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‘Vous Ne Pouvez Le Savoir — Car Vous Vous Détournez’

Liz Guild

(You cannot know — for you turn away)¹

Afterwardsness comes before insight

Lacan, and Montaigne: ‘la vue des angoisses d’autrui m’angoisse matériellement’.² The questions this essay begins to explore form a continuum between Lacan’s averted gaze, and Montaigne’s identificatory absorption, the former’s apparently intolerable, unknowable object, and the latter’s desire to ingest: ‘et le couche en moy’ (I.21, 143) (and lodge it within myself (109)). But it is less an exploration specifically of Montaigne’s text than of issues articulated in the essays by ‘angoisse’, a suffering associated both with desire and torture. Whilst ‘angoisse’ may not be translated simply as ‘anxiety’, as a signal of the anxieties of those times the term is revelatory, especially when coupled with questions of what could (not) directly have been seen or known, and when associated with what already disturbed the supposed confidence and determination of Renaissance visual perspective.

But, as to put Lacan ‘before’ Montaigne suggests, there may be temporal as well as visual/spatial perspectives to question, as Du Bellay’s violent theory of writing illustrates.³ In early modern culture, in which an author assumed his place in a genealogy of authors, his writing incorporated and transformed earlier texts to produce his ‘own’; reading was a form of textual ‘cannibalism’; others’ last words displaced, no longer ‘last’, but one’s own never quite own, or last — rather, the not yet-eaten-words of unknown authors yet to come. What is in abeyance in this model of the processes of reading and writing is the issue of the author’s relation with the meaning of his ‘own’ text: is what is there to be eaten what the author thought he wrote, or is there more beyond what he knew was in it?

For French humanists the desire for knowledge may have been potentially dangerous; but no less so, to relinquish that desire. It is perhaps in this context that Du Bellay’s metaphors capture something

of an anxiety and ambivalence about writing. They dramatize four fundamental issues: the coupling of destruction and creation; the disturbance of a linear chronology of before and after; a desire for wholeness—for the cannibalistic metaphor of generation coexists with that of the text as the child—simultaneous with a necessary fragmentation and fracturing; and an impulse to possess (knowledge) together with a profound suspicion of this desire.

The manifestations of such anxious ambivalence in early modern texts continue to fascinate later readers; indeed some of them may only become visible to latecomers.⁴ Whilst our relationship with earlier textual authorities is very different to that of early modern readers, what of our desire, as it encounters these traces of anxiety, ambivalence and desire, and also, sites of unknown knowledge in the text?

Running through much recent early modern scholarship are questions of 'identity'; and whether the theme be 'subject' and 'object', Old and New World, proto-capitalist and slave, masculine and feminine, Roman Catholic and Huguenot, European and cannibal, even Roman Catholic and cannibal, a structuring, or in some instances deconstructing opposition can be identified, namely inside and outside.⁵ Such readings may unsettle what are in the texts themselves not-yet-settled conceptualizations of the relations between 'self' and 'other' that haunt our thinking about the concepts of identity which such differentiations produce. It may well be that a double emphasis, on what is unsettling, unsettled or transitional in the texts of early modernity, together with exploration of the structures involved, is especially fruitful.⁶

A particular gift of psychoanalytic thinking, especially Lacanian, for which understanding of structural relations is vital, are the topologies and structures it offers us to enable analysis of what might otherwise remain resistant to understanding. Here, I want to draw on the psychoanalytic emphasis on structures and topology, namely the interconnected registers of the Symbolic, Imaginary and Real (the traumatic dimension of being which resists symbolization), to explore further what can be known of early modern structures of feeling, particularly relating to anxiety and desire, as manifest in instances of what, perhaps, texts did not yet know of their own possible meanings. A certain theoretical *perspective* is needed if we are to understand further what was not *directly* known, knowable or representable in early modern texts.⁷ Thus the essay draws on anamorphosis, that is, the visual/spatial equivalent of the *après-coup*, Freud's *Nachträglichkeit*,

together with a focus on anxiety, so as to offer ways to develop understanding of the effect in certain texts of desire, particularly culturally prohibited or difficult desires, which make texts sites of anxiety. It will explore examples of this perspective, reading early modern texts from the 'later' theoretical perspective, so as to bring into focus what in the text cannot be 'seen' directly, or could not yet be known at the time of writing. Not a historical perspective; but not a historically irresponsible perspective either. A psychoanalytic reading will focus on what remains to be known differently in the text, and also on its disavowals, its resistances, what is heterodox; therein lies its responsibility.

When an earlier text and a later reader—or perhaps also a later text (such as the body of knowledge that is psychoanalytic theory)—encounter each other, what follows will inevitably be an act of translation, however closely attentive to the operations of the earlier culturally available discourses through which the original text is articulated. Such translation need not do violence to the text (except insofar as any reading will, as the early modern cannibalistic metaphors suggest); rather, its different perspective may reveal what in the homogeneity of the text seems suspect, for instance, the lure and distraction of its narrative coherence, or how what is missing makes its presence felt indirectly. This act of translation which prizes what is other in the text, and which may therefore produce a version of the text which might even be unrecognizable, might also be called anamorphosis. This concept thus puts the problem of anachronism onto a different footing. It is key to psychoanalytic interpretative practices, but is already at home in the early modern period; it has come, of late, to belong to both (without that making them 'like').

The term which emerges in Lacan's eleventh seminar, *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse* (1964), 'belongs to' the early modern period; not originally, but it acquires particular force then, as Lacan's choice of example, Holbein's *The Ambassadors*, reminds us. The anamorphic object, in its topological relation to 'everyday' reality (the reality of the Symbolic order) shows us something about the dialectic of desire, of the Real from which the 'subject' is structurally split. It is a signal of anxiety, of the unassimilable trauma that Lacan associates with the Real, and its site is at the very edge of representation; its indirect effects set the scene on edge. Lacan casts the early modern as: 'l'époque où se dessine le sujet' (83) (the period in which the subject emerged (88)). While this highly condensed grand narrative should be treated with caution, it nonetheless raises a

key question here: what is the particular place of anamorphosis in this culture of the emergent subject?⁸

The context of anamorphosis is not only the culture of scientific experiment, inquiry into optics, and fascination with the distortions required to produce 'regular' geometrical, visual perspective, but also its association with death, as a favoured device for *memento mori*, and also with the trace of death in life; not for nothing is the apparently meaningless, disruptive anamorphic object in Holbein's canvas a skull. The portrait represents two men in the prime of life, surrounded by symbols of their worldly status and success; but when viewed from the only angle from which the 'skull' can be seen, the rest loses its form and force.⁹ After Lacan, Žižek, articulating the relations between 'theory' and 'culture' gives anamorphosis even more play and purchase. Lacan theorized the phenomenon in the context of the gaze; for Žižek, the potential of the temporal perspective matters as much as the spatial, that is, the *après-coup*. The 'unexpected angle' that is so visually revelatory, is in Kay's words

the visual equivalent of the *après-coup*: it is the backwards glance that assigns meaning to what had previously seemed troublesome, inconsistent or resistant to analysis. [Žižek's primary objective is] to 'look awry' at theory through the seemingly incompatible register(s) of culture; but as we move from one perspective to another, the logic of anamorphosis operates dialectically to ensure that we also see culture in a new light (...). [C]ultural artefacts make visible, in anamorphosis, the relation of our symbolic and imaginary reality to the real.¹⁰

However, there is more at stake than a visual trick or an optional 'backward glance', as is made clearer by Freud's original concept of *Nachträglichkeit*, retrospection, afterwardsness: namely, that it is only — indeed will only have been — afterwards, later, in the future, that the significance of a past event can emerge, as Lacan's and Žižek's rereadings of this concept in Freud demonstrate.

Holbein's canvas gives cultural weight to a phenomenon that might otherwise to us seem to be marginal, or tricky, a form that has less epistemic foundation and force than it has technical virtuosity, belonging to an aesthetics of shock, losing force through repetition and recognition. Rather than visually capturing the disrupting, heterogeneous force of death in life, it risks assigning it too familiar a place, too mappable a relation with the rest. However, there is a third possibility: that the seeming assimilation of what is 'meant to be' unassimilable will, on further interpretation, remind rather of its remaining unassimilability and unbinding force. Coupled to all

of these is the other perspective: namely, what earlier texts reveal to later texts and readers of what they themselves could not see before or were resistant to knowing. This must be so, given that anamorphosis/*après-coup* rests on a different understanding of the chronology and space of the hermeneutic process. Afterwardsness comes before insight. In what follows, I shall explore, in the space available, anamorphic effects which may already (if only afterwards) be identified within the text, so as to suggest the productiveness of such a dialectical reading—productive in rendering unrecognizable, even: not the imposition of extraneous desires on the text so much as a reading open to that which is only obliquely representable, or to that from which representation turns away ('se détourne'), or to what, brought within view, may give more insight into what would otherwise seem resistant to interpretation.

My examples are drawn from prose texts, Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron* and Montaigne's *Essais*. Whilst the second is primarily a temporal instance, the first is both temporal and spatial, chosen not least for its own exploration of narrative desire and its ambivalence about heterogeneity; it is also a rich example in terms of its relation of afterwardsness to Boccaccio's *Decameron* and other earlier narratives; lastly, if it is read as *in some ways* a realist text, the specificity of its setting, stranded far from home after a flood, sets up the place of narration in an 'anamorphic' relationship with the rest of the social world. As for the *Essais*, my focus here will mainly fall on instances of reading, specifically, two instances of different kinds of not knowing associated with texts and reading.

*The 'Heptaméron': 'pire que la mort' (worse than death)?*¹¹

The stories told and discussed in Marguerite de Navarre's text come after a cataclysmic flood, and 'after' Boccaccio's *Decameron*. That the earlier text would be known to readers, and that they might wish to keep it in mind as they read the later is indicated in the Prologue to the *Heptaméron*, where it is invoked as the narrators' model, as they embark on storytelling as a curative and pleasurable pastime.

The perspective adopted here requires a reading that does not turn away from what can be known if the anamorphic perspective persists, and also that the narrative pleasures of this text be resisted; 'narrative dissimulates the radical contingency and flimsiness of the symbolic order; it embodies, naturalizes and fixes fantasy in a way that can only block analysis'.¹² The text's first narrative, that of the

depredations suffered by its narrators-to-be, some returning home from a curative visit to a spa, thematizes just this flimsiness of the natural and social order: lawlessness and natural disasters assail them, prevent their safe return. However, the fragility of their world, as they have just experienced, will not play as a caution throughout what follows; on the contrary, if anything, their not remembering is what is insisted on; that is, precisely, the dissimulatory force of narrative tends to prevail. It is therefore up to the reader to keep it in view, and read from this perspective.

However, there is some residual resistance. The text's own interruptions of the narrative flow, more disruptive than those in Boccaccio's text, already suggest this; they offer us cautionary examples of 'bad' reading, for instance as resistant listeners 'translate' narratives into recognized, untroubling terms and values; they also repeatedly offer examples of interpretative impasse — only released by telling another story; at times they seem to promote a different kind of reading or 'translation', authorized because it recognises in the narrative the traces of biblical or theological themes, concepts and debates. That this position does not always or inevitably dominate, without resistance, seems to suggest the text's openness to heterogeneity. It does not simply uphold the fantasy that narrative pleasure either rests on, or is productive of, stable, single, authoritative meaning.

But it is only resistant to narrative's dissimulations and homogenizing 'pull' up to a point: on the whole, the foundations of the social order (God, marriage, parental and royal authority — masculine or ventriloquized by women) remain fundamentally unquestioned, or if questioned, it is 'only a story'. The anamorphic potential of the setting is rarely realized; or if recognized, the countervailing resistance is stronger. This anxious ambivalence is particularly clear in the thirty-second story, of 'crime and punishment', told to Bernage, ambassador of King Charles VIII, and to whom he in turn recounts it. A nobleman in whose castle Bernage passes a night tells him the story of his beautiful wife, 'la plus malheureuse femme du monde' (244) (the unhappiest woman in the world (333)), to explain the scene witnessed by his dinner guest, namely, her drinking from a man's skull watched in silence by her husband. This was her punishment for adultery: for the husband to kill the lover was not punishment enough: her dead lover's skull became her drinking vessel, his skeleton hanging in her wardrobe her silent companion: *memento mori*. The silence of both men is the eloquent reminder that her desire was judged 'unspeakable'. Bernage reproached the husband's behaviour;

his reproach converted sadistic revenge and repulsion into compassion and a renewal of sexual desire, for the wife went on to bear her husband many fine children. What this narrative also produced was the King's insistence that he have a portrait painted of this great beauty—*'pour luy rapporter cette dame au vif'* (245) (her living likeness (334)). Parlemente, first to comment, judges with spurious symmetry: *'Je trouve (...) ceste punition autant raisonnable qu'il est possible; car, tout ainsy que l'offence est pire que la mort, aussy est la punition pire que la mort'* (245) (I find the punishment extremely reasonable (...) for just as the crime was worse than death, so the punishment was worse than death (334)). Thereafter, the discussion is quick to veer away from the horror of the story. It turns away: so what remains to be known, which the text will not know?

The skull/vessel and the skeleton are the closest that Marguerite de Navarre's stories come to a narrative tradition, still alive in Boccaccio's text, of the eaten heart: women punished for illicit affairs by being forced, usually unknowingly until 'too late', to eat the heart of the slain lover. In some instances of the earlier narrative, the perversely punished woman will transcend the husband's desire and power by embracing death: pronouncing the meal the best ever, she will never eat again. What is striking in Bernage's narrative is the transformation it forces from unassimilability to assimilation: however cruel the 'poetics' of the punishment, nothing so transgressive as cannibalism enters the text. The wife is saved, but perversely, betraying her love, re-embraced by the culture which wants of her to bear legitimate sons. The sadistic voyeuristic pleasures of the narrative are not allowed to resonate, but are bound, in the closing stage of the story, by the king's desire to have captured, for his visual pleasure, her 'living likeness'. Stilled life. The 'living likeness' (*au vif*) seems to function, on a first level, as the antithesis of the skull; however, the eyeless sockets of the dead lover's skull and the painted representations of the eyes of the unhappiest woman in the world share a structural place in the narrative, in that both in turn occupy the place of the gaze, are effects of the Real, signalling to the subject—the husband, and in turn the king, in all his asserted worldly power—disturbing his vision of himself as one who holds power, reminding him of what he does not possess or know of the unhappy woman's desire and of his own. A signal of anxiety.

The skull does not vanish; rather, the two artefacts, skull and 'living likeness', which obeys the Platonic rule of 'perfect copy', are not simultaneously visible from the same perspective. Possession of her

portrait seems to claim her symbolically; but this only covers over the Real of her story, the annihilating effects of desire on the subject, and also the terrible knowledge that commandments (Thou shalt not . . .) can have been broken; how to cover over that terrible knowledge? It has left the women a 'living likeness' of herself (*au vif*) as a woman who still belongs in a world in which prohibition holds, keeping anxiety and unspeakable desire at bay.

The desiring woman is tolerated in this late, adulterated 'eaten heart' narrative by being punished, first sadistically, then by being represented as desiring what men desire for her. The force of her desire—disruptive of the male bond—seems neutered, stilled, repossessed. It is only with a great deal of interpretative insistence, drawing in anamorphically the discarded, unrepeatable aspects of earlier versions, that the 'living likeness', through which she becomes the king's possession, is able to work its anamorphic effect: to allow the 'skull' back in, at the edge of the frame. That is, to remind of the Real from which the symbolic order averts us, affecting *everyone*, rather than being identified with the feminine, rather than being tamed into moderate narrative pleasure and the coherent overlay of the narrative of paternal sagacity and potency, as in this late, submissive version of the transgressive and perverse effects of desire. Why the 'eaten heart' narrative 'goes missing' in the sixteenth century (re-emerging next in Camus's moral tales) is too vast a topic to explore here. To speculate: was it to do with the urgency of the theme of symbolic cannibalism in murderous theological conflict? Early modern belief and theological preoccupations are the necessary dimension to explore for further understanding of these emerging questions of subjectivity, and of the relations between cultural anxiety, desire and ethics.

The text's tendency, then, is to tolerate the presence of some resistant elements and perspectives, but only insofar as they are assimilable, rather than allowing their disruptive, but subsequently creative potential to resonate across the text. The binaries which structure it work to resist what is other—'pire que la mort' (worse than death)—becoming too insistent, and the narrative pleasures distract also; what is then called for is a reading which focuses on the ambivalences and anxieties which haunt the text, and are important aspects of its representation of what troubled the culture that produced it.

'Que c'est sçavoir et ignorer [. . .] doit estre le but de l'estude' (I.26, 206)
(what knowing and not knowing means ought to be the aim of study (178))

The aspects of Montaigne's *Essais* that give it a place in this discussion have to do with reading: less the author's own direct reflection on his reading practice and pleasures, which often are unsurprising or safe, than two examples of strangeness, the first of his own text, the second, a strangely moving instance of the power of reading:

//Et je ne sçay si je n'aimerois pas mieux beaucoup en avoir produict ung, parfaictement bien formé, de l'accointance des muses, que de l'accointance de ma femme.

///A cettuy cy, tel qu'il est, ce que je donne, je le donne purement et irrevocablement, comme on donne aux enfans corporels; ce peu de bien que je luy ay fait, il n'est plus en ma disposition; il peut sçavoir assez de choses que je ne sçay plus, et tenir de moy ce que je n'ay point retenu et qu'il faudroit que, tout ainsi qu'un estranger, j'empruntasse de luy, si besoin m'en venoit. Il est plus riche que moy, si je suis plus sage que luy. (II.8, 73)

(//I am not at all sure whether I would not much rather have given birth to one perfectly formed son by commerce with the Muses than by commerce with my wife.///As for this present child of my brain, what I give it I give unconditionally and irrevocably, just as one does to the children of one's body; such little good as I have already done it is no longer mine to dispose of; it may know plenty of things which I know no longer, and remember things about me which I have forgotten; if the need arose to turn to it for help, it would be like borrowing from a stranger. It is richer than I am, yet I am wiser than it. (451))

Let us accept for the moment the earlier opening comment on Montaigne's desire for a textual child being stronger than for one of flesh-and-blood, and focus instead on the later (///) addition, inserted as he reread his own text, fleshing it out. The textual child has acquired independent life and significance, it is no longer the author's own ('il n'est plus en ma disposition' (no longer mine to dispose of)), and has knowledge that Montaigne now lacks ('il peut sçavoir assez de choses que je ne sçay plus'/it may know plenty of things which I know no longer). What he no longer knows is precisely what in the text makes it strange to him, properly other to him; he must have forgotten those things that he knew for them to become the text's — or only to become known thereafter by other readers: having forgotten, no longer knowing, how would Montaigne recognize this lost knowledge in the text? It would come back to him (if it did) but as borrowed knowledge; or as estranged knowledge, with the capacity

to reveal to him what he did not yet know for/of himself. What at first sight seemed unexceptional, the suggestion that the text will act as his memory, on further reflection, seems altogether stranger. And when he goes on, to insist on (still) being wiser than the text, in what would his wisdom lie? In forgetting? In what he no longer knows? In what it would be wiser not to know?

Whatever his paradoxical wisdom consists of, what is clear in this comment is Montaigne's fantasy of the text's meaning being beyond him, no longer his own; other readers will find in the textual child that survives him and bears his name things he would not recognize or know. We can draw a line from this rather startling moment in Montaigne's writing to what has become a banality of literary criticism and theory, whether we think in terms of the gap between intention and meaning, or of the textual unconscious—terms unavailable to an early modern writer and reader. What matters here is to allow the moment to resonate in this text, in which it is not yet a given, and to read the essays with this in mind.

In its honour, I turn to a second example from the *Essais*, an instance of reading in which the theme of what is not yet known returns: I shall call the scene a philosopher in love.

Et Socrates, plus vieil que je ne suis, parlant d'un object amoureux: 'M'estant, dict-il, appuyé contre son espaule de la mienne et approché ma teste à la sienne, ainsi que nous regardions ensemble dans un livre, je senty, sans mentir, soudain une piqueure dans l'espaule come de quelque morsure de beste, et fus plus de cinq jours depuis qu'elle me fourmilloit, et m'escoula dans le coeur une demangeaison continuelle'. Un attouchement, et fortuite, et par une espaule, aller eschauffer et alterer une ame refroidie et esnervée par l'aage, et la premiere de toutes les humaines en reformation! Pourquoi non, dea? Socrates estoit homme; et ne vouloit estre, ny sembler autre chose. (III.5, 106–7)

And Socrates, when older than I am, said in talking of someone he loved, 'When we touched shoulders and brought our heads together while looking at the same book I felt, I can assure you, a sudden jab in my shoulder like an insect's sting: it went on irritating for five whole days, and poured into my mind a ceaseless longing'. — A mere touch, by chance, on the shoulder, was enough to warm and disturb a soul chilled and enervated by age, a soul which was foremost among all human souls in its re-formation. And why not? Socrates was a man: he never wanted to be, or seem to be, anything else. (1009)

What is missing in Montaigne's version of this love story is Socrates' friend. The philosopher did not know that it was love that touched him: it took his friend Charmides' teasing for him to realize this, five

days later.¹³ The philosopher did not know, for it came through the body; he needed a friend to tell him. It seems that philosophy alone is not enough, but depends on a different kind of understanding if it is, belatedly, to gain insight into what would otherwise remain unknown. Here, then, is a scene of the link between reading, knowledge, love and friendship. What is at stake, here, is how to read what in Montaigne's text is no longer 'his to know', but was also already not yet known to him until it emerged in the text: in part, anamorphically, *après-coup*, but also in part, an act of interpretative 'friendship', without which 'love' is not seen. When, later in 'Sur des vers de Virgile', Montaigne comments: 'Je n'ay point autre passion [sc. l'amour] qui me tienne en haleine' (108) (I have absolutely no other passion but love to keep me going (1011)), what does he mean? What is the link between Montaigne and Socrates ('plus vieil que je ne suis')? What is not 'known' without the body being touched, which only, later, a friend can lead one to know? What is not altogether known in/by this text, without a different, afterwards, interpretation?

Montaigne's description of Socrates' discovery of love seems a faithful translation of the original in Xenophon's *Symposium*, which already insisted on its truthfulness: 'sans mentir' (without lying). But the reality of the experience nonetheless seems only obliquely representable, as a puncturing of the skin, a rash; the surface of the symbolic order is punctured; the Real makes itself felt. Anxiety is like a rash; desire 'bites', it eats you up. This materialization in metaphors is a signal of an 'edge phenomenon', a communication which disturbs the sense of a clear boundary between inside and outside, and lingers without its meaning becoming any clearer except insofar as it prevails, troubles and insists. Montaigne's version translates the original into French and additionally translates; it adds pathos to the sting: 'un attouchement', and seems to assimilate the scene seamlessly into his own text: 'Pourquoy non, dea?' (and why not?). But perhaps this needs to be resisted, and read as a lure, which averts from the sharp otherness of the moment of desire's bite and instantaneous entering which Socrates seems paradoxically slow to understand.

This reading suggests a functional similarity between the insect's sting and the skull in Marguerite de Navarre's *nouvelle*. Montaigne's text offers both an example of the temporal *après-coup* and also another instance of a sixteenth-century text's deceptive assimilation, averting the reader's attention from the anxiety of a difficult desire. Even if Montaigne's account seems to run a line between him and Socrates, through the comparison of their ages, and to palliate the sting of desire,

nonetheless, the sting's vivid forceful otherness is not fully assimilable, is a still disruptive presence, the truth of which eluded Socrates and the 'true' significance of which for Montaigne remains veiled. The potential meaning of this scene of reading as an activity which might incubate such other knowledge, both feared and desired, remains to be discovered by being read, in another, later scene of reading.

Let us return to the missing friend, for what is left out in Montaigne's version, as much as what remains or is added, should engage us. Despite the comparison between Socrates and Montaigne, that the friend is missing is perhaps unsurprising, given the abhorrence avowed in 'De l'amitié' for the 'licence Grecque' (234) (licence of the Greeks (210)). In the frame of the *Essais* as a whole, the 'sting' and rash are the anamorphic site of what may otherwise not be admitted and can only obliquely be represented, making its presence felt.

Towards the close of the essay 'De l'amitié', Montaigne refers again, as at the start, to his dearest friend La Boétie's *De la servitude volontaire*, but obliquely: 'oyons un peu parler ce garçon de seize ans' (242) (let us hear a while this sixteen-year-old boy (218)). This, whatever the essay has earlier said to condemn the 'licence Grecque', is difficult not to read as a reference to the beloved, La Boétie eternally sixteen, even if Montaigne is aging. In their friendship, neither was one or the other, each was both lover and beloved. Towards the end of 'Sur des vers de Virgile' is this other scene of reading. It is the connection — *après-coup* — of the later moment to the earlier on which I want to pause again here, to explore further the 'passion' that brings men together over reading; Montaigne finds it more difficult to allow this 'passion' its full resonance than most of the phenomena that are beyond the probable or the culturally sanctioned. His text is otherwise strikingly open to the enjoyment of such phenomena and to the need to acknowledge that which is not yet knowable, that which challenges existing discourses, perceptions and *doxa*. This is not to suppose that the unthinkable or inadmissible are one and the same as the unassimilable; but they do converge.

It is helpful, at this point, to return to the text, in all the richness of its detail (none of Xenophon's original is lost). 'Un attouchement, et fortuite, et par une espaulle' . . . Here, precisely, it is the writing's caution and faltering that is so moving in this description of love stealing into Socrates as he and Critoboulus sit shoulders together, heads bent over a book; reading together, or in Bartlett's translation of Xenophon's text, 'searching for something in the same book' (150), falling in love; let us allow, for a moment, *après-coup*, that this is what

is meant by hearing the sixteen-year old boy speak. The truth of the moment escapes (even) Socrates, who needs a friend to tell him what it is he feels; perhaps it also escapes Montaigne, although he tells the love story. Perhaps not: precisely because his thoughts are so quick to move on in this essay, from the philosopher falling in love but not knowing it, to what philosophy has to say about love and desire; what it knows, however, appears to be not very much, for it fails to understand that the nature of desire is precisely never to be satisfied: philosophy's lesson of moderation seems somewhat beside the point. Perhaps, however, there is a different way of reading this: Socrates' knowledge is not enough, does not 'know' love when it touches him. To 'know' it requires a different form of knowing, knowledge that comes from a heterodox, different place, figured here by the body and the friend; or, we might say, a reading concerned with disavowed desire and with what is not yet known; a reading in which a psychoanalytic perspective articulates what an earlier cultural and textual phenomenon, anamorphosis, signalled in these troubled texts.

NOTES

- 1 J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire, livre XI: Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse* (Paris, Seuil, 1973), 83; translated by A. Sheridan, *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1977), 88.
- 2 Montaigne, ed. A. Micha, *Essais, Livre 1* (Paris, Garnier-Flammarion, 1969), I.21, 143; all references to this edition. Translated by M. Screech, *Montaigne: The Complete Essays* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1991): 'The sight of another man's suffering produces physical suffering in me' (109).
- 3 I have in mind Du Bellay's vocabulary of devouring digestion and appropriation of the text read by the writer-to-be in the *Deffence et illustration de la langue francoyse*.
- 4 Key examples include: T.C. Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1979), J. Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 1992) and G. Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, translated by R. Martinez (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
- 5 See for instance, *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, edited by M. de Grazia, M. Quilligan and P. Stallybrass (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996); *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, edited by D. Hillman and C. Mazzio (New York and London, Routledge, 1997); *Cannibalism and the Colonial World*, edited by F. Barker, P. Hulme and

M. Iversen (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998); and N. Kenny, *The Uses of Curiosity in Early Modern France and Germany* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004).

- 6 For instance, T. Cave, *Pré-Histoires: Textes troublés au seuil de la modernité* (Geneva, Droz, 1999), and *Pré-Histoires II: Langues étrangères et troubles économiques au XVI^e siècle* (Geneva, Droz, 2001).
- 7 This is not to discount — far from it — the rather different positions taken by scholars such as Skinner and Moriarty.
- 8 If the subject is emergent, that is, not universal and transcultural, is the Real? Is the phenomenon of anamorphosis in this culture an indication of the cultural specificity of the Real also?
- 9 For further analysis, see J. Baltrusaitis, *Anamorphoses ou magie artificielle des effets merveilleux* (Paris, Olivier Perrin, 1969). See chapter 7 for discussion of Holbein's canvas; Baltrusaitis emphasises the 'allegorical' function of the skull.
- 10 S. Kay, *Žižek: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2003), 51, 72.
- 11 Marguerite de Navarre, *L'Heptaméron*, edited by M. François (Paris, Garnier, 1967), 245. All references to this edition. Translated by P.A. Chilton (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1984), 334.
- 12 Kay, *Žižek: A Critical Introduction*, 69.
- 13 Xenophon, *Symposium*, 4, 27–28, in *Xenophon: The Shorter Socratic Writings*, edited and translated by R. C. Bartlett (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1996) 133–72 (150).