

Translating the Renaissance: the *Essays* of Montaigne

[a lecture for Kevin's translation course, LANG3001, 2 June 1999]

L.P. Hartley: 'The past is foreign to us - they do things differently there' (1)
time = distance

In this lecture, I want to ask three questions which may be three forms of the same one, and to which I hope you will be able to suggest answers as good as any I can offer: Can one translate a major Renaissance author nowadays? How should one translate a major Renaissance author nowadays? And how well can one translate a major Renaissance author nowadays? These questions arise because of the difficulty of such a translation, it seems to me, a difficulty which lies largely in the distance of four centuries separating the mind of Montaigne from ours, his culture, his assumptions, his ignorance from ours. It is a distance which affects our way of seeing, or not seeing, the shape and force of his ideas, his style, his originality, his personality, a remove at which we may be unable to discern some of the writer's essential lineaments. It is a distance which must also make us define our purpose in translating such a writer: for that purpose will greatly affect the language we use and the impression we try to give of the writer. These considerations are akin to those which arise with any project of translation of any text from a vastly different age or culture, a notable comparison being translation of the Bible, for in a sense the Bible, at least in English, is also a Renaissance text.

First, three partial definitions: Renaissance, Montaigne and *Essays*. The Renaissance, as the springtime does each year, moved northwards through Europe from Italy. The mellow woodwind sound of cuckoos, about which Englishmen still (I hope) write letters to the *Times*, is often to be heard in the woodlands of southern England in April; and no doubt in Scotland the cuckoos rejoice the ear in the month of May. But in the south of France, milder by a thousand miles, the cuckoos haunt the forests from mid-February. In Italy, the *Rinascimento* includes the fifteenth century. In England, one thinks of it as the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In between Italy's fifteenth century and

Due repetition: 'On Repetition' -
not a subject so familiar to us
nowadays, but one steeped in
Christian
culture.

England's seventeenth there lies France. And in France, the term *Renaissance* suggests especially the sixteenth century. The French word calls to mind the architecture of the châteaux in the Loire valley; the Wars of Religion between Catholics and Reformers soon to be known as Protestants; the names of a few poets: Ronsard, Marot, Scève, du Bellay (3) ~~4~~ [4]; and those of two writers of prose, Rabelais [3] and Montaigne.

Some basic information now about Montaigne (1533-1592), real name Michel Eyquem (2) ~~1~~ (de Montaigne), Eyquem though it may not look very French is in fact not an uncommon name in the south-west of France: there's a village near Bordeaux called something like that, there's a great and wonderful sweet white wine made in the part of south-west France known as Sauternes called Château-Yquem, there's even a part of the city of Bordeaux called Les Eyquems (the name is also known nowadays for a make of spark-plugs, I think). (d' ?) Montaigne was from Bordeaux, in fact he was elected mayor of Bordeaux during the 1580s. Was a lawyer by training, went to the university at the age of thirteen, used to say Latin was his native language, his father, an enlightened man for his time having had his son brought up in Latin from his earliest years, the servants being forbidden to speak in French or their dialect in the boy's hearing. The second half of Montaigne's life was spent in the thirty years of the Wars of Religion, the first of which started in 1562. He belonged to a family which contained both Catholics and Protestants (and his mother was of part-Jewish origin), a family background of diverse religious affiliations which has been seen as a source of the tolerance for which Montaigne is noted in an age when religious intolerance was lighting its execution-fires and igniting wars all over Europe. One very French atrocity was the St Bartholomew's Night massacre in 1572. (7) ~~6~~ [6]. In 1572, Montaigne retired from public & professional life, to his tower ^{google it!} ~~show~~ ^{to the point, problem} ~~show~~ ^{find solution} **postcard**, there to read and eventually write: the beams of his library and their mottoes, readable to this day. His book, *Essays*, was compiled over the last twenty years of his (5) life. the three layers of text: a, b, c, ~~14~~ 1580 (2 vols) 1588 (3 vols) & posthumous [5]. (6) Editions of the *Essays* printed without these pointers in the text can mislead and confuse. For Montaigne, ^{quite a variety} over 20 years, changed his mind on many things. (Indeed, the

eg. M. Rantier

changeability of the human mind is one of the great themes of his essays, and one of the most seminal ideas he passed down to the rest of us about the shapelessness of self.) And these changes of mind he set down beside the former now abandoned view, adding, deleting little, so that one can find successive paragraphs or sentences which contradict each other. (Actually, paragraph is a post-Renaissance concept **show photocopy of pages** of Montaigne in unbroken slabs of text.)

much

when

His three phases of intellectual development: stoicism; scepticism; Epicureanism; (8) ataraxy [4]. His favourite authors, in different phases, Seneca; Plutarch; Cicero [8] (8) .Sextus Empiricus: *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* [9]. Montaigne's « *crise sceptique* » (Pierre Villey); his medallion struck with a sceptical motto *Que sçay-je ?* [10] ✓

Plutarch: Seneca

Montaigne is one of the most original writers ever to have written: almost single-handedly, he invented a literary genre, which I don't believe any other writer has ever done. When he started writing in about 1572, there was no such thing as the essay; when he published his first collection in 1580, he had created it: the essay, the loose, relatively unstructured, personal expression of a non-specialist undogmatic viewpoint on almost any subject under the sun: one of his titles is 'On Thumbs'. The meaning of the French word *essay* was 'attempts', 'tries' or 'testings'. His *Essays* were translated into English for the first time in 1603, bearing the same French title, only about ten years after his death, by John Florio [11], one of the most celebrated and fertile translations ever of any book into the English language (**II on the accompanying A3 sheet**). If anyone ever needs an example of the immense cultural impact of a successful translation, then that of Florio is one of the very best: it has been said of Florio's Montaigne that it was 'an almost unapproached enlargement of the reading sphere of contemporary Englishmen' (Saintsbury's *Introduction*, pp. xxiv-xxv). Shakespeare presumably read Florio's translation of the *Essays*, echoes of which turn up in his later plays; but Montaigne had presumably been known in England since the 1580s in French editions, though less widely than he became known after Florio. Since Florio, Montaigne has been translated

far

of how

namely: 'as possible'

into English many times, eight or nine. Florio probably still in print and probably has seldom been out of print since the early 1600s. Because of Florio, Montaigne is almost an English author. And the genre of the essay flourished in the English language over the succeeding centuries in ways which it never did in French: one thinks of essayists like Bacon, Lamb, Hazlitt, Emerson, Robert Louis Stevenson, George Orwell, and, ~~in~~ ^{close to} our own time, Gore Vidal.

Intellectually, Montaigne is a founding father of much that is integral to the European mind. He is the most important ancestor of what we can call cultural relativism, through which he can also be seen as a seminal writer in the field of what centuries later became anthropology. Tolerance in all things, the primacy of the individual conscience, a conception of the self as utterly changeable, the difficulty of grasping or understanding the self and thereby the crucial necessity of making the effort to understand oneself, humanism in most senses of that word, an untiring curiosity about human motives and an equally untiring concern for the moral value of human acts, both private and public, these are among his legacy to us. His is one of the first European voices ever raised against belief in superstition and witchcraft (epidemic in his day), against torture (which was integral to European legal systems in his day), and against European expansion, against what centuries later would be called colonialism and imperialism. As a philosopher, though unoriginal, he has a place in the history of the dissemination of scepticism. He has particularly nourished doubters and those who suspect that majorities, ideological systems and orthodoxies are almost inevitably in error. His critique of the educational theories and practices of his day is still readable today for its wisdom, its good sense, its humour, its understanding of children: as a writer on what would nowadays be called educational theory, he was the most enlightened commentator on that subject until Rousseau nearly two hundred years later. As a sort of autobiographer, he is one of the most original writers of his time. He has strains of comedy, irony and pessimism.

But at the same time, of course, he was of his time. This is noticeable in the fact that he writes about things of which we have no knowledge, things in which our time has little interest, and that he writes about them in ways which are not ours. His prose is full of allusions to events, men and women, kings, legends, writers, poetry, fictional characters utterly unknown to us. Take Tamburlane and Erasmus [12], who are both mentioned in a piece I propose we look at soon and which you may be inspecting more closely in this week's seminar (or tutorial?). If you are a little learned, you will know that Tamburlane is, for Montaigne's contemporaries, the epitome of the fearsome warlord, the other, Erasmus, the epitome of the writer as stylist and influential intellectual. Montaigne's prose is also full of stylistic figures which we may fail to recognize, of which the most typical of his period is influenced by the Renaissance's view of paradox [13] as being inherent in human affairs, paradox being seen as not only a striking way of speaking but also a fact of existence, an inseparable feature of events themselves. Montaigne was also fond of using another figure, related to paradox, antithesis [14]. One of the most flavoursome features of his prose is its down-to-earthness: he prided himself on writing as he spoke, on using the words of the market-place and the military camp; his prose is marked by colour and verve, by simplicity and directness, by the concreteness and homespun quality of its imagery. The character of the man that comes through the voice is likable. These features of his writing, simplicity, down-to-earthness, concreteness, become more noticeable in the later essays. In the nineteenth century, Nietzsche said of him two things that must be the finest compliments that one writer could pay to another: that because such a man wrote, one takes greater pleasure in being alive; and that as he grew older, he grew younger. A nice paradox in praise of a writer much given to paradox.

impotentness, witty, often middled
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One trouble with translating a classic is that he is a classic: his reputation may lead a reader to expect too much. If in translation his subject is shorn of style he may appear trite. And how can one not divest a 16th-century author of his style if writing for a 20th-century readership? I come to my three questions: Can one translate a major Renaissance author nowadays? How should one translate a major Renaissance author nowadays? And

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how well can one translate a major Renaissance author nowadays? I propose, not to answer these questions, but to examine them by examining the different ways in which a single passage of Montaigne has been translated over the last 400 years. *↳ many times*

The first one: *Can* one translate a major Renaissance author nowadays? Well, it ~~has~~ *was* been done at least five times *in the 16th* century, either in whole or in part. Whether one does it in whole or in part depends on one's purpose in translating him; and that purpose will have an effect on other aspects of your work. One may want to produce a sampler, in which case, the Penguin selection done in 1958 by J. M. Cohen, with a minimal set of footnotes, could give an idea of what the *Essays* are like (**VI on the accompanying A3 sheet**). Or one may take the view that the book as a whole should be kept alive. In which case, one of your aims will no doubt be to accompany it with as much commentary, as many footnotes, as required to make the *Essays* intelligible to any modern reader. This would suggest that a scholar in the field of French Renaissance studies should be at least associated with the enterprise, if not single-handedly in charge of both translation and commentary. This was the case with the translation of Donald Frame (also 1958) (**VII on the accompanying A3 sheet**) and that of M. A. Screech (1991) (**VIII on the accompanying A3 sheet**), each of them men of extreme eminence in their day in French Renaissance studies. A specialist in the field will always do more justice to the content of the text, both semantic and cultural, though he may not necessarily be himself gifted with a matching expertise in style.

Which reminds me of John Florio, whose Jacobean translation is sometimes criticized for two things: one, the errors it contains, for instance, *poisson* (= fish) translated as 'poison'. And two, Florio's exuberance, his liking for amplifying Montaigne's text, for example, Montaigne's statement on the kisses of youth *les estroicts baisers de la jeunesse, savoureux, gloutons et gluants* becomes 'the close-smacking, sweetness-moving, love-alluring and greedy-smirking kisses of youth' [15]. This is often quoted as a liberty taken by Florio. But is it such a liberty? It is certainly creative and full of flavour. But, for

Montaigne's four adjectives, Florio too gives us only four adjectives, albeit double-barrelled adjectives, crammed with more meaning, and more inventive. Translating Montaigne nowadays, would it be possible to say such things as Florio does? To take such liberties? There would be little point, no doubt, in trying to reproduce a Jacobean style nowadays, for two reasons: because Florio still exists and because Florio would do

SAINTSBURY, George: Introduction to The Essays of Montaigne Done into English by John Florio, London, David Nutt, 1892

vol I

pp xvi-xvii:

"The more carefully comparison of his version is made with his original, the better, I think, will it serve to show that the translation, as a whole, cannot be called unfaithful, despite the liberties and the occasional downright mistakes noted above. But, except from the merely pedagogic-pedantic point of view, such a plea is hardly needed. Save for the purposes of a 'crib', or of a pure exercise in scholarship, intended to benefit rather the writer than the reader, it is of infinitely less importance that a translation should be done on the verbum verbo principle than that it should, as far as is (xvii) possible, produce on its reader the effect which the original produces on the reader of that original. And, that it may do this, the certain vital qualities which it must possess consist much more in the spirit and vigour of the phrase, in the gust and character of the version, than in bare faithfulness to the thing translated. In these qualities few translators have surpassed Resolute John when he is at his best.

xvii: What a relish is there in writing of this sort! What a curious sense of life and art as contradistinguished from vegetation and drudgery!

that [the translation] should, as far as is possible, produce on its reader the effect which the original produces on the reader of that original'. While in complete sympathy with the spirit of Saintsbury's comment, I do have a difficulty with that second principle—and another difficulty in defining what my difficulty is. The difficulty lies in the unknowability of 'the effect which the original produces on the reader of that original'.

Cf. John Sturrock's reason for not translating quotations from Racine in Proust:

The big reason for leaving certain quotations in French so far as I was concerned was to avoid having my versions of Racine in the main text, since these wouldn't have anything like the effect the French must have on French readers [his email of to Prousters, 26 April 1999].

How might one find out what *is* 'the effect which the original produces on the reader of that original'? Who is this 'reader of that original'? Is he (or she) the actual reader who

read the *Essays* in 1580? Or is it the ideal reader that Montaigne had in mind in 1580? Surely not—how could we nowadays attempt to reproduce such an unknowable effect on such an unknowable pair of readers, actual or ideal? In any case, readers then were probably just as diverse and irreducible to an ideal figment as they are nowadays. Well, is this ‘reader of that original’ the French person who might read Montaigne nowadays? I confess I don’t find it any easier to define either the mind of such a person or the effect that a reading of Montaigne would have on it nowadays. And I suspect that your average French reader nowadays would have greater difficulties in understanding Montaigne’s French than the average reader of English would have in reading Shakespeare. I do wonder why, with a 400-year old text, one should aim at reproducing the effect it might make on a reader of the original nowadays. I think this is one of those impossible, literally impossible, totally unachievable, almost indefinable, principles (like complete fidelity to the author’s meaning, tone and intention), which all good translators believe in, which all profess and strive towards, but which we can only pretend to practise in our own way, which someone else may see as unprincipled. It may even show the danger, for the principled practitioner, of attending too much to theory and principle: to be a good translator it is not necessary to know much of either and they can get in the way of perfectly good practice.

‘Vegetation’ and ‘drudgery’ then, as we inspect some of the small details making up the general feel of the language. Saintsbury is no doubt right to say that we must judge a translation ‘as a whole’. But a whole is only the sum of its parts. And if the parts are faulty, can the whole be deemed to be good? See the comment of David Lodge (16, on sheet)

Here read out the glosses (to give them just of the passage)

strata indicators are very helpful, especially to the unaccustomed reader. Hence I feel that any edition that aims at giving basic editorial assistance to the threads of a difficult argument (by paragraphing, say) should also give these a, b, c, notations, whether the edition is partial, like Cohen's, or complete, like Trechmann's or Frame's. However, this goes more particularly for editions like Ives, Frame and Trechmann, which can make some claim to being scholarly editions. Of the ^{IV VII V} ~~six~~ ^{2 VII VII} translators we consider, only ^{them} ~~one~~ (Frame ~~& Javed~~) agrees that this code is indeed necessary. To my mind, this earns him a plus mark in my rough and ready marking system.

^{Another} has to do with 2nd point about details, Montaigne's view of human experience and the way this affects his writing, i.e. style in the Essais and some of the reasons for it.

One of the most fundamental ingredients in M's view of the world is paradox; and this propensity to see paradox in all things, and to verbalize that paradoxical content of experience in paradoxical structures, gives to M's prose its recurring figures of oxymoron, antithesis and the balanced two-part statement.

Look at the Montaigne, passage I on the accompanying handout:

the first sentence states a sort of paradox: that excellence of character is not to be equated with exceptional deeds, but with a habitual disciplined steadiness, an evenness of conduct. And that paradox is expressed in an antithesis, a loose antithesis, mind you, the opposition between haut and ordonnement but still an antithesis, and one which (in its context in the essay, viz. a comparison in admirability between Alexander the Great and Socrates, to the detriment of Alexander) is ~~is~~ felt by the reader as an antithesis.

the second sentence: (beginning the longish late interpolation at C) expresses the same paradox in other terms; and this time a) the antithesis is more marked, between grandeur & médiocrité and b) the paradox is more pointed by the repetition of grandeur.

the third sentence: the long sentence (8 lines), likewise an antithesis: on the one hand, we have the people who know one privately (qui nous jugent et touchent au dedans), they do not get taken in by our fine public behaviour; and on the other hand, the ones who know us only publicly, they are deceived about our private character. A balanced sentence in two elements, noting something like a paradox about human beings and expressing it antithetically, the antithesis

being structured merely by the ainsi que at the beginning and by the en pareil cas in the fourth line.

the fourth sentence: a short link between the two parts of the paragraph, going from the general to the particular. It may be seen as the 1st element of a diptych of which Tamburlane forms the second element in the next sentence.

5th, 6th & 7th sentences: are all examples of the way reputation influences our perception of people, so that we magnify them and fail to see their essential ordinariness. The 6th (on Erasmus) and the 7th (about the workman on the lavatory) together form another diptych, another statement in two elements.

Each of these sentences is also of similar structure, each of them containing two binary constructions (typical of the Renaissance writer):

6th: adages et apophthegmes (alliteration, also typical of Montaigne);
à son valet et à son hostesse

7th: sur sa garde-robe ou sur sa femme
maintien et suffisance

the eighth sentence: another antithesis, on haut and s'abaissent.

Hence, if Buffon's dictum ~~about~~ that le style c'est l'homme même is worth respecting, it is clear that, in order to give to an English reader a feeling of what Montaigne himself is like, one will have to use in one's translation of him devices such as: very evident binary structures; antithesis; paradox; alliteration; though not necessarily everywhere M uses them. (By very evident, I mean making sure to have the visibly identical pattern of words in each half of the construction. Unlike, say, Florio, who says 'upon his close stoole or on his wife', a small point, but worth noting. Or Ives, who says (passage IV, 1st sentence): "moving at a height, but fittingly", thus losing the antithesis.

3rd point about details: another very important element in M's ways of writing

a) the ubiquitousness and b) the concreteness of his imagery, examples of which one has especially in the third sentence, the long one, with its jugent & touchent au dedans expressing concretely intimacy with someone; and the extended metaphor: filets & pointes d'eau fine rejaillies d'un fond au demeurant limoneux et poissant. (accoupler and visée are other examples, in this piece, of that concrete figurativeness that is dyed-in-the-wool of Montaigne's prose. As with the binary structures, presumably some attempt must be made to transpose into English that strong flavour of the figurative and the concrete.

Although, as with the binary constructions, not necessarily in a one to one ratio. The metaphorical correspondences between English and French do not match each other closely ^{enough} to permit this without committing what Professor Weightman calls 'queerspeak' — a rule that all of these translators infringe to some extent, as they stick almost word for word to M's terminology (except by Ives, who uses 'source', for fond, instead of 'bottom' which is favoured by the other four. I'm afraid "a muddy bottom" makes me think of an infant not yet house-trained than a river).

4th point about details: to do with the differences between a 16th century essayist and the language used by a 20th century translator. To my mind, this poses the biggest problems of them all for the translator of someone like Montaigne. For, if ^{you} he decides on the one hand to reproduce something of the flavour of Elizabethan prose, by sprinkling ^{his} text with quaint and tasteful period verbiage, ^{you} he runs the risk of being ridiculous, or not doing it well enough, of writing in that sham-antique style that used to be called Wardour Street English. On the other hand if ^{you} he decides to be resolutely contemporary, ^{you} he runs the risk of producing insipidity, like the Rabelais of Cohen in Penguin (Rabelais being usually 3 parts style to one part content, if one fails to capture the verbal flavour and goes for the meaning, what one does capture is not worth reading. There is also the risk that, by couching 16th century concepts ~~in~~ in 20th century language, one will make one's author trite; or the other risk: of not being able to do it thoroughly, because of unmanageable cultural allusions or now outmoded beliefs, and thus of having an incongruous and disconcerting mixture of styles.

It seems to me that Professor Frame, despite all his expertise on M, has come a cropper over this point. He says, in his Note (p xv):

"I have tried (...) to express M as I think he would have expressed himself had he been writing in English today".

That statement suggests so many objections that I do wonder if it means anything at all. I think the biggest objection of all is this: that if M ^{of} were

writing in English today (insofar as that is conceivable, which I agree is almost not at all!), then he would probably not be writing about the sort of subjects that exercised his mind in the 16th century; or if he did write about, say, the subject of this chosen passage, he would probably be a specialist of some sort and his ways of writing would be unrecognizable as M. For example, on this subject he might well be an American popular psychologist (Speak, Sidney!):

handy
for J.B. Bentley
 = IX & X
 (here, include p 6.1)
are

Now, in some ways, that 20th century version is "Montaigne as he would have expressed himself had he been writing in English today": it is faithful to the basic meaning; it preserves the antitheses of the structures (albeit hidden in verbiage); it includes a couple of cultural allusions familiar to a 20th century audience. And (I venture to suggest) it would prove vastly more readable to most 20th century readers than any of these other 20th century versions!).

But, of course, in fundamental respects, it is no longer Montaigne.

And, equally of course, Professor Frame's version is nothing like it. But then it is nothing like 20th century English in some ways either. Frame chooses 'mediocrity' (line 3) as a translation of médiocrité, although he knows that word usually meant 'moderation' (a term of approval), and that 'mediocrity' in 20th century English is a term of disparagement. Elsewhere, Frame uses expressions like "when it so befalls"; "he was so little finicky"; "at grips with"; "defluxion of rheum"; and, for Montaigne's kidney-stone, "colic". Yet, of course, were any translator to take Montaigne at his word ("Le parler que j'ayme, c'est un parler simple et naïftel sur le papier qu'à la bouche") would produce a Montaigne to displease many a 20th century reader.

It seems to me that the best a 20th century translator of a 16th century author can aim at is (to use an apt word of Dr France's) a timeless version.

That is, to avoid using (or over-using) terminology of a marked modern flavour;

to limit oneself to a sort of basic educated vocabulary; and, of necessity, given these inhibitions, to have great difficulty in giving to his version that vitality, so marked in, say, Florio, that a writer gives to his prose

through having a total unself-conscious freedom in his choice of words.

is that by loss of flavour, one loses also the point of the thing: cf. modern versions of the Bible, in quite charmless English. Style is content to a large degree.

So much for the general considerations of some of the problems and basic desiderata in an English version of Montaigne: the contradictoriness of things he says; the paradoxical worldview and its effects on style; the ubiquitous concreteness of the imagery; and the special problems posed by the ^{more than} 400 years culture-gap separating Montaigne from the ^{early 20th} late 20th century.

Now, I want to inspect, briefly, each of our ⁹ translators and see how each of them measures up on those desiderata.

FLORIO (passage II)

printed all in one paragraph: Montaigne's paragraphs, having been invented by modern editors, were non-existent in the original, each essay being an unindented block of ~~print~~ print. Florio uses few paras, but he does break up Montaigne's text a little, though not enough for a modern reader;

no a, b, c, notations; âme he renders as 'minde', to my mind a small plus for Florio, too many people assuming that âme and soul are exact replicas of each other, which is not the case (for example, in English, Christianity has all but annexed 'soul', which has not happened in French to âme);

haut/ordonnement: the antithesis is kept in 'going high/marching orderly';

grandeur/grandeur: the repetition is kept in 'greatnesse/greatnesse';

mediocrité becomes 'mediocritye', which is no doubt acceptable in Jacobean English;

the 3rd sentence is divided into three parts, dislocating to some extent the apparent antithetical structure of it;

juvent & touchent^{au}/dedans; filets & pointes d'eau fine etc: the English is a

word for word transposition of Montaigne's imagery;

si loin de leur visée 'amaze them so far from their levell' (here Florio, typically, copies M's slack syntax);

at four points, Florio adds, mainly adjectives:

i des formes sauvages = 'savage shapes and ougly formes';

ii visage affreux = 'sterne frightfull visage';

iii taille = 'forme or shape';

iv and in the 2nd last sentence venerable par son maintien et suffisance = 'reverend for his carriage and regardfull for his sufficiencie';

none of which irk me — in fact, the maintien et suffisance one is quite felicitous, giving another binary structure. Mind you, this adding by Florio has been objected to over the years, for example by Grace Norton in 1904:

(here add p 8.1

"".....""

To which I would add: there is another mistake in that sentence she quotes that she doesn't mention (the omission of seulement lors). And: she is probably mistaken in what she says about 'success' — it probably meant, in Jacobean English, 'that which happened to' and therefore 'action' fits well enough.

Nor does it strike me as very true to say, as she does that Florio's additions and doublings-up are 'useless' — both French and English, during the period of the Renaissance, were given to what Fowler calls 'Siamese twins' (synonymes ou approchans, as they were called in French by the 17th century grammarians who took exception to them): 'let or hindrance'; 'ways and means'; 'kith and kin'; 'leaps and bounds'; or Florio's 'shape or form'. Montaigne often uses pairs, especially if they alliterate; it is partly from that that his homely proverbial flavour comes. However, the fact is that Florio does add, especially ad-

jectives, a good example being the (often quoted) sentence in which Montaigne describes ~~the~~ les estroicts baisers de la jeunesse, savoureux, gloutons et gluants,

(~~three~~ ^{four} expressive adjectives, two of them alliterating), of which Florio makes Dylan Thomas:

"the close-smacking, sweetness-moving, love-alluring, and greedy-smirking kisses of youth".

Mind you, this adding by Florio has been objected to over the years:

~~10.1~~

8.1

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Grace Norton on Florio:

« "...his abundance is constantly redundance; he has a tiresome use of clumsy compounds and is fond of useless synonyms, while with Montaigne one word is seldom the 'synonym' of another; each added word is an added thought. To illustrate this ^{fully} would take too much space, but a fair example may be found toward the close of the third chapter of the first Book, where in one sentence, that about Diomedon, Florio inserts the words 'ruthless', 'exemplar', 'cruelly', 'bloody', 'I say', 'earnestly', 'revenge'; translates faict by 'success' instead of 'action', making the sense unintelligible; translates paisable (sic) by 'plausible' (probably a misprint, but one that Mr Henry Morley, as editor, accepts); and translates descouvrir (here meaning 'to lay bare') by 'exasperate', again obscuring the meaning. The character — the quality — of the writing is thus changed throughout..."

(from Studies in Montaigne, 1904, p 256, note, quoted by Ives (1946) vol I, xx >> pages IX-X)

* Success probably did mean 'action' in Jacobean or Elizabethan English = "that which happened to"

also: another mistake by Florio that she didn't mention: omission of seulement lors (p. 18, my ed.)

* not very true: English & French, both given, at that period, to Synonymes ou approchans (syn? or near-synonyms).
e.g. 'let or hindrance' 'leaps & bounds' } what Fowler calls 'Siamese Twins'
'shape or form' 'ways & means'
'time & tide' 'aid & abet'
'each & every' 'fear & trembling'
'kith & kin'

& M often uses pairs, esp. if they also alliterate; partly from this that the homely proverbial flavour of M comes — & if one seeks to preserve that homely proverbial flavour, one must (at least now & then) write pairs of near-synonyms & alliterate.

however, the fact is that Florio does add, especially adjectives — a good example being: a) M writes: les estroits baisers de la jeunesse, savoureux, gloutans & gluants; b) 'the close-smacking, sweetness-moring, love-alluring, and greedy-smirking kisses of youth' (!) makes Dylan Thomas:

haut/s'abaissent: Florio gets the neatest words for this antithesis: 'high/low';

ils: he makes of this 'they', which is misleading — in Montaigne's slack syntax ils= President, but in translation it can momentarily appear to include the artisan as well.

All in all, I find that, using a rough-and-ready marking scheme, I give Florio on this passage +6 and -5!

Florio, it must be added, is frequently inaccurate. It is not my job here to reiterate the old charges (that he mistakes poisson for 'poison' etc), but to say only that it would have been easy to choose a passage from Du repentir that would have been much more typical of Florio's shortcomings than this one.

Cotton/Hazlitt (passage III):

a late 19th century revision of a late 17th century translation.

all in one para; no a, b, c, code;

aller haut/ordonnement: Cotton has probably the best attempt of the 6 at an exact antithesis for this sentence: 'in flying high/in walking orderly';

âme/'soul' (?);

grandeur= 'grandeur' (probably 'greatness' would be preferable, being more accurate and more concrete;

mediocrité= 'mediocrity'; in 1892? (the same goes for 'sufficiency' and 'hostess', lower down: in 1892, all these words would be misleading to readers);

3rd sentence in 3 parts: as in Florio, masking the binary structure of the antithesis;

jugent & touchent au dedans etc: all pretty much word for word, which, in a modern translation, is somehow less acceptable than in Florio;

si loin de leur visée/'out of their sight': which comes close to being an error and is certainly extremely misleading;

taille desmesurée: I like Cotton's 'prodigious stature';

le bruit de son nom: = 'the report of his name' I find preferable to 'report

of his fame', favoured by most/other moderns;
 of the

Erasme
Qui m'eust fait veoir/autrefois: for this straightforward statement, each
 and every one of these translators manage to make a clumsy English:

'Had any heretofore shewed me Erasmus...'; 'Had any one formerly brought me
 to Erasmus...'; 'Had I been taken in former times to see Erasmus...';
 'At one time, if I had been introduced to Erasmus, I could hardly have etc' (this
 being Trechmann's misplacing of a clause and misleading the reader about Mon-
 taigne's meaning); 'If, years ago, I had been taken to see Erasmus...'; 'If I
 had been able to see Erasmus in other days...' — all of which have the fault
 of being wordy and awkward ways of saying "If I had ever met Erasmus...".

ils= 'they', the same small misleading detail as in Florio (Cohen being the
 only one of the six to spot this: he uses 'men');

haut/s'abaissent becomes 'high/abase', which loses some of the concreteness
 and the congruence of the two words in French and thus weakens the point of
 the antithesis.

My general reckoning on this piece gives Cotton/Hazlitt +4 and -12, a score
 lower than the one I would have given by an impression-mark.

IVES (IV):

the 'figleaf' edition, debowdlerized in 1946.

omits the strata code — which Frame says the original 1925 edition in-
 cluded; however, in this revised 1946 edition, no a, b, c notations;

âme= 'soul'?

haut/ordonnement= 'moving at a height, but fittingly', which seems to me to
 abolish not only the antithesis, but also the meaning, which is consubstantial
 with the figure of speech. The same goes for his final sentence where, for the
haut/s'abaissent antithesis, he gives us 'lofty/condescend';

grandeur= 'grandeur'; (less concrete, hence less good);

mediocrité= 'mediocrity' (and, lower down, suffisance= 'sufficiency') in 1946?

fond= 'source', a good point (though one suspects that Mr Ives only chose it

because he was shocked by the alternative 'bottom!');

the 3rd sentence: he puts it into two parts, thus preserving the shape of the antithesis — but he gets the meaning wrong! By starting with 'Thus' and continuing, three lines lower, with 'even so', he makes Montaigne say something he does not say;

hostesse: 'the hostess of his inn' strikes me as needlessly wordy; and a mite misleading;

A general glance at other parts of Lives suggests that he has rather too many misprints. And misprints are somehow more misleading in a translation than in the original.

Marks: +3 and -15, the lowest score of all six.

TRECHMANN (V):

First, a good general point about this version: he gives help to the reader with running heads on each page, enabling one to find particular passages with some ease.

Secondly, a bad general point: he suggests, usually via his footnotes, that Montaigne, on religious matters, is a dissembling rationalist whose aim is to undermine Christianity. This is probably the grossest misreading of the Essays ever committed. Trechmann inherited this travesty of Montaigne from the generations of 19th-century, French, anti-clerical commentators on Montaigne who, from Sainte-Beuve onwards (partly because they read him in editions without the strata-code), believed it was impossible for a Renaissance man to be enlightened, humane and a Roman Catholic, and who culminated in the early 20th century in the dominant critical view of Dr ~~Armaingaud~~ Armaingaud. And it is from Armaingaud's atheistic Montaigne that Trechmann's reading of the essayist really derives, I suspect.

This, however, does not show up in the text of his version, only in the biased patten of his footnotes and in the Introduction by J.M. Robertson, who talks of

Montaigne's "agnostic and anti-dogmatic sanity" — despite which, surprisingly, it is still a cogent and illuminating introduction!

Trechmann divides the piece into two paragraphs. To which I have no objection. Except that, since it is all a marginal addition (C), it may well be that Montaigne wrote it all at one go. There is certainly a thematic coherence in it that would justify printing in one paragraph.

the first two antitheses are preserved; the grandeur is well enough coped with;

mediocrité becomes 'middle state', which is probably preferable to the 'mediocrity' of Ives and Frame;

the 3rd sentence: the imagery is word for word, like everybody else;

fond: here we have 'depth', which I think is better than 'bottom';

the 3rd sentence is in three parts, thus losing the binary shape;

visée: becomes 'vision', which is to say the least unfortunate and misleading, if not downright mistaken;

the Erasmus sentence I have mentioned above, with its misplacing of the adverbial clause so that it modifies the wrong verb;

hostesse: Trechmann gives us 'landlady', which strikes me as a bright idea;

garderobe: to translate this as 'stool' is surely misleading when the context deals with an 'artisan'?

the last three sentences: one notices that all of these sentences of Trechmann are borrowed, word for word, by Ives (1946); hence the weaknesses of the one are the weaknesses of the other.

In general, a good sound translation, despite Dr France's disagreement. On this question of our disagreement over the value of Trechmann, I offer an anecdote: I asked an uninformed reader for an opinion on these six versions of this passage, as translations and on their general readability. The answer, completely uninfluenced by me, was that the best of them was... Trechmann. For what it's worth. However, I do feel that this version does share with the other modern versions the fault of sticking so close to the ^{letter} ~~words~~ of Montaigne's imagery as to be decidedly odd at times.

Trechmann's general style is 'timeless' rather than modern — 'Georgian' is Trechmann's hint at his style.

Marks: +6 & -10

COHEN (VI):

gives no strata-code; borrows Trechmann's paragraphing;

âme = 'soul' ;

haut/ordonnement = 'height/steady movement', which loses some of the point;

grandeur/grandeur = 'greatness/mighty', which loses the repetition by which Montaigne sharpens the paradox; however, Cohen compensates for this by making the ~~antithesis~~ vehicle of the antithesis the two adjectives 'mighty/intermediate'; the 3rd sentence: is split into three parts, one of which is a separate sentence, thus abolishing the visible shape of the antithesis;

jugent & touchent au dedans, filets & pointes etc: Cohen keeps to word for word English;

visée: he plumps, like Trechmann, for 'vision', which is a pity, making an obscurity in the English where there is clarity in the French;

taille desmesurée: he borrows Cotton/Hazlitt's expressive 'prodigious stature';

adages et apophthegmes: here we assume Mr Cohen goes right off the rails -- his 'precepts & maxims' is understandable enough, I suppose, but he deprives the informed reader of the learned quip on the titles of Erasmus;

hostesse: Cohen takes Trechmann's bright idea of 'landlady';

un grand President: his 'Chief Justice' seems to me a felicitous modernization giving to a modern reader a cultural equivalent of vivid concreteness;

haut/s'abaissent: is neatly rendered as 'high/low';

ils: as I mentioned before, Cohen is the only one to dodge this minute obscurity, using 'men'.

So, this particular passage of Cohen is not bad; it is good, bad and indifferent. A thoroughly professional job, in fact, i.e. worth about $6\frac{1}{2}/10$. My marks: +5 and -13.

FRAME (VII):

the only one to give the a,b,c, strata code;

âme = 'soul';

aller haut/ordonnement: 'flying high/orderly pace' seems to me not as neat as Florio's or Cotton's;

mediocrité I have mentioned elsewhere;

calque of the original;
 the 3rd sentence: the imagery is/word-for-word/ the sentence is made in 2
 parts, thus preserving and pointing the antithetical observation;

visée: Frame borrows Ives' 'scope', which is a good word here;

hostesse: 'hostess' strikes me as vague and questionable: who on Earth is
 Erasmus' hostess, for goodness sake? Is this 20th century English? Trechmann's
trouvaille of 'landlady' ~~has~~ is perfect, because it is trite, concrete, prosaic &
 bathetic;

sur sa garde-robe: 'on the toilet seat' seems wilfully coy to me;

haut/s'abaissent: 'stoop/lofty' seems to me to weaken the point of the oppo-
 sition;

ils = 'they'

In the main, this is a highly correct version of Montaigne. Mind you, Prof-
 essor Frame is not infallible; one can find here and there errors.

Marks: +5 and -11

Ranking:

1 Florio +6 -5 = +1;

2 Trechmann: +6 -10 = -4;

3 Frame: +5 -11 = -6;

4 equal Cohen ~~and Cotton/Hazlitt~~ +5 -13 = -8
 Cotton/Hazlitt +4 -12 = -8

5 Ives: +3 -15 = -12

VIII - Farelch & XI mhe: do yourself

NB This leaves out of account the readers' purposes served by each one; and
 also leaves aside the whole effect of a complete reading of each version. For
 example, I know that Cohen has more actual mistakes than this passage would
 suggest — in this one essay, of 15 pages in my edition, I noted about 10 or 11
 points in Cohen that could be called errors.

Also, Florio benefits, by virtue of being Elizabethan from indulgences not
 extended to the moderns. For example, Frame in his scrupulous fidelity to
 Montaigne's imagery, writes for a translation of du fond des entrailles
 (meaning a 'heart-felt' cry) 'from the depth of my entrails' which, in a
 version that purports to be 20th century, verges on the ludicrous. Whereas, if
 Florio had written that, we should probably not hold it against him. For, when
 it comes to Montaigne's expression exercice basse et obscure, Florio gets
 away with writing 'base and obscure excercitation'; while the moderns, who would

never be allowed to write any such thing, have to search for other expressions:

'humble and obscure actions', 'mean and obscure employment', 'lowly & obscure activity'.

Having played the eunuch, commenting on others' performances while not venturing to perform myself, I propose now to read to you my own timeless version:

(see page 15.1 "...")

Conclusion:

I think I agree with Trechmann's suggestion, made half a century ago: that somebody should revise Florio, eliminate the errors and retain as much of the period flavour in the writing as possible. It should be amply footnoted, just as Shakespeare is footnoted for those whose native 20th century English cannot comprehend extinct vocabulary. It should have a glossary, which the first modern editor included but which seems nowadays to be omitted. It should be paraphrased.

more than 3/4 of

*

*I have said nothing about
Serech's version
I have not marked by plus/minus
the "timeless" version -
perhaps you cd. do that
& discuss them in yr. tutorial?*

roughly a copy of a paper read (in collaboration with Peter France, Sussex)
to the Seminar on Literary Translation
(HRC, ANU, 2nd September 1977)

A Consumer's Guide to English Versions
of Montaigne's Essais : Du repentir

85 years ago, Geo Saintsbury wrote an Introduction, wise and invigorating, to my mind, to a reprint of the first English translation of the Essais, that by John Florio (1603). That year of 1892 was a good year for Montaigne in English, there being not only that reprint of the Florio (not long rediscovered), but also the WC Hazlitt revised edition of Chas Cotton's late 17th century translation. Both of these were in fact tercentennial publications, M having died in 1592.

Saintsbury, in that Introduction, canvassed the main criticisms and objections made against the Florio version — "the liberties and the occasional downright mistakes" — canvassed them, and then dismissed them. Dismissed them because of what he sees as Florio's redeeming virtues, what he calls "certain vital qualities"; "the spirit & vigour of the phrase"; "the gust & character"; "the "relish" in the writing! Saintsbury's main point is that the version must be judged "as a whole" (p xvi). And that whole, he says,

"remains an almost unapproached enlargement of the reading sphere of contemporary Englishmen" (ppxxiv-xxv).

It must be judged as a whole. But a whole is only the sum of its parts. And, if the parts are faulty, then it is surely only by a Panglossian reasoning that the whole can be deemed to be good.

So: what we are about to do is inspect parts, examine the detail of what goes to make up the whole, not only of Florio but of his more recent competitors. I honestly don't see how else one can judge a translation. Since it is the accumulation of detail, apt or inapt, that gives to the whole its total effect. The 'feeling of insecurity' mentioned by David Lodge in The Language of Fiction (1966, Routledge & Kegan Paul, p 20) as being the feeling one has when reading a translation, is certainly the feeling one gets from the translation as a whole. But it is caused, as Lodge says, by

"the accumulative effect of innumerable, minute uncertainties, awkwardnesses, anomalies, and ambiguities in the language".

Which is to say that the effect of a translation as a whole is the result of the details, of the components.

Details, then: in the first part of this paper I am going to mention the points which I consider a good translator of Montaigne should be aware of and try to take account of to some extent.

1 the code of A, B, C, notations which tell the reader which stratum of the text he is reading. The Essays were written over a period of 20 years, roughly 1572-1592. Nowadays French editions usually employ a ^{typographical} code of a, b, c notations, or some such device to mean:

- a (roughly) material first published in 1580 = 1st ed, 2 books;
- b (roughly) material first published in 1588 = 1st ed of 3 books;
- c (roughly) material 1st published posthumously, and written 1588-1592

the point being that M, through an afterthought of 1592, can juxtapose contradictory statements, one written in, say, 1572, and another 20 years later, when he has outgrown that previous attitude. Now, this can be very misleading. I must disagree with what JM Cohen says (p 20 of his Introduction):

"the identification of the successive strata helps no one to follow his argument"

There are many places where this is patently not true, not only those mentioned by Frame (at p xvi of his 'Note on the Translation'), but even in this very essay Du repentir — e.g. on page 233 of my edition (Classiques Garnier) Montaigne, talking of apportioning blame for one's past errors, on the same page one finds this:

b je ~~n'ay~~ ne m'en prends pas à moy; j'accuse ma fortune;

and then one para later:

c je n'ay gueres à me prendre de mes fautes ou infortunes à autrè qu'à moy

where the inconsistency is made all the more flagrant, and surely all the more misleading by his use of the same verb in both statements. This raises the questions: for whom is one translating? Why translate M? For what purposes? Cohen's translation, offering a mere quarter of the Essais, is a sampler, so to speak. That is to say, he does not aim at giving anything like a complete picture of the book he is translating. On those grounds he would probably be excusable for omitting the strata-code — but, notice: that's not the ground on which he does omit it! No, the ground on which he does base his exclusion of the a, b, c, notations (is, as I say, that it "~~is~~ helps no one follow M's argument") ~~is~~ and that ground, to my mind, is fallacious. As I have just said, I think these