



The Oxford Handbook of Montaigne

Philippe Desan (ed.)

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190215330.001.0001>

Published: 2015

Online ISBN: 9780190215354

Print ISBN: 9780190215330

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CHAPTER

30 Montaigne on Gender

Todd W. Reeser

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190215330.013.32> Pages 562–580

Published: 11 February 2016

Abstract

What would it mean to consider Montaigne as a gender theorist? Not surprisingly, the essayist imagines sex, gender, and sexuality as movement-based, nonontological phenomena, even as stasis remains implicated in that very movement. Above all, gender is a textual process of relations between “forms,” or stable-seeming constructs, and the dismantling or taking apart of those forms. This article places Montaigne into productive dialogue with modern gender, queer, and transgender theory in considering how concepts such as habit, skepticism, form, and imagination relate to movement-centered gender construction. The sexed body, gendered behavior, masculinity, and same-sex male sexuality are the key elements of subjectivity formation discussed in this framework. The article concludes with a consideration of how “queer” can be taken as a possible concept in the *Essays*.

Keywords: [Montaigne](#), [Renaissance](#), [gender](#), [female](#), [male](#), [masculinity](#), [skepticism](#), [sex](#), [queer](#), [transgender](#)

Subject: [Literary Studies \(1500 to 1800\)](#), [Literature](#)

Series: [Oxford Handbooks](#)

Collection: [Oxford Handbooks Online](#)

IN twenty-first century terms, Montaigne writes at the end of “On some verses of Virgil,” that one is not born a man or a woman, but becomes one: “I say that males and females are cast in the same mold; except for education and custom, the difference is not great.”¹ Cultural inscription—not biology—produces not only gender, but also sex. Sexual difference itself—or in the terms implied here, the bifurcation of the molds of the body that supposedly cast us before our births into stable, unchangeable forms that remain discretely male or female—is a product of education and custom. People are taught and get used to cultural constructions of gender as well as to sexed corporality, and that process leads them to assume that there are two separate and discrete sexes. To employ the well-known definition of gender from Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, education and custom are a kind of “apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are

established.”² As the following lines of the essay point out, Plato and Antisthenes allow for gender equality: the former invites women “into his commonwealth” as the physical and intellectual equals of men while the latter “eliminated any distinction between their virtue and ours.”³ This perspective eliminates the maleness and the masculinity of studies, exercises, war, and virtue (from the Latin *vir*, man), as well as the male need “to accuse one sex” (women) in place of “excus[ing] the other,”⁴ which requires an assumption of clear corporeal difference.

p. 563 Montaigne’s statement does not only pertain only to sex and gender, however, for “mold” (*moule*) in Renaissance French refers to printing characters and “cast in a mold” ↳ (*jetté en moule*) to the printed text.⁵ Although male and female bodies may not be cast in the same mold by culture at large, Montaigne presents them in the same print in his own text. His reconfiguration of the sexed body is based on a new textuality in which the essayist will allow for—and be explicit about—the nonbinary mold of the sexed body. If he can reinvent the sex/gender system in text, it is because language subtends the operation of sex and gender, stabilizing it along with—or as part of—“education and custom.” With corporeality a recurring topic in the *Essays*, Montaigne does not take sexual or gender fixity for granted; part of the “undulating [subject]” of the essays is sex and gender,⁶ and a key element of the human subject is gender oscillation. This chapter analyzes how Montaigne recasts or reimprints sex and gender as a nonstatic, movement-based phenomenon, while still incorporating stasis as an element of gender.

Corporeal Molds

No anecdote pertains to sexed corporeal movement as strikingly as the description of Germain in “Of the power of the imagination,” which recurs in slightly different terms in the *Travel Journal*. While travelling through Vitry-le-François in northeastern France, Montaigne hears of a man who self-reports that he used to be a girl: “Straining himself in some way in jumping, he says, his masculine organs came forth.”⁷ The man is unmarried and old, and he has a heavy beard. Montaigne himself did not actually see or meet Germain, writing that he “might have seen” him and that “all the inhabitants of that place had seen and known [him] as a girl named Marie until the age of twenty-two.”⁸

What interests Montaigne is not whether or not Marie actually produced a penis or not (no physical proof is presented), or whether or not Germain is really a man or a woman. Rather, Montaigne focuses on the role that discourses play in the construction of sex. The girls of the village still have a song “by which they warn each other not to take big strides for fear of becoming boys, like Marie Germain.”⁹ In the *Travel Journal*, the song is described: “there is still [in the village] a song commonly (*ordinaire*) in the girls’ mouths.”¹⁰ The imagination of the essay’s title does not, then, belong to Germain nor even to the villagers who may be seeing a man instead of a girl. Rather, it manifests itself as a potent force among the girls post facto to prevent the possibility of any future sex change: “it is so continually and vigorously fixed on this subject.”¹¹

p. 564 It is significant ↳ that the girls sing of “Marie Germain,” not allowing for “Marie” to be “Germain.” Their musical discourse requires naming both sexes because it re-creates the change from one sex to another to discount its possibility. To prevent sex change from happening, Montaigne comments, girls should imagine having the potential to be male and imagine that the male member is already part of their insides: “in order not to have to relapse so often into the same thought and sharpness of desire, it is better off if once and for all [the imagination] incorporates this masculine member in girls.”¹² By imagining a penis within, girls will not worry so much about sprouting one, or will not have to sing songs. This figure may show that sex could be permeable or that a contextualized version of the category transgender existed in the period,¹³ but, more importantly, Montaigne calls attention to the social convention by which non-trans or cisgender individuals aim to reproduce stably sexed bodies.

Other forms of discourse construct binarism in the travel journal version of the story. Montaigne mentions that the physician Ambroise Paré included this story in his medical works, but presents that detail as about citation: “They say that Ambroise Paré has put this story into his book on surgery.”¹⁴ The point is not that a respected royal physician discusses the case, but that the locals say that he does as support for their ideas on sex. The story is considered “very certain” and “was attested to Monsieur de Montaigne by the most eminent officials of the town.”¹⁵ Directly following the description of the leap, and still in the same sentence, is the renaming process: “and Cardinal de Lenoncourt, then bishop of Châlons, gave her the name Germain.”¹⁶ Or, as Paré describes the process, “he received the name of a man.”¹⁷ Civic and religious speech acts—by proclaiming something in language that thereby becomes true by virtue of its enunciation—participate heavily in the construction of sex. Montaigne reveals how the sex/gender system functions through the medium of one exceptional case: it is the verification and approval of official, unofficial, and “ordinary” cultural discourses that allow for sex to change but to remain discrete and “ordered.”

p. 565 With his anecdote, Montaigne suggests something akin to Judith Butler’s idea in *Bodies That Matter*, that bodies “assume” a sex through the process of discursive regulation. Regulatory norms materialize sex, and the still current and repeated (*ordinaire*) ↳ song “work[s] in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies and, more specifically, to materialize the body’s sex, to materialize sexual difference.”¹⁸ The invention of the song responded to an anxiety of unstable sexual materiality, but its repetition works to insure that stable materiality will henceforth remain in place and will always remain still current. Singing the song over and over helps insure that girls will always sing the song and that this means of sexual construction will propagate itself. Montaigne’s phrasing “*comme Marie Germain*” echoes the song itself, performing the very entry of the discursive norm into the *Essays*. He passes on the song without being aware of it, or to mirror how it infiltrates other discourses. If one goal of the norm is, for Butler, to make a human “viable” “within the domain of cultural intelligibility” and not leave one as abject or as a “threatening spectre,”¹⁹ “Marie Germain” is rendered human and not one of the many monsters in Paré’s books because she is discursively sanctioned as a recognizable subject, as a man or as a girl who became a man. She stands in direct contrast to the previous story in the travel narrative about Mary who passed as a man, moved to a new village, and married a woman. He is “recognized by someone,” turned in to the authorities because he is not recognizable as a given sex, and hung for becoming a male and for using “illicit devices to supply her defect in sex,”²⁰ which rendered Marie unrecognizable. Germain can live as a viable human being because he is legibly sexed in discourse, but no discursive conventions are available for this Mary.

When the girls of Vitry-le-François sing their song, they “assume” that they cannot become boys, or that their bodies will remain stably sexed in perpetuity. Marie Germain—whom they had seen and known before the leap—channels corporeal change into sexual fixity and signifies for the girls that sex change cannot happen to them, or to anyone else. After all, “it is not so great a marvel that this sort of accident is frequently met with.”²¹ This “accident”—or fall of the penis (from *accidere*, to fall down)—is also a fall on the part of the girls into an anxiety of sexual indifferentiation (a “relapse”), or a regulatory trap that they keep falling into and cannot get out of. Montaigne’s inability to witness Germain directly (“I might have seen a man”) is transformed into the ability to witness the girls witnessing as he imagines them imagining themselves with two sexes. The sexed imagination should be transformed so that we all imagine that we have other sexed selves within us. The girls should accept—as Baudrillard will put it four centuries later—that “we are all transsexuals symbolically.”²² They reject what Claire Colebrook calls “transitive indifference,” “in which the bounds of the self or individual are not strengthened by the otherness of the other.”²³ By not expelling a transgender body, but incorporating it into their image of their own body, the girls would not be so assiduous ↳ in their construction of sexual binarism. It is a waste of time to “continually and vigorously” fix on and reestablish sexual distinction. The borders of the sexed body are established as solid, clear, and stable, but that process can never be completed, and will never end. For

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matter—as Montaigne writes in the “Apology for Raymond Sebond”—“is ever running and flowing, without ever remaining stable or permanent.”²⁴

As indicated by these two key examples from “On some verses of Virgil” and “Of the power of the imagination,” sex and gender function not only as integral parts of the fabric of the *Essays*, but also as important signifiers that reveal how the world is in movement. Sexed human bodies are not so different from geographical ones. In the same way that land and rivers move over time and do not remain static bodies, the human body changes: “It seems that there are movements, some natural, others feverish, in these great bodies, just as in our own.”²⁵ Marie Germain’s leap into maleness may be natural or it may be feverish, but it is a change not unlike beaches that creep and take over land, part of the changes in bodies that take place all the time. For Montaigne, male and female and masculine and feminine are not necessarily stable binary oppositions that need to be taken apart and dismantled in the first place as they are already in flux. Even if education and custom create binarism, the single mold of male and female bodies nonetheless recurs in the text and dialogues with sexual binarism. A substratum of movement may be the very impetus for the need for culturally defined stability. In a sense, then, Montaigne prefigures Jacques Derrida’s dissemination or dismantling of binarism as a category of Western thought, and is already thinking in terms that might be familiar to post-structuralist-inflected gender theory, queer theory, or transgender theory. The essayist foresees a key function of transgender theory, namely, in the words of Susan Stryker, to critique “sets of norms that are themselves culturally produced and enforced.”²⁶ It is productive, then, to consider how gender theory elucidates Montaigne, but the *Essays* should also be taken as presaging, or laying the groundwork for, gender theory, especially work influenced by French thought.

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The Habit of Gender

The “except for education and custom” comment in my epigraph comes at the conclusion of “On some verses of Virgil,” and Montaigne does not explain what “education” and “custom” mean. But these key terms refer implicitly to other parts of the *Essays*. How, then, is gender taught and practiced for Montaigne? What does it mean to acquire a gender? How is it reified? In what sense is it not natural? A key essay to turn to for answers to these questions is “Of custom.” Here, custom and habit appear natural and are sovereign, “establish[ing] in us, little by little, stealthily, the foothold of her authority.”²⁷ Proof of custom’s functioning in this manner is that, in other contexts, custom takes a different route: “Did not custom ... make a commonwealth of women alone? Did it not put weapons in their hands, make them raise armies and fight battles?”²⁸ Referring to the Amazons and to Plato’s *Republic* in which women could be guardians of the republic, Montaigne suggests that gender is the result of custom applied to our lives. Consequently, habit produces different gendered behaviors: in other cultures, “the men carry their burdens on their head, the women, on their shoulders; and ... women piss standing, men squatting.”²⁹ In some places, “men and women are circumcised as well as baptized.”³⁰ The recurrence of gender in the essay suggests that gender and custom have a special relation, that one cannot be thought without the other. Because of a supposed biological basis or mold, gender comes to appear natural over time even as it is not fully fixed, to the point of blinding us to perception, in a way that mirrors the process of habit itself. “Habit stupefies our senses,” just as gender does.³¹ As Emily Butterworth describes the functioning of the concept in a Butlerian framework: “the repetition of habit could be considered the actuality of a potential essence that is forever in the process of becoming through this very repetition.”³² Or, I might say, gender is constituted not by any ontology or core of being, but by its very performance, which comes to have meaning through the accretion of performances repeated without end.³³

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Although gender factors in to custom, it cannot be easily disbanded: “it is the rule of rules, and the universal law of laws, that each man should observe those of the place he is in.”³⁴ Or, as Montaigne writes in “Of

husbanding your will,” “Habit is a second nature, and no less powerful.”³⁵ Although performed and always “becoming,” gender is not something that can be, or should be, easily mutated.

It is not simply that habit constructs gender through repetition, however, for habit itself is a gendered phenomenon. As a “violent and treacherous schoolmistress,” habit carries out its operations “stealthily,” and then becomes tyrannical.³⁶ The schoolmistress image is followed by a second gendered image: “our most important training is in the hands of nurses.”³⁷ Customs, Montaigne intimates, may construct what people consider sex: “And the common notions that we find in credit around us and infused into our soul by our fathers’ seed, these seem to be the universal and natural ones.”³⁸ We take biology as a given when custom should be examined. Women do not “piss standing,” because of their nature but because of habit. The process of habit coming to seem like nature results, in part, from gender: gendered constructs—such as the belief that paternal semen creates destiny or that nurses create custom—are already important parts of the very idea of the functioning of habit. These seminal notions of gender may predate habit and help invent it as seeming natural. Because habit already has gender so embedded within it, we cannot escape gendered habit by becoming aware of it since gender creates our perception of habit in the first place in ways that we cannot necessarily perceive.

Montaigne begins “Of custom” with an anecdote about a “village woman” who “learned to pet and carry in her arms a calf from the hour of its birth, and continuing always to do so, gained this by habit, that even when he was a great ox she still could carry him.”³⁹ The point of the anecdote is that habit takes power slowly and stealthily. Habit begins gently but over time, “she soon uncovers to us a furious and tyrannical face against which we no longer have the liberty of even raising our eyes. We see her at every turn forcing the rules of nature.”⁴⁰ But here, Montaigne is interested in the invention of the gendered *narrative* of habit. The first sentence of the essay suggests this interest: “That man seems to me to have very well understood the power of habit who first invented [forged] this story.”⁴¹ That “man” may be Montaigne himself since

p. 569 his version of the anecdote differs from the previous versions of Quintilian and of Erasmus, in which Milo of Croton “used to carry a calf for some distance every day, and when it grew into a bull he carried it without difficulty. And thus it will fit those who gradually become accustomed to things, however difficult.”⁴² Habit’s authority depends on the fact that it can trump gender: it is important that a woman learns to carry a calf and overcomes the supposed weakness of her sex by carrying an ox. If habit forces the rules of nature, it is in part because it forces the rules of *gender*. Montaigne’s “man”—possibly himself—rewrites the gender of the Erasmian anecdote in which the woman does not get used to the ox, but to sex. As Quartilla describes the process of habituation: “As a little child I was defiled with those of the same age, and as the years went on I attached myself to older boys, until I came to the age I am at now.”⁴³ By transforming habit from sex to female strength, Montaigne goes against gender custom and forges a new transgendered habit of his own, while calling attention to the mutual imbrication of gender and habit. Tyrannical habit may transform gender (for better or worse), but it is not clear if his narrative of gender has already inflected Montaigne’s idea of habit in the first place as he opens his essay on custom.

Gendered Skepticism

As the ox example shows, habit may have a tyrannical hold over us, but gender does not function only as a stable habit “infused into our soul.” If the *Essays* aim to undo received knowledge, one of the central epistemologies undone is related to gender. Montaigne’s skepticism, under the strong influence of Sextus Empiricus’s model in *Outlines of Skepticism* read in Estienne’s 1562 Latin translation, served as a key tool for rethinking gender. The oppositional technique aims to disband the hegemony of the natural by offering cross-cultural examples of acts that may seem unnatural in one cultural context, but exist routinely in another. It may seem natural for women to receive money for sex in one context, but not in another:

“Among us it is shameful and a matter of reproach for women to prostitute themselves; but with many Egyptians it is glorious.”⁴⁴ Such comparisons relate to men as well: “no male here would wear a brightly-coloured full-length dress, although among the Persians this, which among us is shameful, is thought highly becoming.”⁴⁵ By virtue of counterposing cultural differences and imagining an unending series of examples, the Renaissance skeptic comes to the conclusion that nothing is good or bad by nature. Sextus aims to not consider anything as “good or bad by nature” (*natura bonum aut malum*) in order to create “tranquility” (*imperturbatum mentis statum*) in the mind of the true skeptic.⁴⁶ A man’s or a woman’s behavior—or the custom of gender more broadly—should come to be seen as not bad by nature but by custom. Sextus uses the phrase “among us” (*apud nos* in the Latin version) with some frequency, in opposition to other contexts, and Montaigne too frequently takes his own cultural vantage point as point of comparison. In a long section of “Of custom,” a lengthy list of “places where” foreign custom X is practiced is presented, with the implied contrast “us” (80–83; 112–115), the goal being to denaturalize “our” cultural behavior. There is nothing good, bad, or natural, for instance, about woman urinating sitting or squatting and by extension about men doing so “among us.”⁴⁷

The outside to gender—the other cultural context compared to “among us”—does not necessarily have to be defined in cultural terms. While foreign constructs of gender might come from elsewhere as an anthropological outside, we may also imagine them in our own minds. Imagined fantasies of gender can exist within our realm and can also reveal the relativity of habit. Cultural examples to which one juxtaposes one’s own culture might invite or imply the assumption of cultural difference as only far away and external to one’s own context, but once one begins to imagine difference, the imagination may become the locus of gendered possibility instead of skeptical comparison per se. The comparison between what one imagines and what is proximate in cultural context may disband the natural. By imagining what takes place elsewhere, one may end up bringing that elsewhere to bear on the here and now or on the self. An anthropologically skeptical methodology might be the very impetus for disbanding the distinction between the here and now (“among us”) and the elsewhere. The Marie Germain story in a sense imports the elsewhere and renders him the “elsewhere” for the girls, juxtaposing the foreign sex change and the ordered song they sing in the village. Sex functions in one way for Marie Germain, but “among us” they sing a song. That local habit, however, is not natural and implies a lack of tranquility due to a lack of “cross-cultural” comparison as the girls relapse over and over again. In this case, an imagined elsewhere fails to disband nature and reinscribe gender as contingent.

The Habits of Masculinity

Montaigne's process of essaying the self reimagines masculinity by presenting the male writing subject as sexed and gendered. His textual nudity has to include his entire body to be complete: "I owe a complete portrait of myself to the public."⁴⁸ Each of his body parts constitutes him, he writes, and "no other makes me more properly a man than this one."⁴⁹ As he explains about "the unruly liberty of this member": the member "struggl[es] for mastery so imperiously with our will," and "refuse[s] with so much pride and obstinancy our solicitations, both mental and manual."⁵⁰ His inability to control the male member means that man does not necessarily have full control over the self, as classical concepts of subject formation require. He lacks the hard "virtue" of the ancients, is softer and weaker than the ideal ancient man should be. By virtue of talking about impotence and the defects of his male body (as well as others'), especially in "Of the power of the imagination,"⁵¹ Montaigne marks masculinity and expands what a man in textual form is or can be. The act of dismantling humanist or classical ideas of an ideal man comes to constitute essayistic masculinity.

At the same time, however, Montaigne admits his penile-centeredness: "Never was a man more impertinently genital in his approaches."⁵² The essay may not function simply as a critique of virility or of the cultural obsession with it, but as a way to counteract its threat or absence or—as Lawrence Kritzman considers it—as a "talking cure."⁵³ Montaigne may very well render sexual impotence less abhorrent or less secretive by putting it into his discourse, but the invention of nonideal masculinity does not necessarily have the effect of dismantling the ideal. While the act of talking in a quasi-confessional narrative may allow Montaigne to resist or break the hold of cultural norms of masculinity as phallic, hard, or virile, on another level those very breaks from the ideal are not necessarily forgotten, and masculinity may be predicated on the repetition of the act of breaking from them. As Judith Butler writes: "Our formation does not suddenly fall away after certain breaks or ruptures; they become important to the story we tell about ourselves or to other modes of self-understanding."⁵⁴ Montaigne's movement-centered narrative may break the seal of gendered confession, but that break is not necessarily left behind as an element of masculine subject formation. Or, in Butler's words: "There remains that history from which I broke, and that breakage installs me here and now."⁵⁵ Masculinity may only be thinkable within those breakages and, as such, the ability to break a cultural narrative of masculinity is not gender-neutral but simply creates another form of masculinity. The act of enunciating impotent masculinity may be part of the reformation of masculinity. The telling of impotence may be, all or in part, itself "impertinently genital."

Like virility, moderation functions as a key definition of ideal Renaissance masculinity, and it too is up for discussion. In the Aristotelian tradition reborn in the Renaissance, the virtue of moderation suggests the ability to maintain control over the male self, which in turn justifies control over the other. He who does not err into excess, in areas such as sexuality, warfare, or finances, serves as a model for others (especially women), considered more likely to be excessive. In "Of moderation," Montaigne expresses his love of moderation, and he follows some common contemporaneous notions of the ideal moderate man while challenging others.⁵⁶ Analogies between excess and the non-masculine may permit the essayist to seem or to feel moderate by contrast. He codes Greek love as immoderate in "Of friendship," by implied contrast with nonsexual male friendships such as his.⁵⁷ At other moments, however, Montaigne slips into excesses coded as non-masculine. Just before his comment about males and females "cast in the same mold," for instance, he comments on his own essay, which "has escaped from me in a flow of babble."⁵⁸ His uncontrollable textual immoderation in an essay on sexuality immediately precedes his statement on gender equality, with his "flow of babble" revealing his text as cast in the same mold as a woman's supposed "flow of babble."⁵⁹ Montaigne displays and does not display the virtue of moderation, but his break from that gendered virtue may bring him to moderation as he rides the line between too much and not

enough moderation. Those breaks install him in Butler's "here and now" as part of a new narrative about masculine subjectivity that resists the paradox of excessive moderation.

Resisting Gender Change

p. 573 In "Of repentance," Montaigne writes that "natural inclinations gain assistance and strength from education; but they are scarcely to be changed and overcome."⁶⁰ He adds ↳ that "there is no one who, if he listens to himself, does not discover in himself a pattern all his own [*une forme sienne*], a ruling pattern [*une forme maistresse*], which struggles against education and against the tempest of the passions that oppose it."⁶¹ This use of "form" is not an exception to Montaigne's movement-centeredness, but as Jean-Yves Pouilloux writes, refers to "the way in which being appears, the figure of its manifestation."⁶² If sexual difference is constructed by "*institution*" or education, then within us there may be a "form," or a way in which gendered being appears, that rules us and resists education with respect to gender. Could resistance to imposed ideas about gender be within from the start? Might gender in itself, then, be composed of a struggle within between "form" on the one hand, and the external on the other? If gender is in movement, it is at times a struggle, defined by the tension between one's individual form and that which opposes it from the outside. From this perspective, it is not Montaigne's impotence that defines masculinity on its own terms but rather the agonistic relation between Montaigne's "*forme maistresse*" and education or other "passions that oppose it." Moderation and virility may be external constructs against which his own immoderate or nonvirile form struggles. And, in Montaigne's description, the girls of Vitry-le-François have a cisgender form that struggles against the tempest of Marie-Germain's sex change.

This opposition between form and institution, or between the self and the external, may best define gender in Montaigne. Gender cannot be entirely constructed by the self, even for a man, but it is not constituted entirely by external habits, customs, or discourses either. It is not just that gender itself is in flux, but the very place from which gender comes is in flux between the inside and the outside, between the self and what is external to it. The self or the external can be a "form": the internal form of gender may be in movement while education and the external "tempest" are composed of stable, classical representations, or the external may be in movement while the internal holds fort. This model explains, in part at least, one of the most puzzling questions about gender in Montaigne: why are there constructs that do not appear to be fluid or in movement at all, but common or normative? In his opening essay, for example, Montaigne propagates stable, classic assumptions about women and gender: vigor is coded as masculine, and women are placed in a separate category from men in terms of boldness and valiance. But at the same time, he dismantles binarized, rhetorical norms and oppositions and famously proclaims: "Truly man is a marvelously vain, diverse, and undulating [subject]."⁶³ The point is not that Montaigne contradicts himself, but rather that he establishes a relation between form and movement as itself part of the undulating subject of the text. This is one explanation, then, as to why there seem to be gender ontologies in ↳ Montaigne, or why not all gender representations are linked to movement or to skeptical anti-naturalness: nonmovement-centered representations need to be taken as part of a longer series of textual moments that together suggest gendering processes. Gender in Montaigne is an unending series of relations between forms and the very dismantling or undoing of those forms through opposition.

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Queer Montaigne?

Like the *Essays*, *Gender Trouble* dismantles what Judith Butler calls “the compulsory order of sex/gender/desire.”⁶⁴ One’s gender does not have to naturally follow from one’s sex, and heterosexual desire does not have to follow naturally from one’s gender. A male who embodies social characteristics of masculinity does not necessarily have to desire women. Rather, desire can be a more free-floating phenomenon that may or may not follow from sex and gender. Part of Montaigne’s putting the world into movement involves scrambling this compulsory order. After the description of the titular monstrous child in “Of a monstrous child” is an anecdote about a monstrous shepherd Montaigne saw in Médoc not far from his château who is “thirty years old or thereabouts” and “has no sign [*montre*] of genital parts” but “has three holes by which he continually makes water”: “He is bearded, has desire, and likes to touch women.”⁶⁵ Sexual desire in this case is not inscribed on a standardly sexed body and does not follow from a genital definition of sex.⁶⁶ Despite his showing of a genital absence, the shepherd shows desire for women, and does not lack desire, Montaigne points out. The male genitals do not, in this case, have the signification often accorded to them, and they do not embody maleness, which should establish the grounding for desire. The male genitals cannot “show” (*montrer*) that he is male. Indeed, Montaigne puts the very signifying function of the genitals into question by mentioning that he is bearded. The beard could be taken as the sign of maleness here, or the shepherd’s three holes, replacing the genitalia, displace the need for a male sex in the first place. Without a standard genital sign of maleness, the shepherd corresponds to larger ideas about monstrosity: “What we call monsters are not so to God, who sees in the immensity of his work the infinity of forms that he has comprised in it.”⁶⁷ Part of the nature of the universe is “having no sign of genital parts”: the very lack of genitalia is not contrary to nature: “We call contrary to nature what happens contrary to custom; nothing is anything but according to nature, whatever it may be.”⁶⁸ To not have male genitals and to desire women is a possible combination in nature: the problem is that we have the habit of assuming that genitalia are a necessary condition to be a man, which is a precondition for desiring women. The kind of gendered form on display here, part of nature’s infinity of forms, signifies a blindness to the “arrangement and relationship” of nature.⁶⁹ The arrangement allowed for here is a new order of sex/gender/desire. In this sense, it is not that sex and desire do not exist per se, but rather that the relations among sex, gender, and desire are open to multiple options that should not a priori be taken as “contrary to nature” and that allow for new trajectories.

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Montaigne problematizes the compulsory order of sex/gender/desire by allowing for forms of erotic desire that are not what we might call heterosexual. There is no requirement that maleness be or become heterosexual, and male homoerotic desire is woven throughout sections of the *Essays*, sometimes as a viable form of desire that is part of the natural world. William Beck argues that Montaigne’s post-1580 additions to his text (especially “Of friendship”) suggest a growing acceptance or tolerance of homosexuality.⁷⁰ As I have already suggested, Montaigne is not always critical or anti-normative with respect to gender, but at times subscribes to common views corresponding to cultural context. The same could be said about sexuality. The well-known paragraph about “licentious Greek love” in “Of friendship,” one of the most lengthy statements about ancient pederasty in the Renaissance, begins by proclaiming that it is “justly abhorred by our morality,” and codes it as sexually immoderate: “this first frenzy which the son of Venus inspired in the lover’s hearts at the sight of the flower of tender youth, in which they allow all the insolent and passionate acts that immoderate ardor can produce, was simply founded on external beauty.”⁷¹ Still, Montaigne considers what the specific issues are with this type of relation, and in fact locates some positive elements within in. Notably, he concludes, “all that can be said in favor of the Academy is that this was a love ending in friendship.”⁷²

Since Montaigne does allow for male-male eros to be a viable form of desire at least some of the time, then might it be possible, I would like to ask, to consider the *Essays* as queer? To take apart normativity—or in

p. 576 queer theory terms, “heteronormativity”—to challenge the natural and locate the anti-norm within the norm, is precisely what both queer theory and the essay aim to do. One issue with even posing this question, however, is that queerness itself—if taken in the sense of that which disrupts *sexual* normativity—is anachronistic. If “heterosexuality” and “homosexuality” become available signifiers and concepts and are institutionalized as sexualities in the nineteenth century, then it may not be possible to talk of the queer in Montaigne in the first place. After all, sexual normativity is far from a Renaissance concept. Moreover, the notion of the social itself can be seen as an element of the modern.⁷³ If there is no sexual normativity to disrupt, then how can there be queerness in the *Essays*? Furthermore, Montaigne’s deepest affection is reserved for his male friend Etienne de La Boétie, suggesting that for him love and intimacy are not reserved for the relation between man and woman.⁷⁴

Still, on the other hand, what if the queer were taken as the confusion of existing sexual categories and not as the confusion of “heterosexuality” per se? Or, what if the queer in Montaigne was taken as disrupting categories of gendered bodies not frequently or normally placed together in terms of sexual act or desire, or disrupting those categories in unexpected ways? The shepherd anecdote, for instance, already shows queerness even if there is no actual same-sex desire. A man with three holes who likes to touch women queers the idea that a man-sexed male desires women and forces a confrontation with the possibility of nonstandard sexual acts.

Another way to pose these questions is to ask: can Montaignian skepticism be queer? Is the questioning of the category of the natural somehow queer? Under the influence of Foucault, queer theory has long been invested in critiquing the notion that heterosexuality and the natural are culturally connected and that the presence of an unnatural queer is required in order for heterosexuality to exist as natural. Sextus Empiricus’s *Outlines of Skepticism* offers the possibility of reconsidering the category of male-male sex acts as not contrary to nature. When he provides examples of categories of non-natural acts that can be disbanded by offering counterexamples from other cultures, he offers male-male sexual acts as one example:

p. 577 Among us, for instance, homosexual sex is shameful [*turpe ... mascula venere vti*]—or rather, has actually been deemed illegal—but among the Germani, they say, it is not shameful and is quite normal [*turpe non est, sed unum ex iis quae vsu recepta sunt*]. It is said that among the Thebans in the old days it was not thought shameful, and that Meriones the Cretan was so called to hint at this Cretan custom.⁷⁵

To employ skeptical thinking is to question the assumed unnaturalness of same-sex sexual acts and to allow those acts to be viable interactions. And if male-female desire and sexual acts are taken as incarnating the natural and same-sex versions as “against nature,” then to disband the unnaturalness of same-sex sexuality is a prime avenue for the disbanding of the natural in the first place.

At a number of points in the *Essays*, then, male-male sexual acts and customs are presented as viable cultural practices. In “Of custom,” for instance, Montaigne offers same-sex prostitution and marriage as examples of how there is no habit so strange “that habit has not planted and established it by law in the regions where she saw fit to do so”: “There are places where there are public brothels of males, and even marriages between them.”⁷⁶ Male-male sex acts illustrate the ideas that “there is nothing that custom will not or cannot do” and that custom is “the queen and empress of the world”: “as much by custom as by nature do males have sexual relations with males.”⁷⁷ Same-sex male sexuality in this instance can itself become its own natural-seeming habit, opening (but not answering) the question whether male-female sex has come to seem natural because of habit.

That custom created the conditions for same-sex acts does not necessarily mean that there is queerness everywhere, but in fact the opposite might be the case. A culture might have its own sexual custom that

makes sexual relations possible or natural seeming, and Montaigne's act of positioning same-sex sexual acts as elsewhere might have the effect of keeping them far away in time or place. As Montaigne explains following this example, "the laws of conscience, which we say are born of nature, are born of custom"; as one holds "in inward veneration the opinions and the behavior approved and accepted around him," he is unable to "break loose from them without remorse, or apply himself to them without self-satisfaction."⁷⁸ This statement following on the heels of a same-sex example suggests that male-female sexual relations (behavior) and opinions about that behavior may be a kind of cultural habit that comes to look internal when in fact it is not. Male-female sexual acts are a result of the "power of custom," whose main effect "is to seize and ensnare us in such a way that it is hardly within our power to get ourselves back out of its grip and return into ourselves to reflect and reason about its ordinances."⁷⁹ There is an "order" to sexuality that may exclude the disorder of same-sex sexuality and may order us to not partake in it.

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One downside to the skeptical approach—as tolerant as it may seem to us—is that other forms of sexuality have to be positioned through the lens of cultural alterity in juxtaposition with Montaigne's own cultural context.⁸⁰ In this case, the queer is forced to come from without. Can, then, skepticism really be queer? Men may marry in other cultures, but presumably they do not or cannot in his own context. Montaigne does not directly call for his own cultural context to allow for sexuality to be otherwise in the here and now. When Montaigne discounts "Greek licentiousness" as a valid form of friendship in "Of friendship," he begins by juxtaposing, in an anthropologically skeptical manner, Greek pederasty with his own cultural context: "And that other, licentious Greek love is justly abhorred by our morality."⁸¹ By far the longest statement on same-sex sexuality of any kind in the *Essays*, this passage considers pederasty as a valid human relation but in order to ultimately discount it in his cultural context and to leave "our morality" in place. In fact, his cross-cultural approach might have the effect of containing same-sex sexuality as only outside, as not possible within the self. To talk about male-male brothels, marriage, or sex acts as caused by custom, then, might in the end evoke queer sexuality to render it impossible in his own context and thus to render same-sex cultural configurations anything but queer. It is the sexual equivalent of the "talking cure" of impotency: as a release valve, it evokes in order to expel and dominate the problem and to keep queerness from circulating free-form.

Yet, the condemnation of "Greek licentiousness" can be taken as anomalous in the larger context of the *Essays*. Forms of same-sex sexuality do in fact make their way into the text beyond the construct as exterior forms for skeptical comparison. In a number of cases in "On some verses of Virgil," Socratic desire for boys figures as part of his discussion of desire or eros. As Montaigne explains about sexuality, the entire "whole movement of the world resolves itself into and leads to this coupling. It is a matter infused throughout, it is a center to which all things look," but a single type of desire does not dominate his discussion.⁸² Montaigne offers, for instance, a long list of classical texts that prove the importance of eros, and he includes the male-centered Platonic corpus: "What is the purpose of Plato's so extensive and vivid descriptions of the boldest amours of his time?"⁸³ With many other evocations of Socrates or Plato, eros transcends what we now call object choice, which is almost irrelevant to the discussion about the erotic drives more generally.⁸⁴ What the essayist calls "*accouplage*" is not limited to a single type of coupling but should be governed by principles beyond gender: "Philosophy does not strive against natural pleasures, provided that measure goes with them; she preaches moderation in them, not flight ... she orders us to take an object that simply satisfies the body's need."⁸⁵ A certain type of object choice is not the defining element of eros, but quantity of desire, a guiding principle of the essay that allows for repeated juxtapositions of Platonic/Socratic eros alongside other male-female examples.

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The extent, however, to which this process can be taken as queer remains to be seen: there is no sexual normativity nor is there homophobia in the modern sense against which Montaigne is responding. Yet, while there is nothing stable to queer, a widespread cultural anxiety around sexuality in Plato means that there is a major phenomenon subtending Renaissance humanism against which Montaigne is responding

and that he takes as an inappropriate way of rereading Plato.⁸⁶ While not a form of heteronormativity per se, same-sex eros evokes anxiety and may be effaced and to depict same-sex eros as just one part of his discussion of sexuality without going out of his way to gloss or efface sexual acts could certainly be taken as queer. One of Montaigne's main ideas in the essay is that people tend to think about sex but fear talking about it, and thus they "will frown at the license of my writings" even as they "do not have more to frown at in the license of their thoughts."⁸⁷ His example of these people's hypocrisy relates to same-sex eros: "It is a well-ordered humor that criticizes Plato's writings and glides over his supposed relations with Phaedo, Dion, Stella, and Archeanassa."⁸⁸ Presented early in the essay, the idea that people discuss Plato but ignore sex and three of his male lovers (the first three listed, "Stella" being the Latin name for Aster, and "Phedon" mistaken for "Phèdre"), establishes the rest of the essay as partially about bringing the queer elements of Plato—and perhaps of the ancients more broadly—into the Renaissance and creating a counter-discourse to the actual, or de facto, censorship of same-sex love. This statement allows for the possibility that the *Essays* not "glide over" same-sex elements of the ancient world but allow them to enter and be a "humor" without order: they may disorder and thus in a sense queer the essay genre. As a possible disordering element that may appear when it should not appear, sexuality factors in as one of the essayistic grotesques, or "fantastic paintings whose only charm lies in their variety and strangeness ... having no order" as described at the opening of "Of friendship."⁸⁹ The queer may not disrupt heteronormativity as it does in twenty-first-century culture, but it contributes to disordering and painting the essayistic genre. This erotic reordering, taken alongside the distancing effect described earlier, disorders the essay on another level too, by leaving the location of the queer unclear. It may come from elsewhere, but its potential to enter the essayistic imagination can never be eradicated.

Notes

- 1 All quotations from Montaigne are taken from *The Complete Works of Montaigne*, trans. Donald Frame (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1958), and *Les Essais de Michel de Montaigne*, ed. Pierre Villey and V. L. Saulnier (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1978). III, 5, 685 [897]: "je dis que les masles et femelles sont jettez en mesme moule: sauf l'institution et l'usage, la difference n'y est pas grande."
- 2 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 7.
- 3 III, 5, 685 [897]: "en sa republique"; "ostoit toute distinction entre leur vertu et la nostre."
- 4 III, 5, 685 [897]: "accuser l'un sexe"; "excuser l'autre."
- 5 Edmond Huguet, *Dictionnaire de la langue française du seizième siècle*, vol. 5 (Paris: H. Champion, 1961), 349.
- 6 I, 1, 5 [9]: "subject ... ondoyant."
- 7 I, 21, 69 [99]: "Faisant, dict-il, quelque effort en sautant, ses membres virils se produisirent."
- 8 I, 21, 69 [99]: "peuz voir"; "tous les habitans de là ont cogneu et veu fille, jusques à l'aage de vingt deux ans, nommée Marie."
- 9 I, 21, 69 [99]: "par laquelle elles s'entradvertissent de ne faire point de grandes enjambées, de peur de devenir garçons, comme Marie Germain."
- 10 *Travel Journal*, 870 [7]: "Il y a encore en cette ville une chanson ordinaire en la bouche des filles."
- 11 *Travel Journal*, 870 [7]: "elle est si continuellement et si vigoureusement attachée à ce subject."
- 12 I, 21, 69 [99]: "pour n'avoir si souvent à rechoir en mesme pensée et aspreté de desir, elle [imagination] a meilleur compte d'incorporer, une fois pour toutes, cette virile partie aux filles."
- 13 Gary Ferguson writes that "the challenge faced by the individual likely resembled less the situation of a modern transsexual—that of bringing the body in line with body image—than that of a certain intersex persons required to align the psyche with the body." See "Early Modern Transitions: From Montaigne to Choisy," *L'Esprit créateur* 53 (1) (2013): 149.
- 14 *Travel Journal*, 870 [7]: "Ils disent qu'Ambroise Paré a mis ce conte dans son livre de chirurgie." The story is found in Ambroise Paré, *Des monstres et des prodiges*, ed. Jean Céard (Geneva, Switzerland: Droz, 1971), chap. 7.
- 15 *Travel Journal*, 870 [7]: "très-certain"; "et ainsi tesmoigné à M. de Montaigne par les plus apparens officiers de la ville."
- 16 *Travel Journal*, 870 [7]: "et le Cardinal de Lenoncourt, Evesque pour lors de Chalons, luy donna nom Germain."
- 17 "il receut le nom d'homme," Ambroise Paré, *Des monstres et des prodiges*, 30.
- 18 Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 2.

- 19 Ibid., 2, 3.
- 20 *Travel Journal*, 870 [6]: “reconnu par quelqu’un”; “des inventions illicites à supplir au défaut de son sexe.”
- 21 I, 21, 69 [99]: “Ce n’est pas tant de merveille, que cette sorte d’accident se rencontre frequent.”
- 22 Jean Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil*, trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 1993), 21.
- 23 Claire Colebrook, “What Is It Like to Be a Human?” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 2 (2) (2015): 235.
- 24 II, 12, 456 [603]: “coulante et fluante tousjours, sans jamais demeurer stable ny permanente.” For more on Marie Germain, see Patricia Parker, “Gender Ideology, Gender Change: The Case of Marie Germain,” *Critical Inquiry* 19 (1993): 337–364; Richard L. Regosin, *Montaigne’s Unruly Brood: Textual Engendering and the Challenge to Paternal Authority* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 185–191; Rebecca M. Wilkin, *Women, Imagination and the Search for Truth in Early Modern France* (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2008), 162–168; Edith J. Benkov, “Rereading Montaigne’s Memorable Stories: Sexuality and Gender in Vitry-le-François,” in *Montaigne after Theory, Theory after Montaigne*, ed. Zahi Zalloua (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 202–217; Todd W. Reeser, “Theorizing Sex and Gender in Montaigne,” in *Montaigne after Theory*, 230–233; Lawrence D. Kritzman, *The Fabulous Imagination: On Montaigne’s Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 40–42; Garry Ferguson, “Early Modern Transitions: From Montaigne to Choisy.” Kritzman underscores the phallogocentric aspect of Montaigne’s reimagining of the girls’ imagination (42), as does Regosin (190). It is significant that this sex change takes place in the direction from female to male. Sex change can only take place from “lower” to “upper,” or, according to Paré, humans can move only from less perfect to more perfect because they are moving toward God. For more on this topic, see Parker.
- 25 I, 31, 151 [204]: “Il semble qu’il y aye des mouvemens, naturels les uns, les autres fievreux, en ces grands corps comme aux nostres.”
- 26 Susan Stryker, “(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 3.
- 27 I, 23, 77 [109]: “Elle establit en nous, peu à peu, à la desrobée, le pied de son autorité.”
- 28 I, 23, 82 [114]: “N’a pas faict la coustume . . . une chose publique de femmes à part? leur a elle pas mis les armes à la main? faict dresser des armées, et livrer des batailles?”
- 29 I, 23, 82 [114]: “les hommes portent les charges sur la teste, les femmes sur les espauls: elles pissent debout, les hommes accroupis.”
- 30 I, 23, 82 [114]: “hommes et femmes sont circoncis et pareillement baptisés.”
- 31 I, 23, 78 [109]: “l’accoustumance hebeate nos sens.”
- 32 Emily Butterworth, “The Performance of Habit in Montaigne’s ‘De mesnager sa volonté,’” *French Studies* 59 (2) (2005): 153.
- 33 On Montaigne’s stories of sex change as performative, see Benkov, “Rereading Montaigne’s Memorable Stories: Sexuality and Gender in Vitry-le-François”; and Reeser, “Theorizing Sex and Gender in Montaigne.”
- 34 I, 23, 86 [118]: “c’est la regle des regles, et generale loy des loix, que chacun observe celles du lieu où il est.”
- 35 III, 10, 772 [1010]: “L’accoustumance est une seconde nature, et non moins puissante.”
- 36 I, 23, 77 [109]: “violente et traistresse maistresse d’escole.”
- 37 I, 23, 78 [110]: “nostre principal gouvernement est entre les mains des nourrices.”
- 38 I, 23, 83 [115]: “les communes imaginations, que nous trouvons en credit autour de nous, et infuses en nostre ame par la semence de nos peres, il semble que ce soyent les generalles et naturelles.”
- 39 I, 23, 77 [108–109]: “une femme de village”; “ayant appris de caresser et porter entre ses bras un veau des l’heure de sa naissance, et continuant tousjours à ce faire, gaigna cela par l’accoustumance, que tout grand beuf qu’il estoit, elle le portoit encore.”
- 40 I, 23, 77 [109]: “elle nous descouvre tantost un furieux et tyrannique visage, contre lequel nous n’avons plus la liberté de hausser seulement les yeux. Nous luy voyons forcer, tous les coups, les reigles de nature.”
- 41 I, 23, 77 [108]: “Celuy me semble avoir tres-bien conceu la force de la coustume, qui premier forgea ce conte.”
- 42 Erasmus, *Adages*, trans. Margaret Mann Phillips, *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 31 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 31, 193. Ullrich Langer writes that, as an example of negative freedom, Montaigne’s use of the well-known story is “somewhat wacky” and “skewed.” See “Montaigne’s Customs,” *Montaigne Studies* 4 (1992): 88–89.
- 43 Erasmus, *Adages*, 192.
- 44 Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Skepticism*, ed. Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 197.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Ibid., 10; Sextus Empiricus, *Sexti philosophi pyrrhonianarum hypotyposeon libri III* (Geneva, Switzerland: H. Stephanus, 1562), 15.
- 47 For more on gender and Sextus in the Renaissance, see my *Setting Plato Straight: Translating Ancient Sexuality in the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), chap. 10; Kathleen Perry Long, “Hermaphrodites Newly

- Discovered: The Cultural Monsters of Sixteenth-Century France,” in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 183–201.
- 48 III, 5, 677 [887]: “Je dois au public universellement mon pourtrait.”
- 49 III, 5, 677 [887]: “nulle autre ne me fait plus proprement homme que cette cy.”
- 50 I, 21, 72 [102]: “l’indocile liberté de ce membre”; “contestant de l’autorité si imperieusement avec nostre volonté”; “refusant avec tant de fierté et d’obstination noz sollicitations et mentales et manuelles.”
- 51 See Lee R. Entin-Bates, “Montaigne’s Remarks on Impotence,” *MLN* 91 (4) (1976): 640–654; Yves Citton, *Impuissances. Défaillances masculines et pouvoir politique de Montaigne à Stendhal* (Paris: Aubier, 1994), chap. 3. For more on “hard” virtue, see *Ibid.*, 199–202.
- 52 III, 5, 679 [890]: “Jamais homme n’eust ses approches plus impertinemment genitales.”
- 53 Kritzman, *The Fabulous Imagination*, 49.
- 54 Judith Butler, *Senses of the Subject* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 6.
- 55 *Ibid.*
- 56 For a full discussion, see Todd W. Reeser, *Moderating Masculinity in Renaissance Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).
- 57 For a full discussion, see *Ibid.*, chap. 5.
- 58 III, 5, 684 [897]: “m’est échappé d’un flux de caquet.”
- 59 On gendered “babble” (*caquet*), see Domna C. Stanton, *The Dynamics of Gender in Early Modern France* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2014), chap. 1.
- 60 III, 2, 615 [810]: “Les inclinations naturelles s’aident et fortifient par institution; mais elles ne se changent guiere et surmontent.”
- 61 III, 2, 615 [811]: “il n’est personne, s’il s’escoute, qui ne descouvre en soy une forme sienne, une forme maistresse, qui luict contre l’institution, et contre la tempeste des passions qui luy sont contraires.”
- 62 Jean-Yves Pouilloux, “La forme maistresse,” in *Montaigne et la question de l’homme*, ed. Marie-Luce Demonet (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999), 34. My translation.
- 63 I, 1, 5 [9]: “Certes, c’est un subject merueilleusement vain, divers, et ondoyant, que l’homme.” For a fuller explanation of this juxtaposition, see my “Theorizing Sex and Gender,” 220–223.
- 64 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 6.
- 65 II, 30, 539 [713]: “de trente ans ou environ”; “qui n’a aucune montre des parties genitales”; “a trois trous par où il rend son eau incessamment”; “il est barbu, a desir, et recherche l’attouchement des femmes.”
- 66 As Kritzman writes about this anecdote: “desire is capable of producing an invisible signifier without the biological means to represent it,” in *The Fabulous Imagination*, 38. See also Regosin, *Montaigne’s Unruly Bood*, 166–167.
- 67 II, 30, 539 [713]: “Ce que nous appellons monstres, ne le sont pas à Dieu, qui voit en l’immensité de son ouvrage l’infinité des formes qu’il y a comprises.”
- 68 II, 30, 539 [713]: “Nous apelons contre nature ce qui advient contre la coustume: rien n’est que selon elle, quel qu’il soit.”
- 69 II, 30, 539 [713]: “l’assortiment et la relation.”
- 70 See William J. Beck, “The Obscure Montaigne: The Quotation, the Addition, and the Footnote,” *College Language Association Journal* 34 (1990): 228–252.
- 71 I, 28, 138 [187]: “licence Grecque”; “justement abhorrée par nos meurs”; “cette premiere fureur inspirée par le fils de Venus au cœur de l’amant sur l’objet de la fleur d’une tendre jeunesse, à laquelle ils permettent tous les insolents et passionnez efforts que peut produire une ardeur immodérée, estoit simplement fondée en une beauté externe.”
- 72 I, 28, 139 [188]: “En fin tout ce qu’on peut donner à la faveur de l’Académie, c’est dire que c’estoit un amour se terminant en amitié.”
- 73 See, for instance, Michael Warner, “Introduction,” in *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, ed. Michael Warner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), xxvii.
- 74 For more on same-sex sexuality, see, for example, William John Beck, “Montaigne face à l’homosexualité,” *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Montaigne* 9–10 (1982): 41–50; Beck, “The Obscure Montaigne: The Quotation, the Addition, and the Footnote”; Floyd Gray, *Montaigne bilingue. Le latin des Essais* (Paris: H. Champion, 1991), 77–98; Constance Jordan, “Sexuality and Volition in ‘Sur des vers de Virgile,’” *Montaigne Studies* 8 (1996): 75–80; Marc D. Schachter, “‘That Friendship Which Possesses the Soul’: Montaigne Loves La Boétie,” in *Homosexuality in French History and Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Merrick and Michael Sibal (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2001), 5–21; Todd W. Reeser, *Moderating Masculinity*, 187–214; Todd W. Reeser, “Re-reading Platonic Sexuality Sceptically in Montaigne’s ‘Apologie de Raimond Sebond,’” in *Masculinities in Sixteenth-Century France*, ed. Philip Ford and Paul White (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge French Colloquia, 2006), 103–126; Gary Ferguson, *Queer (Re)Readings in the French Renaissance* (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2008), 191–243; Todd W. Reeser, *Setting Plato Straight*, chap. 10.
- 75 Empiricus, *Outlines*, 196; Empiricus, *Sexti philosophi*, 179. On queer skepticism, see my “Re-reading Platonic Sexuality

- Sceptically”; *Setting Plato Straight*, chap. 10.
- 76 I, 23, 79–80 [111–112]: “qu’elle n’aye planté et estably par loix és regions que bon luy a semblé”; “Il en est où il se void des bordeaux publicz de masles, voire et des mariages.”
- 77 I, 23, 83 [115]: “la Royne et Emperiere du monde”; “autant par coustume que par nature les masles se meslent aux masles.”
- 78 I, 23, 83 [115]: “Les loix de la conscience, que nous disons naistre de nature, naissent de la coustume”; “chacun ayant en veneration interne les opinions et mœurs approuvées et receuës autour de luy”; “ne s’en peut desprendre sans remors, ny s’y appliquer sans applaudissement.”
- 79 I, 23, 83 [115]: “sa puissance”; “c’est de nous saisir et empieter de telle sorte, qu’à peine soit-il en nous de nous r’avoir de sa prinse et de r’entrer en nous, pour discourir et raisonner de ses ordonnances.”
- 80 For more on the limits of Montaigne’s sexual open-mindedness, see my *Setting Plato Straight*, chap. 10.
- 81 I, 28, 138 [187]: “Et cet’ autre licence Grecque est justement abhorrée par nos meurs.” This sentence from the (a) layer was the only sentence from the Greek passage in 1580.
- 82 III, 5, 652 [857]: “Tout le mouvement du monde se resolt et rend à cet accouplage: c’est une matiere infuse par tout, c’est un centre où toutes choses regardent.”
- 83 III, 5, 652 [858]: “Que veulent pretendre les descriptions si estendues et vives en Platon, des amours de son temps plus hardies?”
- 84 For a longer discussion of this topic, see my “Queer Energy and the Opaque Object of Desire in Montaigne’s ‘*On Some Verses of Virgil*’” (forthcoming). It is important to note that female-female coupling is not on Montaigne’s radar in the essay.
- 85 III, 5, 681 [892]: “La philosophie n’estrивe point contre les voluptez naturelles, pourveu que la mesure y soit joincte: et en presche la moderation, non la fuite ... elle nous ordonne, de prendre un object qui satisfait simplement au besoin du corps.”
- 86 For the full context of this issue in humanism in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, see my *Setting Plato Straight*.
- 87 III, 5, 641–642 [845]: “rechigneront à la licence de mes escrits”; “n’ayent plus à rechigner à la licence de leur pensée.”
- 88 III, 5, 642 [845]: “C’est une humeur bien ordonnée de pinser les escrits de Platon et couler ses negotiations pretendues avec Phedon, Dion, Stella, Archeanassa.”
- 89 I, 28, 135 [183]: “peintures fantasques, n’ayant grace qu’en la varieté et estrangeté ... n’ayants ordre.”