

# **The Essays of Montaigne — Volume 15 eBook**

## **The Essays of Montaigne — Volume 15 by Michel de Montaigne**

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## CHAPTER V.

By how much profitable thoughts are more full and solid, by so much are they also more cumbersome and heavy: vice, death, poverty, diseases, are grave and grievous subjects. A man should have his soul instructed in the means to sustain and to contend with evils, and in the rules of living and believing well: and often rouse it up, and exercise it in this noble study; but in an ordinary soul it must be by intervals and with moderation; it will otherwise grow besotted if continually intent upon it. I found it necessary, when I was young, to put myself in mind and solicit myself to keep me to my duty; gaiety and health do not, they say, so well agree with those grave and serious meditations: I am at present in another state: the conditions of age but too much put me in mind, urge me to wisdom, and preach to me. From the excess of sprightliness I am fallen into that of severity, which is much more troublesome; and for that reason I now and then suffer myself purposely a little to run into disorder, and occupy my mind in wanton and youthful thoughts, wherewith it diverts itself. I am of late but too reserved, too heavy, and too ripe; years every day read to me lectures of coldness and temperance. This body of mine avoids disorder and dreads it; 'tis now my body's turn to guide my mind towards reformation; it governs, in turn, and more rudely and imperiously than the other; it lets me not an hour alone, sleeping or waking, but is always preaching to me death, patience, and repentance. I now defend myself from temperance, as I have formerly done from pleasure; it draws me too much back, and even to stupidity. Now I will be master of myself, to all intents and purposes; wisdom has its excesses, and has no less need of moderation than folly. Therefore, lest I should wither, dry up, and overcharge myself with prudence, in the intervals and truces my infirmities allow me:

"Mens intenta suis ne seit usque malis."

["That my mind may not eternally be intent upon my ills."  
—Ovid., *Trist.*, iv. i, 4.]

I gently turn aside, and avert my eyes from the stormy and cloudy sky I have before me, which, thanks be to God, I regard without fear, but not without meditation and study, and amuse myself in the remembrance of my better years:

"Animus quo perdidit, optat,  
Atque in praeterita se totus imagine versat."

["The mind wishes to have what it has lost, and throws itself wholly into memories of the past."—Petronius, c. 128.]

Let childhood look forward and age backward; was not this the signification of Janus' double face? Let years draw me along if they will, but it shall be backward; as long as



my eyes can discern the pleasant season expired, I shall now and then turn them that way; though it escape from my blood and veins, I shall not, however, root the image of it out of my memory:

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“Hoc est  
Vivere bis, vita posse priore frui.”

[“’Tis to live twice to be able to enjoy one’s former life again.”  
—Martial, x. 23, 7.]

Plato ordains that old men should be present at the exercises, dances, and sports of young people, that they may rejoice in others for the activity and beauty of body which is no more in themselves, and call to mind the grace and comeliness of that flourishing age; and wills that in these recreations the honour of the prize should be given to that young man who has most diverted the company. I was formerly wont to mark cloudy and gloomy days as extraordinary; these are now my ordinary days; the extraordinary are the clear and bright; I am ready to leap for joy, as for an unwonted favour, when nothing happens me. Let me tickle myself, I cannot force a poor smile from this wretched body of mine; I am only merry in conceit and in dreaming, by artifice to divert the melancholy of age; but, in faith, it requires another remedy than a dream. A weak contest of art against nature. ’Tis great folly to lengthen and anticipate human incommodities, as every one does; I had rather be a less while old than be old before I am really so.’ I seize on even the least occasions of pleasure I can meet. I know very well, by hearsay, several sorts of prudent pleasures, effectually so, and glorious to boot; but opinion has not power enough over me to give me an appetite to them. I covet not so much to have them magnanimous, magnificent, and pompous, as I do to have them sweet, facile, and ready:

“A natura discedimus; populo nos damus,  
nullius rei bono auctori.”

[“We depart from nature and give ourselves to the people, who understand nothing.”—Seneca, Ep., 99.]

My philosophy is in action, in natural and present practice, very little in fancy: what if I should take pleasure in playing at cob-nut or to whip a top!

“Non ponebat enim rumores ante salutem.”

[“He did not sacrifice his health even to rumours.” Ennius, apud Cicero, De Offic., i. 24]

Pleasure is a quality of very little ambition; it thinks itself rich enough of itself without any addition of repute; and is best pleased where most retired. A young man should be whipped who pretends to a taste in wine and sauces; there was nothing which, at that age, I less valued or knew: now I begin to learn; I am very much ashamed on’t; but what should I do? I am more ashamed and vexed at the occasions that put me upon’t. ’Tis for us to dote and trifle away the time, and for young men to stand upon their



reputation and nice punctilios; they are going towards the world and the world's opinion; we are retiring from it:

“Sibi arma, sibi equos, sibi hastas, sibi clavam, sibi pilam,  
sibi natationes, et cursus habeant: nobis senibus, ex lusionibus  
multis, talos relinquunt et tesseras;”

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["Let them reserve to themselves arms, horses, spears, clubs, tennis, swimming, and races; and of all the sports leave to us old men cards and dice."—Cicero, *De Senec.*, c. 16.]

the laws themselves send us home. I can do no less in favour of this wretched condition into which my age has thrown me than furnish it with toys to play withal, as they do children; and, in truth, we become such. Both wisdom and folly will have enough to do to support and relieve me by alternate services in this calamity of age:

"Misce stultitiam consiliis brevem."

["Mingle with counsels a brief interval of folly."  
—Horace, *Od.*, iv. 12, 27.]

I accordingly avoid the lightest punctures; and those that formerly would not have rippled the skin, now pierce me through and through: my habit of body is now so naturally declining to ill:

"In fragili corpore odiosa omnis offensio est;"

["In a fragile body every shock is obnoxious."  
—Cicero, *De Senec.*, c. 18.]

"Mensque pati durum sustinet aegra nihil."

["And the infirm mind can bear no difficult exertion."  
—Ovid, *De Ponto.*, i. 5, 18.]

I have ever been very susceptibly tender as to offences: I am much more tender now, and open throughout.

"Et minimae vires frangere quassa valent."

["And little force suffices to break what was cracked before."  
—Ovid, *De Tris.*, iii. 11, 22.]

My judgment restrains me from kicking against and murmuring at the inconveniences that nature orders me to endure, but it does not take away my feeling them: I, who have no other thing in my aim but to live and be merry, would run from one end of the world to the other to seek out one good year of pleasant and jocund tranquillity. A melancholic and dull tranquillity may be enough for me, but it benumbs and stupefies me; I am not contented with it. If there be any person, any knot of good company in country or city, in France or elsewhere, resident or in motion, who can like my humour, and whose humours I can like, let them but whistle and I will run and furnish them with essays in flesh and bone:

Seeing it is the privilege of the mind to rescue itself from old age, I advise mine to it with all the power I have; let it meanwhile continue green, and flourish if it can, like mistletoe upon a dead tree. But I fear 'tis a traitor; it has contracted so strict a fraternity with the body that it leaves me at every turn, to follow that in its need. I wheedle and deal with it apart in vain; I try in vain to wean it from this correspondence, to no effect; quote to it Seneca and Catullus, and ladies and royal masques; if its companion have the stone, it seems to have it too; even the faculties that are most peculiarly and properly its own cannot then perform their functions, but manifestly appear stupefied and asleep; there is no sprightliness in its productions, if there be not at the same time an equal proportion in the body too.

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Our masters are to blame, that in searching out the causes of the extraordinary emotions of the soul, besides attributing it to a divine ecstasy, love, martial fierceness, poesy, wine, they have not also attributed a part to health: a boiling, vigorous, full, and lazy health, such as formerly the verdure of youth and security, by fits, supplied me withal; that fire of sprightliness and gaiety darts into the mind flashes that are lively and bright beyond our natural light, and of all enthusiasms the most jovial, if not the most extravagant.

It is, then, no wonder if a contrary state stupefy and clog my spirit, and produce a contrary effect:

“Ad nullum consurgit opus, cum corpore languet;”

["When the mind is languishing, the body is good for nothing."  
(Or:) "It rises to no effort; it languishes with the body."  
—Pseudo Gallus, i. 125.]

and yet would have me obliged to it for giving, as it wants to make out, much less consent to this stupidity than is the ordinary case with men of my age. Let us, at least, whilst we have truce, drive away incommodities and difficulties from our commerce:

“Dum licet, obducta solvatur fronte senectus:”

["Whilst we can, let us banish old age from the brow."  
—Herod., Ep., xiii. 7.]

“Tetrica sunt amcenanda jocularibus.”

["Sour things are to be sweetened with those that are pleasant."  
—Sidonius Apollin., Ep., i. 9.]

I love a gay and civil wisdom, and fly from all sourness and austerity of manners, all repellent, mien being suspected by me:

“Tristemque vultus tetrici arrogantiam:”

["The arrogant sadness of a crabbed face.”—Auctor Incert.]

“Et habet tristis quoque turba cinaedos.”

["And the dull crowd also has its voluptuaries.” (Or:)  
“An austere countenance sometimes covers a debauched mind.”  
—Idem.]

I am very much of Plato's opinion, who says that facile or harsh humours are great indications of the good or ill disposition of the mind. Socrates had a constant countenance, but serene and smiling, not sourly austere, like the elder Crassus, whom no one ever saw laugh. Virtue is a pleasant and gay quality.

I know very well that few will quarrel with the licence of my writings, who have not more to quarrel with in the licence of their own thoughts: I conform myself well enough to their inclinations, but I offend their eyes. 'Tis a fine humour to strain the writings of Plato, to wrest his pretended intercourses with Phaedo, Dion, Stella, and Archeanassa:

"Non pudeat dicere, quod non pudet sentire."

["Let us not be ashamed to speak what we are not ashamed to think."]

I hate a froward and dismal spirit, that slips over all the pleasures of life and seizes and feeds upon misfortunes; like flies, that cannot stick to a smooth and polished body, but fix and repose themselves upon craggy and rough places, and like cupping-glasses, that only suck and attract bad blood.

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As to the rest, I have enjoined myself to dare to say all that I dare to do; even thoughts that are not to be published, displease me; the worst of my actions and qualities do not appear to me so evil as I find it evil and base not to dare to own them. Every one is wary and discreet in confession, but men ought to be so in action; the boldness of doing ill is in some sort compensated and restrained by the boldness of confessing it. Whoever will oblige himself to tell all, should oblige himself to do nothing that he must be forced to conceal. I wish that this excessive licence of mine may draw men to freedom, above these timorous and mincing virtues sprung from our imperfections, and that at the expense of my immoderation I may reduce them to reason. A man must see and study his vice to correct it; they who conceal it from others, commonly conceal it from themselves; and do not think it close enough, if they themselves see it: they withdraw and disguise it from their own consciences:

“Quare vitia sua nemo confitetur? Quia etiam nunc in illia est; somnium narrare vigilantis est.”

[“Why does no man confess his vices? because he is yet in them; ’tis for a waking man to tell his dream.”—Seneca, Ep., 53.]

The diseases of the body explain themselves by their increase; we find that to be the gout which we called a rheum or a strain; the diseases of the soul, the greater they are, keep, themselves the most obscure; the most sick are the least sensible; therefore it is that with an unrelenting hand they most often, in full day, be taken to task, opened, and torn from the hollow of the heart. As in doing well, so in doing ill, the mere confession is sometimes satisfaction. Is there any deformity in doing amiss, that can excuse us from confessing ourselves? It is so great a pain to me to dissemble, that I evade the trust of another’s secrets, wanting the courage to disavow my knowledge. I can keep silent, but deny I cannot without the greatest trouble and violence to myself imaginable to be very secret, a man must be so by nature, not by obligation. ’Tis little worth, in the service of a prince, to be secret, if a man be not a liar to boot. If he who asked Thales the Milesian whether he ought solemnly to deny that he had committed adultery, had applied himself to me, I should have told him that he ought not to do it; for I look upon lying as a worse fault than the other. Thales advised him quite contrary, bidding him swear to shield the greater fault by the less;

[Montaigne’s memory here serves him ill, for the question being put to Thales, his answer was: “But is not perjury worse than adultery?”—Diogenes Laertius, in vita, i. 36.]

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nevertheless, this counsel was not so much an election as a multiplication of vice. Upon which let us say this in passing, that we deal liberally with a man of conscience when we propose to him some difficulty in counterpoise of vice; but when we shut him up betwixt two vices, he is put to a hard choice as Origen was either to idolatrise or to suffer himself to be carnally abused by a great Ethiopian slave they brought to him. He submitted to the first condition, and wrongly, people say. Yet those women of our times are not much out, according to their error, who protest they had rather burden their consciences with ten men than one mass.

If it be indiscretion so to publish one's errors, yet there is no great danger that it pass into example and custom; for Ariston said, that the winds men most fear are those that lay them open. We must tuck up this ridiculous rag that hides our manners: they send their consciences to the stews, and keep a starched countenance: even traitors and assassins espouse the laws of ceremony, and there fix their duty. So that neither can injustice complain of incivility, nor malice of indiscretion. 'Tis pity but a bad man should be a fool to boot, and that outward decency should palliate his vice: this rough-cast only appertains to a good and sound wall, that deserves to be preserved and whited.

In favour of the Huguenots, who condemn our auricular and private confession, I confess myself in public, religiously and purely: St. Augustin, Origen, and Hippocrates have published the errors of their opinions; I, moreover, of my manners. I am greedy of making myself known, and I care not to how many, provided it be truly; or to say better, I hunger for nothing; but I mortally hate to be mistaken by those who happen to learn my name. He who does all things for honour and glory, what can he think to gain by shewing himself to the world in a vizor, and by concealing his true being from the people? Praise a humpback for his stature, he has reason to take it for an affront: if you are a coward, and men commend you for your valour, is it of you they speak? They take you for another. I should like him as well who glorifies himself in the compliments and congees that are made him as if he were master of the company, when he is one of the least of the train. Archelaus, king of Macedon, walking along the street, somebody threw water on his head, which they who were with him said he ought to punish: "Aye, but," said he, "whoever it was, he did not throw the water upon me, but upon him whom he took me to be." Socrates being told that people spoke ill of him, "Not at all," said he, "there is nothing, in me of what they say."

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For my part, if any one should recommend me as a good pilot, as being very modest or very chaste, I should owe him no thanks; and so, whoever should call me traitor, robber, or drunkard, I should be as little concerned. They who do not rightly know themselves, may feed themselves with false approbations; not I, who see myself, and who examine myself even to my very bowels, and who very well know what is my due. I am content to be less commended, provided I am better known. I may be reputed a wise man in such a sort of wisdom as I take to be folly. I am vexed that my Essays only serve the ladies for a common piece of furniture, and a piece for the hall; this chapter will make me part of the water-closet. I love to traffic with them a little in private; public conversation is without favour and without savour. In farewells, we oftener than not heat our affections towards the things we take leave of; I take my last leave of the pleasures of this world: these are our last embraces.

But let us come to my subject: what has the act of generation, so natural, so necessary, and so just, done to men, to be a thing not to be spoken of without blushing, and to be excluded from all serious and moderate discourse? We boldly pronounce kill, rob, betray, and that we dare only to do betwixt the teeth. Is it to say, the less we expend in words, we may pay so much the more in thinking? For it is certain that the words least in use, most seldom written, and best kept in, are the best and most generally known: no age, no manners, are ignorant of them, no more than the word bread they imprint themselves in every one without being, expressed, without voice, and without figure; and the sex that most practises it is bound to say least of it. 'Tis an act that we have placed in the franchise of silence, from which to take it is a crime even to accuse and judge it; neither dare we reprehend it but by periphrasis and picture. A great favour to a criminal to be so execrable that justice thinks it unjust to touch and see him; free, and safe by the benefit of the severity of his condemnation. Is it not here as in matter of books, that sell better and become more public for being suppressed? For my part, I will take Aristotle at his word, who says, that "bashfulness is an ornament to youth, but a reproach to old age." These verses are preached in the ancient school, a school that I much more adhere to than the modern: its virtues appear to me to be greater, and the vices less:

"Ceux qui par trop fuyant Venus estrivent,  
Faillent autant que ceulx qui trop la suyvent."

["They err as much who too much forbear Venus, as they who are too frequent in her rites."—A translation by Amyot from Plutarch, A philosopher should converse with princes.]

"Tu, dea, rerum naturam sola gubernas,  
Nec sine to quicquam dias in luminis oras  
Exoritur, neque fit laetum, nec amabile quidquam."



["Goddess, still thou alone governest nature, nor without thee  
anything comes into light; nothing is pleasant, nothing joyful."  
—Lucretius, i. 22.]

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I know not who could set Pallas and the Muses at variance with Venus, and make them cold towards Love; but I see no deities so well met, or that are more indebted to one another. Who will deprive the Muses of amorous imaginations, will rob them of the best entertainment they have, and of the noblest matter of their work: and who will make Love lose the communication and service of poesy, will disarm him of his best weapons: by this means they charge the god of familiarity and good will, and the protecting goddesses of humanity and justice, with the vice of ingratitude and unthankfulness. I have not been so long cashiered from the state and service of this god, that my memory is not still perfect in his force and value:

“Agnosco veteris vestigia flammae;”

[“I recognise vestiges of my old flame.”—Aeneid., iv. 23.]

There are yet some remains of heat and emotion after the fever:

“Nec mihi deficiat calor hic, hiemantibus annis!”

[“Nor let this heat of youth fail me in my winter years.”]

Withered and drooping as I am, I feel yet some remains of the past ardour:

“Qual l’alto Egeo, per the Aquilone o Noto  
Cessi, the tutto prima il volse et scosse,  
Non ’s accheta ei pero; ma’l suono e’l moto  
Ritien del l’onde anco agitate e grosse:”

[“As Aegean seas, when storms be calmed again, That rolled their tumbling waves with troublous blasts, Do yet of tempests passed some show retain, And here and there their swelling billows cast.”—Fairfax.]

but from what I understand of it, the force and power of this god are more lively and animated in the picture of poesy than in their own essence:

“Et versus digitos habet:”

[“Verse has fingers.”—Altered from Juvenal, iv. 196.]

it has I know not what kind of air, more amorous than love itself. Venus is not so beautiful, naked, alive, and panting, as she is here in Virgil:

“Dixerat; et niveis hinc atque hinc Diva lacertis Cunctantem amplexu molli foveat. Ille repente Accepit solitam flammam; notusque medullas Intravit calor, et labefacta per ossa cucurrit Non secus atque olim tonitru, cum rupta corusco Ignea rima micans percurrit lumine nimbos. . . . . Ea verba loquutus, Optatos dedit amplexus;



placidumque petivit Conjugis infusus gremio per membra soporem.”[“The goddess spoke, and throwing round him her snowy arms in soft embraces, caresses him hesitating. Suddenly he caught the wonted flame, and the well-known warmth pierced his marrow, and ran thrilling through his shaken bones: just as when at times, with thunder, a stream of fire in lightning flashes shoots across the skies. Having spoken these words, he gave her the wished embrace, and in the bosom of his spouse sought placid sleep.” —Aeneid, viii. 387 and 392.]

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All that I find fault with in considering it is, that he has represented her a little too passionate for a married Venus; in this discreet kind of coupling, the appetite is not usually so wanton, but more grave and dull. Love hates that people should hold of any but itself, and goes but faintly to work in familiarities derived from any other title, as marriage is: alliance, dowry, therein sway by reason, as much or more than grace and beauty. Men do not marry for themselves, let them say what they will; they marry as much or more for their posterity and family; the custom and interest of marriage concern our race much more than us; and therefore it is, that I like to have a match carried on by a third hand rather than a man's own, and by another man's liking than that of the party himself; and how much is all this opposite to the conventions of love? And also it is a kind of incest to employ in this venerable and sacred alliance the heat and extravagance of amorous licence, as I think I have said elsewhere. A man, says Aristotle, must approach his wife with prudence and temperance, lest in dealing too lasciviously with her, the extreme pleasure make her exceed the bounds of reason. What he says upon the account of conscience, the physicians say upon the account of health: "that a pleasure excessively lascivious, voluptuous, and frequent, makes the seed too hot, and hinders conception": 'tis said, elsewhere, that to a languishing intercourse, as this naturally is, to supply it with a due and fruitful heat, a man must do it but seldom and at appreciable intervals:

"Quo rapiat sitiens Venerem, interiusque recondat."

["But let him thirstily snatch the joys of love and enclose them in his bosom."—Virg., Georg., iii. 137.]

I see no marriages where the conjugal compatibility sooner fails than those that we contract upon the account of beauty and amorous desires; there should be more solid and constant foundation, and they should proceed with greater circumspection; this furious ardour is worth nothing.

They who think they honour marriage by joining love to it, do, methinks, like those who, to favour virtue, hold that nobility is nothing else but virtue. They are indeed things that have some relation to one another, but there is a great deal of difference; we should not so mix their names and titles; 'tis a wrong to them both so to confound them. Nobility is a brave quality, and with good reason introduced; but forasmuch as 'tis a quality depending upon others, and may happen in a vicious person, in himself nothing, 'tis in estimate infinitely below virtue';

["If nobility be virtue, it loses its quality in all things wherein not virtuous: and if it be not virtue, 'tis a small matter."  
—La Byuyere.]

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'tis a virtue, if it be one, that is artificial and apparent, depending upon time and fortune: various in form, according to the country; living and mortal; without birth, as the river Nile; genealogical and common; of succession and similitude; drawn by consequence, and a very weak one. Knowledge, strength, goodness, beauty, riches, and all other qualities, fall into communication and commerce, but this is consummated in itself, and of no use to the service of others. There was proposed to one of our kings the choice of two candidates for the same command, of whom one was a gentleman, the other not; he ordered that, without respect to quality, they should choose him who had the most merit; but where the worth of the competitors should appear to be entirely equal, they should have respect to birth: this was justly to give it its rank. A young man unknown, coming to Antigonus to make suit for his father's command, a valiant man lately dead: "Friend," said he, "in such preferments as these, I have not so much regard to the nobility of my soldiers as to their prowess." And, indeed, it ought not to go as it did with the officers of the kings of Sparta, trumpeters, fiddlers, cooks, the children of whom always succeeded to their places, how ignorant soever, and were preferred before the most experienced in the trade. They of Calicut make of nobles a sort of superhuman persons: they are interdicted marriage and all but warlike employments: they may have of concubines their fill, and the women as many lovers, without being jealous of one another; but 'tis a capital and irremissible crime to couple with a person of meaner conditions than themselves; and they think themselves polluted, if they have but touched one in walking along; and supposing their nobility to be marvellously interested and injured in it, kill such as only approach a little too near them: insomuch that the ignoble are obliged to cry out as they walk, like the gondoliers of Venice, at the turnings of streets for fear of jostling; and the nobles command them to step aside to what part they please: by that means these avoid what they repute a perpetual ignominy, those certain death. No time, no favour of the prince, no office, or virtue, or riches, can ever prevail to make a plebeian become noble: to which this custom contributes, that marriages are interdicted betwixt different trades; the daughter of one of the cordwainers' gild is not permitted to marry a carpenter; and parents are obliged to train up their children precisely in their own callings, and not put them to any other trade; by which means the distinction and continuance of their fortunes are maintained.

A good marriage, if there be any such, rejects the company and conditions of love, and tries to represent those of friendship. 'Tis a sweet society of life, full of constancy, trust, and an infinite number of useful and solid services and mutual obligations; which any woman who has a right taste:

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“Optato quam junxit lumine taeda”—

["Whom the marriage torch has joined with the desired light."  
—Catullus, lxiv. 79.]

would be loth to serve her husband in quality of a mistress. If she be lodged in his affection as a wife, she is more honourably and securely placed. When he purports to be in love with another, and works all he can to obtain his desire, let any one but ask him, on which he had rather a disgrace should fall, his wife or his mistress, which of their misfortunes would most afflict him, and to which of them he wishes the most grandeur, the answer to these questions is out of dispute in a sound marriage.

And that so few are observed to be happy, is a token of its price and value. If well formed and rightly taken, 'tis the best of all human societies; we cannot live without it, and yet we do nothing but decry it. It happens, as with cages, the birds without despair to get in, and those within despair of getting out. Socrates being asked, whether it was more commodious to take a wife or not, "Let a man take which course he will," said he; "he will repent." 'Tis a contract to which the common saying:

"Homo homini aut deus aut lupus,"

["Man to man is either a god or a wolf."—Erasmus, Adag.]

may very fitly be applied; there must be a concurrence of many qualities in the construction. It is found nowadays more convenient for simple and plebeian souls, where delights, curiosity, and idleness do not so much disturb it; but extravagant humours, such as mine, that hate all sorts of obligation and restraint, are not so proper for it:

"Et mihi dulce magis resolutio vivere collo."

["And it is sweet to me to live with a loosened neck."  
—Pseudo Gallus, i. 61.]

Might I have had my own will, I would not have married Wisdom herself, if she would have had me. But 'tis to much purpose to evade it; the common custom and usance of life will have it so. The most of my actions are guided by example, not by choice, and yet I did not go to it of my own voluntary motion; I was led and drawn to it by extrinsic occasions; for not only things that are incommodious in themselves, but also things however ugly, vicious, and to be avoided, may be rendered acceptable by some condition or accident; so unsteady and vain is all human resolution! and I was persuaded to it, when worse prepared and less tractable than I am at present, that I have tried what it is: and as great a libertine as I am taken to be, I have in truth more strictly observed the laws of marriage, than I either promised or expected. 'Tis in vain to

kick, when a man has once put on his fetters: a man must prudently manage his liberty; but having once submitted to obligation, he must confine himself within the laws of common duty, at least, do what he can towards it. They who engage in this contract, with a design to carry themselves in it with hatred and contempt, do an unjust and inconvenient thing; and the fine rule that I hear pass from hand to hand amongst the women, as a sacred oracle:

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["Serve thy husband as thy master, but guard thyself against him as from a traitor."]

which is to say, comport thyself towards him with a dissembled, inimical, and distrustful reverence (a cry of war and defiance), is equally injurious and hard. I am too mild for such rugged designs: to say the truth, I am not arrived to that perfection of ability and refinement of wit, to confound reason with injustice, and to laugh at all rule and order that does not please my palate; because I hate superstition, I do not presently run into the contrary extreme of irreligion.

(If a man hate superstition he cannot love religion. D.W.)

If a man does not always perform his duty, he ought at least to love and acknowledge it; 'tis treachery to marry without espousing.

Let us proceed.

Our poet represents a marriage happy in a good accord wherein nevertheless there is not much loyalty. Does he mean, that it is not impossible but a woman may give the reins to her own passion, and yield to the importunities of love, and yet reserve some duty toward marriage, and that it may be hurt, without being totally broken? A serving man may cheat his master, whom nevertheless he does not hate. Beauty, opportunity, and destiny (for destiny has also a hand in't),

"Fatum est in partibus illis  
Quas sinus abscondit; nam, si tibi sidera cessent,  
Nil faciet longi mensura incognita nervi;"

["There is a fatality about the hidden parts: let nature have endowed you however liberally, 'tis of no use, if your good star fails you in the nick of time."—Juvenal, ix. 32.]

have attached her to a stranger; though not so wholly, peradventure, but that she may have some remains of kindness for her husband. They are two designs, that have several paths leading to them, without being confounded with one another; a woman may yield to a man she would by no means have married, not only for the condition of his fortune, but for those also of his person. Few men have made a wife of a mistress, who have not repented it. And even in the other world, what an unhappy life does Jupiter lead with his, whom he had first enjoyed as a mistress! 'Tis, as the proverb runs, to befoul a basket and then put it upon one's head. I have in my time, in a good family, seen love shamefully and dishonestly cured by marriage: the considerations are widely different. We love at once, without any tie, two things contrary in themselves.





Socrates was wont to say, that the city of Athens pleased, as ladies do whom men court for love; every one loved to come thither to take a turn, and pass away his time; but no one liked it so well as to espouse it, that is, to inhabit there, and to make it his constant residence. I have been vexed to see husbands hate their wives only because they themselves do them wrong; we should not, at all events, methinks, love them the less for our own faults; they should at least, upon the account of repentance and compassion, be dearer to us.

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They are different ends, he says, and yet in some sort compatible; marriage has utility, justice, honour, and constancy for its share; a flat, but more universal pleasure: love founds itself wholly upon pleasure, and, indeed, has it more full, lively, and sharp; a pleasure inflamed by difficulty; there must be in it sting and smart: 'tis no longer love, if without darts and fire. The bounty of ladies is too profuse in marriage, and dulls the point of affection and desire: to evade which inconvenience, do but observe what pains Lycurgus and Plato take in their laws.

Women are not to blame at all, when they refuse the rules of life that are introduced into the world, forasmuch as the men make them without their help. There is naturally contention and brawling betwixt them and us; and the strictest friendship we have with them is yet mixed with tumult and tempest. In the opinion of our author, we deal inconsiderately with them in this: after we have discovered that they are, without comparison, more able and ardent in the practice of love than we, and that the old priest testified as much, who had been one while a man, and then a woman:

“Venus huic erat utraque nota:”

["Both aspects of love were known to him,"  
—Tiresias. Ovid. *Metam.*, iii. 323.]

and moreover, that we have learned from their own mouths the proof that, in several ages, was made by an Emperor and Empress of Rome,—[Proclus.] —both famous for ability in that affair! for he in one night deflowered ten Sarmatian virgins who were his captives: but she had five-and-twenty bouts in one night, changing her man according to her need and liking;

“Adhuc ardens rigidæ tentigine vulvæ  
Et lassata viris, nondum satiata, recessit:”

["Ardent still, she retired, fatigued, but not satisfied."  
—Juvenal, vi. 128.]

and that upon the dispute which happened in Cataluna, wherein a wife complaining of her husband's too frequent addresses to her, not so much, as I conceive, that she was incommodated by it (for I believe no miracles out of religion) as under this pretence, to curtail and curb in this, which is the fundamental act of marriage, the authority of husbands over their wives, and to shew that their frowardness and malignity go beyond the nuptial bed, and spurn under foot even the graces and sweets of Venus; the husband, a man truly brutish and unnatural, replied, that even on fasting days he could not subsist with less than ten courses: whereupon came out that notable sentence of the Queen of Arragon, by which, after mature deliberation of her council, this good queen, to give a rule and example to all succeeding ages of the moderation required in

a just marriage, set down six times a day as a legitimate and necessary stint; surrendering and quitting a great deal of the needs and desires of her sex,

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that she might, she said, establish an easy, and consequently, a permanent and immutable rule. Hereupon the doctors cry out: what must the female appetite and concupiscence be, when their reason, their reformation and virtue, are taxed at such a rate, considering the divers judgments of our appetites? for Solon, master of the law school, taxes us but at three a month,—that men may not fail in point of conjugal frequentation: after having, I say, believed and preached all this, we go and enjoin them continency for their particular share, and upon the last and extreme penalties.

There is no passion so hard to contend with as this, which we would have them only resist, not simply as an ordinary vice, but as an execrable abomination, worse than irreligion and parricide; whilst we, at the same time, go to't without offence or reproach. Even those amongst us who have tried the experiment have sufficiently confessed what difficulty, or rather impossibility, they have found by material remedies to subdue, weaken, and cool the body. We, on the contrary, would have them at once sound, vigorous plump, high-fed, and chaste; that is to say, both hot and cold; for the marriage, which we tell them is to keep them from burning, is but small refreshment to them, as we order the matter. If they take one whose vigorous age is yet boiling, he will be proud to make it known elsewhere;

“Sit tandem pudor; aut eamus in jus;  
Multis mentula millibus redempta,  
Non est haec tua, Basse; vendidisti;”

[“Let there be some shame, or we shall go to law: your vigour, bought by your wife with many thousands, is no longer yours: thou hast sold it.—“Martial, xii. 90.]

Polemon the philosopher was justly by his wife brought before the judge for sowing in a barren field the seed that was due to one that was fruitful: if, on the other hand, they take a decayed fellow, they are in a worse condition in marriage than either maids or widows. We think them well provided for, because they have a man to lie with, as the Romans concluded Clodia Laeta, a vestal nun, violated, because Caligula had approached her, though it was declared he did no more but approach her: but, on the contrary, we by that increase their necessity, forasmuch as the touch and company of any man whatever rouses their desires, that in solitude would be more quiet. And to the end, 'tis likely, that they might render their chastity more meritorious by this circumstance and consideration, Boleslas and Kinge his wife, kings of Poland, vowed it by mutual consent, being in bed together, on their very wedding day, and kept their vow in spite of all matrimonial conveniences.

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We train them up from their infancy to the traffic of love; their grace, dressing, knowledge, language, and whole instruction tend that way: their governesses imprint nothing in them but the idea of love, if for nothing else but by continually representing it to them, to give them a distaste for it. My daughter, the only child I have, is now of an age that forward young women are allowed to be married at; she is of a slow, thin, and tender complexion, and has accordingly been brought up by her mother after a retired and particular manner, so that she but now begins to be weaned from her childish simplicity. She was reading before me in a French book where the word ‘fouteau’, the name of a tree very well known, occurred;—[The beech-tree; the name resembles in sound an obscene French word.]—the woman, to whose conduct she is committed, stopped her short a little roughly, and made her skip over that dangerous step. I let her alone, not to trouble their rules, for I never concern myself in that sort of government; feminine polity has a mysterious procedure; we must leave it to them; but if I am not mistaken the commerce of twenty lacquies could not, in six months’ time, have so imprinted in her memory the meaning, usage, and all the consequence of the sound of these wicked syllables, as this good old woman did by reprimand and interdiction.

“Motus doceri gaudet Ionicos  
Matura virgo, et frangitur artibus;  
Jam nunc et incestos amores  
De tenero, meditatur ungui.”

[“The maid ripe for marriage delights to learn Ionic dances, and to imitate those lascivious movements. Nay, already from her infancy she meditates criminal amours.”—Horace, *Od.*, iii. 6, 21., the text has ‘fingitur’.]

Let them but give themselves the rein a little, let them but enter into liberty of discourse, we are but children to them in this science. Hear them but describe our pursuits and conversation, they will very well make you understand that we bring them nothing they have not known before, and digested without our help.

[This sentence refers to a conversation between some young women in his immediate neighbourhood, which the Essayist just below informs us that he overheard, and which was too shocking for him to repeat. It must have been tolerably bad.—Remark by the editor of a later edition.]

Is it, perhaps, as Plato says, that they have formerly been debauched young fellows? I happened one day to be in a place where I could hear some of their talk without suspicion; I am sorry I cannot repeat it. By’rlady, said I, we had need go study the phrases of Amadis, and the tales of Boccaccio and Aretin, to be able to discourse with them: we employ our time to much purpose indeed. There is neither word, example, nor step they are not more perfect in than our books; ’tis a discipline that springs with their blood,

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“Et mentem ipsa Venus dedit,”

[“Venus herself made them what they are,”  
—Virg., Georg., iii. 267.]

which these good instructors, nature, youth, and health, are continually inspiring them with; they need not learn, they breed it:

“Nec tantum niveo gavisata est ulla columbo,  
Compar, vel si quid dicitur improbius,  
Oscula mordenti semper decerpere rostro,  
Quantum praecipue multivola est mulier.”

[“No milk-white dove, or if there be a thing more lascivious,  
takes so much delight in kissing as woman, wishful for every man  
she sees.”—Catullus, lxvi. 125.]

So that if the natural violence of their desire were not a little restrained by fear and honour, which were wisely contrived for them, we should be all shamed. All the motions in the world resolve into and tend to this conjunction; 'tis a matter infused throughout: 'tis a centre to which all things are directed. We yet see the edicts of the old and wise Rome made for the service of love, and the precepts of Socrates for the instruction of courtezans:

“Noncon libelli Stoici inter sericos  
Jacere pulvillos amant.”

[“There are writings of the Stoics which we find lying upon  
silken cushions.”—Horace, Epod., viii. 15.]

Zeno, amongst his laws, also regulated the motions to be observed in getting a maidenhead. What was the philosopher Strato's book Of Carnal Conjunction?—[Diogenes Laertius, v. 59.]—And what did Theophrastus treat of in those he intituled, the one 'The Lover', and the other 'Of Love'? Of what Aristippus in his 'Of Former Delights'? What do the so long and lively descriptions in Plato of the loves of his time pretend to? and the book called 'The Lover', of Demetrius Phalereus? and 'Clinias', or the 'Ravished Lover', of Heraclides; and that of Antisthenes, 'Of Getting Children', or, 'Of Weddings', and the other, 'Of the Master or the Lover'? And that of Aristo: 'Of Amorous Exercises' What those of Cleanthes: one, 'Of Love', the other, 'Of the Art of Loving'? The amorous dialogues of Sphaereus? and the fable of Jupiter and Juno, of Chrysippus, impudent beyond all toleration? And his fifty so lascivious epistles? I will let alone the writings of the philosophers of the Epicurean sect, protectress of voluptuousness. Fifty deities were, in time past, assigned to this office; and there have been nations where, to assuage the lust of those who came to their devotion, they kept

men and women in their temples for the worshippers to lie with; and it was an act of ceremony to do this before they went to prayers:

“Nimirum propter continentiam incontinentia necessaria est;  
incendium ignibus extinguitur.”

["Forsooth incontinency is necessary for continency's sake; a  
conflagration is extinguished by fire."]

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In the greatest part of the world, that member of our body was deified; in the same province, some flayed off the skin to offer and consecrate a piece; others offered and consecrated their seed. In another, the young men publicly cut through betwixt the skin and the flesh of that part in several places, and thrust pieces of wood into the openings as long and thick as they would receive, and of these pieces of wood afterwards made a fire as an offering to their gods; and were reputed neither vigorous nor chaste, if by the force of that cruel pain they seemed to be at all dismayed. Elsewhere the most sacred magistrate was revered and acknowledged by that member and in several ceremonies the effigy of it was carried in pomp to the honour of various divinities. The Egyptian ladies, in their Bacchanalia, each carried one finely-carved of wood about their necks, as large and heavy as she could so carry it; besides which, the statue of their god presented one, which in greatness surpassed all the rest of his body.—[Herodotus, ii. 48, says “nearly as large as the body itself.”]—The married women, near the place where I live, make of their kerchiefs the figure of one upon their foreheads, to glorify themselves in the enjoyment they have of it; and coming to be widows, they throw it behind, and cover it with their headcloths. The most modest matrons of Rome thought it an honour to offer flowers and garlands to the god Priapus; and they made the virgins, at the time of their espousals, sit upon his shameful parts. And I know not whether I have not in my time seen some air of like devotion. What was the meaning of that ridiculous piece of the chaussuye of our forefathers, and that is still worn by our Swiss? [“Cod-pieces worn”—Cotton]—To what end do we make a show of our implements in figure under our breeches, and often, which is worse, above their natural size, by falsehood and imposture? I have half a mind to believe that this sort of vestment was invented in the better and more conscientious ages, that the world might not be deceived, and that every one should give a public account of his proportions: the simple nations wear them yet, and near about the real size. In those days, the tailor took measure of it, as the shoemaker does now of a man’s foot. That good man, who, when I was young, gelded so many noble and ancient statues in his great city, that they might not corrupt the sight of the ladies, according to the advice of this other ancient worthy:

“Flagitii principium est, nudare inter gives corpora,”

[“’Tis the beginning of wickedness to expose their persons among the citizens”—Ennius, ap. Cicero, Tusc. Quaes., iv. 33.]

should have called to mind, that, as in the mysteries of the Bona Dea, all masculine appearance was excluded, he did nothing, if he did not geld horses and asses, in short, all nature:

“Omne adeo genus in terris, hominumque, ferarumque,  
Et genus aequoreum, pecudes, pictaeque volucres,  
In furias ignemque ruunt.”



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["So that all living things, men and animals, wild or tame,  
and fish and gaudy fowl, rush to this flame of love."

—Virgil, *Georg.*, iii. 244.]

The gods, says Plato, have given us one disobedient and unruly member that, like a furious animal, attempts, by the violence of its appetite, to subject all things to it; and so they have given to women one like a greedy and ravenous animal, which, if it be refused food in season, grows wild, impatient of delay, and infusing its rage into their bodies, stops the passages, and hinders respiration, causing a thousand ills, till, having imbibed the fruit of the common thirst, it has plentifully bedewed the bottom of their matrix. Now my legislator—[The Pope who, as Montaigne has told us, took it into his head to geld the statues.]—should also have considered that, peradventure, it were a chaster and more fruitful usage to let them know the fact as it is betimes, than permit them to guess according to the liberty and heat of their own fancy; instead of the real parts they substitute, through hope and desire, others that are three times more extravagant; and a certain friend of mine lost himself by producing his in place and time when the opportunity was not present to put them to their more serious use. What mischief do not those pictures of prodigious dimension do that the boys make upon the staircases and galleries of the royal houses? they give the ladies a cruel contempt of our natural furniture. And what do we know but that Plato, after other well-instituted republics, ordered that the men and women, old and young, should expose themselves naked to the view of one another, in his gymnastic exercises, upon that very account? The Indian women who see the men in their natural state, have at least cooled the sense of seeing. And let the women of the kingdom of Pegu say what they will, who below the waist have nothing to cover them but a cloth slit before, and so strait, that what decency and modesty soever they pretend by it, at every step all is to be seen, that it is an invention to allure the men to them, and to divert them from boys, to whom that nation is generally inclined; yet, peradventure they lose more by it than they get, and one may venture to say, that an entire appetite is more sharp than one already half-glutted by the eyes. Livia was wont to say, that to a virtuous woman a naked man was but a statue. The Lacedaemonian women, more virgins when wives than our daughters are, saw every day the young men of their city stripped naked in their exercises, themselves little heeding to cover their thighs in walking, believing themselves, says Plato, sufficiently covered by their virtue without any other robe. But those, of whom St. Augustin speaks, have given nudity a wonderful power of temptation, who have made it a doubt, whether women at the day of judgment shall rise again in their own sex, and not rather in ours, for fear of tempting us again in that holy state. In brief, we allure

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and flesh them by all sorts of ways: we incessantly heat and stir up their imagination, and then we find fault. Let us confess the truth; there is scarce one of us who does not more apprehend the shame that accrues to him by the vices of his wife than by his own, and that is not more solicitous (a wonderful charity) of the conscience of his virtuous wife than of his own; who had not rather commit theft and sacrilege, and that his wife was a murderess and a heretic, than that she should not be more chaste than her husband: an unjust estimate of vices. Both we and they are capable of a thousand corruptions more prejudicial and unnatural than lust: but we weigh vices, not according to nature, but according to our interest; by which means they take so many unequal forms.

The austerity of our decrees renders the application of women to this vice more violent and vicious than its own condition needs, and engages it in consequences worse than their cause: they will readily offer to go to the law courts to seek for gain, and to the wars to get reputation, rather than in the midst of ease and delights, to have to keep so difficult a guard. Do not they very well see that there is neither merchant nor soldier who will not leave his business to run after this sport, or the porter or cobbler, toiled and tired out as they are with labour and hunger?

“Num tu, qux tenuit dives Achaemenes,  
Aut pinguis Phrygiae Mygdonias opes,  
Permutare velis crine Licymnim?  
Plenas aut Arabum domos,  
Dum fragrantia detorquet ad oscula  
Cervicem, aut facili sxvitia negat,  
Quae poscente magis gaudeat eripi,  
Interdum rapere occupet?”

[“Wouldst thou not exchange all that the wealthy Arhaemenes had, or the Mygdonian riches of fertile Phrygia, for one ringlet of Licymnia’s hair? or the treasures of the Arabians, when she turns her head to you for fragrant kisses, or with easily assuaged anger denies them, which she would rather by far you took by force, and sometimes herself snatches one!”—Horace, *Od.*, ii. 12, 21.]

I do not know whether the exploits of Alexander and Caesar really surpass the resolution of a beautiful young woman, bred up after our fashion, in the light and commerce of the world, assailed by so many contrary examples, and yet keeping herself entire in the midst of a thousand continual and powerful solicitations. There is no doing more difficult than that not doing, nor more active:

I hold it more easy to carry a suit of armour all the days of one’s life than a maidenhead; and the vow of virginity of all others is the most noble, as being the hardest to keep:

“Diaboli virtus in lumbis est,”

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says St. Jerome. We have, doubtless, resigned to the ladies the most difficult and most vigorous of all human endeavours, and let us resign to them the glory too. This ought to encourage them to be obstinate in it; 'tis a brave thing for them to defy us, and to spurn under foot that vain pre-eminence of valour and virtue that we pretend to have over them; they will find if they do but observe it, that they will not only be much more esteemed for it, but also much more beloved. A gallant man does not give over his pursuit for being refused, provided it be a refusal of chastity, and not of choice; we may swear, threaten, and complain to much purpose; we therein do but lie, for we love them all the better: there is no allurements like modesty, if it be not rude and crabbed. 'Tis stupidity and meanness to be obstinate against hatred and disdain; but against a virtuous and constant resolution, mixed with goodwill, 'tis the exercise of a noble and generous soul. They may acknowledge our service to a certain degree, and give us civilly to understand that they disdain us not; for the law that enjoins them to abominate us because we adore them, and to hate us because we love them, is certainly very cruel, if but for the difficulty of it. Why should they not give ear to our offers and requests, so long as they are kept within the bounds of modesty? wherefore should we fancy them to have other thoughts within, and to be worse than they seem? A queen of our time said with spirit, "that to refuse these courtesies is a testimony of weakness in women and a self-accusation of facility, and that a lady could not boast of her chastity who was never tempted."

The limits of honour are not cut so short; they may give themselves a little rein, and relax a little without being faulty: there lies on the frontier some space free, indifferent, and neuter. He that has beaten and pursued her into her fort is a strange fellow if he be not satisfied with his fortune: the price of the conquest is considered by the difficulty. Would you know what impression your service and merit have made in her heart? Judge of it by her behaviour. Such an one may grant more, who does not grant so much. The obligation of a benefit wholly relates to the good will of those who confer it: the other coincident circumstances are dumb, dead, and casual; it costs her dearer to grant you that little, than it would do her companion to grant all. If in anything rarity give estimation, it ought especially in this: do not consider how little it is that is given, but how few have it to give; the value of money alters according to the coinage and stamp of the place. Whatever the spite and indiscretion of some may make them say in the excess of their discontent, virtue and truth will in time recover all the advantage. I have known some whose reputation has for a great while suffered under slander, who have afterwards been restored to the world's universal approbation

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by their mere constancy without care or artifice; every one repents, and gives himself the lie for what he has believed and said; and from girls a little suspected they have been afterward advanced to the first rank amongst the ladies of honour. Somebody told Plato that all the world spoke ill of him. "Let them talk," said he; "I will live so as to make them change their note." Besides the fear of God, and the value of so rare a glory, which ought to make them look to themselves, the corruption of the age we live in compels them to it; and if I were they, there is nothing I would not rather do than intrust my reputation in so dangerous hands. In my time the pleasure of telling (a pleasure little inferior to that of doing) was not permitted but to those who had some faithful and only friend; but now the ordinary discourse and common table-talk is nothing but boasts of favours received and the secret liberality of ladies. In earnest, 'tis too abject, too much meanness of spirit, in men to suffer such ungrateful, indiscreet, and giddy-headed people so to persecute, forage, and rifle those tender and charming favours.

This our immoderate and illegitimate exasperation against this vice springs from the most vain and turbulent disease that afflicts human minds, which is jealousy:

"Quis vetat appposito lumen de lumine sumi?  
Dent licet assidue, nil tamen inde perit;"

["Who says that one light should not be lighted from another light? Let them give ever so much, as much ever remains to lose."—Ovid, *De Arte Amandi*, iii. 93. The measure of the last line is not good; but the words are taken from the epigram in the *Catalecta* entitled *Priapus*.]

she, and envy, her sister, seem to me to be the most foolish of the whole troop. As to the last, I can say little about it; 'tis a passion that, though said to be so mighty and powerful, had never to do with me. As to the other, I know it by sight, and that's all. Beasts feel it; the shepherd Cratis, having fallen in love with a she-goat, the he-goat, out of jealousy, came, as he lay asleep, to butt the head of the female, and crushed it. We have raised this fever to a greater excess by the examples of some barbarous nations; the best disciplined have been touched with it, and 'tis reason, but not transported:

"Ense maritali nemo confossus adulter  
Purpureo Stygias sanguine tinxit aquas."

["Never did adulterer slain by a husband  
stain with purple blood the Stygian waters."]

Lucullus, Caesar, Pompey, Antony, Cato, and other brave men were cuckolds, and knew it, without making any bustle about it; there was in those days but one coxcomb, Lepidus, that died for grief that his wife had used him so.

“Ah! tum te miserum malique fati,  
Quem attractis pedibus, patente porta,  
Percurrent raphanique mugilesque.”

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["Wretched man! when, taken in the fact, thou wilt be dragged out of doors by the heels, and suffer the punishment of thy adultery."—Catullus, xv. 17.]

and the god of our poet, when he surprised one of his companions with his wife, satisfied himself by putting them to shame only,

"Atque aliquis de dis non tristibus optat  
Sic fieri turpis:"

["And one of the merry gods wishes that he should himself like to be so disgraced."—Ovid, *Metam.*, iv. 187.]

and nevertheless took anger at the lukewarm embraces she gave him; complaining that upon that account she was grown jealous of his affection:

"Quid causas petis ex alto? fiducia cessit  
Quo tibi, diva, mei?"

["Dost thou seek causes from above? Why, goddess, has your confidence in me ceased?"—Virgil, *AEneid*, viii. 395.]

nay, she entreats arms for a bastard of hers,

"Arena rogo genitrix nato."

["I, a mother, ask armour for a son."—*Idem*, *ibid.*, 383.]

which are freely granted; and Vulcan speaks honourably of *AEneas*,

"Arma acri facienda viro,"

["Arms are to be made for a valiant hero."—*AEneid*, viii. 441.]

with, in truth, a more than human humanity. And I am willing to leave this excess of kindness to the gods:

"Nec divis homines componier aequum est."

["Nor is it fit to compare men with gods."  
—Catullus, lxxviii. 141.]

As to the confusion of children, besides that the gravest legislators ordain and affect it in their republics, it touches not the women, where this passion is, I know not how, much better seated:



“Saepe etiam Juno, maxima coelicolam,  
Conjugis in culpa flagravat quotidiana.”

["Often was Juno, greatest of the heaven-dwellers, enraged by her husband's daily infidelities."—Idem, *ibid.*]

When jealousy seizes these poor souls, weak and incapable of resistance, 'tis pity to see how miserably it torments and tyrannises over them; it insinuates itself into them under the title of friendship, but after it has once possessed them, the same causes that served for a foundation of good-will serve them for a foundation of mortal hatred. 'Tis, of all the diseases of the mind, that which the most things serve for aliment and the fewest for remedy: the virtue, health, merit, reputation of the husband are incendiaries of their fury and ill-will:

“Nullae sunt inimicitiae, nisi amoris, acerbae.”

["No enmities are bitter, save that of love."  
(Or:) "No hate is implacable except the hatred of love"  
—Propertius, *ii.* 8, 3.]



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This fever defaces and corrupts all they have of beautiful and good besides; and there is no action of a jealous woman, let her be how chaste and how good a housewife soever, that does not relish of anger and wrangling; 'tis a furious agitation, that rebounds them to an extremity quite contrary to its cause. This held good with one Octavius at Rome. Having lain with Pontia Posthumia, he augmented love with fruition, and solicited with all importunity to marry her: unable to persuade her, this excessive affection precipitated him to the effects of the most cruel and mortal hatred: he killed her. In like manner, the ordinary symptoms of this other amorous disease are intestine hatreds, private conspiracies, and cabals:

“Notumque furens quid faemina possit,”

[“And it is known what an angry woman is capable of doing.”  
—Aeneid, V. 21.]

and a rage which so much the more frets itself, as it is compelled to excuse itself by a pretence of good-will.

Now, the duty of chastity is of a vast extent; is it the will that we would have them restrain? This is a very supple and active thing; a thing very nimble, to be stayed. How? if dreams sometimes engage them so far that they cannot deny them: it is not in them, nor, peradventure, in chastity itself, seeing that is a female, to defend itself from lust and desire. If we are only to trust to their will, what a case are we in, then? Do but imagine what crowding there would be amongst men in pursuance of the privilege to run full speed, without tongue or eyes, into every woman's arms who would accept them. The Scythian women put out the eyes of all their slaves and prisoners of war, that they might have their pleasure of them, and they never the wiser. O, the furious advantage of opportunity! Should any one ask me, what was the first thing to be considered in love matters, I should answer that it was how to take a fitting time; and so the second; and so the third—'tis a point that can do everything. I have sometimes wanted fortune, but I have also sometimes been wanting to myself in matters of attempt. God help him, who yet makes light of this! There is greater temerity required in this age of ours, which our young men excuse under the name of heat; but should women examine it more strictly, they would find that it rather proceeds from contempt. I was always superstitiously afraid of giving offence, and have ever had a great respect for her I loved: besides, he who in this traffic takes away the reverence, defaces at the same time the lustre. I would in this affair have a man a little play the child, the timorous, and the servant. If not this, I have in other bashfulness whereof altogether in things some air of the foolish Plutarch makes mention; and the course of my life has been divers ways hurt and blemished with it; a quality very ill suiting my universal form: and, indeed, what are we but sedition and discrepancy?

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I am as much out of countenance to be denied as I am to deny; and it so much troubles me to be troublesome to others that on occasion when duty compels me to try the goodwill of any one in a thing that is doubtful and that will be chargeable to him, I do it very faintly, and very much against my will: but if it be for my own particular (whatever Homer truly says, that modesty is a foolish virtue in an indigent person), I commonly commit it to a third person to blush for me, and deny those who employ me with the same difficulty: so that it has sometimes befallen me to have had a mind to deny, when I had not the power to do it.

'Tis folly, then, to attempt to bridle in women a desire that is so powerful in them, and so natural to them. And when I hear them brag of having so maidenly and so temperate a will, I laugh at them: they retire too far back. If it be an old toothless trot, or a young dry consumptive thing, though it be not altogether to be believed, at least they say it with more similitude of truth. But they who still move and breathe, talk at that ridiculous rate to their own prejudice, by reason that inconsiderate excuses are a kind of self-accusation; like a gentleman, a neighbour of mine, suspected to be insufficient:

“Languidior tenera cui pendens sicala beta,  
Numquam se mediam sustulit ad tunicam,”

[Catullus, lxvii. 2, i.—The sense is in the context.]

who three or four days after he was married, to justify himself, went about boldly swearing that he had ridden twenty stages the night before: an oath that was afterwards made use of to convict him of his ignorance in that affair, and to divorce him from his wife. Besides, it signifies nothing, for there is neither continency nor virtue where there are no opposing desires. It is true, they may say, but we will not yield; saints themselves speak after that manner. I mean those who boast in good gravity of their coldness and insensibility, and who expect to be believed with a serious countenance; for when 'tis spoken with an affected look, when their eyes give the lie to their tongue, and when they talk in the cant of their profession, which always goes against the hair, 'tis good sport. I am a great servant of liberty and plainness; but there is no remedy; if it be not wholly simple or childish, 'tis silly, and unbecoming ladies in this commerce, and presently runs into impudence. Their disguises and figures only serve to cosen fools; lying is there in its seat of honour; 'tis a by-way, that by a back-door leads us to truth. If we cannot curb their imagination, what would we have from them. Effects? There are enough of them that evade all foreign communication, by which chastity may be corrupted:

“Illud saepe facit, quod sine teste facit;”

["He often does that which he does without a witness."  
—Martial, vii. 62, 6.]

and those which we fear the least are, peradventure, most to be feared; their sins that make the least noise are the worst:

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“Offendor maecha simpliciore minus.”

["I am less offended with a more professed strumpet."  
—Idem, vi. 7,6.]

There are ways by which they may lose their virginity without prostitution, and, which is more, without their knowledge:

“Obsterix, virginis cujusdam integritatem manu velut explorans, sive malevolentia, sive inscitia, sive casu, dum inspicit, perdidit.”

["By malevolence, or unskilfulness, or accident, the midwife, seeking with the hand to test some maiden's virginity, has sometimes destroyed it."—St. Augustine, *De Civit. Dei*, i. 18.]

Such a one, by seeking her maidenhead, has lost it; another by playing with it has destroyed it. We cannot precisely circumscribe the actions, we interdict them; they must guess at our meaning under general and doubtful terms; the very idea we invent for their chastity is ridiculous: for, amongst the greatest patterns that I have is Fatua, the wife of Faunus: who never, after her marriage, suffered herself to be seen by any man whatever; and the wife of Hiero, who never perceived her husband's stinking breath, imagining that it was common to all men. They must become insensible and invisible to satisfy us.

Now let us confess that the knot of this judgment of duty principally lies in the will; there have been husbands who have suffered cuckoldom, not only without reproach or taking offence at their wives, but with singular obligation to them and great commendation of their virtue. Such a woman has been, who prized her honour above her life, and yet has prostituted it to the furious lust of a mortal enemy, to save her husband's life, and who, in so doing, did that for him she would not have done for herself! This is not the place wherein we are to multiply these examples; they are too high and rich to be set off with so poor a foil as I can give them here; let us reserve them for a nobler place; but for examples of ordinary lustre, do we not every day see women amongst us who surrender themselves for their husbands sole benefit, and by their express order and mediation? and, of old, Phaulius the Argian, who offered his to King Philip out of ambition; as Galba did it out of civility, who, having entertained Maecenas at supper, and observing that his wife and he began to cast glances at one another and to make eyes and signs, let himself sink down upon his cushion, like one in a profound sleep, to give opportunity to their desires: which he handsomely confessed, for thereupon a servant having made bold to lay hands on the plate upon the table, he frankly cried, “What, you rogue? do you not see that I only sleep for Maecenas?” Such there may be, whose manners may be lewd enough, whose will may be more reformed than another, who outwardly carries herself after a more regular manner. As we see some who complain of having vowed chastity before they knew what they did; and I have also

known others really, complain of having been given up to debauchery before they were of the years of discretion. The vice of the parents or the impulse of nature, which is a rough counsellor, may be the cause.

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In the East Indies, though chastity is of singular reputation, yet custom permitted a married woman to prostitute herself to any one who presented her with an elephant, and that with glory, to have been valued at so high a rate. Phaedo the philosopher, a man of birth, after the taking of his country Elis, made it his trade to prostitute the beauty of his youth, so long as it lasted, to any one that would, for money thereby to gain his living: and Solon was the first in Greece, 'tis said, who by his laws gave liberty to women, at the expense of their chastity, to provide for the necessities of life; a custom that Herodotus says had been received in many governments before his time. And besides, what fruit is there of this painful solicitude? For what justice soever there is in this passion, we are yet to consider whether it turns to account or no: does any one think to curb them, with all his industry?

"Pone seram; cohibe: sed quis custodiet ipsos  
Custodes? cauta est, et ab illis incipit uxor."

["Put on a lock; shut them up under a guard; but who shall guard  
the guard? she knows what she is about, and begins with them."  
—Juvenal, vi. 346.]

What commodity will not serve their turn, in so knowing an age?

Curiosity is vicious throughout; but 'tis pernicious here. 'Tis folly to examine into a disease for which there is no physic that does not inflame and make it worse; of which the shame grows still greater and more public by jealousy, and of which the revenge more wounds our children than it heals us. You wither and die in the search of so obscure a proof. How miserably have they of my time arrived at that knowledge who have been so unhappy as to have found it out? If the informer does not at the same time apply a remedy and bring relief, 'tis an injurious information, and that better deserves a stab than the lie. We no less laugh at him who takes pains to prevent it, than at him who is a cuckold and knows it not. The character of cuckold is indelible: who once has it carries it to his grave; the punishment proclaims it more than the fault. It is to much purpose to drag out of obscurity and doubt our private misfortunes, thence to expose them on tragic scaffolds; and misfortunes that only hurt us by being known; for we say a good wife or a happy marriage, not that they are really so, but because no one says to the contrary. Men should be so discreet as to evade this tormenting and unprofitable knowledge: and the Romans had a custom, when returning from any expedition, to send home before to acquaint their wives with their coming, that they might not surprise them; and to this purpose it is that a certain nation has introduced a custom, that the priest shall on the wedding-day open the way to the bride, to free the husband from the doubt and curiosity of examining in the first assault, whether she comes a virgin to his bed, or has been at the trade before.

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But the world will be talking. I know, a hundred honest men cuckolds, honestly and not unbeseemingly; a worthy man is pitied, not disesteemed for it. Order it so that your virtue may conquer your misfortune; that good men may curse the occasion, and that he who wrongs you may tremble but to think on't. And, moreover, who escapes being talked of at the same rate, from the least even to the greatest?

"Tot qui legionibus imperitavit  
Et melior quam to multis fuit, improbe, rebus."

["Many who have commanded legions, many a man much better far than you, you rascal."—Lucretius, iii. 1039, 1041.]

Seest thou how many honest men are reproached with this in thy presence; believe that thou art no more spared elsewhere. But, the very ladies will be laughing too; and what are they so apt to laugh at in this virtuous age of ours as at a peaceable and well-composed marriage? Each amongst you has made somebody cuckold; and nature runs much in parallel, in compensation, and turn for turn. The frequency of this accident ought long since to have made it more easy; 'tis now passed into custom.

Miserable passion! which has this also, that it is incommunicable,

"Fors etiam nostris invidit questibus aures;"

["Fortune also refuses ear to our complaints."  
—Catullus, lxvii.]

for to what friend dare you intrust your griefs, who, if he does not laugh at them, will not make use of the occasion to get a share of the quarry? The sharps, as well as the sweets of marriage, are kept secret by the wise; and amongst its other troublesome conditions this to a prating fellow, as I am, is one of the chief, that custom has rendered it indecent and prejudicial to communicate to any one all that a man knows and all that a man feels. To give women the same counsel against jealousy would be so much time lost; their very being is so made up of suspicion, vanity, and curiosity, that to cure them by any legitimate way is not to be hoped. They often recover of this infirmity by a form of health much more to be feared than the disease itself; for as there are enchantments that cannot take away the evil but by throwing it upon another, they also willingly transfer this ever to their husbands, when they shake it off themselves. And yet I know not, to speak truth, whether a man can suffer worse from them than their jealousy; 'tis the most dangerous of all their conditions, as the head is of all their members. Pittacus used to say,—[Plutarch, On Contentment, c. II.]— that every one had his trouble, and that his was the jealous head of his wife; but for which he should think himself perfectly happy. A mighty inconvenience, sure, which could poison the whole life of so just, so wise, and so valiant a man; what must we other little fellows do? The senate of Marseilles had reason to grant him his request who begged leave to kill himself that he

might be delivered from the clamour of his wife; for 'tis a mischief that is never removed but by removing the whole piece; and that has no remedy but flight or patience, though both of them very hard. He was, methinks, an understanding fellow who said, 'twas a happy marriage betwixt a blind wife and a deaf husband.



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Let us also consider whether the great and violent severity of obligation we enjoin them does not produce two effects contrary to our design namely, whether it does not render the pursuants more eager to attack, and the women more easy to yield. For as to the first, by raising the value of the place, we raise the value and the desire of the conquest. Might it not be Venus herself, who so cunningly enhanced the price of her merchandise, by making the laws her bawds; knowing how insipid a delight it would be that was not heightened by fancy and hardness to achieve? In short, 'tis all swine's flesh, varied by sauces, as Flaminius' host said. Cupid is a roguish god, who makes it his sport to contend with devotion and justice: 'tis his glory that his power mates all powers, and that all other rules give place to his:

"Materiam culpae prosequiturque suae."

["And seeks out a matter (motive) for his crimes."  
—Ovid, *Trist.*, iv. l. 34.]

As to the second point; should we not be less cuckolds, if we less feared to be so? according to the humour of women whom interdiction incites, and who are more eager, being forbidden:

"Ubi velis, nolunt; ubi nolis, volunt ultro;  
Concessa pudet ire via."

["Where thou wilt, they won't; where thou wilt not, they  
spontaneously agree; they are ashamed to go in the permitted path."  
—Terence, *Eunuchus*, act iv., sc. 8, v 43]

What better interpretation can we make of Messalina's behaviour? She, at first, made her husband a cuckold in private, as is the common use; but, bringing her business about with too much ease, by reason of her husband's stupidity, she soon scorned that way, and presently fell to making open love, to own her lovers, and to favour and entertain them in the sight of all: she would make him know and see how she used him. This animal, not to be roused with all this, and rendering her pleasures dull and flat by his too stupid facility, by which he seemed to authorise and make them lawful; what does she? Being the wife of a living and healthful emperor, and at Rome, the theatre of the world, in the face of the sun, and with solemn ceremony, and to Silius, who had long before enjoyed her, she publicly marries herself one day that her husband was gone out of the city. Does it not seem as if she was going to become chaste by her husband's negligence? or that she sought another husband who might sharpen her appetite by his jealousy, and who by watching should incite her? But the first difficulty she met with was also the last: this beast suddenly roused these sleepy, sluggish sort of men are often the most dangerous: I have found by experience that this extreme toleration, when it comes to dissolve, produces the most severe revenge; for taking fire on a

sudden, anger and fury being combined in one, discharge their utmost force at the first onset,

“Irarumque omnes effundit habenas:”

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["He let loose his whole fury."—Aeneid, xii. 499.]

he put her to death, and with her a great number of those with whom she had intelligence, and even one of them who could not help it, and whom she had caused to be forced to her bed with scourges.

What Virgil says of Venus and Vulcan, Lucretius had better expressed of a stolen enjoyment betwixt her and Mars:

"Belli fera moenera Mavors  
Armipotens regit, ingremium qui saepe tuum se  
Rejicit, aeterno devinctus vulnere amoris

.....  
Pascit amore avidos inhians in te, Dea, visus,  
Eque tuo pendet resupini spiritus ore  
Hunc tu, Diva, tuo recubantem corpore sancto  
Circumfusa super, suaveis ex ore loquelas  
Funde."

["Mars, the god of wars, who controls the cruel tasks of war, often reclines on thy bosom, and greedily drinks love at both his eyes, vanquished by the eternal wound of love: and his breath, as he reclines, hangs on thy lips; bending thy head over him as he lies upon thy sacred person, pour forth sweet and persuasive words." —Lucretius, i. 23.]

When I consider this rejicit, fiascit, inhians, ynolli, foveat, medullas, labefacta, pendet, percurrit, and that noble circumfusa, mother of the pretty infuses; I disdain those little quibbles and verbal allusions that have since sprung up. Those worthy people stood in need of no subtlety to disguise their meaning; their language is downright, and full of natural and continued vigour; they are all epigram; not only the tail, but the head, body, and feet. There is nothing forced, nothing languishing, but everything keeps the same pace:

"Contextus totes virilis est; non sunt circa flosculos occupati."

["The whole contexture is manly; they don't occupy themselves with little flowers of rhetoric."—Seneca, Ep., 33.]

'Tis not a soft eloquence, and without offence only; 'tis nervous and solid, that does not so much please, as it fills and ravishes the greatest minds. When I see these brave forms of expression, so lively, so profound, I do not say that 'tis well said, but well thought. 'Tis the sprightliness of the imagination that swells and elevates the words:

"Pectus est quod disertum Tacit."

["The heart makes the man eloquent."—Quintilian, x. 7.]

Our people call language, judgment, and fine words, full conceptions. This painting is not so much carried on by dexterity of hand as by having the object more vividly imprinted in the soul. Gallus speaks simply because he conceives simply: Horace does not content himself with a superficial expression; that would betray him; he sees farther and more clearly into things; his mind breaks into and rummages all the magazine of words and figures wherewith to express

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himself, and he must have them more than ordinary, because his conception is so. Plutarch says' that he sees the Latin tongue by the things: 'tis here the same: the sense illuminates and produces the words, no more words of air, but of flesh and bone; they signify more than they say. Moreover, those who are not well skilled in a language present some image of this; for in Italy I said whatever I had a mind to in common discourse, but in more serious talk, I durst not have trusted myself with an idiom that I could not wind and turn out of its ordinary pace; I would have a power of introducing something of my own.

The handling and utterance of fine wits is that which sets off language; not so much by innovating it, as by putting it to more vigorous and various services, and by straining, bending, and adapting it to them. They do not create words, but they enrich their own, and give them weight and signification by the uses they put them to, and teach them unwonted motions, but withal ingeniously and discreetly. And how little this talent is given to all is manifest by the many French scribblers of this age: they are bold and proud enough not to follow the common road, but want of invention and discretion ruins them; there is nothing seen in their writings but a wretched affectation of a strange new style, with cold and absurd disguises, which, instead of elevating, depress the matter: provided they can but trick themselves out with new words, they care not what they signify; and to bring in a new word by the head and shoulders, they leave the old one, very often more sinewy and significant than the other.

There is stuff enough in our language, but there is a defect in cutting out: for there is nothing that might not be made out of our terms of hunting and war, which is a fruitful soil to borrow from; and forms of speaking, like herbs, improve and grow stronger by being transplanted. I find it sufficiently abundant, but not sufficiently pliable and vigorous; it commonly quails under a powerful conception; if you would maintain the dignity of your style, you will often perceive it to flag and languish under you, and there Latin steps in to its relief, as Greek does to others. Of some of these words I have just picked out we do not so easily discern the energy, by reason that the frequent use of them has in some sort abased their beauty, and rendered it common; as in our ordinary language there are many excellent phrases and metaphors to be met with, of which the beauty is withered by age, and the colour is sullied by too common handling; but that nothing lessens the relish to an understanding man, nor does it derogate from the glory of those ancient authors who, 'tis likely, first brought those words into that lustre.

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The sciences treat of things too refinedly, after an artificial, very different from the common and natural, way. My page makes love, and understands it; but read to him Leo Hebraeus—[Leo the Jew, Ficinus, Cardinal Bembo, and Mario Equicola all wrote Treatises on Love.]— and Ficinus, where they speak of love, its thoughts and actions, he understands it not. I do not find in Aristotle most of my ordinary motions; they are there covered and disguised in another robe for the use of the schools. Good speed them! were I of the trade, I would as much naturalise art as they artificialise nature. Let us let Bembo and Equicola alone.

When I write, I can very well spare both the company and the remembrance of books, lest they should interrupt my progress; and also, in truth, the best authors too much humble and discourage me: I am very much of the painter's mind, who, having represented cocks most wretchedly ill, charged all his boys not to suffer any natural cock to come into his shop; and had rather need to give myself a little lustre, of the invention of Antigenides the musician, who, when he was asked to sing or play, took care beforehand that the auditory should, either before or after, be satiated with some other ill musicians. But I can hardly be without Plutarch; he is so universal and so full, that upon all occasions, and what extravagant subject soever you take in hand, he will still be at your elbow, and hold out to you a liberal and not to be exhausted hand of riches and embellishments. It vexes me that he is so exposed to be the spoil of those who are conversant with him: I can scarce cast an eye upon him but I purloin either a leg or a wing.

And also for this design of mine 'tis convenient for me for me to write at home, in a wild country, where I have nobody to assist or relieve me; where I hardly see a man who understands the Latin of his Paternoster, and of French a little less. I might have made it better elsewhere, but then the work would have been less my own; and its principal end and perfection is to be exactly mine. I readily correct an accidental error, of which I am full, as I run carelessly on; but for my ordinary and constant imperfections, it were a kind of treason to put them out. When another tells me, or that I say to myself, "Thou art too thick of figures: this is a word of rough Gascon: that is a dangerous phrase (I do not reject any of those that are used in the common streets of France; they who would fight custom with grammar are triflers): this is an ignorant discourse: this is a paradoxical discourse: that is going too far: thou makest thyself too merry at times: men will think thou sayest a thing in good earnest which thou only speakest in jest."—"Yes, I know, but I correct the faults of inadvertence, not those of custom. Do I not talk at the same rate throughout? Do I not represent myself to the life? 'Tis enough that I have done what I designed; all the world knows me in my book, and my book in me."

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Now I have an apish, imitative quality: when I used to write verses (and I never made any but Latin), they evidently discovered the poet I had last read, and some of my first essays have a little exotic taste: I speak something another kind of language at Paris than I do at Montaigne. Whoever I steadfastly look upon easily leaves some impression of his upon me; whatever I consider I usurp, whether a foolish countenance, a disagreeable look, or a ridiculous way of speaking; and vices most of all, because they seize and stick to me, and will not leave hold without shaking. I swear more by imitation than by complexion: a murderous imitation, like that of the apes so terrible both in stature and strength, that Alexander met with in a certain country of the Indies, and which he would have had much ado any other way to have subdued; but they afforded him the means by that inclination of theirs to imitate whatever they saw done; for by that the hunters were taught to put on shoes in their sight, and to tie them fast with many knots, and to muffle up their heads in caps all composed of running nooses, and to seem to anoint their eyes with glue; so did those poor beasts employ their imitation to their own ruin they glued up their own eyes, haltered and bound themselves. The other faculty of playing the mimic, and ingeniously acting the words and gestures of another, purposely to make people merry and to raise their admiration, is no more in me than in a stock. When I swear my own oath, 'tis only, by God! of all oaths the most direct. They say that Socrates swore by the dog; Zeno had for his oath the same interjection at this time in use amongst the Italians, Cappari! Pythagoras swore By water and air. I am so apt, without thinking of it, to receive these superficial impressions, that if I have Majesty or Highness in my mouth three days together, they come out instead of Excellency and Lordship eight days after; and what I say to-day in sport and fooling I shall say the same to-morrow seriously. Wherefore, in writing, I more unwillingly undertake beaten arguments, lest I should handle them at another's expense. Every subject is equally fertile to me: a fly will serve the purpose, and 'tis well if this I have in hand has not been undertaken at the recommendation of as flighty a will. I may begin, with that which pleases me best, for the subjects are all linked to one another.

But my soul displeases me, in that it ordinarily produces its deepest and most airy conceits and which please me best, when I least expect or study for them, and which suddenly vanish, having at the instant, nothing to apply them to; on horseback, at table, and in bed: but most on horseback, where I am most given to think. My speaking is a little nicely jealous of silence and attention: if I am talking my best, whoever interrupts me, stops me. In travelling, the necessity of the way will often put a stop to discourse; besides which I, for the most part, travel without

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company fit for regular discourses, by which means I have all the leisure I would to entertain myself. It falls out as it does in my dreams; whilst dreaming I recommend them to my memory (for I am apt to dream that I dream), but, the next morning, I may represent to myself of what complexion they were, whether gay, or sad, or strange, but what they were, as to the rest, the more I endeavour to retrieve them, the deeper I plunge them in oblivion. So of thoughts that come accidentally into my head, I have no more but a vain image remaining in my memory; only enough to make me torment myself in their quest to no purpose.

Well, then, laying books aside, and more simply and materially speaking, I find, after all, that Love is nothing else but the thirst of enjoying the object desired, or Venus any other thing than the pleasure of discharging one's vessels, just as the pleasure nature gives in discharging other parts, that either by immoderation or indiscretion become vicious. According to Socrates, love is the appetite of generation by the mediation of beauty. And when I consider the ridiculous titillation of this pleasure, the absurd, crack-brained, wild motions with which it inspires Zeno and Cratippus, the indiscreet rage, the countenance inflamed with fury and cruelty in the sweetest effects of love, and then that austere air, so grave, severe, ecstatic, in so wanton an action; that our delights and our excrements are promiscuously shuffled together; and that the supreme pleasure brings along with it, as in pain, fainting and complaining; I believe it to be true, as Plato says, that the gods made man for their sport:

"Quaenam ista jocandi  
Saevitia!"

["With a sportive cruelty" (Or:) "What an unkindness there is in  
jesting!"—Claudian in Eutrop. i. 24.]

and that it was in mockery that nature has ordered the most agitative of actions and the most common, to make us equal, and to put fools and wise men, beasts and us, on a level. Even the most contemplative and prudent man, when I imagine him in this posture, I hold him an impudent fellow to pretend to be prudent and contemplative; they are the peacocks' feet that abate his pride:

"Ridentem dicere verum  
Quid vetat?"

["What prevents us from speaking truth with a smile?"  
—Horace, Sat., i. 1, 24.]

They who banish serious imaginations from their sports, do, says one, like him who dares not adore the statue of a saint, if not covered with a veil. We eat and drink,



indeed, as beasts do; but these are not actions that obstruct the functions of the soul, in these we maintain our advantage over them; this other action subjects all other thought, and by its imperious authority makes an ass of all Plato's divinity and philosophy; and yet there is no complaint of it. In everything else a man may keep some decorum, all

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other operations submit to the rules of decency; this cannot so much as in imagination appear other than vicious or ridiculous: find out, if you can, therein any serious and discreet procedure. Alexander said, that he chiefly knew himself to be mortal by this act and sleeping; sleep suffocates and suppresses the faculties of the soul; the familiarity with women likewise dissipates and exhausts them: doubtless 'tis a mark, not only of our original corruption, but also of our vanity and deformity.

On the one side, nature pushes us on to it, having fixed the most noble, useful, and pleasant of all her functions to this desire: and, on the other side, leaves us to accuse and avoid it, as insolent and indecent, to blush at it, and to recommend abstinence. Are we not brutes to call that work brutish which begets us? People of so many differing religions have concurred in several proprieties, as sacrifices, lamps, burning incense, fasts, and offerings; and amongst others, in the condemning this act: all opinions tend that way, besides the widespread custom of circumcision, which may be regarded as a punishment. We have, peradventure, reason to blame ourselves for being guilty of so foolish a production as man, and to call the act, and the parts that are employed in the act, shameful (mine, truly, are now shameful and pitiful). The Essenians, of whom Pliny speaks, kept up their country for several ages without either nurse or baby-clouts, by the arrival of strangers who, following this pretty humour, came continually to them: a whole nation being resolute, rather to hazard a total extermination, than to engage themselves in female embraces, and rather to lose the succession of men, than to beget one. 'Tis said, that Zeno never had to do with a woman but once in his life, and then out of civility, that he might not seem too obstinately to disdain the sex.

[Diogenes Laertius, vii. 13.—What is there said, however, is that Zeno seldom had commerce with boys, lest he should be deemed a very misogynist.]

Every one avoids seeing a man born, every one runs to see him die; to destroy him a spacious field is sought out in the face of the sun, but, to make him, we creep into as dark and private a corner as we can: 'tis a man's duty to withdraw himself bashfully from the light to create; but 'tis glory and the fountain of many virtues to know how to destroy what we have made: the one is injury, the other favour: for Aristotle says that to do any one a kindness, in a certain phrase of his country, is to kill him. The Athenians, to couple the disgrace of these two actions, having to purge the Isle of Delos, and to justify themselves to Apollo, interdicted at once all births and burials in the precincts thereof:

“Nostrī nosmet paenitet.”

["We are ashamed of ourselves."—Terence, *Phoymio*, i. 3, 20.]

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There are some nations that will not be seen to eat. I know a lady, and of the best quality, who has the same opinion, that chewing disfigures the face, and takes away much from the ladies' grace and beauty; and therefore unwillingly appears at a public table with an appetite; and I know a man also, who cannot endure to see another eat, nor himself to be seen eating, and who is more shy of company when putting in than when putting out. In the Turkish empire, there are a great number of men who, to excel others, never suffer themselves to be seen when they make their repast: who never have any more than one a week; who cut and mangle their faces and limbs; who never speak to any one: fanatic people who think to honour their nature by disnaturing themselves; who value themselves upon their contempt of themselves, and purport to grow better by being worse. What monstrous animal is this, that is a horror to himself, to whom his delights are grievous, and who weds himself to misfortune? There are people who conceal their life:

"Exilioque domos et dulcia limina mutant,"

["And change for exile their homes and pleasant abodes."  
—Virgil, *Georg.*, ii. 511.]

and withdraw them from the sight of other men; who avoid health and cheerfulness, as dangerous and prejudicial qualities. Not only many sects, but many peoples, curse their birth, and bless their death; and there is a place where the sun is abominated and darkness adored. We are only ingenious in using ourselves ill: 'tis the real quarry our intellects fly at; and intellect, when misapplied, is a dangerous tool!

"O miseri! quorum gaudia crimen habent!"

["O wretched men, whose pleasures are a crime!"  
—Pseudo Gallus, i. 180.]

Alas, poor man! thou hast enough inconveniences that are inevitable, without increasing them by throe own invention; and art miserable enough by nature, without being so by art; thou hast real and essential deformities enough, without forging those that are imaginary. Dost thou think thou art too much at ease unless half thy ease is uneasy? dost thou find that thou hast not performed all the necessary offices that nature has enjoined thee, and that she is idle in thee, if thou dost not oblige thyself to other and new offices? Thou dost not stick to infringe her universal and undoubted laws; but stickest to thy own special and fantastic rules, and by how much more particular, uncertain, and contradictory they are, by so much thou employest thy whole endeavour in them: the laws of thy parish occupy and bind thee: those of God and the world concern thee not. Run but a little over the examples of this kind; thy life is full of them.

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Whilst the verses of these two poets, treat so reservedly and discreetly of wantonness as they do, methinks they discover it much more openly. Ladies cover their necks with network, priests cover several sacred things, and painters shadow their pictures to give them greater lustre: and 'tis said that the sun and wind strike more violently by reflection than in a direct line. The Egyptian wisely answered him who asked him what he had under his cloak, "It is hid under my cloak," said he, "that thou mayest not know what it is:" but there are certain other things that people hide only to show them. Hear that one, who speaks plainer,

"Et nudum pressi corpus ad usque meum:"

["And pressed her naked body to mine" (Or:) "My body  
I applied even to her naked side"—Ovid, *Amor.*, i. 5, 24.]

methinks that he emasculates me. Let Martial turn up Venus as high as he may, he cannot shew her so naked: he who says all that is to be said gluts and disgusts us. He who is afraid to express himself, draws us on to guess at more than is meant; there is treachery in this sort of modesty, and specially when they half open, as these do, so fair a path to imagination. Both the action and description should relish of theft.

The more respectful, more timorous, more coy, and secret love of the Spaniards and Italians pleases me. I know not who of old wished his throat as long as that of a crane, that he might the longer taste what he swallowed; it had been better wished as to this quick and precipitous pleasure, especially in such natures as mine that have the fault of being too prompt. To stay its flight and delay it with preambles: all things—a glance, a bow, a word, a sign, stand for favour and recompense betwixt them. Were it not an excellent piece of thrift in him who could dine on the steam of the roast? 'Tis a passion that mixes with very little solid essence, far more vanity and feverish raving; and we should serve and pay it accordingly. Let us teach the ladies to set a better value and esteem upon themselves, to amuse and fool us: we give the last charge at the first onset; the French impetuosity will still show itself; by spinning out their favours, and exposing them in small parcels, even miserable old age itself will find some little share of reward, according to its worth and merit. He who has no fruition but in fruition, who wins nothing unless he sweeps the stakes, who takes no pleasure in the chase but in the quarry, ought not to introduce himself in our school: the more steps and degrees there are, so much higher and more honourable is the uppermost seat: we should take a pleasure in being conducted to it, as in magnificent palaces, by various porticoes and passages, long and pleasant galleries, and many windings. This disposition of things would turn to our advantage; we should there longer stay and longer love; without hope and without desire we proceed not worth a pin. Our conquest and entire possession is what they ought infinitely to dread: when they wholly surrender themselves up to the mercy of our fidelity and constancy they run a mighty hazard; they are virtues very rare and hard to be found; the ladies are no sooner ours, than we are no more theirs:

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"Postquam cupidae mentis satiata libido est,  
Verba nihil metuere, nihil perjuria curant;"

["When our desires are once satisfied, we care little  
for oaths and promises."—Catullus, lxiv. 147.]

And Thrasonides, a young man of Greece, was so in love with his passion that, having, gained a mistress's consent, he refused to enjoy her, that he might not by fruition quench and stupefy the unquiet ardour of which he was so proud, and with which he so fed himself. Dearness is a good sauce to meat: do but observe how much the manner of salutation, particular to our nation, has, by its facilities, made kisses, which Socrates says are so powerful and dangerous for the stealing of hearts, of no esteem. It is a displeasing custom and injurious for the ladies, that they must be obliged to lend their lips to every fellow who has three footmen at his heels, however ill-favoured he may be in himself:

"Cujus livida naribus caninis  
Dependet glacies, rigetque barba . . .  
Centum occurrere malo culilingis:"  
Martial, vii. 94.

and we ourselves barely gain by it; for as the world is divided, for three beautiful women we must kiss fifty ugly ones; and to a tender stomach, like those of my age, an ill kiss overpays a good one.

In Italy they passionately court even their common women who sell themselves for money, and justify the doing so by saying, "that there are degrees of fruition, and that by such service they would procure for themselves that which is most entire; the women sell nothing but their bodies; the will is too free and too much of its own to be exposed to sale." So that these say, 'tis the will they undertake and they have reason. 'Tis indeed the will that we are to serve and gain by wooing. I abhor to imagine mine, a body without affection: and this madness is, methinks, cousin-german to that of the boy who would needs pollute the beautiful statue of Venus made by Praxiteles; or that of the furious Egyptian, who violated the dead carcase of a woman he was embalming: which was the occasion of the law then made in Egypt, that the corpses of beautiful young women, of those of good quality, should be kept three days before they should be delivered to those whose office it was to take care for the interment. Periander did more wonderfully, who extended his conjugal affection (more regular and legitimate) to the enjoyment of his wife Melissa after she was dead. Does it not seem a lunatic humour in the Moon, seeing she could no otherwise enjoy her darling Endymion, to lay-him for several months asleep, and to please herself with the fruition of a boy who stirred not but in his sleep? I likewise say that we love a body without a soul or sentiment when we love a body without its consent and desire. All enjoyments are not alike: there are some that are hectic and languishing: a thousand other causes besides good-will may

procure us this favour from the ladies; this is not a sufficient testimony of affection: treachery may lurk there, as well as elsewhere: they sometimes go to't by halves:

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"Tanquam thura merumque parent  
Absentem marmoreamve putes:"

["As if they are preparing frankincense and wine . . . you might think her absent or marble."—Martial, xi. 103, 12, and 59, 8.]

I know some who had rather lend that than their coach, and who only impart themselves that way. You are to examine whether your company pleases them upon any other account, or, as some strong-chined groom, for that only; in what degree of favour and esteem you are with them:

"Tibi si datur uni,  
Quem lapide illa diem candidiore notat."

["Wherefore that is enough, if that day alone is given us which she marks with a whiter stone."—Catullus, lxviii. 147.]

What if they eat your bread with the sauce of a more pleasing imagination.

"Te tenet, absentes alios suspirat amores."

["She has you in her arms; her thoughts are with other absent lovers."—Tibullus, i. 6, 35.]

What? have we not seen one in these days of ours who made use of this act for the purpose of a most horrid revenge, by that means to kill and poison, as he did, a worthy lady?

Such as know Italy will not think it strange if, for this subject, I seek not elsewhere for examples; for that nation may be called the regent of the world in this. They have more generally handsome and fewer ugly women than we; but for rare and excellent beauties we have as many as they. I think the same of their intellects: of those of the common sort, they have evidently far more brutishness is immeasurably rarer there; but in individual characters of the highest form, we are nothing indebted to them. If I should carry on the comparison, I might say, as touching valour, that, on the contrary, it is, to what it is with them, common and natural with us; but sometimes we see them possessed of it to such a degree as surpasses the greatest examples we can produce: The marriages of that country are defective in this; their custom commonly imposes so rude and so slavish a law upon the women, that the most distant acquaintance with a stranger is as capital an offence as the most intimate; so that all approaches being rendered necessarily substantial, and seeing that all comes to one account, they have no hard choice to make; and when they have broken down the fence, we may safely presume they get on fire:



“Luxuria ipsis vinculis, sicut fera bestia,  
irritata, deinde emissa.”

[“Lust, like a wild beast, being more excited by being bound,  
breaks from his chains with greater wildness.”—Livy, xxxiv. 4.]

They must give them a little more rein:

“Vidi ego nuper equum, contra sua frena tenacem,  
Ore reluctanti fulminis ire modo”:

[“I saw, the other day, a horse struggling against his bit,  
rush like a thunderbolt.”—Ovid, Amor., iii. 4, 13.]



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the desire of company is allayed by giving it a little liberty. We are pretty much in the same case they are extreme in constraint, we in licence. 'Tis a good custom we have in France that our sons are received into the best families, there to be entertained and bred up pages, as in a school of nobility; and 'tis looked upon as a discourtesy and an affront to refuse this to a gentleman. I have taken notice (for, so many families, so many differing forms) that the ladies who have been strictest with their maids have had no better luck than those who allowed them a greater liberty. There should be moderation in these things; one must leave a great deal of their conduct to their own discretion; for, when all comes to all, no discipline can curb them throughout. But it is true withal that she who comes off with flying colours from a school of liberty, brings with her whereon to repose more confidence than she who comes away sound from a severe and strict school.

Our fathers dressed up their daughters' looks in bashfulness and fear (their courage and desires being the same); we ours in confidence and assurance; we understand nothing of the matter; we must leave it to the Sarmatian women, who may not lie with a man till with their own hands they have first killed another in battle. For me, who have no other title left me to these things but by the ears, 'tis sufficient if, according to the privilege of my age, they retain me for one of their counsel. I advise them then, and us men too, to abstinence; but if the age we live in will not endure it, at least modesty and discretion. For, as in the story of Aristippus, who, speaking to some young men who blushed to see him go into a scandalous house, said "the vice is in not coming out, not in going in," let her who has no care of her conscience have yet some regard to her reputation; and though she be rotten within, let her carry a fair outside at least.

I commend a gradation and delay in bestowing their favours: Plato 'declares that, in all sorts of love, facility and promptness are forbidden to the defendant. 'Tis a sign of eagerness which they ought to disguise with all the art they have, so rashly, wholly, and hand-over-hand to surrender themselves. In carrying themselves orderly and measuredly in the granting their last favours, they much more allure our desires and hide their own. Let them still fly before us, even those who have most mind to be overtaken: they better conquer us by flying, as the Scythians did. To say the truth, according to the law that nature has imposed upon them, it is not properly for them either to will or desire; their part is to suffer, obey, and consent and for this it is that nature has given them a perpetual capacity, which in us is but at times and uncertain; they are always fit for the encounter, that they may be always ready when we are so "Pati natee."-["Born to suffer."-Seneca, Ep., 95.]—And whereas she has ordered that our appetites shall be manifest

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by a prominent demonstration, she would have theirs to be hidden and concealed within, and has furnished them with parts improper for ostentation, and simply defensive. Such proceedings as this that follows must be left to the Amazonian licence: Alexander marching his army through Hyrcania, Thalestris, Queen of the Amazons, came with three hundred light horse of her own-sex, well mounted, and armed, having left the remainder of a very great, army that followed her behind the neighbouring mountains to give him a visit; where she publicly and in plain terms told him that the fame of his valour and victories had brought her thither to see him, and to make him an offer of her forces to assist him in the pursuit of his enterprises; and that, finding him so handsome, young, and vigorous, she, who was also perfect in all those qualities, advised that they might lie together, to the end that from the most valiant woman of the world and the bravest man then living, there might spring some great and wonderful issue for the time to come. Alexander returned her thanks for all the rest; but, to give leisure for the accomplishment of her last demand, he detained her thirteen days in that place, which were spent in royal feasting and jollity, for the welcome of so courageous a princess.

We are, almost throughout, unjust judges of their actions, as they are of ours. I confess the truth when it makes against me, as well as when 'tis on my side. 'Tis an abominable intemperance that pushes them on so often to change, and that will not let them limit their affection to any one person whatever; as is evident in that goddess to whom are attributed so many changes and so many lovers. But 'tis true withal that 'tis contrary to the nature of love if it be, not violent; and contrary to the nature of violence if it be constant. And they who wonder, exclaim, and keep such a clutter to find out the causes of this frailty of theirs, as unnatural and not to be believed, how comes it to pass they do not discern how often they are themselves guilty of the same, without any astonishment or miracle at all? It would, peradventure, be more strange to see the passion fixed; 'tis not a simply corporeal passion. If there be no end to avarice and ambition, there is doubtless no more in desire; it still lives after satiety; and 'tis impossible to prescribe either constant satisfaction or end; it ever goes beyond its possession. And by that means inconstancy, peradventure, is in some sort more pardonable in them than in us: they may plead, as well as we, the inclination to variety and novelty common to us both; and secondly, without us, that they buy a cat in a sack: Joanna, queen of Naples, caused her first husband, Andrews, to be hanged at the bars of her window in a halter of gold and silk woven with her own hand, because in matrimonial performances she neither found his parts nor abilities answer the expectation she had conceived from his stature, beauty, youth, and

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activity, by which she had been caught and deceived. They may say there is more pains required in doing than in suffering; and so they are on their part always at least provided for necessity, whereas on our part it may fall out otherwise. For this reason it was, that Plato wisely made a law that before marriage, to determine of the fitness of persons, the judges should see the young men who pretended to it stripped stark naked, and the women but to the girdle only. When they come to try us they do not, perhaps, find us worthy of their choice:

“*Experta latus, madidoque simillima loro  
Inguina, nec lassa stare coacta manu,  
Deserit imbelles thalamos.*”

[“After using every endeavour to arouse him to action, she quits the barren couch.”—Martial, vii. 58.]

’Tis not enough that a man’s will be good; weakness and insufficiency lawfully break a marriage,

“*Et quaerendum aliunde foret nervosius illud,  
Quod posset zonam solvere virgineam:*”

[“And seeks a more vigorous lover to undo her virgin zone.”  
—Catullus, lxxvii. 27.]

why not? and according to her own standard, an amorous intelligence, more licentious and active,

“*Si blando nequeat superesse labori.*”

[“If his strength be unequal to the pleasant task.”  
—Virgil, Georg., iii. 127.]

But is it not great impudence to offer our imperfections and imbecilities, where we desire to please and leave a good opinion and esteem of ourselves? For the little that I am able to do now:

“*Ad unum  
Mollis opus.*”

[“Fit but for once.”—Horace, Epod., xii. 15.]

I would not trouble a woman, that I am to reverence and fear:

“Fuge suspicari,  
Cujus undenum trepidavit aetas  
Claudere lustrum.”

["Fear not him whose eleventh lustrum is closed."  
—Horace, *Od.*, ii. 4, 12, limits it to the eighth.]

Nature should satisfy herself in having rendered this age miserable, without rendering it ridiculous too. I hate to see it, for one poor inch of pitiful vigour which comes upon it but thrice a week, to strut and set itself out with as much eagerness as if it could do mighty feats; a true flame of flax; and laugh to see it so boil and bubble and then in a moment so congealed and extinguished. This appetite ought to appertain only to the flower of beautiful youth: trust not to its seconding that indefatigable, full, constant, magnanimous ardour you think in you, for it will certainly leave you in a pretty corner; but rather transfer it to some tender, bashful, and ignorant boy, who yet trembles at the rod, and blushes:

“Indum sanguineo veluti violaverit ostro  
Si quis ebur, vel mista rubent ubi lilia multa  
Alba rosa.”

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["As Indian ivory streaked with crimson, or white lilies mixed with the damask rose."—Aeneid, xii. 67.]

Who can stay till the morning without dying for shame to behold the disdain of the fair eyes of her who knows so well his fumbling impertinence,

"Et taciti fecere tamen convicia vultus,"

["Though she nothing say, her looks betray her anger."  
—Ovid, Amor., i. 7, 21.]

has never had the satisfaction and the glory of having cudgelled them till they were weary, with the vigorous performance of one heroic night. When I have observed any one to be vexed with me, I have not presently accused her levity, but have been in doubt, if I had not reason rather to complain of nature; she has doubtless used me very uncivilly and unkindly:

"Si non longa satis, si non bene mentula crassa  
Nimirum sapiunt, videntque parvam  
Matronae quoque mentulam illibenter:"

[The first of these verses is the commencement of an epigram of the Veterum Poetayurra Catalecta, and the two others are from an epigram in the same collection (Ad Matrones). They describe untranslatably Montaigne's charge against nature, indicated in the previous passage.]

and done me a most enormous injury. Every member I have, as much one as another, is equally my own, and no other more properly makes me a man than this.

I universally owe my entire picture to the public. The wisdom of my instruction consists in liberty, in truth, in essence: disdaining to introduce those little, feigned, common, and provincial rules into the catalogue of its real duties; all natural, general, and constant, of which civility and ceremony are daughters indeed, but illegitimate. We are sure to have the vices of appearance, when we shall have had those of essence: when we have done with these, we run full drive upon the others, if we find it must be so; for there is danger that we shall fancy new offices, to excuse our negligence towards the natural ones, and to confound them: and to manifest this, is it not seen that in places where faults are crimes, crimes are but faults; that in nations where the laws of decency are most rare and most remiss, the primitive laws of common reason are better observed: the innumerable multitude of so many duties stifling and dissipating our care. The application of ourselves to light and trivial things diverts us from those that are necessary and just. Oh, how these superficial men take an easy and plausible way in comparison of ours! These are shadows wherewith we palliate and pay one another; but we do not pay, but inflame the reckoning towards that great judge, who tucks up our

ragged and tattered above our shameful parts, and suckles not to view us all over, even to our inmost and most secret ordures: it were a useful decency of our maidenly modesty, could it keep him from this discovery. In fine, whoever could reclaim man from so scrupulous a verbal superstition,

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would do the world no great disservice. Our life is divided betwixt folly and prudence: whoever will write of it but what is reverend and canonical, will leave above the one-half behind. I do not excuse myself to myself; and if I did, it should rather be for my excuses that I would excuse myself than for any other fault; I excuse myself of certain humours, which I think more strong in number than those that are on my side. In consideration of which, I will further say this (for I desire to please every one, though it will be hard to do):

“Esse unum hominem accommodatum ad tantam morum  
ac sermonum et voluntatum varietatem,”

["For a man to conform to such a variety of manners,  
discourses, and will."—Q. Cicero, *De Pet. Consul*, c. 14.]

that they ought not to condemn me for what I make authorities, received and approved by so many ages, to utter: and that there is no reason that for want of rhyme they should refuse me the liberty they allow even to churchmen of our nation and time, and these amongst the most notable, of which here are two of their brisk verses:

“Rimula, dispeream, ni monogramma tua est.”

“Un vit d’amy la contente et bien traicte.”

[*St. Gelais, (Euvres Poetiques)*, p. 99, ed. of Lyons, 1574.]

besides how many others. I love modesty; and ’tis not out of judgment that I have chosen this scandalous way of speaking; ’tis nature that has chosen it for me. I commend it not, no more than other forms that are contrary to common use: but I excuse it, and by circumstances both general and particular, alleviate its accusation.

But to proceed. Whence, too, can proceed that usurpation of sovereign authority you take upon you over the women, who favour you at their own expense,

“Si furtiva dedit mira munuscula nocte,”

["If, in the stealthy night, she has made strange gifts."  
—Catullus, *lxviii*. 145.]

so that you presently assume the interest, coldness, and authority of a husband? ’Tis a free contract why do you not then keep to it, as you would have them do? there is no prescription upon voluntary things. ’Tis against the form, but it is true withal, that I in my time have conducted this bargain as much as the nature of it would permit, as conscientiously and with as much colour of justice, as any other contract; and that I



never pretended other affection than what I really had, and have truly acquainted them with its birth, vigour, and declination, its fits and intermissions: a man does not always hold on at the same rate. I have been so sparing of my promises, that I think I have been better than my word. They have found me faithful even to service of their inconstancy, a confessed and sometimes multiplied inconstancy. I never broke with them, whilst I had any hold at all, and what occasion soever they have given me, never broke with them to hatred



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or contempt; for such privacies, though obtained upon never so scandalous terms, do yet oblige to some good will: I have sometimes, upon their tricks and evasions, discovered a little indiscreet anger and impatience; for I am naturally subject to rash emotions, which, though light and short, often spoil my market. At any time they have consulted my judgment, I never stuck to give them sharp and paternal counsels, and to pinch them to the quick. If I have left them any cause to complain of me, 'tis rather to have found in me, in comparison of the modern use, a love foolishly conscientious than anything else. I have kept my word in things wherein I might easily have been dispensed; they sometimes surrendered themselves with reputation, and upon articles that they were willing enough should be broken by the conqueror: I have, more than once, made pleasure in its greatest effort strike to the interest of their honour; and where reason importuned me, have armed them against myself; so that they ordered themselves more decorously and securely by my rules, when they frankly referred themselves to them, than they would have done by their own. I have ever, as much as I could, wholly taken upon myself alone the hazard of our assignations, to acquit them; and have always contrived our meetings after the hardest and most unusual manner, as less suspected, and, moreover, in my opinion, more accessible. They are chiefly more open, where they think they are most securely shut; things least feared are least interdicted and observed; one may more boldly dare what nobody thinks you dare, which by its difficulty becomes easy. Never had any man his approaches more impertinently generative; this way of loving is more according to discipline but how ridiculous it is to our people, and how ineffectual, who better knows than I? yet I shall not repent me of it; I have nothing there more to lose:

“Me tabula sacer  
Votiva paries, indicat uvida  
Suspendisse potenti  
Vestimenta maris deo.”

[“The holy wall, by my votive table, shows that I have hanged up my wet clothes in honour of the powerful god of the sea.”  
—Horace, *Od.*, i. 5, 13.]

'tis now time to speak out. But as I might, per adventure, say to another, “Thou talkest idly, my friend; the love of thy time has little commerce with faith and integrity;”

“Haec si tu postules  
Ratione certa facere, nihilo plus agas,  
Quam si des operam, ut cum ratione insanias.”

["If you seek to make these things certain by reason, you will do no more than if you should seek to be mad in your senses."  
—Terence, *Eun.*, act i., sc. i, v. 16.]

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on the contrary, also, if it were for me to begin again, certainly it should be by the same method and the same progress, how fruitless soever it might be to me; folly and insufficiency are commendable in an incommendable action: the farther I go from their humour in this, I approach so much nearer to my own. As to the rest, in this traffic, I did not suffer myself to be totally carried away; I pleased myself in it, but did not forget myself. I retained the little sense and discretion that nature has given me, entire for their service and my own: a little emotion, but no dotage. My conscience, also, was engaged in it, even to debauch and licentiousness; but, as to ingratitude, treachery, malice, and cruelty, never. I would not purchase the pleasure of this vice at any price, but content myself with its proper and simple cost:

“Nullum intra se vitium est.”

[“Nothing is a vice in itself.”—Seneca, Ep., 95.]

I almost equally hate a stupid and slothful laziness, as I do a toilsome and painful employment; this pinches, the other lays me asleep. I like wounds as well as bruises, and cuts as well as dry blows. I found in this commerce, when I was the most able for it, a just moderation betwixt these extremes. Love is a sprightly, lively, and gay agitation; I was neither troubled nor afflicted with it, but heated, and moreover, disordered; a man must stop there; it hurts nobody but fools. A young man asked the philosopher Panetius if it were becoming a wise man to be in love? “Let the wise man look to that,” answered he, “but let not thou and I, who are not so, engage ourselves in so stirring and violent an affair, that enslaves us to others, and renders us contemptible to ourselves.” He said true that we are not to intrust a thing so precipitous in itself to a soul that has not wherewithal to withstand its assaults and disprove practically the saying of Agesilaus, that prudence and love cannot live together. ’Tis a vain employment, ’tis true, unbecoming, shameful, and illegitimate; but carried on after this manner, I look upon it as wholesome, and proper to enliven a drowsy soul and to rouse up a heavy body; and, as an experienced physician, I would prescribe it to a man of my form and condition, as soon as any other recipe whatever, to rouse and keep him in vigour till well advanced in years, and to defer the approaches of age. Whilst we are but in the suburbs, and that the pulse yet beats:

“Dum nova canities, dum prima et recta senectus,  
Dum superest lachesi quod torqueat, et pedibus me  
Porto meis, nullo dextram subeunte bacillo,”

[“Whilst the white hair is new, whilst old age is still straight shouldered, whilst there still remains something for Lachesis to spin, whilst I walk on my own legs, and need no staff to lean upon.” —Juvenal, iii. 26.]

we have need to be solicited and tickled by some such nipping incitation as this. Do but observe what youth, vigour, and gaiety it inspired the good Anacreon withal: and Socrates, who was then older than I, speaking of an amorous object:

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"Leaning," said he, "my shoulder to her shoulder, and my head to hers, as we were reading together in a book, I felt, without dissembling, a sudden sting in my shoulder like the biting of an insect, which I still felt above five days after, and a continual itching crept into my heart." So that merely the accidental touch, and of a shoulder, heated and altered a soul cooled and enervated by age, and the strictest liver of all mankind. And, pray, why not? Socrates was a man, and would neither be, nor seem, any other thing. Philosophy does not contend against natural pleasures, provided they be moderate, and only preaches moderation, not a total abstinence; the power of its resistance is employed against those that are adulterate and strange. Philosophy says that the appetites of the body ought not to be augmented by the mind, and ingeniously warns us not to stir up hunger by satiation; not to stuff, instead of merely filling, the belly; to avoid all enjoyments that may bring us to want; and all meats and drinks that bring thirst and hunger: as, in the service of love, she prescribes us to take such an object as may simply satisfy the body's need, and does not stir the soul, which ought only barely to follow and assist the body, without mixing in the affair. But have I not reason to hold that these precepts, which, indeed, in my opinion, are somewhat over strict, only concern a body in its best plight; and that in a body broken with age, as in a weak stomach, 'tis excusable to warm and support it by art, and by the mediation of the fancy to restore the appetite and cheerfulness it has lost of itself.

May we not say that there is nothing in us, during this earthly prison, that is purely either corporeal or spiritual; and that we injuriously break up a man alive; and that it seems but reasonable that we should carry ourselves as favourably, at least, towards the use of pleasure as we do towards that of pain! Pain was (for example) vehement even to perfection in the souls of the saints by penitence: the body had there naturally a share by the right of union, and yet might have but little part in the cause; and yet are they not contented that it should barely follow and assist the afflicted soul: they have afflicted itself with grievous and special torments, to the end that by emulation of one another the soul and body might plunge man into misery by so much more salutiferous as it is more severe. In like manner, is it not injustice, in bodily pleasures, to subdue and keep under the soul, and say that it must therein be dragged along as to some enforced and servile obligation and necessity? 'Tis rather her part to hatch and cherish them, there to present herself, and to invite them, the authority of ruling belonging to her; as it is also her part, in my opinion, in pleasures that are proper to her, to inspire and infuse into the body all the sentiment it is capable of, and to study how to make them sweet and useful to it. For it is good reason, as they say, that the body should not pursue its appetites to the prejudice of the mind; but why is it not also the reason that the mind should not pursue hers to the prejudice of the body?

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I have no other passion to keep me in breath. What avarice, ambition, quarrels, lawsuits do for others who, like me, have no particular vocation, love would much more commodiously do; it would restore to me vigilance, sobriety, grace, and the care of my person; it would reassure my countenance, so that the grimaces of old age, those deformed and dismal looks, might not come to disgrace it; would again put me upon sound and wise studies, by which I might render myself more loved and esteemed, clearing my mind of the despair of itself and of its use, and reintegrating it to itself; would divert me from a thousand troublesome thoughts, a thousand melancholic humours that idleness and the ill posture of our health loads us withal at such an age; would warm again, in dreams at least, the blood that nature is abandoning; would hold up the chin, and a little stretch out the nerves, the vigour and gaiety of life of that poor man who is going full drive towards his ruin. But I very well understand that it is a commodity hard to recover: by weakness and long experience our taste is become more delicate and nice; we ask most when we bring least, and are harder to choose when we least deserve to be accepted: and knowing ourselves for what we are, we are less confident and more distrustful; nothing can assure us of being beloved, considering our condition and theirs. I am out of countenance to see myself in company with those young wanton creatures:

*“Cujus in indomito constantior inguine nervus,  
Quam nova collibus arbor inhaeret.”*

[“In whose unbridled reins the vigour is more inherent than in the young tree on the hills.”—Horace, *Epod.*, xii. 19.]

To what end should we go insinuate our misery amid their gay and sprightly humour?

*“Possint ut juvenes visere fervidi.  
Multo non sine risu,  
Dilapsam in cineres facem.”*

[“As the fervid youths may behold, not without laughter, a burning torch worn to ashes.”—Horace, *Od.*, iv. 13, 21.]

They have strength and reason on their side; let us give way; we have nothing to do there: and these blossoms of springing beauty suffer not themselves to be handled by such benumbed hands nor dealt with by mere material means, for, as the old philosopher answered one who jeered him because he could not gain the favour of a young girl he made love to: “Friend, the hook will not stick in such soft cheese.” It is a commerce that requires relation and correspondence: the other pleasures we receive may be acknowledged by recompenses of another nature, but this is not to be paid but with the same kind of coin. In earnest, in this sport, the pleasure I give more tickles my imagination than that they give me; now, he has nothing of generosity in him who can receive pleasure where he confers none—it must needs be a mean soul that will owe

all, and can be content to maintain relations with persons to whom he is a continual charge; there is no beauty, grace, nor privacy so exquisite

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that a gentleman ought to desire at this rate. If they can only be kind to us out of pity, I had much rather die than live upon charity. I would have right to ask, in the style wherein I heard them beg in Italy: "Fate ben per voi,"—"Do good for yourself."—or after the manner that Cyrus exhorted his soldiers, "Who loves himself let him follow me."—"Consort yourself," some one will say to me, "with women of your own condition, whom like fortune will render more easy to your desire." O ridiculous and insipid composition!

"Nolo  
Barbam vellere mortuo leoni."

["I would not pluck the beard from a dead lion."—Martial]

Xenophon lays it for an objection and an accusation against Menon, that he never made love to any but old women. For my part, I take more pleasure in but seeing the just and sweet mixture of two young beauties, or only in meditating on it in my fancy, than myself in acting second in a pitiful and imperfect conjunction;

[Which Cotton renders, "Than to be myself an actor in the second with a deformed creature."]

I leave that fantastic appetite to the Emperor Galba, who was only for old curried flesh: and to this poor wretch:

"O ego Di faciant talem to cernere possim,  
Caraque mutatis oscula ferre comis,  
Amplectique meis corpus non pingue lacertis!"

[Ovid, who (Ex. Ponto, i. 4, 49) writes to his wife, "O would the gods arrange that such I might see thee, and bring dear kisses to thy changed locks, and embrace thy withered body with my arms"]

Amongst chief deformities I reckon forced and artificial beauties: Hemon, a young boy of Chios, thinking by fine dressing to acquire the beauty that nature had denied him, came to the philosopher Arcesilaus and asked him if it was possible for a wise man to be in love—"Yes," replied he, "provided it be not with a farded and adulterated beauty like thine."

[Diogenes Laertius, iv. 36. The question was whether a wise man could love him. Cotton has "Emonez, a young courtesan of Chios."]

Ugliness of a confessed antiquity is to me less old and less ugly than another that is polished and plastered up. Shall I speak it, without the danger of having my throat cut?



love, in my opinion, is not properly and naturally in its season, but in the age next to childhood,

“Quem si puellarum insereres choro,  
Mille sagaces falleret hospites,  
Discrimen obscurum, solutis  
Crinibus ambiguoque vultu:”

[“Whom if thou shouldst place in a company of girls, it would require a thousand experts to distinguish him, with his loose locks and ambiguous countenance.”—Horace, *Od.*, ii. 5, 21.]

nor beauty neither; for whereas Homer extends it so far as to the budding of the beard, Plato himself has remarked this as rare: and the reason why the sophist Bion so pleasantly called the first appearing hairs of adolescence ‘Aristogitons’ and ‘Harmodiuses’—[Plutarch, *On Love*, c.34.]— is sufficiently known. I find it in virility already in some sort a little out of date, though not so much as in old age;

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“Importunus enim transvolat aridas  
Quercus.”

[“For it uncivilly passes over withered oaks.”  
—Horace, *Od.*, iv. 13, 9.]

and Marguerite, Queen of Navarre, like a woman, very far extends the advantage of women, ordaining that it is time, at thirty years old, to convert the title of fair into that of good. The shorter authority we give to love over our lives, 'tis so much the better for us. Do but observe his port; 'tis a beardless boy. Who knows not how, in his school they proceed contrary to all order; study, exercise, and usage are their ways for insufficiency there novices rule:

“Amor ordinem nescit.”

[“Love ignores rules.” (Or:) “Love knows no rule.”  
—St. Jerome, Letter to Chyomatius.]

Doubtless his conduct is much more graceful when mixed with inadvertency and trouble; miscarriages and ill successes give him point and grace; provided it be sharp and eager, 'tis no great matter whether it be prudent or no: do but observe how he goes reeling, tripping, and playing: you put him in the stocks when you guide him by art and wisdom; and he is restrained of his divine liberty when put into those hairy and callous clutches.

As to the rest, I often hear the women set out this intelligence as entirely spiritual, and disdain to put the interest the senses there have into consideration; everything there serves; but I can say that I have often seen that we have excused the weakness of their understandings in favour of their outward beauty, but have never yet seen that in favour of mind, how mature and full soever, any of them would hold out a hand to a body that was never so little in decadence. Why does not some one of them take it into her head to make that noble Socratical bargain between body and soul, purchasing a philosophical and spiritual intelligence and generation at the price of her thighs, which is the highest price she can get for them? Plato ordains in his *Laws* that he who has performed any signal and advantageous exploit in war may not be refused during the whole expedition, his age or ugliness notwithstanding, a kiss or any other amorous favour from any woman whatever. What he thinks to be so just in recommendation of military valour, why may it not be the same in recommendation of any other good quality? and why does not some woman take a fancy to possess over her companions the glory of this chaste love? I may well say chaste;

“Nam si quando ad praelia ventum est,  
Ut quondam in stipulis magnus sine viribus ignis,  
Incassum furit.”

["For when they sometimes engage in love's battle,  
his sterile ardour lights up but as the flame of a straw."  
—Virgil, *Georg.*, iii. 98.]

the vices that are stifled in the thought are not the worst.

To conclude this notable commentary, which has escaped from me in a torrent of babble, a torrent sometimes impetuous and hurtful,

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“Ut missum sponsi furtivo munere malum  
Procurrit casto virginis a gremio,  
Quod miserae oblita molli sub veste locatuat,  
Dum adventu matris prosilit, excutitur,  
Atque illud prono praeceps agitur decursu  
Huic manat tristi conscius ore rubor.”

[“As when an apple, sent by a lover secretly to his mistress, falls from the chaste virgin’s bosom, where she had quite forgotten it; when, starting at her mother’s coming in, it is shaken out and rolls over the floor before her eyes, a conscious blush covers her face.”  
—Catullus, lxxv. 19.]

I say that males and females are cast in the same mould, and that, education and usage excepted, the difference is not great. Plato indifferently invites both the one and the other to the society of all studies, exercises, and vocations, both military and civil, in his Commonwealth; and the philosopher Antisthenes rejected all distinction betwixt their virtue and ours. It is much more easy to accuse one sex than to excuse the other; ’tis according to the saying,

“Le fourgon se moque de la paele.”  
[“The Pot and the Kettle.”]

ETEXT *editor’s bookmarks:*

A gallant man does not give over his pursuit for being refused  
A lady could not boast of her chastity who was never tempted  
Appetite is more sharp than one already half-glutted by the eyes  
Bashfulness is an ornament to youth, but a reproach to old age  
Certain other things that people hide only to show them  
Chiefly knew himself to be mortal by this act  
Dearness is a good sauce to meat  
Each amongst you has made somebody cuckold  
Eat your bread with the sauce of a more pleasing imagination  
Evade this tormenting and unprofitable knowledge  
Feminine polity has a mysterious procedure  
Few men have made a wife of a mistress, who have not repented it  
First thing to be considered in love matters: a fitting time  
Friend, the hook will not stick in such soft cheese.  
Give the ladies a cruel contempt of our natural furniture  
Guess at our meaning under general and doubtful terms  
Hate all sorts of obligation and restraint  
Have ever had a great respect for her I loved  
Have no other title left me to these things but by the ears  
Heat and stir up their imagination, and then we find fault



Husbands hate their wives only because they themselves do wrong  
I am apt to dream that I dream  
I do not say that 'tis well said, but well thought  
I had much rather die than live upon charity.  
I was always superstitiously afraid of giving offence  
If I am talking my best, whoever interrupts me, stops me  
If they can only be kind to us out of pity  
In everything else a man may keep some decorum  
In those days, the tailor took measure of it  
Inclination to variety and novelty common to us both

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Inconsiderate excuses are a kind of self-accusation  
Interdiction incites, and who are more eager, being forbidden  
It happens, as with cages, the birds without despair to get in  
Jealousy: no remedy but flight or patience  
Judgment of duty principally lies in the will  
Ladies are no sooner ours, than we are no more theirs  
“Let a man take which course he will,” said he; “he will repent.”  
Let us not be ashamed to speak what we are not ashamed to think  
Love is the appetite of generation by the mediation of beauty  
Love shamefully and dishonestly cured by marriage  
Love them the less for our own faults  
Love, full, lively, and sharp; a pleasure inflamed by difficulty  
Man must approach his wife with prudence and temperance  
Marriage rejects the company and conditions of love  
Men make them (the rules) without their (women's) help  
Misfortunes that only hurt us by being known  
Modesty is a foolish virtue in an indigent person (Homer)  
Most of my actions are guided by example, not by choice  
Neither continency nor virtue where there are no opposing desire  
No doing more difficult than that not doing, nor more active  
O wretched men, whose pleasures are a crime  
O, the furious advantage of opportunity!  
Observed the laws of marriage, than I either promised or expect  
One may more boldly dare what nobody thinks you dare  
Order it so that your virtue may conquer your misfortune  
Plato says, that the gods made man for their sport  
Pleasure of telling (a pleasure little inferior to that of doing)  
Priest shall on the wedding-day open the way to the bride  
Prudent man, when I imagine him in this posture  
Rage compelled to excuse itself by a pretence of good-will  
Rather be a less while old than be old before I am really so  
Represented her a little too passionate for a married Venus  
Revenge more wounds our children than it heals us  
Sex: To put fools and wise men, beasts and us, on a level  
Sharps and sweets of marriage, are kept secret by the wise  
Sins that make the least noise are the worst  
Sleep suffocates and suppresses the faculties of the soul  
Sufficiently covered by their virtue without any other robe  
The best authors too much humble and discourage me  
The impulse of nature, which is a rough counsellor



The privilege of the mind to rescue itself from old age  
Their disguises and figures only serve to cosen fools  
There is no allurements like modesty, if it be not rude  
These sleepy, sluggish sort of men are often the most dangerous  
They better conquer us by flying  
They buy a cat in a sack  
They err as much who too much forbear Venus  
They must become insensible and invisible to satisfy us  
They who would fight custom with grammar are triflers  
Those which we fear the least are, peradventure, most to be fear  
Those within (marriage) despair of getting out  
Tis all swine's flesh, varied by sauces

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To what friend dare you intrust your griefs  
Twas a happy marriage betwixt a blind wife and a deaf husband  
Unjust judges of their actions, as they are of ours  
Very idea we invent for their chastity is ridiculous  
Virtue is a pleasant and gay quality  
We ask most when we bring least  
We say a good marriage because no one says to the contrary.  
When jealousy seizes these poor souls  
When their eyes give the lie to their tongue  
Who escapes being talked of at the same rate  
Wisdom has its excesses, and has no less need of moderation  
Would in this affair have a man a little play the servant