noblemen in the Renaissance, but its novelty lies in the emphasis on the manner in which it is to be undertaken.[19] Although it is unseemly to brag of one's prowess at arms or to dress one's hair too carefully, it is nevertheless expected that the courtier exploit every occasion to promote his cause. Whether at tournaments or in battle he should try to distinguish himself in the eyes of his lord, that is to say the prince to whom he owes allegiance, without at the same time offending his peers in the community of the court:

> ... je dis que pour acquerir a bon droict louange & bonne reputation empres chascun, & grace des seigneurs lesquelz il sert, me semble necessaire qu'il sache ordonner toute sa vie: & s'ayder de ses bonnes qualitez universellement a la frequentation de toutes personnes sans en acquerir envie.[20]

The idea of a performance is clearly present and is taken even further with the discussion on jests. The laughter that is provoked by the recital of numerous amusing anecdotes in the second book serves to illustrate Bernardo da Bibiena's point that man is distinguished by his ability to laugh:

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[19] Woodhouse, *Castiglione,* p 39-46 and p 55-56.

[20] Castiglione, *Le Courtisan,* Bk II f 73 recto.

> car se ris se voit seullement aux hommes, & est quasi tousjours tesmoing d'une certaine resjouyssance que lon sent au dedans du couraige, qui de sa nature est tiré a plaisir, & appete repos, & se recrée.[21]

Castiglione is able to depict the habits and customs of a wide variety of contemporary noblemen through the conversation of his assembled characters, who may have met in Urbino but who represent many different parts of Italy. Thus Bernardo da Bibiena and Pietro Bembo taunt each other with tales of the Venetians, the Sienese and the Florentines, Count Ludovico of Canossa relates two jests involving a Dutchman and a Spaniard, and Lord Giuliano de Medicis introduces an element of the legendary with his tale of Russian fur-trading. In the seemingly random and spontaneous recital of these humorous tales Castiglione is himself demonstrating his awareness of the 'sprezzatura' which will entertain his readers while persuading them of his arguments:

> & en toutes les choses qu'il a a faire ou a dire, s'il est possible qu'il y vienne preparé, & y ayant pensé, faisant neantmoins semblant que le tout soit a l'impourveu.[22]

Moreover, at the end of this section he puts into the mouth of the Lord Giuliano a hint of scepticism which tempers the expectations the noblemen have set themselves to meet:

> car en verite je ne me sentz point suffisant, & ne suis pas tel, comme le conte, & messire Federic, lesquelz avec leur eloquence ont forme ung Courtisan qui ne fut jamais, ne paradventure poeut estre,...[23]

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By adopting this light-hearted and seemingly casual tone Castiglione reminds his readers, gently yet insistently, of the responsibility of his courtier not only to mould his own conduct according to the consensus, but also to advise his patron on the right path to follow. This moral duty is presented as a matter of honour in the fourth book, yet it may also be understood as a political move to curry the favour of the courtier's benefactor.[24] Jests may be the most acceptable way of offering advice:

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21 Castiglione, *Le Courtisan*, Bk II f 107 verso.

22 Castiglione, *Le Courtisan*, Bk II f 101 verso.

23 Castiglione, *Le Courtisan*, Bk II f 142 recto.

24 Woodhouse, *Castiglione*, p 145-149.

> En oultre de beaucoup servent tant les motz plaisans pour poindre que les dictz graves pour louer.[25]

It is in the fourth book that we read of the qualities of justice, temperance, magnanimity and continence which it is the courtier's duty to encourage in his lord:

> Pourtant j'estime que si comme la musicque, les passetemps, les jeux, & autres conditions plaisantes sont quasi la fleur; pareillement induire, ou ayder son prince a suyvre le bien, & l'espouventer du mal, est le vray fruict de la courtisanye.[26]

The social skills described as desirable in the first three books are now given a wider purpose than merely to refine the manners of the individual. Aristotle makes a similar association between the accomplished member of society and the virtuous man:

> But the virtues we do acquire by first exercising them, just as happens in the arts. Anything that we have to learn to do we learn by the actual doing of it: people become builders by building and instrumentalists by playing instruments. Similarly we become just by performing just acts, temperate by performing temperate ones, brave by performing brave ones.[27]

Moral qualities must be first developed in the individual and then communicated to the outside world. Words are not enough but must be tested against deeds, a message we have seen echoed by Montaigne. The actively virtuous man is more likely than the selfish or apathetic to reach the universal human goal of happiness, which Aristotle defines as an activity of the soul and as having the quality of absolute perfection:

> ...the conclusion is that the good for man is an activity of soul in accordance with virtue, or if there are more kinds of virtue than one, in accordance with the best and most perfect kind.[28]

For Castiglione too the culmination of the courtier's training is his moral development, but the fourth book takes on a markedly spiritual overtone, whereas for Aristotle the differentiation is between the physical and the rational. Woodhouse argues that Castiglione reconciles the differences between Aristotelean empiricism and Platonic idealism, adding the contemporary Christian doctrine of the immortality of the soul, to

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25 Castiglione, *Le Courtisan*, Bk II f 117 verso.

26 Castiglione, *Le Courtisan*, Bk IV f 5 verso.

27 Aristotle, *Ethics,* p 91.

28 Aristotle, *Ethics,* p 76.

make of the fourth book of The Courtier a profoundly serious moral treatise.[29]

The superiority of spiritual over temporal life is postulated in Bembo's discourse on love which concludes *The Book of the Courtier* and which reiterates the Platonic view of beauty:

> Je dis que la beaulté vient & prent naissance de dieu & est comme ung cerne d'ont bonté est centre; & pourtant comme ung cerne ne poeut estre sans centre, beaulté ne poeut estre sans bonté, a ceste cause peu souvent advient que une mauvaise ame habite en ung beau corps, parquoy la beaulté exterieure est vray signe de la bonté interieure,...

Bembo expounds at length the process by which the courtier of mature years and experience may learn to 'enjoy beautie without passion' and so gain access to heavenly love, which leads to true understanding:

> ...pourtant l'ame estrangée des vices, purgée par les estudes de vraye philosophie, acoustumée en vie spirituelle, & exercitée es choses de l'entendement en se retournant a la contemplation de sa propre substance, comme resveillée d'ung tresparfaict sommeil, ouvre les yeulx que tous ont, mais que peu de gens mettent en oeuvre: & voit en soymesmes ung rais de la lumiere, qui est la vraye image de la beaulté angelicque...

As the scholar proceeds with his exposition, his tone develops from the rhetorical to the incantatory and his audience first responds to his argument, then listens in silence and finally is obliged to rouse him physically from his rapture. The solemnity of the moment is broken and returned to the former atmosphere of amusement by Lady Emilia's remark:

> Prenez garde messire Pierre que avec ces pensemens vostre ame ne se separe aussi du corps.[30]

Castiglione is then able to promise further entertainment within the framework of their first discussion. Bembo's discourse is presented as a departure from the rules of the social game and is set apart as a divinely-inspired interlude. Its elevated tone is however echoed in Castiglione's lyrical description of the dawn outside the palace. This passage marks a movement from the strictly delineated interior world of court society to the world at large, which is described in terms of natural phenomena and which thus indicates the conclusion to his current undertaking:

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29 Woodhouse, *Castiglione*, p 141-3.

30 Castiglione, *Le Courtisan*, Bk IV f 56 verso.

> ...ilz veirent en Orient ja estre née une belle estoille journalle de couleur de roses, & toutes les estoilles disparues excepte la doulce gouvernante du ciel de Venus, qui tient les confins du jour & de la nuyt,...

The paradox of perfecting moral qualities and social skills and yet appearing natural in whichever situation one may be, arose because of the position of dependence in which Castiglione's courtier found himself. If the prince is presented as the fount of all well-being it stems perhaps from the author's nostalgia for the experiences of his youth, when he was at the court of Urbino for four years under the patronage of the Duke Guidobaldo de Montefeltro.[31] Woodhouse argues that Castiglione wished to depict the stability of a community where prince and courtier lived in harmony and mutual benefit.[32] The practical application of the concepts of 'sprezzatura' or 'affettazione' rested on the courtier's awareness of his circumstances and the appropriate behaviour to foster this harmony. The relativity of the rules for behaviour belongs to a tradition we have seen beginning with Aristotle.

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A comparison may now be made between Castiglione and Montaigne. Although the circumstances change to a setting in France at least seventy years later, we shall see that Montaigne adopts many of the same criteria to assess his performance as a gentleman. The very fact that there is dialogue rather than monologue in *The Book of the Courtier* leads each speaker automatically to interact with his or her companions; the literary format mirrors the physical reality. Montaigne's audience on the other hand is physically absent, leaving him relatively free from the constraints of time, place and tone in his conversation. We shall see nevertheless a constant and deliberate self-consciousness in Montaigne which suggests at least an awareness of the factors that counted in contemporary behaviour.

Individual apprehension of the rules depends on one's sense of sufficiency within society, so that if one feels secure one can express ideas and opinions unguardedly. In a society where established institutions and boundaries are being challenged it becomes unwise to trust anyone else with one's every thought or feeling. Castiglione expresses

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31 Woodhouse, *Castiglione*, p 11-12.

32 Woodhouse, *Castiglione*, p 145.

this idea through the mouth of Pietro Bembo in one instance and of Giuliano de Medici in another, the latter with regard to secrecy in affairs of the heart. The former speaks from bitter experience on the subject of the company one keeps and the effect on one's reputation:

> ...je pense quelque foys en moy mesme ne se fier jamais a personne du monde estre bon, ne se donner tant en proye a ung amy pour cher que lon l'aye aymé, quel qu'il soit,...[33]

Despite the close proximity to his peers afforded by court-life, he feels unable to be open and spontaneously truthful with anyone, and gives as a reason for this mistrust:

> Car en noz couraiges il y a tant de cachettes, & de destours, qu'il est impossible que prudence humaine puisse cognoistre les fantaisies & les simulations qui sont cachées au dedans.[34]

This brings to mind a similar image in Montaigne's 'De l'exercitation:

> (c) C'est une espineuse entreprinse, et plus qu'il ne semble, de suyvre une alleure si vagabonde que celle de nostre esprit; de penetrer les profondeurs opaques de ses replis internes; de choisir et arrester tant de menus airs de ses agitations. (II, 6 p 358.)

But Montaigne states the difficulty of the task, not in order to warn the reader of the danger of such transparency, but to share with him the problems of applying rules to such a complex and indisciplined organism. In contrast to Castiglione, Montaigne intends to concentrate on the internal aspects of his character through the rational analysis of his experiences:

> (c) Il y a plusieurs années que je n'ay que moy pour visée à mes pensées, que je ne contrerolle et estudie que moy; et, si j'estudie autre chose, c'est pour soudain le coucher sur moy, ou en moy, pour mieux dire. (II, 6 p 358.)

However he remains very much aware of the need to present himself in an acceptable light:

> (c) Encore se faut-il testoner, encore se faut-il ordonner et renger pour sortir en place. (II, 6 p 358.)

There are repeated references to the same notion of individual discretion

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33 Castiglione, *Le Courtisan*, Bk II f 93 verso.

34 Castiglione, *Le Courtisan*, Bk II f 93 verso.

concerning one's standing and appropriate conduct in society in 'De la praesumption'. This essay is worthy of close scrutiny with regard to Castiglione's work, since it is here that Montaigne applies the theory outlined in *The Book of the Courtier* to his own case.

Here he demonstrates his own expertise in social skills and his understanding of the question of acceptable conduct. He begins with a plea for a balanced approach to the strengths and weaknesses in any individual:

> (a) Je ne veux pas que, de peur de faillir de ce costé là, un homme se mesconnoisse pourtant, ny qu'il pense estre moins que ce qu'il est. Le jugement doit tout par tout maintenir son droit: c'est raison qu'il voye en ce subject, comme ailleurs, ce que la verité luy presente. (II, 17 p 615.)

The strictures of what Montaigne calls 'la ceremonie', (which could perhaps be translated as etiquette), are now ostensibly swept aside for the purposes of this essay:

> (a) Je me trouve icy empestré és loix de la ceremonie car elle ne permet ny qu'on parle bien de soy, ny qu'on en parle mal. Nous la lairrons là pour ce coup. (II, 17 p 615.)

This essay will not obey rules that might interfere with Montaigne's perception of the truth. But as he reiterates in 'Du repentir' he will temper the truth of his writing with the notion of what he regards as socially acceptable:

> (b) Je dy vray,non pas tout mon saoul,mais autant que je l'ose dire; et l'ose un peu plus en veillissant, car il semble que la coustume concede à cet aage plus de liberté de bavasser et d'indiscretion à parler de soy. (III, 2 p 783.)

It is a question of degree and also of authority. Montaigne rejects externally imposed rules, but admits the need for some kind of self-imposed restraint and retains the idea of performance. He implicitly groups himself with those who write for an interested audience, but finds it necessary to cite Horace and Tacitus to justify his audacity in concentrating upon himself as subject-matter:

> (a) ils sont excusables s'ils prennent la hardiesse de parler d'eux mesmes envers ceux qui ont interest de les connoistre, à l'exemple de Lucilius: (II, 17 p 615.)

What he later describes as his confession is thus tailored to some degree for the public arena, and is politely presented with exactly the kind of courtly humility that Castiglione advocates. Again the very lack of ceremony with which he treats 'la ceremonie' is an example of his nonchalance with regard to the rules and also of the irony which

Montaigne turns upon himself as well as others throughout the *Essais*. The parallel with Castiglione's recommendation that serious discourse is made more palatable by humour, is obvious.

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The introductory tone of this chapter is critical of a general complacency concerning one's sense of worth:

> (a) C'est un'affection inconsiderée, dequoy nous nous cherissons, qui nous represente à nous mesmes autres que nous ne sommes; (II, 17 p 614.)

However he goes on to weigh positive points against all the defects he describes in himself. For example, considering his merits as a conversationalist, Montaigne obviously has Castiglione's courtier in mind when he admits being unable to recount anecdotes in an amusing fashion:

> (a) ...et suis du tout denué de cette facilité, que je voy en plusieurs de mes compaignons, d'entretenir les premiers venus et tenir en haleine toute une trouppe, ou amuser, sans se lasser, l'oreille d'un prince de toute sorte de propos, la matiere ne leur faillant jamais, pour cette grace qu'ils ont de sçavoir employer la premiere venue, et l'accommoder à l'humeur et portée de ceux à qui ils ont affaire. (II, 17 p 620.)

The irony of 'de toute sorte de propos' and 'la premiere venue' indicates that Montaigne's admiration for courtly conversation is not quite unreserved. Castiglione's advice on behaviour at court and the method of appearing at ease in any situation has been interpreted to suit his own personality:

> Et cela je veulx que le Courtisan l'accommode (si bien il n'en sent estrange sa nature) en sorte que toutes les foys que le seigneur le voyt, il pense qu'il luy ayt a parler de chose qui luy soit aggreable,...[35]

Montaigne is more concerned to be truthful to the extent of his knowledge than to please his superiors, even if such an attitude compromises his social success:

> (b) Les princes n'ayment guere les discours fermes, ny moy à faire des contes. (II, 17 p 621.)

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[35] Castiglione, *Le Courtisan*, Bk II f 83 recto.

What he is really attacking here is affectation and deceit and his avowed shortcomings in being able to entertain his audience are neatly balanced by this confident reference to his honesty. Again he skilfully deflects any potential accusation of taking too much care himself by describing his awareness of the problem:

> (a) Mais je sens bien que par fois je m'y laisse trop aller, et qu'à force de vouloir eviter l'art et l'affectation, j'y retombe d'une autre part: II, 17 p 621.)

He concludes that he can only follow his natural inclination and show that he is ready to accept the consequences. The reader has been subtly persuaded that what Montaigne initially described as a failing in himself is really preferable to what is seen in others. He has thus successfully trodden the line between boastfulness and undue modesty.

There follows an example of Montaigne's inclination in matters of language, which reveals the tone he is trying to achieve in his own writing:

> (a) Il y a bien au-dessus de nous, vers les montaignes, un Gascon que je trouve singulierement beau, sec, bref, signifiant, et à la verité un langage masle et militaire plus qu'autre que j'entende; (II, 17 p 622.)

But he rounds off the literary considerations of this part of the chapter with a nonchalant aside, an expression of typical 'sprezzatura':

> (a) Voylà combien peu je vaux de ce costé là.

Again the balance is achieved between over-zealous literary discussion and declarations of ineptitude.

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Passing on to consideration of the Platonic theory of a beautiful mind in a beautiful body, Montaigne now restates the idea of the indivisible union of body and soul in any human being:

> (a) Le corps a une grand'part à nostre estre, il y tient un grand rang; ainsin sa structure et composition sont de bien juste consideration. (II, 17 p 622.)

We are reminded of his delight in the 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond' at discovering that his way of life, or manners, had direct philosophical precedents:

> (c) De quel regiment estoit ma vie, je ne l'ay appris qu'après qu'elle est exploitée

et employée.
Nouvelle figure: un philosophe impremedité et fortuite! (II, 12 p 528.)

The physical reality found expression before the intellectual, and yet corresponded exactly.

Unlike Castiglione, Montaigne is not advocating a progression or development from the realm of the senses to that of the spirit, but rather a fusion of the two, so that they become inextricably entwined:

> (a) Il faut ordonner à l'ame non de se tirer à quartier, de s'entretenir à part, de mespriser et abandonner le corps (aussi ne le sçauroit elle faire que par quelque singerie contrefaicte), mais de se r'allier à luy, de l'embrasser, le cherir, luy assister, le contreroller, le conseiller, le redresser et ramener quand il fourvoye, l'espouser en somme et luy servir de mary; (II, 17 p 622.)

This passage, echoing the terms of a marriage contract, illustrates the mutual dependence of body and soul and implies moral failure if they become separated. If one's actions belie one's thoughts, one cannot proceed with honour: the true gentleman will seek to harmonise both sides of his nature. The passage serves to introduce a description of Montaigne's own physical appearance and an ironic anecdote to illustrate his perceived shortcomings in that area. He obviously suffered from the lack of due deference, which he felt was a result of his small size:

> (a) C'est un grand despit qu'on s'adresse à vous parmy vos gens, pour vous demander:'Où est monsieur?' et que vous n'ayez que le reste de la bonnetade qu'on fait à vostre barbier ou à vostre secretaire. (II, 17 p 624.)

He proceeds with an enumeration of the social skills recommended by Castiglione, such as singing, fencing or dancing, and declares his own low level of achievement in each of them. He adds a few skills that are not mentioned in '*The Courtier*', such as sharpening quills or carving at table, which again lend a note of dry humour to this description. And he concludes that his physical attributes do indeed reflect the spiritual side of his character:

> (a) Mes conditions corporelles sont en somme trèsbien accordantes à celles de l'ame. Il n'y a rien d'allegre: il y a seulement une vigueur pleine et ferme.
> (II, 17 p 625.)

Montaigne's insistence on the connection between his inner life and the life he leads in the world takes him to a point of basic dissent from Castiglione. He is happy

to enjoy the benefits of a fortunate situation without worrying either about income or expenditure. A naturally lazy and unrestrained disposition towards events has led to a reliance upon himself rather than any attempt to intervene, and to a conservatism in matters of social advancement:

> (b) et je suis d'advis que, si ce qu'on a suffit à maintenir la condition en laquelle on est nay et dressé, c'est folie d'en lâcher la prise sur l'incertitude de l'augmenter. (II, 17 p 628.)

What he will not tolerate and what he feels compelled to control in his own conduct is dissimulation:

> (a) C'est un'humeur couarde et servile de s'aller desguiser et cacher sous un masque, et de n'oser se faire veoir tel qu'on est. (II, 17 p 630.)

Where Castiglione actually preached dissimulation, Montaigne declares telling the truth to be the first priority in the pursuit of virtue. But once more the theory is tempered by the practice. Montaigne paraphrases Aristotle in all seriousness before admitting not only that he does occasionally lie, but also that it would be foolish to reveal all he knows:

> (a) Il ne faut pas tousjours dire tout, car ce seroit sottise; mais ce qu'on dit, il faut qu'il soit tel qu'on le pense, autrement c'est meschanceté. (II, 17 p 631.)

One's discretion is called for rather in deciding what to say, than in disguising what is said to make it acceptable to one's company. The distinction may appear specious, but is a clear example of Montaigne's interpretation of the rules according to his own situation. We are persuaded of his sincerity by another self-deprecating aside:

> (a) Or, de moy, j'ayme mieux estre importun et indiscret que flateur et dissimulé. (II, 17 p 632.)

With this succinct opposition of two extremes Montaigne suggests that he belongs on neither side but neatly in the middle. Here is a clear demonstration of his ability to sway his public and at the same time to obey the social rule of good judgement. Potential accusations of vanity and stubbornness are countered by protestations of spontaneity and lack of artifice. By listing his weaknesses, such as lack of memory or being slow to respond, he is simultaneously following his own aim of being open and honest, as well as excusing any offence he may cause in his candour;

> (b) Presentant aux grands cette mesme licence de langue et de contenance que j'apporte de ma maison, je sens combien elle decline vers l'indiscretion et incivilité. (II, 17 p 632.)

The essay concludes with an examination of the way in which Montaigne forms his opinions. The term 'ma confession' suggests he is being as truthful as he can, and yet the reader, in the role of confessor, cannot help but pardon, when all the author claims is the exercise of common sense:

> (a) ...mais l'advantage du jugement, nous ne le cedons à personne; et les raisons qui partent du simple discours naturel en autruy, il nous semble qu'il n'a tenu qu'à regarder de ce costé là, que nous les ayons trouvées. (II, 17 p 640.)

What matters for Montaigne is the assurance of being true to himself, both in what he says and what he does, rather than any claim of excellence measured by comparison with others:

> (b) La recommandation que chacun cherche, de vivacité et promptitude d'esprit, je la pretends du reglement; d'une action esclatante et signalée, ou de quelque particuliere suffisance, je la pretends de l'ordre, correspondance et tranquillité d'opinions et de meurs. (II, 17 p 642.)

His judgement is exercised by reference to self-imposed rules which seek to align his thoughts and actions.

Unlike Castiglione's courtier, Montaigne is not constrained by a physical dependence on society for security. Even so, he recognises the value of applying certain of Castiglione's criteria to his own behaviour. He acknowledges the validity of the notion of performance, although his audience is a somewhat different one - in the preface to the first edition of his essays he suggests it is his family and a few close friends. The qualities that formed the classical ideal still pertain, but cannot only be judged by external appearances:

> (a) Les plus notables hommes que j'aye jugé par les apparences externes (car, pour les juger à ma mode, il les faudroit esclerer de plus près),... (II, 17 p 644.)

The *Essais* are his means of exploring beneath the surface, in the search for truth, and the criteria that guided Castiglione have been turned inwards, since his own example is the only one which he feels able to regulate:

> (b) Ne pouvant reigler les evenements, je me reigle moy-mesme, et m'applique à eux s'ils ne s'appliquent à moy. (II,17 p 627.)

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In this chapter we have looked at examples taken from Montaigne's personal experience and his reading that may have influenced his formulation of the concept of the ideal gentleman. We have seen in 'De l'institution des enfans' that Montaigne shared with Castiglione a belief that man's existence is driven by a fundamental desire for happiness and that this happiness was a moral quality which should be constantly pursued by the individual, but which was not inaccessible. At an early stage in his work Castiglione describes the correspondence between the courtier's moral stature and his social behaviour, arguing that from the basic quest for good proceed all other qualities:

> ...nous dirons en peu de parolles suyvant nostre propos, qu'il souffit qu'il soit ainsi que lon dict, homme de bien & entier. Car en cela se comprend la prudence, bonté, fortitude, & temperance de couraige, & toutes les aultres conditions qui conviennent a si honorable tiltre.[36]

In his discussion of the nature of social intercourse in 'De trois commerces' Montaigne uses the same epithet of honesty to describes the kind of men he feels most at ease with:

> (b) Les hommes de la société et familiarité desquels je suis en queste, sont ceux qu'on appelle honnestes et habiles hommes; l'image de ceux cy me degouste des autres. (III, 3 p 802.)

He then describes the ideal social gathering as a communion of like-minded souls and thus implies that he is more interested in moral compatibility than any social prestige. However, the epithet 'habile' in the above quotation suggests a training in social skills which should reflect outwardly the individual's moral fibre, an idea which is confirmed for example in the essay 'Des destries', where a fine horseman will convey as much about his personal qualities as his knowledge of riding, by his performance in the saddle:

> (c) Bon homme de cheval, à l'usage de nostre parler, semble plus regarder au courage qu'à l'adresse. (I, 48 p 284.)

This parallel development of social skills and moral qualities is a theory we have traced in *The Book of the Courtier,* and in turn we have noted the influence of Aristotle's theory of the Mean on Castiglione's concept of 'sprezzatura'. The notion of good judgement is

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[36] Castiglione, *Le Courtisan*, Bk I f 51 verso.

developed by Montaigne so that as well as pleasing society by obeying the rules, he seeks to limit their constraints on his freedom by living in a way that suits his nature. He does not reject the rules but interprets them so that he is at ease both with his fellows and with himself.

Chapter Four

The Mask and Beneath.

In chapter three we considered the way in which Montaigne applied a theory of conduct previously reflected in *The Book of the Courtier* to his own case in 'De la praesumption'. We shall now move from theory to practice and consider the evidence of his successes or failures in applying this theory or set of rules for gentlemanly behaviour to his practical experiences in different areas of activity, as they are described in the *Essais*.

We shall see that he is concerned with the moral impact of these rules as well as with their social impact but, although the first of these seems far to outweigh the second, he is nevertheless susceptible to both. Manners may not always be the focal point of Montaigne's writings on various subjects, but he constantly adds seemingly casual asides to the reader which cast light on his practical solutions to the problems posed by living in society. Thus we see him no longer merely as an analyst and a theorist as he appears in ' De la praesumption', but as a participant in the society of his day, someone who knows exactly what is expected of a man in his position and who, both in behaviour and in his writings, does his best to conserve the ideals of the society in which he is living.

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The society in which Montaigne operated had, like any society, two sets of rules - the rules laid down by law, that is the customary law[1] of the different provinces of France which Montaigne as a magistrate had had to administer and the unwritten rules of social intercourse, the more obviously gentlemanly rules. Both these sets of rules are defined in large part by custom and in their turn create custom. Let us examine first Montaigne's attitude to the law, as this will reflect his attitude to the public institution of power in his society. The close association of the law of a given land with its customs

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[1] For the interdependence of the body of Roman law established in the sixth century by the Emperor Justinian and the law of local custom, see I. Maclean, *Interpretation and Meaning in the Renaissance* (Cambridge, 1992) p 13-16.

and traditions is clearly stated in the chapter 'De la coustume et de ne changer aisément une loy receüe'. Montaigne first of all lists a series of strange customs in foreign lands, drawn from his reading of Classical historians such as Herodotus, and contemporary ones such as Lopez de Gomara and Goulard[2]. The impact of these shocking habits, for example female circumcision or the disposal of the dead by feeding the mortal remains to birds or beasts, is compounded by Montaigne's insistence on the relativity of habit and belief:

> (a) Et les communes imaginations, que nous trouvons en credit autour de nous et infuses en nostre ame par la semence de nos peres, il semble que ce soyent les generalles et naturelles. (I, 23 p 114.)

The implication is that the power of habit is so great, the reader must realise his own opinions and conduct are themselves bound by it and that they must appear to others and be analysed by others in the same way as Montaigne analyses his own habits in the essays. For example Montaigne describes his own uncertainty when called upon to interpret a particular custom in his capacity as lawyer in the high court of Bordeaux. Unwilling to refer simply to the law in his efforts to justify this custom, which he does not in this instance specify, he finds little else to convince him of its necessity. While making the reader privy to his thoughts and feelings in retrospect however, Montaigne makes it clear that under pressure of events, he will suppress his opinions and follow the consensus:

> (a) La societé publique n'a que faire de nos pensées; mais le demeurant, comme nos actions, nostre travail, nos fortunes et nostre vie propre, il la faut préter et abandonner à son service et aux opinions communes,... (I, 23 p 117.)

The inference is that laws are founded on the general pattern of life in any given community and that the prosperity of that community depends upon the maintenance of the 'status quo'. Hence Montaigne's aversion to social upheaval and the 'si horrible corruption de meurs que les guerres civiles apportent'[3]. The power of habit is a force to the good if it enables the individual to live in peace and reinforces the current institutions of authority. Yet this idea stands in direct counterpoint to the idea expressed only a little earlier of freedom and the greater clarity of judgement which results if the individual

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2 *Essais* I, 23 p 110-114.

3 *Essais* I, 23 p 119.

dare to think for himself and reject the example of custom:

> (a) Qui voudra se desfaire de ce violent prejudice de la coustume, il trouvera plusieurs choses receues d'une resolution indubitable, qui n'ont appuy qu'en la barbe chenue et rides de l'usage qui les accompaigne; mais, ce masque arraché, rapportant les choses à la verité et à la raison, il sentira son jugement comme tout bouleversé, et remis pourtant en bien plus seur estat. (I, 23 p 116.)

There is an apparent contradiction here which leaves the reader to share Montaigne's observation of the situations described and then decide independently where he stands[4].

In 'Des loix somptuaires' Montaigne's own position with regard to the monarchy is ostensibly supportive when he speaks of the king's power to dictate fashions to his courtiers and thence to the rest of the country:

> (b) C'estoit une très-utile maniere d'attirer par honneur et ambition les hommes à l'obeissance. Nos Roys peuvent tout en telles reformations externes; leur inclination y sert de loy. (I, 43 p 260.)

The cohesion of the community that is the royal court depends upon the king's wishes in practical areas of daily life such as the food one eats or the clothes one wears. An underlying assumption is the responsibility of the king to encourage good habits, not bad ones, and to lead his people in the right direction, but the fundamental importance of a strong leader in the person of a monarch is unquestioned. Remarking in a 1588 addition on the civil wars that were dividing France, Montaigne suggests that the country would soon flourish again if one leader could unite it in a common cause.

> (b) Et qui nous pourroit joindre à cette heure et acharner à une entreprise commune tout nostre peuple, nous ferions refleurir nostre ancien nom militaire. (II, 7 p 362.)

His concern is not so much for the individual figure of the leader as for the community which would be brought together under him and which would by its own efforts re-establish its renown. The framework of the community is further reinforced by clear distinctions of degree among all its members and Montaigne adds an aside lending his personal support to this system:

> (b) Par l'exemple de plusieurs nations, nous pouvons apprendre assez de

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[4] M. McGowan, *Montaigne's Deceits* (London, 1974) p 90.

> meilleures façons de nous distinguer exterieurement et nos degrez (ce que j'estime à la verité estre bien requis en un estat),... (I, 43 p 260.)

But the subsequent remark on the speed with which people can become used to and adopt a new custom, undermines somewhat his original point on the power of the king to influence general opinion. Once again the reader is faced with a paradox which obliges him to choose between criticism of and support for royal authority. Montaigne thus demonstrates one aspect of the notion of 'sprezzatura' as the avoidance of dogma and a pedantic tone in his writing, which would not befit the literary productions of a gentleman.[5]

One of the clearest statementsof Montaigne's opinion in this chapter occurs in a 1595 addition on the benefits of stability and the danger of change. He invokes the authority not only of kings but also of God in support of his proposition that constant innovation has a debilitating effect on the human spirit. This is true on a superficial level in such areas of social intercourse as clothing, gesture, dances, song and even sports, where, borrowing from Plato, he argues that time-honoured practices should be respected lest morals be corrupted:

> (c) ...remuant son jugement tantost en cette assiette, tantost en cette là, courant après les nouvelletez, honorant leurs inventeurs; par où les moeurs se corrompent, et toutes anciennes institutions viennent à desdein et à mespris. (I, 43 p 261.)

This plea for the upholding of tradition argues that if customs are not respected, the people among whom they arose have no recognisable points of reference and lose their sense of communal identity.

More seriously though, in the domain of politics the agitation of a few malcontents can threaten the very fabric of the whole of society:

> (b) Celle [la nouvelleté] qui nous presse depuis tant d'ans, elle n'a pas tout exploicté, mais on peut dire avec apparence, que par accident elle a tout produict et engendré, voire et les maux et ruines qui se font depuis sans elle, et contre elle; (I, 23 p 118.)

Further on in the chapter 'De la coustume et de ne changer aisément une loy receüe', using the image of a medicinal purge Montaigne illustrates the danger of disturbing the

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5 McGowan, *Montaigne's Deceits*, p 4.

peace and making things worse than they were initially. In several places in the *Essais* he attacks the French legal system and in 'De l'experience' even excuses disobedience of the law when it is so corrupt.[6] But he remains sceptical that any system will administer perfect justice and suggests that the individual will find greater tranquillity in following public order than in attacking it.

The only way change in the legal and constitutional structure of a society may be envisaged by Montaigne is by the intervention of an authority which is above human jurisdiction and which he attributes alternately to notions of divinity and of fortune. Acknowledging that occasions do arise when it may be impossible to follow custom, he counsels a certain flexibility in the face of violence. He refers obliquely to the Wars of Religion as one such instance and yet is anxious to preserve the institutions of authority that are under attack, mindful that there is nothing else to take their place:

> (a) Car, à la verité, en ces dernieres necessitez où il n'y a plus que tenir, il seroit, à l'avanture plus sagement fait de baisser la teste et prester un peu au coup, que, s'ahurtant outre la possibilité à ne rien relascher, donner occasion à la violance de fouler tout aux pieds; (I, 23 p 122.)

Outwardly at least Montaigne appears to be advocating a position of acquiescence before the law, and of acceptance of inevitable change. If he allows the reader to share in his misgivings on certain points, he is by no means urging him to act, merely to reconsider.

In the same way he describes the difficulties associated with the administration of the law in 'De l'experience'.[7] He underlines his dissatisfaction with the relation of fixed rules to the myriad combinations of circumstances that they are supposed to govern. Now he rails against the complexity and meaninglessness of legal jargon and against the failure of the ever-increasing volume of commentary to arrive any nearer a statement of universal truth. The development by humanist scholars of a historical approach to the body of Roman law established by the Emperor Justinian was in direct contrast to the accumulative approach favoured by the glossators and postglossators from the eleventh century onwards.[8] Montaigne avoids openly taking sides in the controversy, although he does appear to be attacking the traditional interpretative approach here,

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6 *Essais* III, 13 p 1049-50.

7 *Essais* III, 13 p 1042-1044.

8 Maclean, *Interpretation and meaning*, p 21.

which favoured the assimilation of Roman law with local custom. He argues that while it is a feature of human nature constantly to ask questions and then to proffer opinions, it is also inevitable that there will be discord and disagreement in the dispensation of justice. Yet it is here that Montaigne argues 'faute de mieux' for adherence to the law, chiefly for the liberty it affords the individual:

> (b) Mon Dieu! que mal pourroy-je souffrir la condition où je vois tant de gens, clouez à un quartier de ce royaume, privés de l'entrée des villes principalles et des courts et de l'usage des chemins publics, pour avoir querellé nos loix! (III, 13 p 1049.)

Thus we see that Montaigne's position with regard to the rules imposed on a given community is essentially pragmatic. He makes little distinction between rules imposed through law, religion or social ritual. Whether he is discussing the royal court, the Church or the French system of justice, he is prepared to support the institutions of authority and to follow the guidelines they set out. What is important is the existence, however flawed, of a system of reference against which the individual may measure his performance and identify his position in his community. This attitude could be termed gentlemanly in that Montaigne obviously wishes to participate in the preservation of his society. As in the case of the Lord Octavian in *The Book of the Courtier* , Montaigne feels a moral responsibility to uphold those who wield power and to influence them where possible in the right direction.[9]

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The tension between what Montaigne privately feels is right and the behaviour required of him in a public capacity sometimes necessitates a conscious separation of his inner thoughts and outer performance. Our next task must be to examine how he copes with this tension and how the *Essais* are part of the solution. This is much clearer as we approach the unwritten rules of social intercourse - the more specifically gentlemanly code. The image of the mask which occurs notably in ' De la coustume et de ne changer aisément une loy receüe', brings with it connotations of theatre and role-play which are particularly helpful in considering Montaigne's reaction to the social code. We know

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9 Compare for example Montaigne, *Essais* III, 13 p 1055 and Castiglione, *Le Courtisan,* Bk IV f 5 verso.

from his description of his schooldays at the end of 'De l'institution des enfans' that Montaigne was a keen participant in school plays, perhaps, he suggests, because of a particular aptitude for dramatic interpretation.[10] He appears to confront matters of conduct as if performing on a stage in a similar way:

> (b) Chacun peut avoir part au battelage et representer un honneste personnage en l'eschaffaut,... (III, 2 p 786.)

The use of a term of popular entertainment suggests the light in which Montaigne views the social stage. This is a view of social behaviour as an expression of accumulated training rather than natural character but one in which he takes pleasure and will not hesitate to demonstrate his skills.

The first area of social intercourse where Montaigne makes a conscious decision to comply with externally imposed rules and to perform a suitably gentlemanly role concerns his physical appearance. We have already noted his perceived lack of physical stature in the preceding chapter; this natural shortcoming with regard to the commanding presence required of a gentleman is ruefully acknowledged in the list of compensating physical features which Montaigne agrees are not enough to make 'un bel homme'.[11] Nevertheless the positive aspects of clear eyes, well-proportioned nose and ears, white teeth and carefully groomed beard stand in obvious counterpoint to this failing and leave the reader in no doubt that Montaigne pays great attention to his presentation as a gentleman. In other words he is aware of the general ideal of physical beauty for the men of his day and does his best to conform in so far as he can. The irony of his remarks only serves to point up the force of this social requirement.

In matters of dress Montaigne reveals himself to be equally aware of the effect his appearance will have on others and of the pressure to conform. In 'De l'usage de se vestir' (I, 36), he mentions his predilection for black or white clothing to the exclusion of other colours and attributes this to the influence of his father. The desirability of sombre dress is also expressed in *The Book of the Courtier* and is another indication of the existence of a pattern or ideal which both men were following.[12] Moreover in uttering the wish that the king will turn his court away from the cut-away hose and bulky

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[10] *Essais* I, 26 p 176.

[11] *Essais*, II, 17 p 624.

[12] *Castiglione, Le Courtisan*, Bk II f 91 recto.

doublet which Montaigne finds distasteful, he is describing these fashions as if he also follows them:

> (b) Qu'ils se desplaisent de cette vilaine chaussure qui montre si à descouvert nos membres occultes; ce lourd grossissement de pourpoins, qui nous faict tous autres que nous ne sommes, si incommode à s'armer; (I, 43 p 261.)

Far be it from Montaigne to admit to being a slave to fashion, but he does give an example which shows how well-acquainted he is with such phenomena:

> (a) ...à l'opinion d'un chacun, les soyes estoient venuës à telle vilité que, si vous en voyez quelqu'un vestu, vous en faisiez incontinent quelque homme de ville. (I, 43 p 260.)

The distinction between nobleman and bourgeois is plainly evident in this disdainful comment on the wearing of silk. The reader is left in no doubt concerning which social group Montaigne belonged to, nor concerning his participation in the fashion for wearing cloth in deference to the passing of Henri II.

While remarking upon the fickle nature of the Frenchman's dress-sense in ' Des coustumes anciennes', he writes from a standpoint of acceptance rather than rejection and simply notes the phenomenon as an illustration of human behaviour.[13] In 'De l'institution des enfans' he admits having imitated a contrived air of casualness in his dress and describes exactly how to achieve such an effect. He is thus conscious of the importance clothes can have in creating a desired impression. In this instance he is at pains to show his disdain for affectation and for those who try to stand out from the crowd. He suggests that on the contemporary social stage too obvious a preoccupation with one's dress will not be well received in a gentleman, in a passage which bears a strong resemblance to Castiglione's advice:[14]

> (c) Toute affectation, nomméement en la gayeté et liberté françoise, est mesadvenante au cortisan. Et, en une monarchie, tout Gentil'homme doit estre dressé à la façon d'un cortisan. Parquoy nous faisons bien de gauchir un peu sur le naïf et mesprisant. (I, 26 p 171.)

Even in his apparent carelessness of dress Montaigne demonstrates his knowledge of the social code befitting a gentleman, if he is not to attract the ridicule of his fellows.

The gesture of saluting one's acquaintances with one's hat is a custom which

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13 *Essais* I, 49 p 285.

14 Castiglione, *Le Courtisan,* Bk II f 91 verso.

Montaigne gently derides, saying he is particularly prone to this habit in warm weather. The humorous tone of this comment in 'De la praesumption' on the frequency with which he is obliged to raise his hat and his description of greetings almost as an act of aggression leave the reader with the impression that this is one rule he is personally exasperated by:

> (b) Je suis assez prodigue de bonnetades, notamment en esté, et n'en reçoys jamais sans revenche, de quelque qualité d'homme que ce soit, s'il n'est à mes gages. (II, 17 p 616.)

Yet he goes on to suggest simply that a salute is more effective if used sparingly: it is not the actual custom which is at fault, only the interpretation of it. To give a balanced picture he cites the example of the Roman emperor Constantius who never saluted anybody, and his own opinion of such behaviour is expressed in the word 'desreglé'. Thus the rule is open to abuse through over- or under-use, but the reader is left free to decide how to apply it to his own case.

Again he is upset when mistaken for his barber or secretary and not accorded due reverence with the hat[15]. We cannot be sure whether he is genuinely contemptuous of the ritual or merely affecting disdain and secretly convinced of its usefulness. Gesture is also acknowledged to be an important aspect of social communication at table. In 'De trois commerces' Montaigne feels he may discern a guest's character more accurately through the opportunity to observe him eating or just sitting in silence and smiling, than by meeting him in a formal setting.[16] By these simple, physical expressions of the social code one gentleman may recognise another and seek out his company.

Interestingly the recognition of such a group depends on the discretion of the observer and Montaigne implies that this discretion is a matter of innate gift just as the qualities of 'honnesteté' and 'habileté' in his fellows will be. The insistence on the importance of inborn qualities echoes the consensus in *The Book of the Courtier* that a noble ancestry is more likely to engender moral stature, a point we noted in our second chapter. Although it is allowed that individuals may shine through their own virtues, the advantage of an established family tradition is held to be a considerable spur to gentlemanly morals.[17] However, moral and social distinction appear inextricably bound

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[15] *Essais* II, 17 p 624.

[16] *Essais* III, 3 p 802.

[17] Castiglione, *Le Courtisan* Bk I f 22 verso.

together in both Castiglione and Montaigne, for both go on to speak of the training and nurture which must accompany an auspicious start in life:

> (b) Une ame bien née et exercée à la praticque des hommes se rend pleinement aggreable d'elle mesme. (III, 3 p 802.)

The moral training will inevitably depend on the individual's social circumstances.

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The next area of presentation involved in the role Montaigne wants to perform on the public stage concerns the language he uses. Here he makes a distinction between those people whose company he has actively sought and those with whom he converses in a more formal and obligatory context. With the latter he manifests difficulty in conducting his conversation with the caution and even the suspicion he feels is justified:

> (b) Aussi, que j'ay naturellement peine à me communiquer à demy et avec modification, et cette servile prudence et soupçonneuse qu'on nous ordonne en la conversation de ces amitiés nombreuses et imparfaictes; et nous l'ordonne l'on principalement en ce temps, qu'il ne se peut parler du monde que dangereusement ou faucement. (III, 3 p 798.)

He has evidently found such conversations demeaning, but is acutely aware how easy it is to make enemies if one is not to speak deliberate falsehoods. It is clear that a mask of deception is a necessary precaution in such circumstances and involves a certain detachment on the part of the individual. In fact he speaks in 'De la vanité' of the conflict between the conscious attempt to prepare what he says and the desire to appear spontaneous and sincere, in terms that remind the reader of Castiglione's theory of dissimulation:

> (b) Autant que je m'en rapporte à elle,(la memoire) je me mets hors de moy, jusques à essaier ma contenance; et me suis veu quelque jour en peine de celer la servitude en laquelle j'estois entravé, là où mon dessein est de representer en parlant une profonde nonchalance et des mouvemens fortuites et impremeditez, comme naissans des occasions presentes: (III, 9 p 940.)

The struggle to hide his intellectual effort, to compose his countenance and to create a natural impression is justified because to speak otherwise is unseemly for people in his profession. Whether this is a reference to his position as a man of arms or of law it is

evident that Montaigne does not feel able to speak freely in public and that this feeling necessitates the metaphorical disguise he refers to elsewhere as the mask.

When the occasion for public pronouncement does arise, such factors as stance, facial expression, tone of voice, dress and attitude are listed as contributory to the success of Montaigne's spoken language. His alleged natural propensity for spontaneity lends itself more to oral than to written expression, although this claim could be interpreted as one more indication of his desire to avoid unseemly affectation:

> (a) Comme à faire, à dire aussi je suy tout simplement ma forme naturelle: d'où c'est à l'adventure que je puis plus à parler qu'à escrire. Le mouvement et action animent les parolles, notamment à ceux qui se remuent brusquement, comme je fay, et qui s'eschauffe. (II, 17 p 621-2.)

In any event the combination of action and speech reveals a preoccupation with the power of persuasion which we have already noted in Castiglione:

> ...et non seullement l'habillement, mais toutes les manieres et coustumes, oultre les oeuvres et les parolles sont iugemens des qualitez de celluy en qui on les veoit.[18]

Gesture and countenance, in short the body language, is a powerful element of communication and makes an essential contribution to the overall performance of the individual in public. Montaigne repeatedly describes the spoken and written language he admires in terms that correspond to this physical impact:

> (a) Le parler que j'ayme, c'est un parler simple et naïf, tel sur le papier qu'à la bouche; un parler succulent et nerveux, court et serré, (c) non tant delicat et peigné comme vehement et brusque: (I, 26 p 171.)

His admiration for the military vigour of the Gascon dialect serves also to reaffirm his identity as a soldier from that part of France, as he uses adjectives from three other social categories to describe the kind of speech he avoids:

> (a) ...non pedantesque, non fratesque, non pleideresque, mais plustost soldatesque,... (I, 26 p 171.)

The superiority of gentlemen bearing arms over scholars, clerics and lawyers is plain.

When he discusses the merits of the French language compared to Latin or Greek, he criticises the tendency of contemporary French writers to seize on new, exotic

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[18] Castiglione, *Le Courtisan*, Bk II f 93 recto.

words at the expense of the common and more effective ones. However he finds himself borrowing from all possible sources, not only from Ancient and contemporary writers and from his local dialect, but also from the language of the common people. He recognises that he expresses himself differently when in Paris and at home and argues in 'De trois commerces' that one should be able to adapt according to the level of one's interlocutor. In practical terms this means reading the indicators of social status and being sufficiently flexible to communicate on the same footing:

> (b) Je louerois un' ame à divers estages, qui sçache et se tendre et se desmonter, qui soit bien par tout où sa fortune la porte, qui puisse deviser avec son voisin de son bastiment, de sa chasse et de sa querelle, entretenir avec plaisir un charpentier et un jardinier; j'envie ceux qui sçavent s'aprivoiser au moindre de leur suitte et dresser de l'entretien en leur propre train. (III, 3 p 799.)

This idea can be directly linked with Castiglione's advice to the courtier to hide the evidence of his social training[19] and to make himself agreeable to his company rather than to try and set himself apart, although Montaigne applies this advice in a much wider context than the royal court. In only one instance does Montaigne concede that he has been able to communicate in a totally spontaneous and natural fashion; that is of course with Etienne de la Boétie. In view of the fact that Montaigne must live from the age of thirty without the company of La Boétie, he will nevertheless seek some comfort in conversation with people who in his estimation have the right moral and intellectual qualities. Language is thus for Montaigne a vital tool in representing his identity as a gentleman, but he uses it also to demonstrate the superiority of moral over social considerations:

> (b) Car de servir de spectacle aux grands et faire à l'envy parade de son esprit et de son caquet, je trouve que c'est un mestier très-messeant, à un homme d'honneur. (III, 8 p 901.)

A final concession to the social code which Montaigne makes in his personal presentation concerns his attitude towards public honours. While denouncing the current explosion of aristocratic titles and the resulting devaluation of family crests in the chapter 'Des noms', he takes care to describe his own coat of arms and we know from the 'Journal de Voyage en Italie' that he had them painted as a memorial of his visit in

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[19] Castiglione, *Le Courtisan*, Bk I f 34 recto.

several towns[20]. Similarly he left a silver plaque representing himself and his wife and daughter as an ex-voto in the church of Loreto: this bore the legend 'Michael Montanus, Gallus Vasco, Eques regii Ordinis, 1581' which is a discreet but assured reminder of his social status. And at the end of 'De la vanité' he transcribes word for word the declaration of Roman citizenship which he was accorded by the Pope as a result of considerable persistence[21]. While carping at the term 'bourgeois' he argues that Rome is a venerable exception and that to deny the pleasure this honour affords him would be to hide part of his nature. Moreover he cannot conceal a note of pride when he describes his nomination as mayor of Bordeaux and names other august personalities who have held the same office. Thus the external trappings of public honour are greedily acquired by Montaigne, just as they are by other individuals desirous of affirming their gentlemanly social status. The *Essais* ostensibly excuse this hunger but they also reveal their author's active participation in the social theatre of his day.

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If we turn now to the relationship of Montaigne's public persona to his involvement in various fields of daily life, we shall see how his respect for the conventional ideal of gentlemanly behaviour is demonstrated and how his political neutrality could be explained as the extension of a personal conviction that rules can be followed without damaging the individual's fundamental liberty.

In the field of military action we have noted in the preceding chapter the frequency of his allusions to this occupation. His insistence that the bearing of arms is a noble calling is maintained in the final essay, although here he also provides an interesting point of comparison with the domestic situation on the subject of death:

> (b) La mort est plus abjecte, plus languissante et penible dans un lit qu'en un combat, les fiévres et les catarres autant doleureux et mortels qu'un harquebusade. Qui seroit faict à porter valeureusement les accidents de la vie commune, n'auroit poinct à grossir son courage pour se rendre gendarme.
> (III, 13 p 1076.)

This point of view detracts somewhat from the convention that the greatest valour is to

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20 See Montaigne, *Journal de Voyage* in *Oeuvres Complètes,* p 1125 and p 1161 for examples.

21 Montaigne, *Journal de Voyage* in *Oeuvres Complètes,* p 1236.

be found on the battlefield. While Montaigne does not make light of the dangers of being a soldier, he now sees equal opportunity for a valiant spirit in a civil context. We noted in the preceding chapter his opinion that hypocrisy and dissimulation are a coward's way of behaving. A gentlemanly respect for the truth and the corresponding courage to keep one's word are qualities requiring as much bravery in social intercourse as the physical trials of war.

Yet there are sufficient asides in the *Essais* to leave us in no doubt that Montaigne is on the side of the moral majority. It is clear that in the conflict between Catholic and Protestant, he is following the dictates of duty and has taken up arms in support of the King. For example his praise of the Protestant de la Noue is tempered by a strongly partisan denunciation of the faction this gentleman is fighting for:

> (c) Comme aussi la constante bonté, douceur de meurs et facilité conscientieuse de monsieur de la Nouë, en une telle injustice de parts armées, vraie eschole de trahison, d'inhumanité et de brigandage, où tousjours il s'est nourry, grand homme de guerre et très-experimenté. (II, 17 p 645.)

Montaigne is objective enough to admire the moral qualities of this man, regardless of his cause, and this suggests a nostalgia for Classical ideals of virtue and despair at the social chaos wrought by contemporary warfare.[22] The call to arms should in Montaigne's eyes provide an opportunity to put one's moral ideal into practice, but the reality, he knows, is a severe testing-ground. The hazards of war are graphically described in 'Que le goust des biens et des maux depend en bonne partie de l'opinion que nous en avons':

> (a) S'il ne faut coucher sur la dure, soustenir armé de toutes pieces la chaleur du midy, se paistre d'un cheval et d'un asne, se voir detailler en pieces, et arracher une balle d'entre les os, se souffrir recoudre, cauterizer et sonder, par où s'acquerra l'advantage que nous voulons avoir sur le vulgaire? (I, 14 p 56.)

Here Montaigne stresses the value of overcoming military hardships in social terms, but his chief thought is for the moral distinction which long-suffering resolution will bring. However the issue is complicated in 'De la conscience' by the impossibility of distinguishing the enemy in a civil war:

> (a) ...et le pis de ces guerres, c'est que les cartes sont si meslées, votre ennemy n'estant distingué d'avec vous de aucune marque apparente, ny de langage, ny de port, nourry en mesmes loix, meurs et mesme air, qu'il est mal-aisé d'y eviter

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[22] G. Nakam, *Les Essais de Montaigne: Miroir et Procès de leur temps,* (Paris, 1984) p 121-5.

confusion et desordre. (II, 5 p 346.)

If two gentlemen of the same social standing are on opposite sides in the conflict, it is the society they come from that is under attack. This clear statement of the social dilemma leaves the moral question implied but unanswered. How is a gentleman to choose sides? It occurs in the chapter entitled 'De la conscience' which goes on to discuss the unreliability of methods of torture in extracting the truth in both guilty and innocent. For Montaigne the only sure way of deciding which path to follow is by acting according to one's conscience. Once again the moral ideal is the guiding force behind the outward display.

Another point in contrast to the conventional military role of a nobleman is the revelation in 'De la phisionomie' that Montaigne did not barricade himself into his own home and take up arms, to protect his family from the brigands who were plundering the countryside in supposed pursuit of one side or other of the Wars of Religion. As he explains in 'Que nostre desir s'accroit par la malaisance' he preferred to trust in divine providence and leave his attackers open to charges of cowardice and treachery rather than to spend large amounts of time and money defending his property. Apart from the gentlemanly duty only to fight if one has taken all steps to prepare for such a public display of strength, there is the astute calculation that such preparation actually invites attack:

> (c) Un gentilhomme a tort de faire montre d'estre en deffense, s'il ne l'est parfaictement. Qui est ouvert d'un costé, l'est par tout. Noz peres ne pansarent pas à bastir des places frontieres. Les moyens d'assaillir, je dy sans baterie et sans armée, et de surprendre nos maisons, croissent tous les jours audessus des moyens de se garder. Les esprits s'esguisent generalement de ce costé là.
> (II, 15 p 600.)

Although Montaigne recognises the leader of a band of about thirty armed men who enter his house in 1585 and realises that his story is probably a ruse for plunder, he allows him free access on the grounds that all might be lost if he did not keep up his initial courtesy:

> (b) Tant y a que, trouvant qu'il n'y avoit point d'acquest d'avoir commencé à faire plaisir si je n'achevois, et ne pouvant me desfaire sans tout rompre, je me laissay aller au party le plus naturel et le plus simple, comme je faicts toujours, commendant qu'ils entrassent. (III, 12 p 1038.)

He emphasises instead the importance of openness and an equable demeanour in self-preservation. Well aware of the danger he is in, he asserts that it is safer to trust to fortune and treat all visitors with the same courtesy. His deliberate pretence of solicitude convinces the reader that Montaigne's role-play does not here match his thoughts; but the rules of gentlemanly conduct serve him well. Once more moral concepts override social considerations and his refusal to exhibit fear is the deciding factor:

> (b) Souvant depuis, il a dict, car il ne craingnoit pas de faire ce compte, que mon visage et ma franchise luy avoient arraché la trahison des poincts.
> (III, 12 p 1039.)

Thus we see that Montaigne's experiences of military action cause him to stray in some ways from traditional noble practice, and that his underlying sense of obligation to defend the established institutions of authority is balanced by a desire to judge each case according to the circumstances. Even if he avoids conflict, he remains loyal to the monarchy and his reputation is sufficient to extricate himself on one occasion from the Bastille by the good graces of Catherine de Medicis[23]. He plainly feels that the strength of spirit which each man can demonstrate in military service is a matter for individual discretion; ultimately he alone can measure the benefits of such experience and must decide for himself whether and how to participate:

> (b) Vous vous conviez aux rolles et hazards particuliers selon que vous jugez de leur esclat et de leur importance, (c) soldat volontaire,... (III, 13 p 1076.)

Blind adherence to duty is ill-advised; knowing one's personal strengths and weaknesses and coordinating them with the rules of conduct by the exercise of one's free will is the only way to achieve a truly honourable standing:

> (b) Si l'action n'a quelque splendeur de liberté, elle n'a point de grace ni d'honneur. (III, 9 p 944.)

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The same attitude is evident in Montaigne's interpretation of his role as mayor of Bordeaux. He speaks explicitly of the separation between his behaviour in public

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[23] Montaigne, 'Notes sur les 'Ephémérides" in *Oeuvres Complètes*, p 1410.

office and that of the private individual. The light-hearted way in which he speaks of metaphorically making up and donning a mask for his function as mayor reinforces what he says at the beginning of 'De mesnager sa volonté' about maintaining a certain distance from his public duties:

> (c) C'est assés de s'enfariner le visage, sans s'enfariner la poictrine.
> (III, 10 p 989.)

Now he wishes to avoid his father's example, despite being nominated in this connection, and to acquit himself of his responsibilities as best he can without undue strain. Where Pierre devoted himself to public duties to the detriment of his health and general well-being, Michel argues the need for balance. There is greater satisfaction to be had from a life that concentrates equally upon private and public activities than from one that is obsessed with either sphere:

> (b) Cettuy-cy, sçachant exactement ce qu'il se doibt, trouve dans son rolle qu'il doibt appliquer à soy l'usage des autres hommes et du monde, et, pour ce faire, contribuer à la societé publique les devoirs et offices qui le touchent.
> (III, 10 p 984.)

But the separation of public and private identities is not totally practicable; elements of character inevitably colour the individual's social judgement. For example, a sense of distance from public issues should bring with it the ability to see both good and bad whatever side of a debate one is drawn to. Montaigne found that a moderate position was open to criticism from both sides in the Wars of Religion, as he indicates in the allusion to Guelphe and Gibelin factions in 'De la Phisionomie'.[24] Tactfully he refrains from naming the opposing sides in the current troubles, and draws an analogy instead with a past conflict in Italy between supporters of the Pope and of the Germanic emperor. He suggests that the success of his mayorship and his re-election for a second period of office was founded on his impartiality and that this aspect of his behaviour stemmed from a trait of his personality:

> (b) Aucuns disent de cette mienne occupation de ville (et je suis content d'en parler un mot, non qu'elle le vaille, mais pour servir de montre de mes meurs en telles choses), que je m'y suis porté en homme qui s'esmeut trop laschement et d'une affection languissante; et ils ne sont pas du tout esloignez d'apparence.
> (III, 10 p 998.)

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[24] *Essais* III, 12 p 1021.

The coordination of his personal characteristics with external rules of conduct serves furthermore to reinforce Montaigne's social status. He explains his quiet, unremarkable period of office by reference to his family background. This is an excellent opportunity to emphasise, albeit in rather imprecise terms, the long-standing nobility of his lineage and to express satisfaction with his performance as mayor in comparison with other more troubled attempts. There is a hint of complacency in his concluding remarks to this chapter which is perhaps not fitting for a man in Castiglione's mould:

> (b) Les corps raboteux se sentent, les polis se manient imperceptiblement; la maladie se sent, la santé peu ou point; ny les choses qui nous oignent, au pris de celles qui nous poignent. (III, 10 p 999.)

but this is balanced by the protestation that he really did very little. The call of duty has been answered with dignity but the period of office was not prolonged, and social institutions have been upheld, but these were already in place before his arrival. While recognizing that public service cannot be accomplished without some tarnishing of one's moral integrity:

> (b) ...l'innocence mesme ne sçauroit ny negotier entre nous sans dissimulation, ny marchander sans manterie. (III, 1 p 772.)

Montaigne has countered this by not seeking to exploit his social position and by straightforward fulfilment of his obligations. He refers specifically to the concept of grace in expressing the observation that actions achieved without self-publicity will be judged all the more favourably by both onlooker and recipient of those actions, a clear echo of Castiglione's ideal.[25]

Two further examples of Montaigne's respect for the rules of social conduct will serve to illustrate his resolution of the tension between public behaviour and private thought. The ability to act out emotions which do not come from a genuine inner feeling is mentioned in 'De la colère,' where Montaigne sometimes has to feign anger to keep his household in order. At other times he feels anger is justified but is careful not to react in the expected fashion for fear of being carried away. However he recognises that there will be occasions when he will be taken by surprise and unable to control himself in the same way:

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[25] *Essais* III, 10 p 1001.

> (b) ...et le mal'heur veut que, dépuis que vous estes dans le precipice, il n'importe qui vous ayt donné le branle, vous allez tousjours jusques au fons; la cheute se presse, s'esmeut, et se haste d'elle mesme. (II, 31 p 698.)

The image of a falling body gathering momentum until it crashes to the ground expresses Montaigne's sense of failure here to play his part. The force of the emotion of anger is sometimes great enough to overwhelm all sense of propriety and make the mask slip from the actor's face. With the advance of years he resolves to be more amenable in his daily dealings with family and servants, but speaks of the increasing effort of will to do so:

> (b) A mesure que l'aage me rend les humeurs plus aigres, j'estudie à m'y opposer, et feray, si je puis, que je seray dores en advant d'autant moins chagrin et difficile que j'auray plus d'excuse et d'inclination à l'estre,... (II, 31 p 698.)

Similarly the capacity to hide his feelings and to do what he perceives as his duty is noted in 'Sur des vers de Virgile'. Montaigne reminisces about the circumstances of his marriage and how unwillingly he entered it, but implies that he has in fact changed his mind with the passage of time. Again a note of compromise enters his argument that once one is committed one should strive to fulfill the obligation with a good will:

> (b) Il faut prudemment mesnager sa liberté; mais depuis qu'on s'est submis à l'obligation, il s'y faut tenir soubs les loix du debvoir commun, aumoins s'efforcer. (III, 5 p 830.)

The marriage laws may not always be fully adhered to, but the validity of this institution is defined as primarily social rather than personal, since the procreation of heirs is its principal function. Strong feelings of love and desire do not belong here and are consigned to a part of Montaigne's existence that is outside the realm of public display. Marriage is something that has to be crafted in the manner of a work of art:

> (b) A le bien façonner et à le bien prendre, il n'est point de plus belle piece en nostre société. (III, 5 p 829.)

In both these examples, as with his experiences of military service and public office, there is an acute awareness of the social requirements of a situation and of the problems they pose for his personal freedom. The solution is straightforward and unhesitating and involves a deliberate masking of private thoughts for the benefit of circumstance. As a result he admits his conduct could be termed flexible rather than rigidly principled, and his approach suggests a desire to fit in with his peers:

> (b) Ay-je besoing de cholere et d'inflammation? Je l'emprunte et m'en masque. Mes meurs sont mousses, plustost fades qu'aspres. (III, 10 p 999.)

Rules of conduct are accepted in theory but are constantly modified by the dual forces of Montaigne's personal characteristics and the pressure of circumstance. It is the moral value of a situation which governs him, ahead of any social ambitions he may nurture. However he admits the existence of both values and has found that his experience of public life has obliged him to relate his behaviour to his situation, even to the extent of momentarily abandoning his early training:

> (b) Celuy qui va en la presse, il faut qu'il gauchisse, qu'il serre ses couddes, qu'il recule ou qu'il avance, voire qu'il quitte le droict chemin, selon ce qu'il rencontre; (III, 9 p 970.)

What he retains is an awareness of the 'droict chemin', the expectation of his social class.

* * *

We must now consider what evidence there is that Montaigne retains elements of the social code when the mask is removed and his field of vision turns inward. We shall see that even when the need to conform has been lifted because he has largely left the public stage, the influence of his father's example, of his education and of his training is still discernible in his approach to the reading and writing he undertakes in later life. The rules of gentlemanly conduct have been internalized but not forgotten or rejected as being no longer of value or relevance.

When Montaigne retires from his position as a magistrate in the high court of Bordeaux at the age of thirty-eight, he fulfils one of the requirements of gentlemanly conduct in that he no longer actively pursues gainful employment. His explicit aim of ending his days in the pleasurable pastime of study can be viewed as a step befitting his social status, but more importantly as one corresponding to his moral preoccupations. The decision to step down from the public stage was only partly achieved since his nomination as mayor occurred nearly ten years after his retirement; and we know for example from notes on 'Les Ephémérides', a record of the main events in the Montaigne

family history, that Michel received Henri de Navarre and his entourage at his home.[26] But he writes in 'De l'exercitation' of his current occupation as 'un amusement nouveau et extraordinaire' which has drawn him away from more social duties, even of the most prestigious kind. Now Montaigne wishes to undertake an intellectual task which has the merit of bringing personal reward rather than material gain.

The idea of diversion contained in this new occupation is often reflected elsewhere in the *Essais*, particularly in his argument that his most profound thoughts occur to him anywhere other than in his library. He insists that he is not a 'faiseur de livres' and apologises to the reader for the dilettante presentation of his literary work, but feels that it would not be accurate to omit the amusing side of life:

> (c) Nostre vie est partie en folie, partie en prudence. Qui n'en escrit que reveremment et regulierement, il en laisse en arriere plus de la moitié. (III, 5 p 866-7.)

Moreover where learning was pursued in his youth first for social reasons, then for moral guidance, now it is chiefly for the pleasure it affords:

> (b) J'estudiay , jeune, pour l'ostentation; depuis, un peu, pour m'assagir; à cette heure, pour m'esbatre; jamais pour le quest. (III, 3 p 807.)

Earlier in the writing of the *Essais* Montaigne did speak of his aim to follow the workings of his mind in its most intricate detail both as a pleasure and a serious occupation:

> (a) Je ne cherche aux livres qu'à m'y donner du plaisir par un honneste amusement; ou si j'estudie, je n'y cherche que la science qui traicte de la connoissance de moy mesmes, et qui m'instruise à bien mourir et à bien vivre: (II, 10 p 388.)

The use of 'honneste' and 'bien' here calls to mind Castiglione's moral concept of grace and the serious intent concerns the author's gentlemanly desire to discover a graceful way of life and death. The *Essais* are not intended to instruct others, only to portray the author in as truthful and entertaining a light as possible and are therefore not written according to a conventional format. He cannot claim to explain his thoughts with any professional authority, only to record them in random fashion as they occur to him in the course of daily life:

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[26] Montaigne, *Oeuvres Complètes*, p 1409.

(c) Les sçavans partent et denotent leurs fantasies plus specifiquement, et par le menu. Moy, qui n'y voy qu'autant que l'usage m'en informe, sans regle, presente generalement les miennes, et à tastons. (III, 13 p 1054.)

This style of presentation corresponds to Montaigne's alleged personal inclination towards spontaneity and natural diversity. He wishes to be free to follow the train of his thoughts not only because it is more truthful to do so, but also because it is more amusing. He perceives his writing as a kind of hunting game, in which the reader will be rewarded for his efforts with the prize of another piece to help him put the puzzle together:

(c) C'est l'indiligent lecteur qui pert mon subject, non pas moy; il s'en trouvera tousjours en un coing quelque mot qui ne laisse pas d'estre bastant, quoy qu'il soit serré.
(III, 9 p 973.)

This playful approach is similar to Lady Emilia's wish in *The Book of the Courtier* that the discussion be commenced by Count Ludovico since he will set the proceedings on a light-hearted footing:

...mais pource qu'en disant toutes choses au contraire (comme nous esperons que ferez) le ieu en sera plusbeau d'aultant que chascun aura dequoy vous respondre.[27]

There is the same notion of a game being played where certain conventions are accepted, but where it would be unthinkable to bore one's audience.

While maintaining his freedom to write within a very loose framework, Montaigne finds that his project is far from easy and that it is never-ending. There is as much work involved in learning about oneself as about the outside world:

(c) Et quand personne ne me lira, ay-je perdu mon temps de m'estre entretenu tant d'heures oisifves à pensements si utiles et agreables? (II, 18 p 647.)

The occupation may be pleasant and pursued at leisure but it has also to convey all the parts of the puzzle. Here the assumption is clear that learning for Montaigne involves both the absorption of ideas and their reproduction in literary form. The *Essais* are said to be an extension of the author's mind as he reacts to whatever material presents itself and in so doing defines his own identity. The random nature of this process could be

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27 Castiglione, *Le Courtisan*, Bk I f 21 recto.

described as another example of Montaigne's 'sprezzatura', since he also wishes to avoid accusations of flamboyant literary prowess.[28] The obvious delight of the author in the sound of words is difficult to conceal however in the innumerable examples of alliteration, assonance and other figures of speech with which he manipulates his ideas. This is not the work of someone with no aptitude for the task; he simply refrains from claiming expertise or purpose. This is the pastime of someone who has a certain standing in society and who is writing from the material security of his position in order to achieve a target he has set himself, not to promote that standing. Any social honour that may accrue is incidental. Such an attitude may appear disingenuous in the light of the fact that the *Essais* ran to five editions between 1580 and 1588[29] and had been well received by Henri III.[30] But it is an example of gentlemanly restraint in advertising his skills.

* * *

The fact that Montaigne has more time to turn away from extraneous affairs and concentrate on himself is paradoxically the very opposite of leisure, in the sense of relaxation, since his thoughts naturally wander along the most tortuous paths and cause him the greatest internal debate:

> (b) Pour leger subject qu'on luy donne, elle (l'âme) le grossit volontiers et l'estire jusques au poinct où elle ait à s'y embesongner de toute sa force. (III, 3 p 796.)

As a result he refutes any notion of cohesion in his writing. He will faithfully record his thoughts as they occur, but will not necessarily have the same ideas on the same subject from one occasion to the next. Thereby the act of recording his thoughts is a concrete demonstration of the relativity of one man's opinions. Since the mind is inseparable from the body, his thoughts will to some extent be determined by his physical condition and this in turn is influenced by such factors as health, diet or the weather. Just as Castiglione is unable to quantify the concept of grace and can only describe good

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28 *Essais,* II, 18 p 648.

29 The 1588 edition of the essays (Paris, Abel l'Angelier) calls itself on the title page 'Cinquiesme edition, augmentée d'un troisiesme livre; et de six cens additions aux deux premiers'. However no copies of the 'missing' fourth edition have ever been found. See R.A.Sayce and D.Maskell, *A Descriptive Bibliography of Montaigne's Essais 1580-1700* (London, 1983) p 11.

30 McGowan, *Montaigne's Deceits,* p 4-5.

conduct in relation to its opposite in a given situation, so Montaigne cannot prescribe his judgement and can only describe the various factors that influence him. It is in the experience of a situation that the individual must determine what is right. Montaigne maintains his right to exercise his discretion according to criteria of his own choosing, since only he can know his true feelings and motives at any one time. Now the opinions and actions of a gentleman depend on his individual judgement, since the general consensus is untrustworthy:

> (c) Signamment en un siecle corrompu et ignorant comme cettuy-cy, la bonne estime du peuple est injurieuse; à qui vous fiez vous de veoir ce qui est louable? (III, 2 p 785.)

But the social code has been internalized, not abandoned: Montaigne still accepts the need for some moral limitation on his nature and expresses it in terms of external institutions:

> (b) J'ay mes loix et ma court pour juger de moy, et m'y adresse plus qu'ailleurs. (III, 2 p 785.)

Deprived of the only friend with whom he could communicate in totally unfettered confidence, Montaigne uses the *Essais* as the vehicle for a dialogue with an imaginary reader who will enable him to formulate his own opinions by acting as a sounding board. The only authority Montaigne acknowledges now in matters of debate is his conscience. It is far more important to satisfy the demands of personal honour than of legal obligation:

> (b) Le neud qui me tient par la loy d'honnesteté me semble bien plus pressant et plus poisant que n'est celuy de la contrainte civile. (III, 9 p 944.)

The feeling of pleasure he gains from obeying his conscience echoes the Lord Octavian's description of the ideal moral standpoint in *The Book of the Courtier*. There is no violence or compulsion, only a sense of well-being produced by discerning right from wrong:

> Pareillement ceste vertu sans faire force a l'entendement, mais luy instillant par voyes paisibles une vehemente persuasion qui s'incline a lhonnestete, le rend transquille et plain de repos esgal en toutes choses....[31]

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[31] Castiglione, *Le Courtisan*, Bk IV f 14 recto / verso.

The tradition of the benefactor receiving greater satisfaction than the beneficiary can be traced back to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and is linked by Montaigne with the concept of civility. Behaving properly may have the effect of securing social honour, but first and foremost is the reward of a clear conscience:

> (c) Qui bien faict, exerce une action belle et honneste; qui reçoit, l'exerce utile seulement; or l'utile est de beaucoup moins aimable que l'honneste. L'honneste est stable et permanent, fournissant à celuy qui l'a faict une gratification constante. (II, 8 p 366.)

However, the preservation of one's moral integrity does entail the exercise of one's will-power and in the depiction of his personality as a whole Montaigne cannot omit those thoughts and feelings that occur despite the control of reason or will-power. In 'De la colere' he describes the conflict between external calm and internal turmoil in an acquaintance of his, and suggests the maintenance of the mask by the exercise of the will is in some cases detrimental to the individual's well-being.[32] Similarly in 'De l'affection des peres aux enfans' he reports the grief felt by the Maréchal de Monluc that his son died before he could show the affection he felt for him. The father was so inhibited by notions of paternal gravitas that he missed the opportunity to enjoy the pleasures of his relationship:

> (a) Je me suis contraint et geiné pour maintenir ce vain masque; et y ay perdu le plaisir de sa conversation, et sa volonté quant et quant,... (II, 8 p 376.)

Significantly this anecdote prompts Montaigne to think not of his own father whose contrasting indulgence is amply witnessed in the *Essais*, but of La Boétie whose friendship was so fully communicated and reciprocated by Montaigne. Now the mask is a hindrance to communication. The pain that Montaigne felt in his life at loosing La Boétie is soothed by the knowledge that they shared all their thoughts without rein.

Since such communion is no longer possible, Montaigne is always prepared for the disappointment of being misjudged:

> (a)mais, sçachant combien c'est chose eslongnée du commun usage qu'une telle amitié, et combien elle est rare, je ne m'attens pas d'en trouver aucun bon juge. (I, 2 p 191.)

It is more important to find a way of living and behaving that will achieve a harmony of

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32 *Essais*, II, 31 p 696.

individual and communal values than either to submit oneself wholesale to social pressures or to live in isolation. The mask has a necessary function as the meeting point of the two forces, but should be worn in full cognisance of its limitations. This is where Montaigne departs from the general principle enunciated in *The Book of the Courtier* that the knowledge derived from basic instincts is inferior to that obtained by the exercise of reason. For Castiglione the goal is the achievement of complete social integration through a gradual selection and refinement of one's innate characteristics: for Montaigne it is the fusion of natural and inculcated traits so that the individual may live at one with his society and yet be true to himself. Where Castiglione seeks to mould the individual to the requirements of his surroundings, Montaigne seeks on the other hand to reduce the constraints of his environment and to employ conventions only so far as they are useful.

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In this chapter we have endeavoured to show how Montaigne has been influenced by the ideas expressed in *The Book of the Courtier* and yet how he has adapted them for his own purpose. He has accepted the need for some kind of social apparel, devised through custom and usage, which we have called the mask and which Montaigne wore with willingness and ease. Equally he has espoused the ideal of graceful behaviour in the sense that he seeks the approval of his society and views his position as automatically being a member of that society. But the vital element of a code of conduct for Montaigne concerns the moral integrity of the individual and his freedom to follow its dictates. The discovery of the nature of such integrity and the best way to achieve it forms the essence of the task that Montaigne set himself in his writing. The social and moral content of one's behaviour cannot be separated and however one may act, either succeeding or failing to obey the gentlemanly rules, is an active demonstration of one's understanding of the circumstances. What Montaigne rejects is the purely material advancement that comes from unthinking adherence to social ritual. If the moral aspects of one's behaviour and opinions are neglected, one does not deserve the position of gentleman at all and loses any meaningful identity. This attitude has led Montaigne to a point where his presence at court and in public affairs has become difficult and tiresome:

> (b) Je sens que, si j'avois à me dresser tout à faict à telles occupations, il m'y faudroit beaucoup de changement et de rabillage. Quand je pourrois cela sur moy (et pourquoy ne le pourrois je, avec le temps et le soing?), je ne le voudrois pas. (III, 9 p 970.)

His withdrawal from public life signals his desire to find greater freedom to pursue all the questions his conscience may put to him. To this extent the *Essais* may be seen as the resolution of the tension Montaigne feels between his public and his private identities. What he wishes now is to reconcile the two so that his work in fact becomes the testimony of one individual but also a memorial of the society that formed him.

Conclusion.

This thesis has looked at an ideal of social intercourse, which we have termed gentlemanly behaviour, that was prevalent in France in the second half of the sixteenth century and evident in Montaigne's *Essais*. We have seen that the development of society at this time led to an increasing concern with the nature and definition of nobility and a tendency to stress education and character rather than military function, when assessing the hallmarks of superior social status. We have noted that this new emphasis on moral qualities rather than social role was supported by renewed attention to Greek and Latin texts on education by such authors as Cicero and Quintilian in the fifteenth century. The spread of Humanist scholarship led to a fundamental re-evaluation of educational practice and the establishment of many urban schools intended for the children of successful and affluent citizens who had ambitions to rise above their current social status. Montaigne's personal acquaintance with Classical literature provides a framework of reference for the opinions he expresses in the *Essais,* but his avowed admiration for and reliance on this literature stems as much from the contemporary interest in the Classical revival as from a personal predilection.

The *Essais* reflect the changing perceptions of Montaigne's society regarding the role of its elite and serve as an illustration of the interest in manners as an essential factor in determining the individual's position in society. The conduct manuals which were the focus of this interest at the beginning of the sixteenth century also derive much of their material from the works of the Ancient philosophers, but again adapt their precepts to the demands of the contemporary situation. We have attempted to shed light on Montaigne's ideal of gentlemanly behaviour by making a sustained comparison with Castiglione, who grapples with the problem of the moral responsibility of the individual and the necessary correspondence of his actions with his beliefs. The importance of *The Book of the Courtier* lay in the formulation of an ideal of social performance, resting, as we have seen, upon the concept of grace or an awareness of the intermediate path between two excessive extremes. Behaviour in a social environment became a performance in which the individual strove to conceal his natural impulses and reactions, and presented instead an appearance of ease and assurance which was in fact hard-won.

Montaigne considers his own case from the perspective of a social performance

in several of his essays, particularly in 'De la praesumption' which tackles the question of self-esteem and the esteem in which one holds other people. The repeated insistence that he is writing not to impress but in order to explore the only subject he knew better than anyone else, is employed both as a conventional expression of modesty and as proof of his concern with what he does rather than what he says. He rejects academic learning in favour of the practical demonstration of one's understanding and instances of his appearance, dress, gestures and demeanour reveal, in the same way as Castiglione's courtier, behaviour as the expression of moral attitude. The ideal of gentlemanly behaviour which emerges from this essay consists in the exercise of his discretion according to the circumstances in which he finds himself. The *Essais* repeatedly describe his sensitivity to the diversity of these circumstances among the different peoples of the world, and his insistence that each set of customs is as valid for the people who follow them as the next, informs his approach to his own social performance. His superior social status rests upon a secure material and financial position, but once that is acquired, as it may easily be by many in his social peer-group, it is not enough to exercise authority only by means of such trappings as extravagant dress, housing and military honours. For Montaigne a truly well-born gentleman should be distinguished by his wisdom: the understanding he manifests of the people he meets and the situations he experiences will be expressed through the actions he takes, rather than the words he utters.

However if Montaigne has nevertheless devoted the latter part of his life to putting words on paper, it is because that is where his particular gifts lie. The gentlemanly ideal also consists in successfully coordinating one's personal attributes with the demands imposed by the social context, so that the individual is not constrained by his environment, but feels able to contribute positively to it. Thus with material success comes the responsibility to develop one's intellectual and moral faculties , and in full cognizance of one's natural propensities, to discover a way of life that will both suit the individual's personal requirements and be appropriate for his social circumstances. In this respect we noted a fundamental difference between Montaigne's approach and that advocated by Castiglione. Where the Italian courtier was advised to sublimate his natural characteristics in the attempt to gain the approval of the onlookers, Montaigne consciously sought to use the rules as a means to show his audience his true nature. He willingly accepted the need for order and discipline in both a communal and

an individual context, but gained greatest satisfaction from a sense of personal liberty in doing so:

> (c) Composer nos meurs est nostre office, non pas composer des livres, et gaigner, non pas des batailles et provinces, mais l'ordre et tranquillité à nostre conduite. Nostre grand et glorieux chef d'oeuvre, c'est vivre à propos.
> (III, 13 p 1088.)

Thus the highest form of social conduct rested for Montaigne on the coordination of natural gifts with moral judgement, so that one's actions and general behaviour were appropriate to one's circumstances but allowed the individual to reject conventions if he deemed it necessary. We have noted the sources of this ideal in Aristotle and Castiglione and attempted to describe the ways in which he makes it his own. This thesis has perceived the gentlemanly ideal as a powerful undercurrent in the *Essais* of Montaigne, which has shaped the author's view of his position in society and of his relations with his fellow man.

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