**CORE106 Fall 2015**

**October 12, 2015**

**Class Notes**

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

1. **Parallels to Virginia Woolf and a Room of One’s Own:**

We know that retreating into a world of contemplation has its rewards. Montaigne seeks to live for “himself, rather than duty.”   
  
The ancient philosophers thought of this phase a long preparation for death.

BUT: Seneca warns of dangers (first paragraph on page 30).  
  
“Montaigne’s mind galloped off like a runaway horse...filled with nonsense.” What does this reveal about happiness?

Seneca (31): “If you become depressed or bored in your retirement, just look around you and interest yourself in the variety and sublimity of things. **Salvation lies in paying full attention to nature.”**

**Plutarch, Seneca: “How does one achieve peace of mind?” “Focus on what is present in front of you and pay full attention to it.” (32) Why do we resist this habit?**Notice the observation about trade and the dismissiveness of it.

**“We are foolish but we may as well relax and life with it.” (43)**Seneca: Life does not pause to remind you that time is running out.

The anti-intellectual streak (p. 51): peasants were the heirs of classical sages…because they knew nothing much about anything else.”

1. **What Montaigne reveals about the writing process. Steams of consciousness, the phrase invented by William James.**

**The difference between observation and thought. Really, two kinds of knowledge.**

What do we make of the contrast of plumbing the depths through writing? “Montaigne wanted to drift away, yet he also wanted to attach himself to reality and extract every grain of experience from it. Writing made it possible to do both.”

You can never retrieve an experience in full. "You can never step in the same river twice." -- Heraclitus.

Montaigne recognized that the observer is as unreliable as the observed. A critical evolution in modern literature.

“I portray passing. Not the passing from one age to another, but from day to day, minute to minute.”

Note the connection to Virginia Woolf on page 36. “Observe, observe perpetually.”

“Naïve amazement at each instant of experience.”

Montaigne was unusual because of his mixed identity (p. 52).

He was educated in the Latin language, but raised by peasants.

“Command of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ was the highest goal of humanistic education”: What would this be today?