

Part I

Early Modern Economies and Ecologies

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Through a Glass Darkly: Dominion and the French Wars of Religion

Abstract: This chapter proposes an ecocritical reading of early modern French political and polemical writing via the biblical notion of dominion. The frequent recourse to the conventional, didactic medieval genre of the *principum specula* [mirrors for princes] throughout the religious ‘troubles’ of the sixteenth century foregrounds and reworks the notion of advising the prince on how to address the associated destruction of infrastructure and economy. Essentially, the ‘good’ prince (Henri IV) is depicted as taking responsibility for conscientious management of the royal domain and French dominions broadly conceived, whereas the ‘bad’ prince (Henri III) is castigated for neglecting the same, and for ceding control to corrupt agents (the Gallican Church; royal favourites). This chapter focusses primarily on ‘late’ additions to *principum specula* literature, such as the variously attributed 1581 triptych of *Le Secret des finances de France*, *Le Miroir des François* and *Le Cabinet du roi de France*, as well as Jean-Aimé de Chavigny’s 1594 repackaging of Nostradamus’ prophecies, *La Première Face du Ianus François*, and references such classics as the *De duodecim abusivis saeculi* [*On Twelve Forms of Abuse*], long attributed to Cyprian. These works, which often take the form of actual books of accounts, however exaggerated – even fabricated – for polemical purposes, undertake to assess the physical state of the realm late in the Wars of Religion. In them can be found early signs of an environmental consciousness for which the sovereign is held increasingly accountable, albeit always in the ultimate interest of *human* prosperity and wellbeing.

Avant que l’homme, eut peché contre toy,
D’ouailles & beufz, avoit la seignorie
Incontinent, elle fut deperie
Quand eut peché, en transgressant ta foy.¹

[Before man sinned against you,
Over sheep and oxen he had dominion.
It was lost abruptly
When he sinned by transgressing your faith.]

To what extent – if at all – did contemporaries consider the French Wars of Religion (1562–98) in environmental terms? The question is of potential topical interest, given that crediting medieval and early modern Europeans with some form of ecological consciousness we ‘moderns’ can appreciate and elucidate

1 Mathieu Malingre, *Noelz nouveaulx* ([Neufchâtel]: [Pierre de Vingle], 1533), Cv-C_{ii}v [unreferenced translations are mine].

(if, primarily, the better to condemn) is manifestly an academic growth industry.² Period partisan accounts of the endemic violence and destruction occasioned by the ‘troubles’ over more than three decades, however diffuse and sporadic, themselves constituted something of an ephemeral publishing boom.³ Replete with aggrieved reports of personal and/or collective injury and outrage, most often marshalled polemically as proof of a perpetrator’s sacrilegious otherness, such accounts do necessarily include – but rarely foreground – incidents of environmental degradation. When they do, the referenced degraded environment is almost invariably man-made: the domestic, civic and military infrastructure, as it were, of sixteenth-century life.⁴ Such a corpus might thus seem an unlikely source for signs of ecological awareness, (early modern or otherwise), in view of the common perception that such consciousness relates to a focus on the *natural* environment; on ways, as ecocritic Jonathan Bate so eloquently phrases it, ‘of reflecting upon what it might mean to dwell with the earth.’⁵ Yet it is precisely

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- 2 Richard C. Hoffmann, *An Environmental History of Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); John Aberth, *An Environmental History of the Middle Ages: The Crucible of Nature* (London: Routledge, 2013); Bruce T. Boehrer, *Environmental Degradation in Jacobean Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Gabriel Egan, *Green Shakespeare: From Ecopolitics to Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2006); John F. Richards, *The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003); Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600–1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500–1800* (London: Allen Lane, 1983); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York, NY: Academic Press, 1974). For a thoughtful proof of the latter book’s ecocritical *bona fides*, see Jason W. Moore, ‘The Modern World-System as Environmental History? Ecology and the Rise of Capitalism’, *Theory and Society* 32.3 (2003), 307–77.
 - 3 Andrew Pettegree, Malcolm Walsby and Alexander S. Wilkinson, *French Vernacular Books: Books Published in the French Language before 1601* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Jean-François Gilmont, *GLN 15–16: les éditions imprimées à Genève, Lausanne et Neuchâtel aux XVe et XVIe siècles* (Geneva: Droz, 2015).
 - 4 As we might expect, acts of iconoclasm loom large in anti-Protestant polemic. See Carlos M. N. Eire, *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Lee P. Wandel, *Voracious Idols and Violent Hands: Iconoclasm in Reformation Zurich, Strasbourg, and Basel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
 - 5 Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 266.

here that at least one striking early modern formulation of a thoughtful relation between humans and the environment can nonetheless be found.

This chapter will thus focus on a sample of generically and thematically connected didactic and polemical works in French from the second half of the sixteenth century, all of which can fruitfully be read as contributions to the venerable tradition of the *principum specula* – mirrors for princes. These works profess to offer sage advice on the art of governance to novice sovereigns. Logically enough, works of this nature tended to proliferate in periods of political instability, and their dissemination was greatly enhanced by the exploitation of printing technology in the early modern era, especially during the Wars of Religion, when a significant percentage of vernacular polemical texts exhibited associated moralising characteristics. They multiplied almost exponentially under the last Valois monarch, Henri III (reigned 1574–89), not only in the form of the weightier self-proclaimed ‘mirrors’ considered here, but also in a torrent of short ephemeral works – often enough single-sheet, octavo, sixteen-page broadsheets or pamphlets – with telltale titles: so many *advertissements*; *advis*; *discours*; *harangues*; *remonstrances*; *responses*; *requestes*. Aside from attempting to (re)define relations between confessions, among subjects, and between subjects and sovereign (as to be expected in a series of conflicts that were ultimately as civil as they were religious), they disclose something about the way sovereigns and subjects should relate to the environment, advising on how best to manage it in the interests of personal and general prosperity.

In 1594, Jean-Aimé de Chavigny, a medically trained humanist, published poet, and former secretary to the oracular apothecary Michel de Nostredame (Nostradamus), brought out in Lyon *La Premiere Face du Janus françois*,⁶ a bilingual exegesis of his late mentor’s *Prophéties*, or *Centuries*.⁷ Chavigny’s unabashedly partisan work sorts and arranges the famously enigmatic quatrains into a triumphalist facing-page French/Latin chronicle of ‘les troubles, guerres civiles & autres choses memorables advenuës en la France & ailleurs’, from the arrival of Lutheran heresies in France in the 1530s, through the assassination of Henri III

6 Jean-Aimé de Chavigny, *La Premiere Face du Ianus François, contenant sommairement les troubles, guerres civiles & autres choses memorables advenuës en la France & ailleurs dès l’an de salut MDXXXIII jusques à l’an MDLXXXIX fin de la maison Valesienne* (Lyon: Roussin, 1594).

7 On the historically cloudy identity of Chavigny, see Bernard Chevignard, ‘Jean-Aimé de Chavigny: son identité, ses origines familiales’, *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance* 58.2 (1996), 419–25.

in 1589.⁸ It is dedicated to the Bourbon successor, Henri IV, whose abjuration of Calvinism in July 1593 cleared the final obstacle to legitimate sovereignty and – Chavigny foretells – the assumption of universal empire, with an explicit and expansive guarantee of peace and prosperity for all.⁹ In the second of two notes to the reader – the first delicately dispatches the hazardous issue of prophecy in an orthodox Catholic context –, Chavigny endeavours to give providential meaning to decades of confessional strife in France. They are to be understood, he argues, as divine punishments for French waywardness, for the French having shifted their devotion – like Noah’s hapless contemporaries – from the creator to the creation. It was, according to Chavigny, the extraordinary largesse of that creation that led humans in Genesis, as in Valois France, into the impious ‘vice d’ingratitude’:

Quiconque aura leu attentivement les saintes escritures, & quelques histoires profanes aussi, aura appris & remarqué que ce tres sage & tres grand Architecte de tout le monde combien qu’il soit tres riche & abondant, & n’ait faite d’aucune chose qui se puisse voir, ou non voir, à creé neantmoins & fait de rien tout ce beau pourpris des cieux, la terre, le Soleil & ceste Lune, & toutes autres choses que nous apprehendons par les sens, *pour l’usage des hommes & commodité*: voire deployant les tresors de sa grande liberalité & magnificence à *conferé à l’homme* plus que pour ses necessitez ordinaires: de sorte que par la creation & *don gratuit* de tant de choses, l’humain genre à *moyen de iouyr de tous biens* avec plaisir & contentement, & se former ça bas un petit paradis terrestre.¹⁰

[Whosoever will have read holy scripture attentively, together with a few profane histories, will have learned and noted that the very wise and great Architect of the entire world, however rich and abundant and lacking in nothing seen nor unseen he may be, has nevertheless created and made out of nothing the vast vault of the heavens, the earth, the sun and the moon, and all other things that we can perceive with our senses *for the use and comfort of humans*. Indeed, disbursing his treasures with great liberality and magnificence he has *bestowed on humans* more than their ordinary needs require, such that by the creation and *free gift* of so many things, the human race has the means *to use all goods* with pleasure and contentment and to make for itself here below a little earthly paradise.]

Like all post-Edenic terrestrial paradises, it has suffered – and will suffer – human and environmental degradation of quasi-apocalyptic proportion, be it flooding, war, famine and/or pestilence as a means of correction. Chavigny’s copiously annotated edition of the *Centuries* proceeds to demonstrate that Nostradamus

8 Although only one edition of Chavigny’s work is known to us, a number of close variations were published in Paris in 1594, 1596 and 1603.

9 Chavigny promises the second, forward-looking ‘face’ of Janus for 1607, once said empire will have been realised, but no sequel came to print.

10 Chavigny, *La Premiere Face du Ianus François*, 13 [my emphasis].

foresaw this most recent fall from grace, and prophesied the advent of its Bourbon redeemer.

As the excerpted passage repeatedly accentuates, Chavigny takes for granted the notion of dominion; in other words, as medieval historian Lynn White Jr so contentiously wrote a half-century ago, 'the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man'.¹¹ Chavigny's concerns are immediate and local: he invokes biblical dominion primarily as a potent analogy for the very real French royal dominion in its various manifestations – physical, spiritual, political, economic –, all of them devastated by war resulting from Valois misrule. In a controversial article published at the dawn of the 'ecocritical age', White Jr posited Judeo-Christian dominion as the historic root of, and justification for, our very different – in scope, in scale, in significance –, but not unrelated, modern 'ecologic crisis', the product of ostensible (Western) misrule. The profuse critical response provoked by his thesis has not, in common with the crisis, become exhausted or resolved.¹² It continues to generate, as White Jr fully intended, much worthwhile debate concerning medieval and early modern (lack of) European environmental consciousness, and its practically mandatory expression in terms of Christian cosmological hierarchy, as extrapolated from Genesis 1.28. Chavigny's treatment is perfectly consonant with White Jr's thesis: he assumes that his contemporaries' relation to creation, hence to the environment, must begin with Genesis, just as in the case of his rearrangement of Nostradamian prophecies. He can thereby herald a renewed post-war commitment to it, personified in the accession of a new and vigorous Catholic dynast (Henri IV), who will be responsible for restoring the proper management ('usage'; 'iour'; 'se former') of the environment for the benefit ('commodité'; 'plaisir'; 'contentement') of his subjects, as God the Master Builder ('grand Architect') intended when he freely gave the wealth of creation to his creatures ('conferer'; 'don gratuit'; 'tresors'). Good stewardship is, then, the defining feature of the monarch in Chavigny's formulation, and the *Ianus François* can be read as the latest variant in a long line of *principum specula*.

Chavigny's lesson is not terribly original: the chronic civil disorder under the last Valois kings – three brothers who each contended with some degree of *de*

11 Lynn T. White Jr, 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis', *Science* 155.3767 (1967), 1203–7 (1207).

12 Jacques Grinevald, 'La Thèse de Lynn White, Jr (1966): sur les racines historiques, culturelles et religieuses de la crise écologique de la civilisation industrielle moderne', in *Crise écologique, crise des valeurs? Défis pour l'anthropologie et la spiritualité*, ed. by D. Bourg and P. Roch (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2010), 39–67; Hoffmann, *An Environmental History of Medieval Europe*, chapter 3.

facto or *de iure* maternal regency – prompted numerous didactic works on kingship. If the veritable metastasis in France of Machiavelli's *Il Principe* following Jacques Gohory's 1571 translation¹³ – not to mention such censorious reactions as Innocent Gentillet's *Contre Nicolas Machiavel*¹⁴ and Jean Bodin's *République*,¹⁵ both from 1576 – set political theory on a pragmatic modernising course, earlier paradigms of idealised just kingship persisted.¹⁶ Closely aligned with Chavigny's interpretation was the tenacity of the *De duodecim abusivis saeculi*. Long attributed to third-century bishop Cyprian of Carthage, and reinvigorated by Catholic printer Frédéric Morel's translation (1563), coinciding with Charles IX's majority, it enjoyed multiple strategic reprintings through the 1570s (after the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre; on the accession of Henri III). Morel's dedicatory epistle to Henri d'Angoulême – the legitimated half-brother of the last three Valois – in the third printing (1568) explicitly classes the text in the tradition of the princely mirror genre: 'Et quant à l'utilité d'iceluy traicte, lequel est intitulé Des douze abus du monde: ie n'en diray autre chose, sinon qu'il me semble estre *comme un certain & vray miroir de la vie humaine*, dans lequel un chacun, de quelque aage ou estat qu'il soit, peut appercevoir non seulement ce qui est de son devoir pour bien & Chrestienement vivre: mais aussi s'il y a quelque tache ou macule en ses mœurs, le moyen de l'oster & du tout effacer'.¹⁷ The most reprised of the twelve abuses in contemporaneous polemic was, unsurprisingly, the ninth 'mirror' – reserved for the prince –, 'Du Roy inique' ['Of the Unjust King'], whose principal latent 'stain' or 'blemish' is delineated in Morel's translation:

Mais celuy qui ne gouverne son Royaume & soy-mesme selon ceste loy [Catholic doctrine], il se met au hazard, & est en danger d'endurer en son temps beaucoup d'iniures & d'adversitez. Car à cause de ce, souvent la paix est rompue entre les peuples & nations, & de là adviennent grands scandales & troubles en un Royaume. Les fruicts aussi de la

13 Nicolas Machiavel, *Le Prince*, trans. by J. Gohory (Paris: Le Mangnier, 1571).

14 Innocent Gentillet, *Discours svr les moyens de bien gouverner et maintenir en bonne paix vn Royaume ou autre Principauté; contre Nicolas Machiavel* ([Paris]: [n. pub.], 1576).

15 Jean Bodin, *Les Six Livres de la République* (Paris: Du Puy, 1576).

16 On the topic of Machiavelli translated into French, see Willis H. Bowen, 'Sixteenth-Century French Translations of Machiavelli', *Italica* 27.4 (1950), 313–20; Donald R. Kelley, 'Murdrous Machiavel in France: A Post-Mortem', *Political Science Quarterly* 85.4 (1970), 545–59.

17 [Cyprian], *De douze manieres d'abus qui sont en ce monde en diverses sortes de gents, & du moyen d'iceux corriger, & s'en donner garde*, trans. by F. Morel (Paris: Morel, 1568), 4 [my emphasis]. On the *De duodecim abusivis saeculi* in a much earlier but pertinent politico-historical context, see Rob Meens, 'Politics, Mirrors of Princes and the Bible: Sins, Kings and the Well-Being of the Realm', *Early Medieval Europe* 7.3 (1998), 345–57.

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terre en sont diminuez, & les subsides des peuples empeschez. Beaucoup d'autres maux aussi corrompent & gastent la prosperité du Royaume. La mort des enfans, & plus chers amis, apporte de la tristesse: les courses qui font les ennemis gastent par tout les provinces: les bestes sauvages se iettent sur les troupeaux tant du gros que du menu bestail: les tempestes du printemps & de l'hyver empeschent la fertilité des terres, & le rapport de la mer. Et quelque fois la foudre & les esclairs bruslent les bleds & les arbres, les fleurs & les bourgeons.¹⁸

[But he who does not govern his realm and himself according to this law [Catholic doctrine] puts himself in jeopardy and in danger of suffering in his time many injuries and adversities. For this reason peace is often broken among peoples and nations, whence great scandals and troubles in a realm arise. The fruits of the earth are diminished, and subsidies from the people impeded. Many other ills corrupt and destroy the prosperity of the realm. The death of children and dear friends brings sadness; enemy raids lay waste to the provinces; wild beasts attack herds of livestock big and small; spring and winter storms diminish the fertility of the earth and bounty of the sea. And sometimes thunder and lightning burn the wheat and the trees, the flowers and the buds.]

The prince who strays from the path of Christian virtue abandons the requisite qualities of the good steward, and his realm suffers the consequences in very real environmental terms: crops fail; children die; wild animals feast on the domesticated; weather patterns become devastatingly unpredictable. The realm's prosperity is 'spoiled and corrupted', leading to diminished state revenue ('les subsides des peuples'). The divinely instituted order of the human, animal and plant worlds is turned topsy-turvy; a punitive *mundus inversus* is realised. If the *Twelve Abuses* are generic enough to cover any monarchical regime, they are also sufficiently germane to the state of affairs in the sixteenth century to resonate with the chroniclers of France's protracted confessional conflict. Chavigny holds accountable one particular errant prince, Henri III, just as he credits his agnatic kinsman and heir Henri IV with the prophetically proven potential to set things right.

Between Morel and Chavigny, other forthright attempts to hold Henri III to account appeared, among which a striking (and strikingly understudied) trio of polemical publications from the early 1580s, the first two of which marketed themselves as annotated books of account, while the third presented itself as the critical handbook, or hand-mirror, to prompt the king to reflect on such works, and turn them to figurative and literal profit. In order of dated dedicatory epistles, the works are: *Le Secret des finances de France*, signed Nicolas Froumenteau, and addressed to Henri III (January 1581); *Le Miroir des François*, autographed Nicolas de Montand, and dedicated to Louise de Lorraine, the consort of Henri III

18 [Cyprian], *De douze manieres d'abus*, 37.

(October 1581); *Le Cabinet du roy de France*, attributed to Nicolas Barnaud, and – like *Le Secret* – addressed to Henri III (November 1581). All three issued *sans privilège* from anonymous presses. Of the three largely undocumented authors, only Barnaud – a medically trained alchemist and Calvinist convert from the Drôme who resided in Geneva during the 1570s and 80s – seems to have had a publishing life outside the material in question.¹⁹

These massive pamphlets, which exhibit varying degrees of Calvinist bias, offer a singularly prodigious array of fantastical statistics, fictional colloquies, imagined debates, and long-winded authorial harangues comprising well over two thousand octavo pages. Each is a coherent and autonomous work in its own right, but with sufficient shared internal references, points of style, and an overarching agenda to have long made the idea of a group reading – even a concerted strategy – attractive. They loosely form a definitive and authoritative, albeit often satirical, audit of the steadily worsening Valois fiscal crisis, and propose ways of addressing it. They thus provide a rare glimpse into the (imagined) workings of early modern provincial estates, the Estates-General, and associated gatherings for the expression of limited popular sovereignty, for which the manifest model was – not by chance – the defiant Estates-General at Blois in 1576–7. The serious challenges to royal authority made there by the Huguenots and, increasingly, the Catholic League multiplied the opportunities and the perceived need for such expression, in the (vain) hope of putting an end to the internecine destruction. The assembly was convened during the brief respite following the Edict of Beaulieu (May 1576), between the fifth and the sixth of eight wars, when damage to and mishandling of the economy, the commonweal and the environment had drastically reduced the revenue stream for the monarchy, obliging the king to increase exactions from the first and third estates. The works create a discursive triptych representing a polemically slanted *recensement* of the state of the realm circa 1580 with regard to its economic health (poor), its wealth (misappropriated and/or squandered), and

19 The most extensive effort to sort out this tripartite publishing enigma was undertaken by the brothers Eugène and Émile Haag, whose fascination and frustration are palpable in the biographical entries spread across three volumes and a dozen years of their encyclopedic *La France protestante* in the mid-nineteenth century. They ultimately throw up their hands, ‘en attendant que de nouvelles recherches nous autorisent à nous prononcer [while waiting for new research to authorise a definitive decision]’ (I, 256); the matter has yet to be resolved. Eugène Haag and Émile Haag, *La France protestante*, 10 vols (Paris: Cherbuliez, 1846–59), entries for ‘Barnaud (Nicolas)’, I (1846), 250–6; ‘Froumenteau (Nicolas)’, V (1855), 181–5; ‘Montand (Nicolas de)’, VII (1857), 449–53 [each entry contains a detailed synopsis of the attributed work].

its management (corrupt, but salvageable). They constitute a vast hall of princely mirrors for the direct and express edification of Henri III, with the aim of advising him about the most just (and lucrative) methods of taking back his largely alienated domain, and reasserting his dominion.

Le Cabinet du roi de France is divided into three books, each devoted to one of the three pearls ‘d’ineestimable valeur’, revealed upfront as a metaphor for the three traditional estates of France: the clergy; the nobility; the bourgeoisie or the commons. Logically enough, the first pearl denotes the first estate, the Gallican Church, warranting Barnaud’s most detailed and sustained treatment. Its principal conceit takes the form of an exposé or, more precisely, an ‘outing’ of the Gallican Church: the author claims to have obtained secret accounts (‘catalogue’), akin to a confidential internal memo entitled *La Poligamie sacree*, which purportedly documents the deviant (and inextricably intertwined) sexual and financial practices of clerics of all ranks. The ‘leaked’ file is apparently so damning that, in the words of an anxious senior prelate who claims to have no direct knowledge of it, ‘si l’on continuë à le publier, n’y aura grands ny petits, qui ne nous crache au visage [if we persist in publishing it, there will be no one, great or humble, who will not spit in our faces]’.²⁰

This exposé (‘mise en lumière’) of *La Poligamie sacree* is seemingly a confused mishmash of Huguenot polemical thrusts and parries, familiar since the outbreak of the Wars. What is perhaps most striking and novel is the opening hundred pages of ‘proof’ – ‘preuve’ is one of Barnaud’s terms of choice – in the form of detailed accounts of the real revenue of the Gallican Church, and its expenses. By Barnaud’s calculations, the Gallican Church counts twenty-one archbishoprics (of which twelve in France), 160 bishoprics (of which ninety-six in France), 132,000 parishes, 540 archpries, 1450 abbeys, 12,320 priories, 259 commanderies, 152,000 chapels, 567 women’s priories and abbeys, 700 convents, and 180,000 castles belonging to the clergy, of which 83,000 exercise high, middle and low jurisdiction (which might be glossed as criminal, civil and small-claims courts) over some 1,377,000,000 subjects. The annual revenue from all this amounts to 92 million *écus* ‘en deniers clairs & liquides’, which – at 3 *livres* to the *écu* – comes to over 270 million *livres*.²¹ Barnaud then accounts for the prodigious amount that the Church collects in kind – legumes and grains, including wheat; cattle and other stock; eggs; butter –, and inventories the number of farms and fields, the

20 [Barnaud, Nicolas], *Le Cabinet du roy de France, dans lequel il y a trois Perles precieuses d’ineestimable valeur*, 3 vols ([Geneva]: [Laimarie], 1581), I, 120.

21 [Barnaud], *Le Cabinet du roy*, I, 2.

number and the size of fishponds and water-mills, and the acreage of vine, pasturage and woodland. He calculates that of the 200 million *arpents* of French land, the Gallican Church pockets tithes from 47 million. In sum, the annual receipts of the Gallican Church have deprived the kings of France of 3,060,000,000 *écus* (or 9,180,000,000 *livres tournois*); the narrator drily notes that ‘par ainsi ne faut s’esmerveiller si trois millions de personnes vivent aux depens du Crucifix [thus one should not wonder that three million people earn a living from the Cross]’.²²

It is not so much the receipts, however, as the expenses that bear the brunt of Barnaud’s scrutiny. It is one thing that the Gallican Church rakes in fantastical proceeds, to which – the account implies – it has dubious claim; how it expends those proceeds is quite another. Attention shifts to the facing page of the ledger, to an itemised account of corporate outlay. As might be expected, the pursuit of terrestrial pleasures – antithetical to the Church’s celestial mission – is the big ticket item: whores and adulteresses, and their numerous bastard progeny, even the bastard offspring of bastards, sodomites and catamites (presented as a Jesuit weakness), and the human and animal retinue necessary to maintain them. The narrator provides statistical ‘proof’ of obscene Church wealth immorally squandered on scandalous commodities, both sexual and sensual. Here begins the *satyre violente* proper: the discrediting of the Gallican Church, which is the goal of *Le Cabinet*, is effected by means of a corrosive representation of a literal act of *déboursement*, the emptying of a *bourse* – which has the pointed advantage of meaning ‘purse’ and ‘testicles’ – that is both public (French patrimony) and private (illegitimate clerical paternity). These are the ‘lignes de compte’, the ledger items with which the fiscal hawk concerns himself, and endeavours to concern the presumably scandalised reader. The meticulously measured outflow is one of substance and semen, the stuff of earthly kingdoms and earthy men.

Le Secret des finances is likewise a tripartite ledger of meticulous, if equally inflated accounts. It opens on an overt exhortation to Henri III to put the royal house in order. France was once the enviable ‘miroir & principal regard de la Chrestienté [reflection and principal representation of Christianity]’:

Toutes ses Provinces sont bien & proprement marquées de villes & citez, si bien traversees de fleuves & rivieres, qu’outre la douce & plaisante navigation d’icelles, le seul regard contenté l’homme: arrousent d’autre costé les prez & her[b]ages, qui produisent en leur saison fertilité de fruicts, si grande & si heureuse, qu’il y a bien peu de pays estrangers, prochains & lointains, qui ne participent de son abondance.²³

22 [Barnaud], *Le Cabinet du roy*, I, 16.

23 Froumentau, Nicolas, *Le Secret des finances de France*, 3 vols ([Geneva]: [Berjon], 1581), I, ii.

All of [France's] provinces are amply and neatly dotted with towns and cities traversed by so many rivers and streams that, aside from the gentle and pleasant navigation of them, the mere view of them delights the human eye. They irrigate on either side meadows and pastures that produce in season such a great and happy abundance of fruits that few foreign countries, near and far, do not profit from it.

Civil war and disastrous fiscal mismanagement ('desordre & mauvais mesnage-ment') have sadly reduced it, and the obsessive author-*cum*-statistician reproduces the tarnished mirror that remains, the better to stir the king to action that, if successful, will see 'ce Royaume en peu de temps reprendre sa premiere splendeur'.²⁴

The first of the three books covers receipts from the royal domain, various forms of national taxation (salt, wine, ban & arrière-ban), and royal and government expenses from the reign of Henri II through December 1580. The second and third volumes, taking up 911 of the work's 1063 pages, extend to a comprehensive, itemised assessment of the fiscal health of the entire realm, following a relatively simple, repetitive formula. The realm is split into north/south along an east-west axis running south of the forty-sixth parallel, so that the Midi and l'Occitanie feature in Book 3, and the northern two-thirds in Book 2, reflecting the perception that the Midi and the southwest were disproportionately affected by the combat. The three books inventory in thoroughly disturbing detail, diocese by diocese, the price of war: first, the multiple taxes and other forms of official exaction ('gabelles'; 'tailles'; 'aydes'; 'dons gratuits'; 'subsides & imposts'); second, the increase in the number of fees ('espices') for grasping royal functionaries ('sergens'; 'notaires'; 'advocats'; 'procureurs'); finally, the violent deaths of men of both cloths, nobles, soldiers of both confessions, natives and foreigners, the number of women and girls raped, of homes destroyed and of villages burned. A total of 765,200 dead, according to Froumenteau's *Estat final*, among whom 32,900 nobles, which rises to 1,244,078 if one tallies up the actual itemisation – roughly 6% of a population of ± 20 million in 1580.²⁵ The funds levied (and lost) to support this war are calculated (as of 1580) at 4,750,000,000 *livres tournois*, at a time when the king's annual revenue from all taxes was around 15 million *lt*, and government debt just over 40 million.²⁶ Froumenteau claims to keep the books for writing down – but not

24 Froumenteau, *Le Secret des finances*, I, vii^v.

25 Froumenteau, *Le Secret des finances*, III, 377–80. For population figures, see Jacques Dupâquier, ed., *Histoire de la population française*, vol. 2 (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1988), 151.

26 Georges Picot, *Histoire des États Généraux, considérés au point de vue de leur influence sur le gouvernement de la France de 1355 à 1614*, 4 vols (Paris: Hachette, 1872), III, 3; 20.

off – the intolerably high cost of property seized, damaged and destroyed during France’s seemingly unending religious and civil troubles.

As if only too aware of the incendiary nature of the astonishingly detailed statistics, Froumenteau near the close is careful to offer up thirty-four pages of what he, like Barnaud, calls ‘preuves’, such as the ‘rooles & contrerolles’, the ‘contes ès Chambre des contes’, and the ‘cahiers de doléances’ that he claims to have consulted. Froumenteau’s claims allow him to produce what cultural historian Mary Poovey terms ‘the appearance of accuracy.’²⁷ This enables him to create a persuasive statistical map – an early, discursive form of cadastral survey – of the degraded state of the realm that is explicitly charted for the king, and ostensibly drawn from unprecedented measurements recorded by the king’s men, in order to assist the monarch in (re)claiming his own, and restoring the realm to the peaceful and prosperous glory it knew under Louis XII (reigned 1498–1515), the yardstick by which all the numbers in *Le Secret* are measured. It was evidently designed to make Henri III and his advisors *ébahis* [abashed/astonished] – one of Froumenteau’s preferred terms – by the scale and the scope of a seemingly endless national, regional and local calamity; as proof of, according to Froumenteau’s dire concluding warning, ‘le danger eminent de [l]’estat, qui ne tient qu’à un filet [the imminent danger to the state, which hangs by a thread].’²⁸

Unlike *Le Cabinet* and *Le Secret*, *Le Miroir des François* only sporadically respects the format of a formal book of accounts,²⁹ and is dedicated not to Henri III, but to Louise de Lorraine-Vaudémont, the king’s consort of the preceding half-decade. It plays nimbly – if tritely – on the suitability of a princely mirror as a gift to ‘la plus belle creature & rare en lineations de visage qu’on ait peu rencontrer aux quatre coins du monde.’³⁰ Such attractions perfectly position her to influence

According to Picot (III, 20n2), these figures feature in unpublished papers belonging to the Venetian ambassador.

27 Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 56; on the ‘epistemological effect’ of the spread of double-entry bookkeeping, see 30–2.

28 Froumenteau, *Le Secret des finances*, III, 415.

29 In contrast to *Le Cabinet* and *Le Secret*, *Le Miroir* was taken relatively seriously as an exercise in economic reporting by at least one near-contemporary, Antoine de Montchrestien, who excerpted whole sections of it – neglecting attribution – in his widely known *Traicté de l’economie politique* ([Paris]: [n. pub.], 1615). The basic tenets of seventeenth-century mercantilism are thus in many ways due to Montand’s – somewhat scattershot – notions of political economy, though Montand lifted a sizeable portion of material from Bodin’s *Les Six Livres de la République* – also neglecting attribution.

30 Nicolas de Montand, *Le Miroir des François*, 3 vols ([Geneva]: [Laimarie], 1581), I, iiiii^{r-v}.

her husband; if she succeeds, the rewards will be real, quantifiable and commensurate with those recovered in *Le Cabinet* and *Le Secret*, including ‘environ deux cens millions que ces arpyes ont volé peculativement, tant sur le Roy que sur son peuple’.³¹ Like the other two works, *Le Miroir* is something of a hodgepodge: over two of three books, seven improbably populated colloquies – Étienne Marcel, the martyred fourteenth-century Prévôt des Marchands de Paris and Third-Estate fiscal hawk at the Estates-General of Paris in 1355, is placed in dialogue with Pierre de Versoris, the late sixteenth-century Parisian parliamentarian, Third-Estate delegate, speaker and editor of *cahiers de doléances* – are peppered with Rabelaisian lists, cost of living indices, and so forth. The third book is devoted to a rambling first-person harangue by Montand, a heteroclite assemblage of gripes from which a pattern of nascent political economy emerges. In his severe, meandering critique of social ills connected by their perceived lack of self or public control – sumptuary abuses; alcoholism; gluttony; gambling; dancing; sorcery; aristocratic hunting practices and horse-feeding (both of which have a negative impact on commoners) –, there is something of a Calvinist blueprint for an obsessively, puritanically controlled economy, maniacally mindful of waste. Montand goes as far as proposing price controls, a comprehensive inventory of production, the supervised distribution of goods (primarily wine and wheat) – a system of tight control for an environment that has, to return to White Jr’s terms, ‘no reason for existence save to serve man’.³²

Like *Le Cabinet* and *Le Secret*, all ‘proof’ is forcefully assembled to shore up Valois legitimacy by offering a multi-pronged approach to reclaiming royal dominion. If such measures, Montand claims, are judiciously reflected upon and applied, and if existing edicts of toleration – themselves management of the confessional environment – are enforced, a utopian period of peace and prosperity will ensue:

Voici qui adviendra, le marchant qui s’adonne trop à l’avarice, & à courrir iour & nuit par mer & par terre, pour avoir des biens, les trouvera tout prests à sa porte, le laboureur verra paistre son troupeau parmy les valees & montagnes, sans avoir peur du felon soldat, ny des voleur & brigands, car le pays en sera despétré, le gentilhomme verra ses suiets cultiver & labourer la terre, qui luy payeront librement ses rentes & censives: les prestres travailleront de leurs mains, les sages mesnagers nourriront abondamment la volaille, & autres animaux qui serviront à l’usage & nourriture des hommes: les uns feront valoir les terres infertiles, les autres feront des vergers nouveaux, qui produiront fruits plantureux & divers, d’autres nettoyeront les prez qui sont desers & en buissons, & feront courir l’eau au moulin d’iceux d’un autre artifice qu’on n’avoit pas encores accoustumé, aucuns

31 Montand, *Le Miroir*, I, iiiiv.

32 White Jr, ‘Historical Roots’, 1207.

semeront de luyserne pour avoir quantité de foin, d'autres feront de petits garennes pour la sauvagine, l'un plantera force muriers pour nourrir les vers d'Indie, l'autre force saules: qui semera des pepins, qui des meilleurs fruits, qui des fossez autour des her[b]ages. Et finalement on verra produire plus de biens s'il plaist à Dieu dans une annee que l'on n'en recueilleoit en cinq ou six precedentes.³³

[Here is what will happen: the merchant who is too prone to avarice and to scurrying day and night by sea and by land to amass goods, will find them ready at his door. The husbandman will see his flock graze among the valleys and mountains, with no fear of marauding soldier, thief or brigand, for the country will be free of them. The gentleman will see his tenants cultivate and work the earth, and they will freely pay his rents and charges. The priests will work with their hands. The prudent householders will feed their poultry generously, together with other animals who serve the needs and nourishment of men. Some will make infertile lands produce, others will plant new orchards that will produce abundant and diverse fruits. Others will clear abandoned and overgrown meadows and channel water to mills, using techniques to which we are not yet accustomed. Some will sow clover to produce much fodder, others will make warrens for wild game. One will plant many mulberry trees to nourish silk worms, another many willows. Yet another will sow fruit seeds, another [will plant] the best fruit trees, one [will dig] ditches around pastures. And finally we will see produced more goods, if it please God, in one year than we harvested in the five or six preceding ones.]

This beatific vision pointedly recalls the opening of the third book, an eloquent rendering of the principal promises of biblical dominion drawn word-for-word from Leviticus 26.3–6 in Pierre Robert Olivétan's translation (1535), which was the basis for the later Genevan Bible:

*Si vous cheminez en mes ordonnances, & gardez mes commandemens, & les faites, ie vous donneray la pluye en son temps, & la terre donnera son fruit, & les arbres des champs donneront leur fruit, la bature des grains entre vous rencontrera la vendange, & la vendange rencontrera les semailles, & mangerez vostre pain en santé, & dormirez seurement en vostre terre, & donneray paix en la terre, vous dormirez sans que nul vous espouvante. Ie feray cesser les mauvaises bestes de la terre, & le glaive ne passera point par vostre terre.*³⁴

[If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them; Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time: and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely. And I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will rid evil beasts out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land.]

33 Montand, *Le Miroir*, III, 483.

34 Montand, *Le Miroir*, III, 446 [my emphasis]. The English rendering is from the King James version of the Bible (1611).

As with Chavigny and Cyprian/Morel's formulations, Barnaud, Froumentau and Montand make a concerted effort to 'prove' that an environment conducive to human prosperity – which is the unquestionable goal and good – is *contingent* on competent stewardship. The Wars of Religion, characterised as a consequence of Valois misrule, serve as a catastrophic counter-example. In the estimation of these authors, God-given dominion and its concomitant responsibilities have been alarmingly compromised, and the duty of a good and just Christian king – be he Valois or Bourbon, and capable of being rehabilitated for the task – is to reassert the first and live up to the second, even if he has to confront powerful, corrupt institutions, such as the Gallican Church (*Le Cabinet*) or the king's own ministers and favourites (*Le Miroir*), among many examples of failed stewardship.

The three polemical works offer evidence ('preuves') that the quality of the environment is increasingly perceived as quantifiable in the early modern period; degradation due to human mismanagement must be measured, if solely to correct negative effects on *human* welfare. In this, we can locate early expressions of an ecocritical sensibility; of, returning to Bate's terms, 'reflecting upon what it might mean to dwell with the earth.'³⁵ All the aforementioned authors of *principum specula* engage seriously with the biblical notion of dominion – both reflecting and reflecting *upon* contemporary notions of it. Understanding the evolution of that engagement, as White Jr pointed out for the medieval period so many decades ago, is an indispensable preliminary to ecocritiquing French history.

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35 Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, 266.

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Pauline Goul

The Vanity of Ecology: Expenditure in Montaigne's Vision of the New World

Abstract: Ecocriticism can acquire important insights from interrogating Renaissance, humanist texts and contexts. The humanist authors who seem to be at odds with ecocriticism's professed turn to the natural world – in this study, Michel de Montaigne – exhibit, in fact, a certain form of environmental awareness in their work. They index humanism's shifting relationship to the environment in ways that have shaped our own ecological consciousness. Building on Louisa Mackenzie's development of a queer, early modern French practice of ecocriticism, this chapter goes beyond merely thematic understandings of ecology to question how the human being confronts environmental change. Montaigne's 'Des coches' ['On Coaches'] and 'Des cannibales' ['On Cannibals'], often read as economic and ideological critiques of colonisation, contain the depiction of an environmental crisis in Renaissance France, in terms of the notion of a global world, and insofar as the Wars of Religion turn the French territory into a barren wasteland. Juxtaposed with Georges Bataille's *La Part maudite* [*The Accursed Share*], particularly the notion of *dépense* [expenditure], Montaigne's essays appear to pre-formulate a paradoxical concern for sustainability. This chapter begins by examining the overlooked backdrop of 'On Cannibals' as one of environmental troubles, or trembling, based on moveable ground and the considerations of floods. This unsettling sense of humans' insufficient control over the nonhuman environment carries into an analysis of the setting of 'On Coaches' at the other end of the *Essais*, focussing on the (perhaps metaphorical) sea-sickness of Montaigne. Is his discussion of an anxiety about travel the symptom of a larger, more global concern for a world in which imperialistic views are overtaking human beings? Montaigne's arguments regarding luxury and commerce take on the depth of an environmental critique if we compare them to the postmodern environmental economy of Bataille that is founded on a paradoxical relationship to expenditure. The tone of vanity frequently adopted by Montaigne coincides with Bataille's arguably vain ecology. In the early modern period, as in 2016, is ecological thought an inherently absurd endeavour?

A great paradox courses through sixteenth-century literature in France. Despite being a century of abundance and economic prosperity after many decades of war and famine, and notwithstanding the glorious Renaissance of Loire Valley châteaux and Francis I's colonial endeavours in the New World, scholars such

as Rebecca Zorach argue that abundance and excess were far from unanimous.¹ Many of the most influential writers of the period dwell on the wastefulness of the century: Michel de Montaigne deplored a ‘siècle desbordé [an overwhelmed century]’;² a ‘saison si gâtée [a wasted season]’ (*E* 649). In the second chapter of the first book of the *Essais* (1580), Montaigne congratulates himself on ‘se sentir préservé de la contagion d’un siècle si gasté [feeling unspoiled by the contagion of such a wasted century]’ (*E* 22).³ Despite Montaigne advocating a philosophy of moderation, images of overflow and excess suffuse the *Essais*. These versions of waste amount to a *dépense* [spending] of energy, money or natural resources. What led Montaigne to maintain such a negative opinion of spending and expenditure? I shall argue that Montaigne is an environmental writer by way of his definition of *dépense*. In my reading, ‘environmental’ is a term that can be applied to texts and authors who demonstrate a tropological relationship to the nonhuman environment as a structural dimension of their thought.⁴ In his chapters about the New World, ‘Des cannibales’ and ‘Des coches’, Montaigne develops a strangely modern care for the environment, yet scholars have not often drawn conclusions that combine Montaigne’s economic and ecological insight.⁵ An environmental and economic reading of expenditure in the wake of Bataille helps us to rethink environmental crisis in our own era as much as Montaigne’s, and might begin to explain why the long sixteenth century began with the Columbian Exchange and concluded with the Wars of Religion. How was the promise of a new world with new resources ultimately wasted?

The environmental aspects of ‘Des cannibales’, one of the most studied chapters of Montaigne’s work, are somewhat dissimulated under the author’s humanist commentary, but the environment is structurally significant to Montaigne’s

1 Rebecca Zorach, *Blood, Milk, Ink, Gold: Abundance and Excess in the French Renaissance* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

2 Michel de Montaigne, *Les Essais*, ed. by J. Balsamo, M. Magnien, C. Magnien-Simonin and A. Legros (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), 923 [hereafter *E*; unreferenced translations are mine].

3 Note the etymological relationship between the Middle French *gaster* and the modern environmental issue of waste. For more details on the significant etymology of *gaster*, see Pauline Goul, “‘Et voilà l’ouvrage gasté’: The Poetics of Plenitude and Scarcity in Rabelais’s *Gaster*,” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 50.3 (2014), 332–40.

4 With this definition, I distance myself from a more thematic understanding of the word that would limit what is environmental to what is green or natural.

5 For an economic analysis of ‘Des coches’, see Koji Takenaka, ‘Montaigne et l’économie royale dans l’essai “Des coches”’, *Le Verger* 2 (2012), 19 pages, <http://cornucopia16.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Verger2_TAKENAKA.pdf> [accessed 3 February 2016].

argument. From the beginning, ‘Des cannibales’ grapples with questions of space and scale. Montaigne first identifies the New World as ‘cet autre monde [this other world]’, introducing the eyewitness account of a man who was in his service, and who lived a decade in ‘la France Antartique’.⁶ Immediately after announcing this continent as irremediably other, Montaigne narrows the scope from world to ‘païs’: ‘cette descouverte d’un país infiny, semble de grande consideration (E 208) [the discovery of a boundless country seems worthy of consideration]’.⁷ In Middle French, *pays* refers to a ‘région géographique habitée, plus ou moins nettement délimitée [a geographical region that is inhabited, more or less neatly delimited]’.⁸ It is likely that the ‘less neatly delimited’ dimension interests Montaigne: ‘Infiny’ points to the idea of the New World having no limits – neither material nor conceptual, since its boundaries are still being defined as a site of speculation. The figurative limits of the world are at stake in the discussion that follows: ‘j’ay peur que nous ayons les yeux plus grands que le ventre, et plus de curiosité, que nous n’avons de capacité: nous embrassons tout, mais nous n’estreignons que du vent [I am afraid we have eyes bigger than our stomachs, and more curiosity than capacity. We embrace everything, but we clasp only wind] (E 208; W 182). Montaigne moves from a mere consideration to a declared fear, revealing his scepticism about colonial endeavours in the New World. It is significant that the chosen idiom usually refers to appetite or greed; Montaigne relates the infiniteness that defines the New World to the finiteness of human capacities and the human body. In Montaigne’s analogy, it is as if humanity will bodily absorb the New World in some way. From the very beginning of ‘Des cannibales’, colonisation is a problem of consumption that is a vain movement: ‘nous n’estreignons que du vent’.

The human body is never far from the nonhuman environment in Montaigne’s work, and both entities are closely related, if not, I would argue, porously bound. The aforementioned reference to wind is not uncharacteristic, and the text soon turns to another meteorological element. Surrounded by images of water and floods, we come across Atlantis: ‘jadis et avant le deluge, il y avoit une grande Isle nommée Atlantide, droict à la bouche du destroit de Gibraltar, qui tenoit plus de país que l’Afrique et l’Asie toutes deux ensemble [in days of old, before the

6 For more details on the significance of testimonial narratives, see Andrea Frisch, *The Invention of the Eyewitness: Witnessing and Testimony in Early Modern France* (Chapel Hill, NC: North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures, 2004).

7 Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Works*, trans. by D. M. Frame (New York, NY: Knopf, 2003), 182 [hereafter W].

8 All notes on lexicology or etymology are sourced from the Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales.

Flood, there was a great island named Atlantis, right at the mouth of the Strait of Gibraltar, which contained more land than Africa and Asia put together]' (E 208; W 182).⁹ After retelling the tale of Atlantis, Montaigne concludes by describing the simultaneous, common end of the island, its inhabitants, and some Athenians who 'furent engloutis par le deluge [were swallowed up by the Flood]' (E 209; W 182). This is the first of many instances of *engloutissement* – another form of consumption – in relation to the New World, and it sets up a motif of conflict between earth and water that resurfaces in 'Des coches'. The biblical flood prompts an environmental thought: 'il est bien vraysemblable, que cet extrême ravage d'eau ait fait des changements estranges aux habitations de la terre: comme on tient que la mer a retranché la Sicile d'avec l'Italie [it is quite likely that that extreme devastation of waters made amazing changes in the habitations of the earth, as people maintain that the sea cut off Sicily from Italy]' (E 209; W 183). Montaigne's environment is nonhuman; the only human element is the 'habitations de la terre'. It is the nonhuman that acts: the sea cuts off the land between Sicily and Italy. The images invoke water wasting away the land, as the exceptional dimensions of the water conjure associations with a disaster: the 'extrême ravage d'eau' and the 'effect incroyable d'inundation' are followed, a few lines later, by the erosion of the Dordogne, as the discussion of Atlantis prompts Montaigne to consider his *païs* alongside the Dordogne.

Without concluding the reflection on Atlantis, or introducing the discussion of erosion, Montaigne proceeds: 'il semble qu'il y aye des mouvemens naturels les uns, les autres fievreux en ces grands corps, comme aux nostres [it seems that there are movements, some natural, others feverish, in these great bodies, just as in our own]' (E 209; W 183). The chiasmus opposes two types of movements with adjectives that do not seem to contradict one another, although their position in the chiasmus suggests that they do. In this context, *naturel* appears to be synonymous with normal, and to stand in opposition to *fievreux*, which denotes a disease, an infection, or an abnormal event in the body.¹⁰ Montaigne situates his observation in the realm of medicine, since the other parallelism of the sentence – the simile – links human bodies and the somewhat vague concept of 'ces grands

9 Here, *païs* signifies a quality, something solid that one holds, such as a stretch of land.

10 Montaigne seems to consider diseases as accidents (the word is repeatedly used), instead of natural phenomena, which they obviously are; nature appears to be a habit, whereas disease is a rare occurrence. For further details of the intricacies of nature and the natural in Montaigne's *Essais*, see Yvonne Bellenger, "Nature" et "Naturel" dans quatre chapitres des *Essais*, *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Montaigne* V.25–6 (1978), 37–49.

corps'. This description finds meaning somewhere between the various islands under discussion, 'ce monde nouveau [this new world]' (E 209; W 183), and 'les terres [the lands]' (E 209; W 183). The result of the observation is a merging of lands and human beings as 'corps' [bodies] encompassing normal and abnormal movements. In 'Des cannibales', environmental disasters appear as floods or figures of imminent, ongoing erosion, and are compared to diseases of the human body in a condemnatory mode informed by Montaigne's negative views on medicine.

The surprising appearance of an environmental discussion is little more than a pretext for another anecdote on a legendary transatlantic voyage. The consideration of the erosion of the Dordogne comes just before the chapter reaches its announced topic, cannibals, by way of the Aristotelian anecdote of Carthaginians who found a fertile land in the West: 'cette narration d'Aristote a non plus d'accord avec nos terres neufves [this story of Aristotle does not fit our new lands any better than the other]' (E 210; W 184). As he approaches the topic, Montaigne considers all of these islands and lands in order to trace the relation of possession between a land and its inhabitants. The first mention of the key term *païs* is bound with a possessive 'leur', and the Atlantis anecdote concludes with another determiner: 'et eux et leur Isle furent engloutis [both the Athenians and themselves and their island were swallowed]' (E 209; W 182). Once the Dordogne comes under discussion, Montaigne moves toward his own possession of the land:

Quand je considere l'impression que *ma* riviere de Dordoigne faict de mon temps, vers la rive droicte de sa descente; et qu'en vingt ans elle a tant gagné, et desrobé le fondement à plusieurs bastimens, je vois bien que c'est une agitation extraordinaire: car si elle fust tousjours allée ce train, ou deust aller à l'advenir, la figure du monde seroit renversée. (E 210)

[When I consider the inroads that my river, the Dordogne, is making in my lifetime into the right bank in its descent, and that in twenty years it has gained so much ground and stolen away the foundations of several buildings, I clearly see that this is an extraordinary disturbance; for if it had always gone at this rate, or was to do so in the future, the face of the world would be turned topsy-turvy.] (W 183)

In Middle French, the word 'impression', which one annotation translates as *érosion*, signifies a trace left by one body on another;¹¹ to take an example from the *Essais* that features in the *Trésor de la Langue Française Informatisé*: 'action d'un

11 According to *Le Trésor de la langue française informatisé* (2016), it is an 'empreinte laissée par un corps pressé sur une surface', <<http://atilf.atilf.fr/dendien/scripts/tlfiv5/visusel.exe?11;s=4010862615;r=1;nat=;sol=0>> [accessed 3 February 2016].

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corps sur un autre [the action of one body on another].¹² Montaigne's comments about the 'agitation extraordinaire' evoke the feverish movements of human and nonhuman bodies, as the author accounts for the impact of changes in great bodies on the human realm. The scale is also quite striking, since the mere erosion of a riverside prompts Montaigne to foresee its global impact: 'la figure du monde seroit renversée'. The verbs such as 'desrobé' and 'renversée' convey the instability of the environment that surrounds the human being, and a lack of control over these surroundings is perceptible: 'mais il leur prend des changements: tantost elles s'espandent d'un costé, tantost d'un autre, tantost elles se contiennent. Je ne parle pas des soudaines inondations dequoy nous manions les causes [but rivers are subject to changes: now they overflow in one direction, now in another, now they keep to their course. I am not speaking of the sudden inundations whose causes are manifest]' (E 210; W 183).¹³ Montaigne mentions environmental movements whose causes human beings understand, such as floods, but erosion is not one of these; in that regard, he depicts a frightening view of the seaside in his vicinity: 'en Medoc, le long de la mer, mon frere Sieur d'Arsac, voit une sienne terre, ensevelie soubz les sables, que la mer vomit devant elle [in Médoc, along the seashore, my brother, the sieur d'Arsac, can see an estate of his buried under the sands that the sea spews forth]' (E 210; W 183). Similar devices of environmental unrest appear, as the possessed land, 'sienne terre', is immediately threatened by another version of *engloutissement*, 'ensevelie soubz les sables.' The text becomes violent, with sand being generated by the sea throwing up.¹⁴ The link between human and nonhuman bodies on the basis of movement comes full circle through the motif of sickness: the personified sand morphs into monstrous invaders, and the *païs infiny* gives way to a more universal environment: 'ces sables sont des fourriers. Et voyons de grandes montjoies d'arenes mouvantes, qui marchent une demie lieue devant elle, et gagnent païs [these sands are its harbingers; and we see great

12 *Le Trésor de la langue française informatisé* (2016), <<http://atilf.atilf.fr/dendien/scripts/tlfiv5/visusel.exe?11;s=4010862615;r=1;nat=;sol=0>> [accessed 3 February 2016]. The quotation comes from the very next chapter, I.31.

13 Montaigne could be suggesting that humans manipulate the causes of floods, perhaps provoking them (I thank Stephanie Posthumus for drawing my attention to this matter). While the context of the remark seems to hint simply at 'understanding', the twofold meaning is interesting, particularly in light of the subsequent discussion of human engineering in the Roman circus.

14 It is perhaps significant that the sea is feminine, and that the masculine 'grands corps' and 'mouvements fievreux' quite suddenly turn into a feminine river, as the Dordogne suddenly becomes plural ('tantost elles s'espandent').

dunes of moving sand that march half a league ahead of it and keep conquering land]’ (E 210; W 183). With ‘fourriers’, derived from *fourrer* [to stuff], Montaigne provides another image of *engloutissement*. At the beginning of a chapter about American natives consuming each other and the bodies of European colonisers, Montaigne piles up, like dunes, visions of a nonhuman environment consuming itself and human constructions.

In counterpoint to such unstable ground, Montaigne foregrounds anecdotes of conquered lands, and ‘Des cannibales’ comes to represent settling in an unsettled environment. The Carthaginians of Aristotle’s anecdote discovered ‘une grande isle fertile [a great fertile island]’, prompting them to settle there: ‘eux, et autres depuis, attirez par la bonté et fertilité du terroir, s’y en allèrent avec leurs femmes et enfans, et commencerent à s’y habituer [they, and others since, attracted by the goodness and fertility of the soil, went there with their wives and children, and began to settle there]’ (E 210; W 184). From inhabitation to accustomisation, ‘s’y habituer’ embodies a range of circumstances: the personal pronoun denotes a relationship to the land; the adverbial pronoun refers to a place; the verb signifies ‘accoutumer [to grow accustomed]’ and ‘s’établir’, the active movement of settling. The digressive anecdotes that inaugurate the chapter are fundamental to the core argument in ‘Des cannibales’. Montaigne argues that cannibalism is a matter of accustomisation: ‘or je trouve, pour revenir à mon propos, qu’il n’y a rien de barbare et de sauvage en cette nation, à ce qu’on m’en a rapporté: sinon que chacun appelle barbarie, *ce qui n’est pas de son usage* [now, to return to my subject, I think there is nothing barbarous and savage in that nation, from what I have been told, except that each man calls barbarism whatever is not his own practice]’ (E 211; W 195 [my emphasis]).

In the other chapter that Montaigne dedicates to critiquing the colonisation of the New World, we find a similar representation of humanity’s precarious position in an unstable environment. After evoking the landslides and the crumbling buildings of the Médoc during the Renaissance, ‘Des coches’ stages the ruin of the Inca and Aztec Empires, and evokes environmental upsets. The idea of transportation spans the chapter, from Montaigne’s *coche* to the mode of conveyance for of the last king of Peru, Atahualpa, who died while being transported on a golden chair. The chapter begins with Montaigne describing his motion sickness, following a more general sense of sickness in the narrative that depicts sneezing and various types of bodily waste: ‘me demandez-vous d’où vient cette coutume, de benire ceux qui esternuent? Nous produisons trois sortes de vent [do you ask me whence comes this custom of blessing those who sneeze? We produce three sorts of wind]’

(E 942; W 832).¹⁵ The text then abruptly turns to the main topic, reflecting on 'la cause du souslevement d'estomach, qui advient à ceux qui voyagent en mer [the reason for the heaving of the stomach that afflicts those who travel by sea]' (E 942; W 832). The conceptual conjunction of sickness and the sea recalls the *vomissement* of the sea on the shores of the Médoc in 'Des cannibales'.

After mentioning the 'heaving of the stomach' in 'Des coches', Montaigne distances his symptoms from that which is usually thought to cause seasickness, namely fear: 'moy qui y suis fort subject, sçay bien, que cette cause ne me touche pas [I, who am very subject to seasickness, know very well that this cause does not affect me]' (E 942; W 832). The discussion continues on the subject of fear before returning to a more general sense of motion sickness: 'or je ne puis souffrir long temps (et les souffrois plus difficilement en jeunesse) ny coche, ny littiere, ny bateau, et hay toute autre voiture que de cheval, et en la ville, et aux champs [now I cannot long endure (and I could endure them less easily in my youth) either coach, or litter, or boat; and I hate any other transportation than horseback, both in town and in the country]' (E 944; W 833). The verb *souffrir* – with the Middle-French meaning of 'to bear or to endure something' – recalls 's'y habituer' in 'Des cannibales'. Is it *un mal des transports* that Montaigne is describing, or a more general nausea resulting from the instability of his grounding, from environmental unrest? At first, the sickness is directed at the sea, implying perhaps that transatlantic voyaging is the disease of the wasted century, yet the unease is by turns more general and more personal: 'par cette legere secousse, que les avirons donnent, desrobant le vaisseau soubz nous, je me sens brouiller, je ne sçay comment, la teste et l'estomach: comme je ne puis souffrir soubz moy un siege tremblant [by that slight jolt given by the oars, stealing the vessel from under us, I somehow feel my head and stomach troubled, as I cannot bear a shaky seat under me]' (E 944; W 834). The unrest is powerfully represented by the 'secousse', the verb 'brouiller', and the vivid image of a 'siege tremblant'. Given that *siege* in Middle French signifies 'la place que l'on occupe [the place one occupies]' or even 'un lieu où est établie une autorité [the place where an authority is established]' (the Latin *sedes* is another word for *habitation* or *domicile*), Montaigne's evocation of his 'siege tremblant' in the company of images of consumption and *engloutissement*, as well as the repetition of *desrober*, hints at environmental risk. Moreover, the key verb *habituer*, close to *souffrir*, expresses a concern for something akin to the modern notion of sustainability. How should one endure such crumbling buildings, such a moveable terrain?

15 There are echoes of 'Des cannibales', which starts with 'nous n'embrassons que du vent'.

The environmental implications of motion sickness set the stage for an exploration of the human consequences of the colonisation of the Americas. By way of various examples of coaches and transportation, the chapter comes to focus on issues of luxury and *dépense*. Motion sickness gives way to seemingly whimsical anecdotes about eccentric coaches: 'l'Empereur Firmus fit mener son coche, à des Autruches de merveilleuses grandeur, de maniere qu'il sembloit plus voler que rouler [Emperor Firmus had his chariot drawn by ostriches of marvelous size, so that it seemed rather to fly than to roll]' (E 945; W 835). The topics of coaches and expenditure diverge here, leading to a digression on the obsessive taste for luxury among sovereigns:

L'étrangeté de ces inventions, me met en teste cett'autre fantasie: Que c'est une espece de pusillanimité, aux monarques, et un tesmoignage de ne sentir point assez, ce qu'ils sont, de travailler à se faire valloir et paroistre, par *despences excessives*. (E 945 [my emphasis])

[The strangeness of these inventions puts into my head this other notion: that it is a sort of pusillanimity in monarchs, and evidence of not sufficiently feeling what they are, to labor at showing off and making a display by excessive expense.] (W 835)

Montaigne contemplates the notion of *dépense* in an explicit critique of the excessive spending of kings, yet he does not condemn spending as such: 'l'emploitte me sembleroit bien plus royale, comme plus utile, juste et durable, en ports, en havres, fortifications et murs: en bastiments sumptueux, en Eglises, hospitaux, colleges, reformation de rues et de chemins [the outlay would seem to me much more royal as well as more useful, just, and durable, if it were spent on ports, harbors, fortifications, and walls, on sumptuous buildings, churches, hospitals, colleges, and the improvement of streets and roads]' (E 946; W 835). Montaigne's account of the difference between excessive and acceptable spending in terms of the common good is perfectly in line with discussions of spending at the time.¹⁶ For a modern reader, the terms 'useful', 'fair' and 'durable' evoke ecological considerations. Is Montaigne formulating an early concern for sustainability? The United Nations definition of sustainability uses precisely such concepts: 'sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.'¹⁷ The French translation of

16 Daniel Ménager, 'Montaigne et la magnificence', *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Montaigne* VII.29–32 (1993), 63–71.

17 World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 43.

sustainability – *développement durable* – chimes with Montaigne’s vocabulary.¹⁸ From ‘Des cannibales’ onwards, Montaigne’s writing expresses environmental concerns in a mode that can be perceived as a kind of advocacy for a reasoned consumption of resources. A discordant element is, however, present in the list of useful and durable constructions: how pragmatic are the ‘bastiments sumptueux’?

The notion of ‘bastiments sumptueux’ counters the utilitarianism of the other edifices, especially since ‘sumptueux’ fundamentally refers to pure consumption (since Roman times, sumptuary laws had served to control luxurious consumption). Montaigne’s appreciation for ‘la belle structure du Pont Neuf’ seems more aesthetic and pleasure-oriented than utilitarian. This account strongly contradicts the more conservationist and reductionist one in the earlier passage that hints at a care for some kind of sustainability. After criticising excessive spending, Montaigne surprisingly announces his admiration for luxurious buildings.¹⁹ How does an obsession with excessive spending sit alongside a concern for sustainability in an era without a definition for capitalism or ecology?²⁰ In his study of Georges Bataille’s work, Allan Stoekl coined the term ‘postsustainability’ to refer to Bataille’s theory of *dépense* or expenditure; that is to say, ‘la notion de dépense’ and ‘la part maudite.’²¹ It could be argued that Montaigne is a presustainable writer because the *Essais* announce not only a series of concerns that will nourish modern ecological

18 I propose to treat Montaigne’s environmental representation of the New World, and the subsequent shift to the rest of the world, as a register of ecological issues, in addition to the common perception of ‘Des coches’ as a chapter focussing on economic matters.

19 The adjective ‘sumptueux’ is defined as ‘qui représente de fortes dépenses; qui impressionne fortement par sa grandeur ou sa beauté.’ *Le Trésor de la langue française informatisé* (2016), <<http://atilf.atilf.fr/dendien/scripts/tlfiv5/advanced.exe?8;s=1353711105>> [accessed 3 February 2016].

20 It could be argued that Montaigne’s aesthetic admiration for luxury, even more blatant in the rest of ‘Des coches’ does not necessarily contradict his original condemnation of excessive spending. The ideas are, however, conflicting, and this contradiction is the basis of many modern concerns about adopting an ecological lifestyle. Efficiency and sustainability do not necessarily go hand-in-hand with beauty, and it is precisely the role of green consumerism to change this assumption.

21 Allan Stoekl, *Bataille’s Peak: Energy, Religion and Postsustainability* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007). Stoekl does not clearly define what he means by postsustainability, but it can be understood as what comes after sustainability, a state ‘in which we labor in order to expend, not conserve’ (xvii). Presustainability would thus be what came before sustainability: the contradictory movements of conserving and expending. As such, Montaigne in ‘Des coches’ strikingly prefigures Bataille and ecological concerns.

thought, but also because they coincide with several of Bataille's key arguments. Bataille argues that societies are defined by how they put into use the surplus that they produce.²² Reversing common and moral ways of thinking about consumption, the core of Bataille's argument is that human societies might gain something from considerable wastefulness. For Bataille, human activity is divided into two parts: one that is concerned with the 'minimum nécessaire', and the other that is a series of 'dépenses improductives', which he calls simply *dépense*. His definition of *dépense* aligns with the topics that Montaigne covers in 'Des coches': 'le luxe, les deuils, les guerres, les cultes, les constructions de monuments somptuaires, les jeux, les spectacles, les arts, l'activité sexuelle perverse (c'est-à-dire détournée de la finalité génitale) représentent autant d'activités qui, tout au moins dans les conditions primitives, ont leur fin en elles-mêmes [luxury, mourning, war, cults, the construction of sumptuary monuments, games, spectacles, arts, perverse sexual activity (i.e., deflected from genital finality) – all these represent activities which, at least in primitive circumstances, have no end beyond themselves]'.²³ Leaving aside unproductive sex – which is very much a focus of the *Essais*, although not in 'Des coches' – the list accurately describes Montaigne's train of thought. The difference in vocabulary – Bataille uses 'monuments somptuaires' while Montaigne writes about 'bastiments sumptueux' – is significant, though the etymological root has to do with consuming: the only two occurrences of the adjective 'somptueux' in all of the *Essais* qualify buildings and a meal; 'somptuaire' is quite another concern, since it figures in the title of 'Des loix somptuaires', one of the chapters in the first book of the *Essais*. Bataille, on the other hand, uses 'somptuaire' in his theory of expenditure as a central adjective that is essentially defined as a superfluous, luxury *dépense*. Both words subsume Montaigne and Bataille's obsession with useless expenditure.²⁴

In terms of war, the first coaches of 'Des coches' are 'ces coches guerriers', and luxury is broached with the turn to 'despences excessives' (E 945).²⁵ The root of 'somptuaire' is focalised in relation to the rites of mourning for the death of the

22 In the words of Jean Piel in his introduction to *La Part maudite*, 'tout le problème est de savoir comment, au sein de cette économie générale, est utilisé le surplus'. Georges Bataille, *La Part maudite; La Notion de dépense*, ed. by J. Piel (Paris: Minuit, 1967), 16.

23 Bataille, *La Part maudite*, 24; Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, trans. by A. Stoekl, C. R. Lovitt and D. M. Leslie Jr (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 118.

24 In the chapter on sumptuary laws, Montaigne refers to useless expenditure as 'choses vaines et inutiles'. This description is key to the rest of my analysis.

25 In contrast to Bataille, who advocates for the necessity of military expenditure, Montaigne criticises extravagant spending related to wars.

king of Peru: 'et puis, pour endormir les peuples estonnez et transis de chose si estrange, on contrefit un grand deuil de sa mort, et luy ordonna on des *somptueuses funerailles* [and then, to lull the people, stunned and dazed by such a strange thing, they counterfeited great mourning over his death and ordered a sumptuous funeral for him]' (E 957; W 845). Montaigne even evokes art in the sense of ornament when distinguishing European and American civilisations according to their use of gold: kings in the New World use gold 'pour faire ce grand monceau de vases et statues, à l'ornement de leur palais, et de leurs temples: au lieu que nostre or est tout en emploite et en commerce [to make that great heap of vases and statues for the adornment of their palaces and their temples; whereas our gold is all in circulation and in trade]' (E 958; W 847). As for *jeux* and spectacles, these constitute the pivotal point of the *essai*, as the transition through which the discussions of excess and the New World merge. Environmental concerns resurface at a point of convergence between 'Des coches' and 'Des cannibales,' where Montaigne stages human mastery over nature:

Et la place du fons, où les jeux se jouoyent, la faire premierement par art, entr'ouvrir et fendre en crevasses, representant des antres qui vomissoient les bestes destinées au spectacle: et puis secondement, l'inonder d'une mer profonde, qui charioit force monstres marins, chargée de vaisseaux armez à représenter une bataille navalle: et tiercement, l'applanir et assécher de nouveau, pour le combat des gladiateurs. (E 950)

[Also, first of all, to have the place at the bottom, where the games were played, open artificially and split into crevasses representing caverns that vomited forth the beasts destined for the spectacle; and then, second, to flood it with a deep sea, full of sea monsters and laden with armed vessels to represent a naval battle; and third, to level it and dry it off again for the combat of the gladiators.] (W 839)

The redundancy of the phrase 'les jeux se joueyent,' and the violence of 'vomissaient les bestes' (recalling the vomiting sea of 'Des cannibales'), points to the circus-like characteristics of the New World, and the verb *vomir* recalls the nausea described by Montaigne at the beginning of the chapter. The deep sea with vessels and sea monsters in the centre of the arena – later deemed 'ce grand vuide' – refers to the motion sickness of the beginning, and to the great sea change of the sixteenth century, namely the advent of transatlantic commerce and moral anxieties resulting from the exploitation of the resources of the New World. Montaigne's concerns about early consumerist behaviour and the environment converge on the notion of a Roman circus, prefiguring the cruelty and the wastefulness of the Spanish conquest of Mexico and Peru.

Does the formulation of a concern for something akin to sustainability in Montaigne's critique of colonial endeavours mean that colonisation is a 'despence

excessive'? For Bataille, the development of luxury is the dominant event of human history: 'l'histoire de la vie sur la terre est principalement l'effet d'une folle exubérance: l'événement dominant est le développement du luxe, la production de formes de vie de plus en plus onéreuses [the history of life on earth is mainly the effect of a wild exuberance; the dominant event is the development of luxury, the production of increasingly burdensome forms of life]'.²⁶ Montaigne expresses a similar view: 'tant de villes rasées, tant de nations exterminées, tant de millions de peuples, passez au fil de l'espée, et la plus riche et belle partie du monde bouleversée, pour la negotiation des perles et du poivre: Mechaniques victoires [so many cities razed, so many nations exterminated, so many millions of people put to the sword, and the richest and most beautiful part of the world turned upside down, for the traffic in pearls and pepper! Base and mechanical victories!]' (E 955; W 844). Montaigne spatially and temporally expands the scope of the essay beyond the New World by referring to 'tant de nations exterminées', yet the last part of the exclamation returns to a narrow focus on the New World. Behind Montaigne's methodical critique of colonisation, there appears to be a critique (more universal than local, and more environmental than economic) of the waste of human and nonhuman resources due to societal progress. The quick and radical decay of societies such as the Roman Empire and the Incan Empire results in a feeling of wasted energy: 'comme vainement nous concluons aujourd'hui l'inclination et la decrepitude du monde par les arguments que nous tirons de nostre propre foiblesse et decadence [...]; ainsi vainement concluait cettuy-là sa naissance et jeunesse, par la vigueur qu'il voyoit aux esprits de son temps, abondans en nouvelles et inventions de divers arts [as vainly as we today infer the decline and decrepitude of the world from the arguments we draw from our own weakness and decay [...]; so vainly did this poet infer the world's birth and youth from the vigor he saw in the minds of his time, abounding in novelties and inventions in various arts]' (E 952; W 841). A term appears here that subsequently gains in importance: *vainement*, the same *vanité* that will title two of Montaigne's other essays. Montaigne acknowledges that his position is a vain one, as a writer and human living in a 'wasted century'. Bataille, too, focusses on the importance of vanity: vanity is a key term of the accursed share linked to the 'vain gaspillage des profits'.²⁷ If the *dépense improductive* is vain, is it wasteful, or is it necessary and meaningful?

26 Bataille, *La Part maudite*, 59; Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, trans. by R. Hurley, vol. 1 (New York, NY: Zone, 1988), 33.

27 Bataille, *La Part maudite*, 50; with Hurley's translation of 'the squandering of profits' (22), the adjective 'vain' is lost.

There is a redundancy to vanity that is embodied in the Roman circus as Montaigne describes it: ‘Tous les costez de ce grand vuide remplis et environnez depuis les fons jusques au comble, de soixante ou quatre vingts rangs d’echelons, aussi de marbre couvers de carreaux [all the sides of this vast emptiness filled and surrounded from top to bottom with sixty or eighty rows of seats, also made of marble, covered with cushions]’ (E 949 [my translation]). The etymology of the central verb in this description, ‘environnez’, is traced by Karen Pinkus to the verb ‘virer’, a maritime term signifying a turn, a change.²⁸ As Pinkus argues, the Latin root of *veering* leads to *vibrating*, recalling Montaigne’s shaky seat, and the crumbling shores of the Médoc. This notion, reminiscent of Montaigne’s nausea, prompts several questions: insofar as we humans are surrounded by the environment, are we all on a shaky seat? What if the role of the human in the environment is all about movement? A movement that produces enduring nausea, and that perseveres despite a perceived lack of utility. Montaigne, using a compound of ‘virer’ once more in the context of vanity, writes: ‘nous n’allons point, nous rodons plustost, et nous tournevirons çà et là: nous nous promenons sur nos pas. Je crains que nostre cognoissance soit foible en tous sens. Nous ne voyons ny gueres loin, ny guere arriere. Elle embrasse peu et vit peu: courte et en estandue de temps, et en estandue de matiere [we do not go in a straight line; we rather ramble, and turn this way and that. We retrace our steps. I fear that our knowledge is weak in every direction; we do not see very far ahead or very far behind. It embraces little and has a short life, short in both extent of time and extent of matter]’ (E 951; W 840).

‘Des coches’ ultimately subsumes the abundance and the fertility of the New World into something like a wasteland, where humans err and are redundant. Their excess results in too little of everything, too little knowledge, too little life, too little sensuality, too little time, and too little matter. Montaigne evokes the necessity of turning away from such a course. If Bataille offers a post-sustainable alternative, as Allan Stoekl argues,²⁹ Montaigne provides a pre-sustainable one. The sixteenth-century writer’s precocious grasp of sustainability strikes a middle way between commerce and ornament, between utility and durability, between the sumptuous and sumptuary dimensions of things.³⁰

28 Karen Pinkus, ‘The Risks of Sustainability’, in *Criticism, Crisis, and Contemporary Narrative: Textual Horizons in an Age of Global Risk*, ed. by P. Crosthwaite (London: Routledge, 2011), 62–80.

29 Stoekl, *Bataille’s Peak*, 144.

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