**CORE106 Fall 2015**

**October 2, 2015**

**Notes: Bakewell: Intro and c.1**

**Sarah Bakewell. *How to Live: Or A Life of Montaigne in One Question and Twenty Attempts at an Answer***

Let’s put a finishing bow on Crito:

* Socrates is deferential to authority to the point where any contradiction between his own behavior and the direction of the state is a flaw, even if it costs him his life.
* He’s on one end of a continuum: at what point is the rule of law no longer something to obey?

Douglass probably has an opinion on this.

Montaigne's Project according to Sarah Bakewell

* The transition into today: why do we listen to ordinary people instead of listening to the experts. Make no mistake: that practice can be dangerous. But there are advantages.
* By describing what makes them different from anyone else, the contributors reveal what they share with everyone else: the experience of being human.
* “Create a mirror in which people recognize their own humanity.”
* (3) Montaingne did not write about his achievements. He wrote about his own experience. “His essays rarely offer to explain or teach anything.”
* Now you know where stream of consciousness began: seeing the world as a blend of others and ourselves like we’re looking in a reflective window.
* You and I disappear, which, if you think about it, is the highest aspiration of a writer. Incandescence?

What is the agenda with this book, and why Bakewell and not Montaigne?

* Partly, this is a tease. Forcing you to read Montaigne is one way to make you hate him.
* Bakewell's narrative is so good and so accessible.

Obviously, the book isgood in ways that a 21st century reader can appreciate.

So light, so poetic, in a sense, undemanding.

Also partly to make a point about perspective. Seeing Montaigne see himself will eventually ease the path of entry.

And I hope the intellectual spirit is apparent: He’s the first person who elevated his own responses to the world to content.

**Montaigne coined the word "essay" and invented the form!**

**What does the word “essay” mean, and how is this meaning so different from the way we often understand it?**

“[Tedious] discourses existed in Montaigne’s day, but essays did not.”

Let’s talk about general reactions to the goals of the book in the introduction. Some of you enjoyed it and a couple called it fuzzy. Say more about the ways in which Montaigne seems to be positioned as a different kind of writer?

This is how you should think of writing: to try (*essayer* is the French infinitive "to try").

**What is the difference between “How to Live” vs. “How Should We Live”?**

Questions: What is it about the classical philosophers pose towards death that Montaigne rebels against, in Bakewell’s account?

How to live? Don’t worry about death.

What changed after Montaigne's near fatal accident?  
  
Disconnect of mind from body. The point isn’t that he always lived that way: he suffered pain. But he went through a kind of moment of disconnected observation of himself.

By the way: This is a hugely important development in the mark of western civilization.

**MORAL: LEARN HOW TO SLIDE OVER DEATH AND YOU CAN SEE YOURSELF IN ALMOST ANY SITUATION. THE ABILITY TO STAND APART FROM YOURSELF (SAY, 20 FEET AWAY) AND WATCH YOURSELF.**

**Montaigne learned not to fear his own non-existence.**

Montaigne before: obsessed with death. Obsessed with every negative association of it. Obsessed with experiences that can only be described as traumatic.

This lesson improves life in thousands of ways.

It’s a retort to the philosophical obsession about death.

* We want to face it “stoically” and courageously.
* We want to be accountable to God.

(14) How can we rid ourselves of of the thought of death…

What happened in Montaigne’s transformation?

“People are full of themselves.”

Note the Oxford Muse: replacing stereotypes with real people.