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MONTAIGNE AND THE TRIAL OF SOCRATES

In 399 BC Socrates was tried and condemned to death by an Athenian jury on charges of impiety and corruption of youth in a case that continues to reverberate in our own time. Due to the hagiographic efforts of Plato and Xenephon, Socrates has assumed the role of an exemplar of virtue and a martyr of free thought. One submerged feature of this portrait drawn by his disciples is Socrates' status as a victim of democracy, whose unjust fate vindicates his own antagonism to popular government. This political dimension of the trial has acquired renewed relevance in the era of modern democracy, but what could the Renaissance have understood of Socrates' political engagement? For the Renaissance, Socrates was an ethical hero, abstracted from time and place, whom Erasmus praised as a figure of Christ and whom Montaigne chose as the finest example of humanity in the closing pages of his *Essais*. Democracy, by contrast, was primarily an antiquarian topic if not simply an anachronism for the Renaissance, dominated as it was by the rivalry of absolutist states. Nevertheless, despite the political disparity between ancient Athens and early modern Europe, it was possible for a Renaissance writer to find some affinities between his own circumstances and the issues at stake beneath the surface of Socrates' trial. We will take the case of Montaigne's essay « De la phisionomie », which rehearses the trial of Socrates in order to advance an aristocratic critique of some of the most cherished if illusory ideals of Renaissance humanism. Through the dexterous interweaving of literary reminiscences, Socrates emerges from the pages of the *Essais* as a champion of Montaigne's peculiar political and social bias.

A key aspect to the trial and conviction of Socrates, to which Montaigne would have been deeply attentive, was the philosopher's paradoxical attitude to teaching and learning and its implications for Athenian politics. Socrates was charged by a trio of accusers, named Meletus, Lycon, and Anytus, with corrupting youth and disbelieving the gods of the city, but in Plato's *Apology* Socrates considers these charges to be secondary and subordinate to the informal indictment brought against him by the comic poets in their caricature of his philosophy. Socrates summarizes his comic caricature as follows: « Socrates is guilty of wrongdoing in that he busies himself studying things in the sky and below the earth; he makes the worse into the

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stronger argument, and he teaches these same things to others »(19b)[1]. His response is that he never studies such esoteric or forbidden topics and moreover he is not a teacher. While professing a somewhat disingenuous admiration for those who teach for a living, he insists on disassociating himself from the professional teachers or sophists such as « Gorgias of Leontini, Prodicus of Ceos, and Hippias of Elis »(19e), all of whom appear elsewhere in Plato's dialogues as Socrates' interlocutors and antagonists. Later in his speech to the jury Socrates declares emphatically: « I have never been anyone's teacher »(33a). Therefore, he adds, he can't be held responsible for the conduct of those who are misidentified as his pupils. This latter phrase suggests a practical motive for denying the title of teacher or didaskalos. We know from Xenophon (*Memorabilia* 1.2.12) that Socrates was blamed for having trained two of the arch-enemies of Athenian democracy, Alcibiades, who betrayed his city in the Peloponnesian war, and Critias, who led the regime of the thirty tyrants founded in 404 BC after Athens' defeat in the war. This was surely an important subtext to the official accusation of corruption of youth. Therefore, Socrates had a strictly expedient motive for his strenuous denial of teaching.

Yet expediency is not the only explanation. Socrates' hostility to teaching in general and to the Sophists in particular is a key element of his philosophy and of his engagement with society throughout Plato's dialogues. Socrates is famous for his profession of ignorance, and this profession would seem to dictate his attitude to teaching. To his jury, as to his other audiences, Socrates insists that he knows nothing, except for his own ignorance, and therefore he can't be expected to teach or to impart positive knowledge (21d,29b). Thus the disavowal of knowledge entails the repudiation of teaching and of the teaching profession as represented by the sophists. The sophists are continually subjected to ridicule and scorn in Plato's dialogues, where they appear as cultural mercenaries bearing the social stigma of wage-earning. This first trait is particularly conspicuous in the opening pages of the *Hippias Major* and it continues in dialogues such as the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*, where Socrates denounces sophistical rhetoric and its role in the polis. Elsewhere, in the *Protagoras* and the *Meno*, Socrates addresses the vexed question of whether virtue can be taught and, while leaving the main issue torturously in suspense, he conclusively maintains that virtue is not taught in Athens, least of all by the sophists or their accomplices, the Athenian politicians. In particular, he wonders why Pericles' son turned out so bad. Clearly there is a political dimension to this critique of sophistry which did not escape Plato's ancient readers (or Socrates' jurors as we may infer from his conviction).

[1] All translations from the *Apology*, as well as the *Meno*, are drawn form Plato, *Five Dialogues*, tr. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1981).

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One of the earliest and most authoritative testimonies to the name and concept of sophist comes from the 2nd-century AD Greek rhetor Publius Aelius Aristides, who identified Plato as the one who did the most to give sophists a bad name. The reason which he alleges for this hostility is Plato's notorious contempt for the common people (ton pollon hyperphronesis)[2]. Plato confirms this reputation in the *Republic* where Socrates identifies the common people (hoi polloi) meeting together in their assemblies or law courts as the greatest sophist of them all (492a-b). In these terms to oppose sophistry is to oppose democracy. Plato's motives can be inferred from his own contention that the sophists teach those arts of speech which provide access to power in a democracy, namely forensic and deliberative rhetoric (*Gorgias* 452e). As an aristocrat, Plato viewed such instruction as a threat to his social privilege and an affront to his political ideals. From this admittedly quite conjectural train of reasoning, we can argue that one issue at stake in the trial of Socrates as staged by Plato is the antagonism of social privilege to public instruction, especially rhetorical and literary training.

We can seek to transpose the terms of this debate to Renaissance society when we study those writers who recanonized Socrates for the modern era. In the case of Montaigne, we can ask what is the political and social dimension of his fascination with Socrates. How do Plato's prejudices resurface in the *Essais* and what new antagonisms do they express when Montaigne reopens the trial of Socrates?

The essay «De la phisionomie», which paraphrases several passages of Plato's *Apology*, presumably through the intermediary of Marsilio Ficino's Latin translation, begins with the disjunction between Socrates' style of speech and the style in vogue with Montaigne's contemporaries. «Les discours de Socrate» flow with naiveté and simplicity while the new style is conspicuous for its artifice and ostentation (1037)[3]. Socrates' speech is humble; our speech, Montaigne complains, is pompous. Socrates' humility was a familiar Renaissance topos rendered proverbial by Erasmus' adage «Sileni Alcibiadis», which alludes to the statuettes of Silenus to which Alcibiades compares Socrates in Plato's *Symposium*[4]. Montaigne acknowledges Socrates' Silenic stature when he contrasts the form and content of his speech: «Soubs une si vile forme nous n'eussions jamais choisi la noblesse et splendeur de ses conceptions admirables» (1037). Yet the *Symposium* is not the only locus for the disjunction of natural and artificial style with

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2 Aristides, *In Defense of the Four* 681 in *Sofisti. Testimonianze e frammenti*, ed. Mario Untersteiner, vol. 1 (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1961) 4.

3 All quotations of Montaigne are drawn from *Les Essais de Montaigne*, eds. Villey and Saulnier (Paris: PUF, 1978).

4 For the Silenus topos and its role in «De la phisionomie» see Joshua Scodel, «The Affirmation of Paradox: A Reading of Montaigne's 'De la phisionomie' (III:12)», *Yale French Studies* 64 (1983) 209-37.

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which Montaigne begins his essay. In the *Apology* Socrates initiates his speech to the jury by disavowing the artificial oratory of his accusers in favor of the plain truth which he promises his audience. « From me you will hear the whole truth, though not, by Zeus, gentlemen, expressed in embroidered and stylized phrases like theirs, but things spoken at random and expressed in the first words that come to mind » (17c). Rather than the fine, false words spoken by the prosecution, Socrates prefers eikei legomena, which implies improvisation, and epitychousin onomasi, where the root tyche refers to fortune or chance. Socrates' trust in tyche will become exemplary in the course of Montaigne's essay. The style professed by Socrates in the *Apology* irresistibly recalls the esthetic of the *Essais*, which Montaigne defines in terms of improvisation and chance: « mon dessein est de representer en parlant une profonde nonchalance et des mouvemens fortuites et impremeditez, comme naissans des occasions presentes » (III,9,963). In this way, the opening of « De la phisionomie » not only evokes the Erasmian tradition but also inscribes itself in the tradition of Socrates' fatal polemic against the sophists and their arts of speech.

Throughout his essay, Montaigne will draw a constant connection between sophistry and civil war, between the intellectual and the political troubles that beset his land. The intellectual problem which he discerns is the excessive reliance on superficial learning and acquired culture. Improbably, the French seem to read too much. Politically, the problem is just the opposite; namely, incorrigible rebelliousness or self-reliance. Socrates can remedy this situation by teaching the proper self-reliance. « Il a faict grand faveur à l'humaine nature de montrer combien elle peut d'elle-mesme » (1038). One thing we can do on our own is to find knowledge. « Il ne nous faut guere de doctrine pour vivre à nostre aise. Et Socrates nous aprend qu'elle est en nous, et la manière de l'y trouver et de s'en ayder »(1039). In effect, Socrates teaches us to do without a teacher. He does so in part by his deeds, especially by his exemplary courage in the face of death, which is more edifying than all the lessons of the philosophers. Yet Socrates also espouses, on at least one occasion, a specific pedagogy which can teach us, as Montaigne says, « the way to find learning in ourselves and how to use it ». This pedagogy, which Socrates demonstrates in the *Meno*, derives from the doctrine of anamnesis, which Plato introduces in various dialogues and to which Montaigne refers explicitly in two places in the « Apologie de Raimond Sebond » (II,12,548,555). That Montaigne has anamnesis in mind when he praises Socrates' pedagogy is purely conjectural, but it is not inconsistent with a pattern of Platonic images and allusions, some hitherto unnoticed by the commentators, that lend coherence to the disparate themes of « De la phisionomie ».

In the *Meno*, Socrates and Meno discuss whether virtue can be taught, but their answers leave all of us, readers and interlocutors alike, as per-

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plexed as Panurge in the *Tiers Livre*. If virtue is knowledge, it can be taught, they agree, but it is not taught so it must not be knowledge, Socrates seems to conclude, even though everyone knows that Socrates believes that virtue is knowledge. One possible issue or escape from this dilemma is the theory of anamnesis, which Socrates tries to demonstrate in practice. When Meno despairs of finding a solution to their problem, Socrates explains the Pythagorean doctrine of metempsychosis, or the transmigration of the soul, which entails the belief that all knowledge is recollection. If this is so, Socrates admonishes Meno, «there is no teaching but recollection» (82a). To prove his point, Socrates goes through a geometry problem with Meno's young slave, who is presumed to have no formal instruction, and after some false starts he elicits from the boy the correct solution of the problem. From this experience, he infers that we can find all knowledge within ourselves through recollection. We might further infer that virtue is one type of knowledge that we can retrieve through recollection. In any case, formal or professional pedagogy is superfluous. The slave only needs a questioner, «and he will know it without having been taught but only questioned and find the knowledge within himself» (85d). Plato's phrase autos ex autou, describing how the boy finds knowledge, emphasizes the autonomy which Socrates' method offers to readers like Montaigne afflicted by education. This is the self-sufficiency which Socrates teaches against teachers The problem for Montaigne is that, since the death of La Boétie, he has no questioner, no interlocutor to activate his memory unless it be his reading. If we understand reading as anamnesis, as a process which evokes our own latent ideas without compromising our intellectual self-sufficiency, we have a solution to Montaigne's dilemma. Moreover, anamnesis implies that nothing is new, which comforts the conservative instincts of one who proclaims himself «desgousté de la nouvelleté» (I,23,119) or simply «incapable de nouvelleté» (III,10,1010). We never invent but only recollect knowledge. In this way, Socrates' pedagogy in the *Meno*, based on the doctrine of anamnesis, represents autonomy anchored in tradition or a sort of conservative independence tailored to Montaigne's needs[5].

Lest this Platonic reminiscence seem extraneous to Montaigne's essay, we can look at a passage added to the discussion of Socratic self-reliance in the C-text of «De la phisionomie». To evoke the hazards of learning, Montaigne draws an analogy to the marketplace. Unlike the food and drink which we purchase in the market, knowledge cannot be tested before it is ingested.

[5] For another view of anamnesis in the *Essais*, see William Engel, «Aphorism, Anecdote, and Anamnesis in Montaigne and Bacon», *Montaigne Studies* 1 (1989) 158-76. Based on Montaigne's use of commonplaces, Engel identifies anamnesis, in the sense of repetition, as «the principle of composition at the root of Montaigne's endeavor» (176). Engel's article reminds us of how quotation can be a creative process.

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> Car au reste, ce que nous avons achetté nous l'emportons au logis en quelque vaisseau; et là avons loy d'en examiner la valeur, combien et à quelle heure nous en prendrons. Mais les sciences, nous ne les pouvons d'arrivée mettre en autre vaisseau qu'en nostre ame: nous les avallons en les achetant, et sortons du marché ou infects desjà ou amendez. 1039

This comparison is taken directly from Plato's *Protagoras* (314a-b) where Socrates warns Hippocrates of the danger of learning from a sophist[6]. Socrates calls the sophist an emporos (313c) or merchant, which is the ultimate stigma for Plato's social milieu as for Montaigne's. We should note that the *Protagoras* is in some ways a companion piece to the *Meno*, since Socrates and Protagoras debate whether virtue can be taught, and they end up reversing their positions and leaving us in our habitual perplexity or aporeia. In any event, Montaigne clearly studied Socrates' slander of sophists, and he borrows Socrates' voice to warn us against « les sciences ».

If Montaigne's warning follows Socrates' attack on the sophists, then who are the new merchants of knowledge who take after Protagoras and his colleagues? The answer can be found in another essay crowded with Platonic reminiscences, «Du pedantisme» (I,25). Here Montaigne seeks to explain and confirm the bad reputation of «pedantes» or school teachers. Borrowing from the *Meno* (91d), Montaigne explicitly likens the humanist pedagogues of Renaissance France to the sophists of ancient Greece for their false pretension to teach virtue.

> Ces maistres icy, comme Platon dit des sophistes, leurs germains, sont de tous les hommes ceux qui promettent d'estre les plus utiles aux hommes, et, seuls entre tous les hommes, qui non seulement n'amendent point ce qu'on leur commet, comme fait un charpentier et un masson, mais l'empirent, et se font payer de l'avoir empiré. 138

He follows this paragraph with an allusion to the system of fees which Protagoras charged his students from *Protagoras* 328b-c. Later he recalls Socrates' ironic interrogation of Hippias of Elis from the *Hippias Major* which tends, in Montaigne's estimation, to demonstrate the inutility of the sophists' arts (143). All these allusions serve to discredit the humanists as modern sophists.

Montaigne clarifies the social context of his argument when he remarks that « les lettres », or the humanities, have become the exclusive province of

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[6] Ficino translates the passage as follows: « Nam longe gravius periculum est in disciplinis quam in cibis emendis. Etenim qui a caupone, aut nec mercatore esculenta emit et poculenta, potest antequam his vescat, in aliis quibusdam vasculis illa domum deferre, ibique deposita diligenter examinare, et advocato aliquo istarum rerum perito, quid edendum bibendumve sit, quid non, quantumque, et quando, deliberare quamobrem haud grave est in emendo periculum. Disciplinas autem non licet alio in vase transferre, sed necesse est, ut qui emit eas animo capiat, et relicto pretio habeat, intra se ferens, vel inquinatus iam, vel ad meliora provectus.» *Divini Platonis opera omnia* (Lyons, 1557) 158.

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professionals, such as doctors, lawyers, theologians, and teachers, who pursue learning solely for profit (140-41). This claim echoes Socrates' indictment of sophists as merchants, perhaps too closely for the comfort of an author whose own grandfather was a renowned emporos in Bordeaux. Montaigne adds that the profit motive has alienated the nobility from study and left learning in the hands of the base born, like a precious drug corrupted by its container. «C'est une bonne drogue, que la science; mais nulle drogue n'est assez forte pour se preserver sans alteration et corruption, selon le vice du vase qui l'estuye» (141). This curious pharmaceutical metaphor is not without Platonic resonance, being a sort of sinister variation on the Silenus, and it helps link «Du pedantisme» with «De la phisionomie» as we shall see from the pattern of medical imagery in the latter essay. Montaigne's antagonism to the pedants, otherwise known as the humanists, replicates Plato's antagonism to the sophists, as the reaction of an aristocrat toward a new cultural class, whose successful divulgation of knowledge threatens the traditional social hierarchy. Gilbert Gadoffre has documented the impact of humanism on French Renaissance society, and the antagonisms it provoked, and his thesis can be confirmed in Montaigne's essay[7]. What we can add to his analysis is the parallel between Montaigne's provocative treatment of learning and Socrates' polemical role in Plato's dialogues. Anti-humanism seems more humane when it is Socratic[8].

The metaphor of the drug corrupted by its container recalls the end of the passage from «De la phisionomie» borrowed from the *Protagoras*. While Socrates tells Hippocrates that we leave the marketplace of knowledge either helped or «defiled» (Ficino renders Plato's beblammenon by the Latin inquinatus), Montaigne prefers a more explicitly medical metaphor: «et sortons du marché ou infects desjà ou amendez». He then adds a sentence that has no counterpart in Plato's text. Speaking of «les sciences», he remarks, «Il y en a qui ne font que nous empescher et charger au lieu de nourrir et telles encore qui, sous titre de nous guerir, nous empoisonnent» (1039). Knowledge is thus a type of pharmakon, or drug, which can either poison or heal. This metaphor, which Montaigne could have found in many of Plato's dialogues, was used by the sophists themselves to describe the power of speech[9]. In his encomium of Helen of Troy, Gorgias compares the force of language, tou logou dynamis, to a pharmakon because language can

[7] Gilbert Gadoffre, *La révolution culturelle dans la France des humanistes* (Geneva: Droz, 1997). Gadoffre studies the role of Guillaume Budé as the representative of «une nouvelle classe culturelle».

[8] For a sensitive discussion of Montaigne's use of Socrates to express his own doubts about the value of learning see James Supple, *Arms versus Letters. The Military and Literary Ideals in the «Essais» of Montaigne* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984) 280-92.

[9] See Jacqueline de Romilly, *Magic and Rhetoric in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975) 20-21, 34-35.

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persuade either to good or evil[10]. It is a powerful but ambivalent drug. This amorality of rhetoric, which Gorgias willingly acknowledges, may have spurred Plato's contempt of the sophists and their verbal prowess. Montaigne in turn adapts Plato's polemic to discredit those who dispense knowledge in the French Renaissance.

The metaphor of the pharmakon recurs on two more occasions in the opening pages of the essay, revealing an unexpected continuity between France's cultural and political troubles. At one point, Montaigne interrupts himself to explain that he had been writing his essay during a crisis of the civil wars in his home region of Perigord. This leads to a meditation on the peculiar evil of civil war, which only exacerbates what it would alleviate, like an inept or malicious doctor. « Nostre medecine porte infection » (1041). Not only is civil war a « maladie populaire » (1041), but it also coincides with an outbreak of the plague, which encourages the pattern of medical imagery in Montaigne's essay[11]. He alludes to the pharmakon once again to repudiate all forms of civil war and rebellion: « Mais est-il quelque mal en une police qui vaille estre combatu par une drogue si mortelle » (1043). The persistence of the drug metaphor links civil warriors with sophists and pedants as poisoners of the body politic and enemies of the established social order. In a C- addition immediately following the third instance of the pharmakon, Montaigne invokes Plato's authority in order to condemn revolution: « Platon de mesme ne consent pas qu'on face violence au repos de son pays pour le guerir, et n'accepte pas l'amendement, qui couste le sang et ruine des citoyens » (1043). This phrase refers to Plato's *Seventh Letter*, written ostensibly to advise those contemplating armed resistance to the tyrant of Syracuse, in which Plato establishes the duty of the wise man to speak out against the wrongs of his government but never to attempt to change the constitution of his native land by force. This may have appealed to Montaigne as sound advice for a nobleman in the French Wars of Religion, and it may have been intended as it claims to appease the conflict in Syracuse, but it also seems to pertain to Socrates. He spoke out against Athenian statesmen and statecraft, but he never fought against Athens. His neutrality during the 30 tyrants is a separate issue. By alluding to Plato's letter and its brief portrait of the wise man in times of civil strife,

[10] Gorgias, *Helenes Enkomion* 14 in Untersteiner, ed. *Sofisti*, vol. 2, 106. Pietro Bembo renders the passage as follows: « Plane orationes in componendis animis eandem potestatem habent quam in ordinandis corporibus varietates medicinarum. Quemadmodum enim medicinae alios aliae quoque ex corpore excivere, aliae morbos, aliae vitam expulere, ita orationum aliae molestiam attulere, aliae oblectationem, timorem illae incussere audientibus; hae ut fiderent, effecere; quaedam nocuis persuasionibus venenatos sensus incantatosque reliquere.» *Gorgiae Leontini In Helenam Laudatio*, ed. Francesco Donadi (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1983) 14-16.

[11] See Scodel 219-21.

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Montaigne raises the question which seems to preoccupy him the most. What does Socrates mean for the antagonists of the Wars of Religion?

If Socrates represents intellectual self-assurance and superiority to professional wisdom, what stance does he exemplify in political struggle? Is he a rebel or a loyalist, or something different from either term of the opposition? Socrates may have been executed on suspicion of disloyalty to Athenian democracy, and this suspicion may have had some foundation in fact[12], but this need not discredit him in the eyes of a monarchist. Resistance in one context may signify submission in another. To see how Montaigne attempts to assign a political value to Socrates' conduct, we can examine his paraphrase of Socrates' speech to the jury in Plato's *Apology*.

Montaigne incorporates Socrates' speech within his own critique of learning and curiosity. In keeping with the paradoxical tenor of the entire essay, Montaigne advocates the study of stupidity: «tenons d'ores en avant escolle de bestise» (1052). In this school, Socrates will be the teacher, and his lesson will be the speech he delivers to the jury, remarkable for its unlearned eloquence. While greatly compressing Socrates' speech and rearranging its arguments, Montaigne amplifies certain elements so as to convey the image of Socrates as a skeptic resigned to his own death. Montaigne's version begins with a paraphrase of *Apology* 29a-b where Socraes declares that he does not fear death because fear implies knowledge and he is ignorant. His awareness of his own ignorance in turn confirms the oracle's pronouncement that no one is wiser than Socrates. From this arrogant profession of ignorance, Montaigne extracts the skeptical lesson that we cannot fear what we do not know. Next Montaigne paraphrases the second phase of the trial where Socrates assesses the penalty against himself at free meals for life in the Prytaneum. This antitimesis or counter penalty was the most provocative part of Socrates' speech and the one best calculated to insure the assessment of the death penalty, from which Xenephon inferred, on the authority of a certain Hermogenes, that Socrates wanted to die (*Apologia Socratis* 5-9). This was also the portion of Socrates' speech that earned him, in Xenephon's words, an unwonted reputation for megalegoria or big talk (*Apologia Socratis* 1), which seems to undermine the aptness of his example for Montaigne's purposes. The next and final section of Montaigne's paraphrase derives from the end of Socrates' initial address to the jury, before the penalty assessment, when he refuses to beg for clemency with the usual rhetorical or theatrical ploys known to sway an Athenian jury. What

[12] I.F. Stone exposes Socrates' antagonism to democracy in *The Trial of Socrates* (New York: Random House, 1989) while Gregory Vlastos defends Socrates' democratic credentials in *Socratic Studies* (Cambridge University Press, 1994) ch. 4 «The Historical Socrates and Athenian democracy.» Richard Kraut provides an interesting review of the question in *Socrates and the State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984) 194-244.

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might strike us as perversity or obstinacy appears in Montaigne's version as a profession of piety. Rather than supplicate the jury and tarnish his exemplary image, Montaigne's Socrates trusts in the gods: « Je m'y fie du tout et tiens pour certain qu'ils feront en cecy selon qu'il sera plus propre à vous et à moy » (1054). In this way, Socrates shows himself faithful to Plato's precept, as cited by Montaigne from the *Seventh Letter*, « establissant l'office d'un homme de bien, en ce cas [the case of political upheaval], de laisser tout là; seulement de prier Dieu qu'il y porte sa main extraordinaire » (1043). Thus « De la phisionomie » underlines Socrates' skepticism and amplifies his piety without however concealing his defiance of convention, both juridical and rhetorical.

The commentary that Montaigne appends to his own impersonation of Socrates' courtroom performance emphasizes the ethical and esthetic qualities of the speech. In sum, Socrates is the very embodiment of nature, a lesson whose ambivalence has not escaped recent criticism[13]. But in political terms, what conduct is natural? If, as Montaigne insists, Socrates « devoit sa vie, non pas à soy mais à l'exemple du monde » (1054), of what is he an example? For some, he is an example of defiance and resistance to power, for he risks martyrdom rather than compromise his principles and renounce his philosophy[14]. This is clearly a dangerous counter-example in times of civil war. Yet Socrates' defiance is also his submission, for he refuses to defend himself or to contest the charges in any conventional way. His defiance is completely passive and pacific.

At the beginning of the essay, Montaigne admires Socrates' « patience » (1038) or endurance of hardship before ascribing the same quality to his peasants(1040) and to himself (1047). Earlier, in the « Defence de Seneque et de Plutarque » (II,32), Montaigne identified « patience » as the characteristic quality of his era:

> Et qui s'enquerra à nos argolets des experiences qu'ils ont euës en ces guerres civiles, il se trouvera des effets de patience, d'obstination et d'opiniatreté, parmy nos miserables siecles et en cette tourbe molle et effeminée encore plus que l'Egyptienne, dignes d'estre comparez à ceux que nous venons de reciter de la vertu Spartaine. II, 32, 724

Here, « patience » is allied to obstinacy and intransigence as catalysts of civil war. In « De la phisionomie », by contrast, the « patience » which Montaigne shares with Socrates and the peasants is a type of submission if not simply of suicide. The peasants for instance manifest their patience by

[13] For Socrates' ambivalence as an exemplary figure in III,12, see Timothy Hampton, *Writing from History: The Rhetoric of Exemplarity in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990) 175-88.

[14] See David Quint, *Montaigne and the Quality of Mercy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998) 122-40.

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digging their own graves and sleeping in them (1049). Socrates may die for his beliefs, but he doesn't fight for them, and this certainly appeals to authority.

In fact, in so far as Socrates does resist authority, he furthers the cause of monarchy, to which Montaigne remains loyal. In the first book of the *Memorabilia*, Xenephon reports a four-fold accusation brought against Socrates after his death by an anonymous accuser who can be identified from Isocrates' *Busiris* and other sources with the sophist Polycrates, who was active in Athens in the early 4th century BC. Polycrates' *Kategoria Sokratous*[15], written around 393 or 392 BC and now lost, charges the philosopher with fomenting resistance to democracy by a variety of means, including subversive quotations from the poets. In particular, Xenephon (*Memorabilia* 1.2.58) mentions a passage from the *Iliad* where Odysseus, in order to rally the troops who are deserting the camp, speaks respectfully to the nobles but berates and abuses the common soldiers (*Iliad* 2.188-91,198-202). Polycrates seems to have charged Socrates with repeating these verses frequently in order to corrupt the youth of Athens and turn them to tyranny. This may seem far-fetched until we remember, following I.F. Stone's lead[16], the verses that immediately follow the passage quoted in Xenephon, where Odysseus proclaims: «Ouk agathon polykoiranin; eis koiranos esto, / eis basileus» (*Iliad* 2.204-05; no good is the rule of many; let there be one ruler, one king). This sentiment must have been quite incendiary in the atmosphere of Athenian democracy.

The verse ouk agathon polykoiranin seems to have achieved proverbial status by the time of Aristotle, for he cites it in his *Politics* (1292a13) in book 4, chapter 4, where he proposes a typology of democracy. Homer's verse illustrates the fifth and worst type of democracy where supreme power is vested in the people rather than the law and where demagogues enjoy the same influence as do flatterers in a tyranny. The reference to demagogues recalls the notorious influence of Cleon and other leaders of the popular party in Athens after Pericles' death, which Aristotle himself deplores in the *Constitution of Athens*[17]. While acknowledging the ambivalence of the term

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15 The two major sources for reconstituting the lost text of the *Kategoria* are Xenephon's *Memorabilia* and the *Defense of Socrates* by the 4th-century AD sophist Libanius. Renaissance readers could also have learned about the *Kategoria* from Gerardus Listrius' commentary to Erasmus' *Praise of Folly*. When Erasmus refers to Polycrates' mock encomium of the tyrant Busiris in his prefatory epistle to Thomas Moore, Listrius glosses the reference as follows: «Polycrates. Rhetor Atheniensis, qui scripsit encomium Busiridis. Idem composuit orationem, qua fuit accusatus Socrates.» Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, ed. Joannes Clericus, 10 vols. (Leiden, 1703) 4:401-02.

16 Stone 28-32.

17 After reviewing the popular leaders of Athens from Solon to Cleophon, Aristotle remarks, «After Cleophon, there was an unbroken series of demagogues whose main aim was to be outrageous and please the people with no thought for anything but the present». *Con-*

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polykoiranin, Aristotle seems to assimilate this term with mob rule or the most extreme form of democracy (perhaps the form prevailing in Athens at the time of the trial of Socrates) in which the decrees of the popular assembly override the laws. Thus for a classical reader, Odysseus' phrase endorses monarchy and repudiates a form of democracy familiar to Athenians. Accordingly, Polycrates called Socrates a misodemos (Libanius 53) and Xenephon responded with a strained description of his hero as demotikos and philanthropos (*Memorabilia* 1.2.60). To Renaissance readers familiar with the *Iliad*, the *Memorabilia*, and the *Politics*, Socrates' Homeric tastes could have appeared either to authorize monarchy or to challenge republican government.

This admittedly obscure aspect of the Socratic tradition may have assumed greater urgency for Montaigne due to its prominence in the *Discours de la servitude volontaire* by Estienne de la Boétie. For La Boétie begins his treatise with a version of *Iliad* 2.204-05: «D'avoir plusieurs seigneurs aucun bien je n'y voy / Qu'un sans plus soit le maistre, et qu'un seul soit le Roy.»[18] He approves of the first verse and its rejection of polykoiranin, but he contests the second for its endorsement of monarchy. Written in 1548 and revised sometime around 1553 when La Boétie was about to begin his parliamentary career, the *Discours* inscribes itself in the tradition of civic humanism and its cult of liberty modeled on ancient Greece and Rome and modern Venice. While expressing constant admiration for classical Athens, the *Discours* shows no interest in Socrates, and La Boétie may have been unaware of the tenuous Socratic connection of his epigraph. However, even if he never meant to reopen the trial of Socrates, he did provoke a counter argument from Montaigne in which Socrates plays a major role. For if we reexamine the essay «De la phisionomie» in light of the *Discours de la servitude volontaire*, we can discern the tension between the two works and their orientation to humanism. In many ways, Montaigne's Socratism reacts against La Boétie's humanist ideals[19].

As we have seen, Montaigne employs the image of the pharmakon to discredit any resistance to authority or tradition. Not even tyranny justifies so mortal a remedy, he declares, on the authority of a certain «Fao-

stitution of Athens 28.4 translated by J.M. Moore in *Aristotle and Xenephon on Democracy and Oligarchy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975) 171. Aristotle's *Constitution of Athens* was not known during the Renaissance.

[18] All quotations of the *Discours* are taken from Estienne de la Boëtie, *De la servitude volontaire ou contr'un*, ed. Malcolm Smith (Geneva: Droz, 1987).

[19] Henri Weber situates the *Discours* in relation to humanist political theory in «La Boétie et la tradition humaniste d'opposition au tyran» in *Culture et politique en France à l'époque de l'humanisme et de la Renaissance*, ed. Franco Simone (Turin, 1974) 355-74. Weber takes La Boétie's anti-monarchism much more seriously than do most readers, including Montaigne. Quint 104-08 reads the *Essais* as a rehabilitation of voluntary servitude against La Boétie's naive indignation.

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nius»(1043) or Marcus Favonius, who refused to join the conspiracy against Caesar according to Plutarch's *Life of Brutus*. Here Montaigne invokes a counter figure to the glorious tyrannicides of antiquity whom La Boétie celebrates in a litany of honor: «Harmode, Aristogiton, Thrasybule, Brute le Vieus, Valere et Dion»(53). From the same passage of Plutarch's text where Montaigne read of Favonius' reluctance (which didn't protect him ultimately from the retribution of Marc Antony), La Boétie reports «que Brute, Casse et Casque, lors qu'ils entreprindrent la delivrance de Romme ou plutost de tout le monde, ne voulurent pas que Ciceron, ce grand zelateur du bien public s'il en fut jamais, fust de la partie»(53). The equation of Rome and the world is a typical humanist hyperbole imported from Italian tradition[20]. Another hero in the pantheon of tyrannicides is Cato of Utica, whose precocious impatience to assassinate the dictator Sulla marks him in La Boétie's estimation as a true Roman (50). We may recall that Montaigne prefers Socrates to Cato at the outset of «De la phisionomie» for his more natural and human virtue (1037-38), but this ethical opposition can also assume a political significance in reference to the *Discours*.

As a champion of nature, Socrates helps Montaigne to defuse the political import of La Boétie's argument. According to the *Discours*, everyone is born with a natural seed of reason in his soul, «il y a en nostre ame quelque naturelle semence de raison»(41), which guides us to value and preserve our freedom. However, custom can stifle this natural instinct and condition us to acquiesce in our servitude just as Mithridates accustomed himself to drink poison. This analogy allows La Boétie to introduce his own pharmaceutical metaphor when he speaks of «le venin de la servitude»(47). The force of custom is particularly conspicuous in the opposition of the Venetians, born and raised to freedom, «ainsi nés et nourris»(47), and the Turks who are only born to serve the Sultan, «qui ne veulent estre nez que pour le servir»(48). Everywhere custom becomes a second nature and cancels man's memory of original freedom or «la souvenance de son premier estre»(44). Nevertheless, in the midst of tyranny, there remain some noble spirits who cannot help but remember their natural instinct of freedom: «qui tousjours...ne se peuvent tenir d'aviser à leurs naturels privileges et de se souvenir de leurs predecesseurs et de leur premier estre»(51-52). These partisans of liberty are those who perfect their good nature with study and knowledge: «ce sont ceus qui, aians la teste d'eusmesmes bien faite, l'ont ancore polie par l'estude et le sçavoir» (52). This explains why the Ottoman Emperor forbids books and learning in order to preserve his rule (a rather

[20] See Petrarch's famous exclamation: «Quid est enim aliud omnis historia, quam romana laus?» from the *Invectiva contra eum qui maledixit Italie*. Francesco Petrarca, *Prose*, eds. G. Martellotti et alia (Milan-Naples: Ricardo Ricciardi, 1955) 790. Du Bellay echoes this topos in *Antiquitez* 26: «Rome fut tout le monde, et tout le monde est Rome.»

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startling fabrication on the part of La Boétie or his sources). Books pose a threat to tyranny because they conserve the example of past resistance. La Boétie himself retrieves the glorious victories of the Greeks in the Persian Wars from « la memoire des livres et des hommes » (37). To judge from the frequency with which he employs such terms as « souvenance », « souvenir », and « mémoire », La Boétie seems to have developed his own theory of anamnesis, distinct from that of Socrates and Montaigne. La Boétie portrays reading and study as a sort of anamnesis of freedom, which can activate our instinctive resistance to tyranny.

In « De la phisionomie » we can hear an echo and an answer to many of the themes from the *Discours*. Socrates, as we have seen, offers a rebuttal to Cato. To the venom of servitude, Montaigne opposes the venom of civil war: « Monstrueuse guerre: les autres agissent au dehors; cette-cy encore contre soy se ronge et se desfaict par son propre venin » (1041). Where La Boétie espouses an unconditional humanist faith in learning and literary tradition, Montaigne counters with a Socratic profession of ignorance: « Et ne traicte...d'aucune science que de celle de l'inscience »(1057). To his friend's « naturelle semence de raison », the essayist prefers « la semence de la raison universelle » which corrected Socrates' vices and made him obedient to men and Gods (1059). Socrates' obedience to civil and religious authority contrasts starkly with Montaigne's contemporaries, who confuse « la devotion et la conscience » and who think religion suffices « seule et sans les meurs »(1059). There emerges from this passage on universal reason, added in the C- text of the essay, the sense that Socrates was a true precursor of the Politiques, a loyalist who subordinated religious belief to political duty as if the latter were more natural than the former. Socrates thus allows Montaigne to redefine La Boétie's natural law, for the seed which Socrates nurtures is not an instinct of freedom but a seed of submission. Finally, Montaigne does not neglect to praise the discipline of the Turks and propose their army as a model to correct the indiscipline of the French Wars of Religion.

> J'aimeroy bien que nostre jeunesse, au lieu du temps qu'elle employe à des peregrinations moins utiles et apprentissages moins honorables, elle le mist moitié à veoir de la guerre sur mer, sous quelque bon capitaine commandeur de Rhodes, moitié à recognoistre la discipline des armées Turkesques, car elle a beaucoup de differences et d'advantages sur la nostre. 1042

Apparently, Venice is not worth a detour.

From the perspective of the *Discours*, Montaigne's vaunted conformity to nature may appear to be a model of servitude. To introduce the two physiognomic anecdotes with which his essay concludes, Montaigne affirms his complete surrender to nature and to circumstance, which has been aptly described as an « ethics of yielding »[21]. Rather than resist, he lets himself go:

[21] Quint ch. 4.

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«je me laisse aller» is his unconventional motto. Such yielding, Montaigne is convinced, preserved him on those two occasions when he was ambushed during the civil wars and where he owed his freedom to his trusting and compliant nature. No doubt we can infer from these personal experiences a political moral of submission to authority and resolution of conflict. Yet, if Montaigne would set a precedent for compromise and reconciliation, he also follows a precedent of servitude, one of which he could not be unaware. If we recall, Montaigne advocates «patience», which he associates with himself, Socrates, and the peasants, as a form of resignation and yielding in conformity with nature. When we consult the literary etymology of patience, we can see its importance for the imperial regime of ancient Rome. In a key passage from the exordium to the *Agricola*, written during the reign of Trajan, Tacitus deplores the tyranny and persecution to which Rome submitted under emperor Domitian. From the security of the present, he acknowledges the shame of the recent past while commemorating the liberty of the republic: «dedimus profecto grande patientiae documentum; et sicut vetus aetas vidit quid ultimum in libertate esset, ita nos quid in servitute»(*Agricola* 2.3). Here, patientia is a synonym of servitus and could very well be rendered as «servitude volontaire»[22]. The passivity toward power which strikes La Boétie as a betrayal of human nature appeals to Montaigne as an antidote to civil war.

There is one other respect in which «De la phisionomie» can be seen to correct the message of the *Discours*, and that involves the contested value of rhetoric, with which we began our inquiry into the role of Socrates. Montaigne hails the speech which Socrates addresses to the jurors, and which Montaigne paraphrases in his essay, as a masterpiece of natural expression: «il represente en une hardiesse inartificielle et niaise, en une securité puérile, la pure et premiere impression et ignorance de nature» (1055). Socrates' speech, like the essay which frames it, is an exercise in anti-rhetoric, that is a careful choice of words designed to devalue the art of speech and its political uses[23]. This repudiation of artificial speech necessarily implicates the rhetorical form of La Boétie's *Discours*, with its elegant periodic style and its learned classical allusions. Not only does the *Discours* reflect the author's rhetorical training, as all acknowledge, but it also embodies the humanist ideal of eloquence in defense of freedom. This is a political ideal, however obsolete, and Socrates' plain speech represents a

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22 Louis Delaruelle identified *Agricola* 2 as a possible inspiration for La Boétie in «L'inspiration antique dans le *Discours de la servitude volontaire*», *RHLF* 17 (1910) 34-72, 69. That Montaigne knew the *Agricola*, we may infer from his remark in «De la phisionomie»: «Et Tacitus a raison de louer la mere d'Agricola d'avoir bridé en son fils un appetit trop bouillant de science» (1038).

23 Paolo Valesio analyzes the «rhetoric of antirhetoric» in *Novantiqua. Rhetorics as a Contemporary Theory* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1980) 41-60.

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counter ideal. For, in Montaigne's essays as in Plato's dialogues, Socrates' true political meaning lies in his hostility to rhetoric.

Socrates' most emphatic challenge to rhetoric, and thus his most political performance, is his role in the *Gorgias*, where Plato reveals most clearly his dissatisfaction with Athenian democracy. The dialogue is supposed to have taken place around 427 BC when the renowned sophist Gorgias visited Athens and caused a sensation with his oratorical prowess. Socrates and his companions Chaerephon and Callicles meet Gorgias and question him, and his follower Polus, about the craft of rhetoric. In the course of their discussion, the search for a definition of rhetoric leads to a denunciation of Athenian politics.

First Socrates elicits from Gorgias the sophist's definition of rhetoric as the art of political persuasion to be exercised specifically in a law court, a council meeting, or an assembly (452e). This definition makes explicit the political scope of rhetoric if not the equivalence of rhetoric and politics in a popular regime. Next Socrates explains his own view that rhetoric is not an art at all but rather a knack (empeiria) for producing a certain gratification and pleasure (462c). He identifies oratory as a type of flattery (kolakeia) along with cooking, cosmetics, and sophistry (463b). The assimilation of rhetoric and flattery was to prove influential in Renaissance polemics. The four types of flattery, he explains to Polus, impersonate the four crafts of medicine, gymnastics, legislation, and justice; but whereas craft (techne) relies on knowledge, flattery relies on sleight of hand. Having explained his typology of flattery, Socrates embarks on a long demonstration that the unjust man cannot be happy and that oratory is only good for defending injustice. Apparently, Socrates does not discern any justice in the law courts or assembly or any other institution of democratic Athens. When Polus is completely confounded by Socrates' unorthodox ethics, the young aristocrat Callicles intervenes to persuade Socrates to «abandon philosophy and move on to more important things» (484c)[24]. After a lengthy exchange of views, Socrates recapitulates what is for him the crucial issue of their discussion, «the way we are supposed to live» (500c), which amounts to a choice between philosophy and politics, which is identified with public oratory.

It has been remarked that Plato uses Socrates to justify his own conversion from politics to philosophy as recounted in the beginning of the *Seventh Letter*, and we might add that Plato's model has some bearing on Montaigne's vaunted «retraite»[25]. To Callicles, Socrates asserts that political

[24] All translations of the *Gorgias* are taken from Plato, *Gorgias*, tr. Donald Zeyl (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987).

[25] E.R. Dodds in the introduction to his edition and commentary of the *Gorgias* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959) remarks: «In the light of the *Seventh Letter* it is fairly clear that the *Gorgias* is more than an apologia for Socrates; it is at the same time Plato's apologia pro vita sua»(30).

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orators only seek to gratify the people rather than make them better and more virtuous (502e). When Callicles objects that an exception ought to be made for the four great statesmen of the past, Themistocles, Cimon, Miltiades, and Pericles (recently deceased at the time of Gorgias' visit to Athens), Socrates tries to show that these four were not good citizens because they corrupted the people. In the case of Pericles, Socrates blames him for making the people lazy and greedy by instituting the misthophoria or payment for public service such as jury duty (515e), which was a key democratic reform that enabled poor citizens to participate in public affairs[26]. Socrates declares dogmatically that Athens has had no true statesmen (517a), for even the four great figures of the fifth century only thought to build more ships and walls and docks (517c), by which Plato alludes to the mercantile expansionist policy of the Athenian empire that was beginning to revive in his own day after the restoration of the democracy in 403 BC[27]. In the same vein, Socrates likens the Athenian politician to a merchant or emporos (517d) eager to satisfy his customers, which is the same disparaging analogy he uses in the *Protagoras* to describe the sophist and which Montaigne adapts to the humanists in his essays (III,12,1039). In Plato this social prejudice conveys a political critique of Athenian imperialism of which we can perhaps hear an echo in Montaigne's «Des coches» when he denounces the Spanish conquest of the New World as «mechaniques victoires» (III,6,910). The same aristocratic contempt for mercantilism inspires both critiques of empire[28]. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates finally declares himself to be the only good politician of Athens, because he alone speaks to the people not to gratify them but to improve them (521d). In this way, what began as an inquiry into the definition of rhetoric widens into a sweeping indictment of Athenian institutions.

In a work such as the *Gorgias*, the style obviously pertains to the subject matter. On several occasions Socrates exhorts his interlocutors to forgo long, formal speeches in favor of dialogue. He prefers brachylogia to makrologia (449c). He expresses the same preference in the *Protagoras* where he advocates brevity or brachylogia and condemns long speeches (335a). Socrates' brachylogia is a stylistic model for the discontinuous discourse of the *Essais* and an ideological model for their hostility to rhetoric[29].

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26 Dodds 356-57 commentary on 515e5-7.

27 Dodds 363 on 517c2-4.

28 For a class-based analysis of Plato's anti-imperialism, see V. de Magalhães-Vilhena, *Socrate et la légende platonicienne* (Paris: PUF, 1952) 123 ff. For a similar analysis of Montaigne's critique of colonialism, see Giuliano Gliozzi, *Adamo e il nuovo mondo* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1977) 199-219.

29 For the notion of discontinuous discourse in Montaigne and his immediate successors in French prose, see the admirable article by Jean Lafond, «Les formes brèves de la prose et le discours discontinu» in *Lire, vivre où mènent les mots* (Paris: Champion, 1999) 299-326.

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Montaigne offers what might be considered an updated version of the *Gorgias* in the essay «De la vanité des paroles» (I,51), which makes explicit the intersection of rhetoric and politics in the *Essais*. Here, in carefully crafted prose conspicuous for its own rhetorical devices, Montaigne rehearses a litany of complaints about rhetoric inherited from Plato, Plutarch, Tacitus and other classical authors. Rhetoric is dishonest, seditious, emotional, and better suited for a republic than a monarchy. The essay acknowledges its Platonic antecedents in a C-addition which recalls ancient definitions of rhetoric: «Ariston definit sagement la rhetorique: science à persuader le peuple; Socrates, Platon, art de tromper et de flatter; et ceux qui le nient en la generale description le verifient partout en leurs preceptes». (305). Moreover, in keeping with Plato's typology of flattery from the *Gorgias*, Montaigne compares rhetoric both to cooking and to cosmetics: «Ceux qui masquent et fardent les femmes font moins de mal», he declares, than those who disguise their words (305); and the vainest speech, it appears, is speech about food, which the Italians have elevated to a science, ironically designated as «cette science de gueule» (306). Clearly, Montaigne has Plato's strictures in mind when he criticizes rhetoric. Yet the main context for his topic seems to be the disturbing similarity between ancient Rome and modern France, which share the experience of civil war: «L'eloquence a fleury le plus à Rome, lors que les affaires ont esté en plus mauvais estat, et que l'orage des guerres civiles les agitoit» (306). Rome's example would seem to implicate rhetoric in France's civil strife and to dictate an authoritarian solution. If the emperors presided over the decline of Roman oratory, perhaps the French monarchs should proscribe public eloquence. History does not lack illustrious precedents for such a policy: «On n'a pas veu sortir de Macedoine, ny de Perse, aucun orateur de renom» (306). The appeal to Persian precedent is a rebuke to La Boétie, whose *Discours* portrays the Persian empire as the archetypal tyranny.

In «De la vanité des paroles» Montaigne endorses Socrates' choice of philosophy over oratory on the basis of his experience of France's neo-Roman civil wars. The link in Montaigne's argument between Greek philosophy and Roman history is provided by Tacitus' *Dialogue of the Orators*, which has been long recognized as an important intertext of essay I,51[30]. Less known but no less important is the role of Plato's *Gorgias* as a model

[30] Morris Croll pointed out this intertextual relation in an essay on «Attic Prose» first published in 1921 and reprinted in *Style, Rhetoric, and Rhythm*, ed. J. Max Patrick (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966) 65. Marc Fumaroli discusses Montaigne's use of Tacitus' dialogue in *L'Age de l'éloquence* (Geneva: Droz, 1980), and more recently Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani has identified further connections between the *Dialogus* and the *Essais* in «L'intertexte rhétorique: Tacite, Quintilien et la poétique des *Essais*» in *Montaigne et la rhétorique*, eds. John O'Brien, Malcolm Quainton, and James Supple (Paris: Champion, 1995) 17-26.

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of Tacitus' dialogue, an insight that is due, we might say, to Montaigne as much as to modern philology[31]. While Plato represents the dispute between Socrates and Callicles as a choice between philosophy and oratory, Tacitus stages a choice between poetry and oratory, or between private and public eloquence, in the confrontation of Curiatius Maternus and Marcus Aper. To this pair, Tacitus adds a third figure, Messala, who speaks on behalf of traditional rhetoric against the modern style championed by Aper. We should note that in the *Dialogus de oratoribus*, Aper is not only the spokesman of modern rhetoric but also a self-described « homo novus » (7.1) who owes his social promotion exclusively to his speaking ability. As such, he provides a link between Plato's sophists and Montaigne's « pedantes » while his adversary Maternus is an intermediary figure between Socrates and the narrator of the *Essais*. Socrates is the philosopher alienated from Athenian democracy while Maternus is an aristocrat living in retirement during the reign of Vespasian when Rome gave such a great example of patience to the world, as the *Agricola* puts it. Montaigne's narrator seems to conflate those two figures into a persona who is both philosophic and poetic, wary of rhetoric and patient of authority. In effect, Montaigne has polished his Socratism with a veneer of Tacitism in order to convey an image of loyal abstention from politics and aristocratic antagonism to professional learning. From the trial of Socrates to the Wars of Religion via Imperial Rome, the narrator of the *Essais* seeks to define his place in French society and in literary tradition. As the new Socrates, he challenges the new sophists whom he identifies with the humanist pedagogues who constituted a new cultural class in 16th-century France. As the new Maternus, he warns against the new forces of civil strife and disorder and supports the state at a distance. This is the literary persona which Montaigne projects, as different perhaps from the historical Montaigne as Plato's Socrates may be from the unknown historical Socrates. From an attentive and sympathetic reading of Plato's dialogues, Montaigne authored his own Apology.

Bloomington, Indiana. Eric MacPhail

[31] After Montaigne, the credit for recognizing this relation is due to Franz Egermann, « Der Dialogus des Tacitus und Platons Gorgias », *Hermes* 70 (1935) 424-30.

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