

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE
ESSAYS



Book 1 · Chapter 19

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That to Study Philosophy Is to Learn to Die

CICERO says, *That to study Philosophy is nothing but to prepare a Man's self to die.* The reason of which is, because Study and Contemplation do in some sort withdraw from us, and deprive us of our Souls, and employ it separately from the Body, which is a kind of Learning to die, and a resemblance of Death; or else because all the Wisdom and reasoning in the World, does in the end conclude in this Point, to teach us not to fear to die. And to say the Truth, either our Reason does grossly abuse us, or it ought to have no other Aim but our Contentment only, nor to endeavour any thing but in Sum to make us live well, and, as the Holy Scripture says, at our Ease. All the Opinions of the World agree in this. That Pleasure is our end, though we make use of divers means to attain unto it, they would otherwise be rejected at the first motion; for who would give Ear to him that should propose Affliction and Misery for his end? The Controversies and Disputes of the Philosophical Sects upon this Point are merely verbal, *Transcurramus solertissimas nugas*, Let us skip over those learned and subtle Fooleries and Trifles; there is more in them of Opposition and Obstinacy than is consistent with so sacred a Profession, but what kind of Person soever Man takes upon him to personate, he over-mixes his own part with it; and let the Philosophers all say what they will, the main thing at which we all aim, even in Virtue it self, is Pleasure. It pleases me to rattle in their Ears this Word, which they so nauseate to hear; and if it signifie some supream Pleasure and excessive Delight, it is more due to the Assistance of Virtue than to any other Assistance whatever. This Delight, for being more gay, more sinewy, more robust, and more manly, is only to be more serioussy voluptuous, and we ought to give it the Name of Pleasure, as that which is more benign, gentle, and natural, and not that of Vigour, from which we have deriv'd it: the other more mean and sensual part of Pleasure, if it could deserve this fair Name, it ought to be upon the Account of Concurrence, and not of Privilege; I find it less exempt from Traverses and Inconveniences, than Vertue it self; and besides that, the Enjoyment is more momentary, fluid, and frail; it has its Watchings, Fasts, and Labours, even to Sweat and Blood; and moreover, has particular to it self so many several sorts of sharp and wounding Passions, and so stupid a Satiety attending it, as are equal to the severest Penance. And we mistake to think that Difficulties should serve it for a Spur, and a seasoning to its Sweetness, as in Nature

one Contrary is quickned by another, and to say when we come to Vertue, that like Consequences and Difficulties overwhelm and render it austere and inaccessible; whereas, much more aptly than in Voluptuousness, they enable, sharpen, and heighten the Perfect and divine Pleasure they procure us. He renders himself unworthy of it who will counterpoise his Expence with the Fruit, and does neither understand the Blessing, nor how to use it. Those who Preach to us, that the quest of it is craggy, difficult, and painsul, but the Fruition pleasant and grateful, what do they mean by that but to tell us that it is always unpleasing? The most perfect have been forc'd to content themselves to aspire unto it, and to approach it only without ever possessing it. But they are deceiv'd, and do not take notice, that of all the Pleasures we know, the very Pursuit is pleasant. The Attempt ever relishes of the quality of the thing to which it is directed, for it is a good part of, and consubstantial with the Effect. The Felicity and Beatitude that glitters in Vertue, shines throughout all her Apartments and Avenues, even to the first Entry, and utmost Pale and Limits. Now of all the Benefits that Vertue confers upon us, the Contempt of Death is one of the greatest, as the means that accommodates Humane Life with a soft and easie Tranquillity, and gives us a pure and pleasant Taste of Living, without which all other pleasure would be extinct; which is the Reason why all the Rules by which we are to live, centre and concur in this one Article. And altho they all in like manner with one consent endeavour to teach us also to despise Grief, Poverty, and the other Accidents to which humane Life by its own Nature and Constitution, is subjected, it is not nevertheless with the same Importunity, as well by reason the fore-named Accidents are not of so great necessity, the greater part of Mankind passing over their whole Lives without ever knowing what Poverty is, and some without Sorrow or Sickness as *Xenophilus* the Musician, who liv'd a hundred and six Years in a perfect and continual Health; as also because, at the worst, Death can, whenever we please, cut short, and put an end to all these Inconveniences. But as to Death, it is inevitable.

*Omnes eodem cogimur, omnium
Versatur Urna; serius, ocyus
Sors exitura, nos in æternum
Exilium impositura Cymbæ.*

*We all are to one Voyage bound; by turn,
Sooner or latter, all must to the Urn:
When Charon calls aboard we must not stay,
But to eternal Exile fail away.*

And consequently, if it frights us, 'tis a perpetual Torment, and for which there is no Consolation nor Redress. There is no way by which we can possibly avoid it, it commands all Points of the Compass; we may continually turn our Heads this way and that, and pry about as in a suspected Country, *quæ quasi saxum Tantalò semper impendet*, but it, like *Tantalus* his Stone, hangs over us. Our Courts of Justice often send back condemn'd Criminals to be executed upon the Place where the Fact was committed, but carry them to all fine Houses by the way, and prepare for them the best Entertainment you can,

*non Sicula Dapes
Dulcem elaborabunt saporem:
Non Avium, Citharæque cantús
Somnum reducent.*

*the tasts of such as these
Choicest Sicilian Dainties cannot please,
Nor yet of Birds, or Harps the Harmonies
Once charm asleep, or close their watchful Eyes.*

do you think they could relish it? and that the fatal end of their Journey being continually before their Eyes, would not alter and deprave their Palate from tasting these Regalio's?

*Audit iter numeratque dies spatiaque viarum
Metitur uitam, torquetur peste futura.*

*He time and space computes, by length of ways
Sums up the number of his few sad days,
And his sad thoughts, full of his fatal doom,
Can dream of nothing but the blow to come.*

The end of our Race is Death, 'tis the necessary Object of our aim, which if it fright us, how is it possible to advance a step without a Fit of an Ague? the Remedy the Vulgar use, is not to think on't: but from what brutish stupidity can they derive so gross a blindness? They must bridle the Ass by the Tail.

Qui capite ipse suo instituit uestigia retro.

*He who the order of his steps has laid
To light and natural motion retrograde;*

'tis no wonder if he be often trap'd in the Pitfall. They use to fright People with the very mention of Death, and many cross themselves, as it were the name of the Devil; and because the making a mans Will is in reverence to dying, not a man will be perswaded to take a Pen in hand to that purpose, till the Physician has pass'd sentence upon him, and totally given him over, and then betwixt Grief and Terror, God knows in how fit a condition of Understanding he is to do it. The *Romans*, by reason that this poor syllable *Death* was observ'd to be so harsh to the Ears of the People, and the sound so ominous; had found out a way to soften and spin it out by a *Periphrasis*, and instead of pronouncing bluntly, such a one is dead, to say, *such a one has liv'd*, or *such a one has ceas'd to live*; for, provided there was any mention of Life in the Case, though past, it carried yet some sound of Consolation. And from them it is that we have borrow'd our expression of *the late Monsieur such and such a one*. Peradventure (as the Saying is) the term we have liv'd is worth our money. I was born betwixt eleven and twelve a clock in the Forenoon the last of *February* 1533. according to our Computation, beginning the Year the first of *January*, and it is now but just fifteen days since I was compleat nine and thirty years old; I make account to live at least as many more. In the mean time, to trouble a mans self with the thought of a thing so far of, is a senseless Foolery. But what? Young and Old die after the very same manner, and no one departs

out of Life otherwise, than if he had but just before enter'd into it; neither is any so old and decrepid, who has heard of *Methusalem*, that does not think he has yet twenty years of Constitution good at least. Fool that thou art, who has assur'd unto thee the term of Life? Thou depend'st upon Physicians Tales and Stories, but rather consult Experience, and the fragility of humane Nature: for, according to the common course of things, 'tis long since that thou liv'd'st by extraordinary Favour. Thou hast already out-liv'd the ordinary term of Life, and that it is so, reckon up thy Acquaintance, how many more have died before they arriv'd at thy Age, than have attain'd unto it, and of those who have ennobled their Lives by their Renown, take but an Account, and I dare lay a Wager, thou wilt find more who have dyed before than after five and thirty years of age. It is full both of Reason and Piety too, to take Example by the Humanity of Jesus Christ himself, who ended his Life at three and thirty years. The greatest man, that ever was no more than a man, *Alexander* died also at the same Age. How many several ways has Death to surprize us?

*Quid quisque uitet, nunquam homini satis
Cautum est in horas*

*Man fain would shun, but 'tis not in his Power
T'evade the dangers of each threatning hour*

To omit Fevers and Pleurisies, who would ever have imagin'd that a Duke of *Britanny* should be press'd to death in a Crowd, as that Duke was at the entry of Pope *Clement* into *Lyons*? Have we not seen one of our Kings¹ kill'd at a Tilting, and did not one of his Ancestors die by the justle of a Hog? *Æschylus*, being threatned with the fall of a house was to much purpose so circumspect to avoid that danger, when he was knock'd o'th' head by a Tortoise-shell falling out of an Eagles Talons in the Fields. Another was choak'd with a Grape-stone; an Emperour kill'd with the scratch of a Comb in combing his Head. *Æmilius Lepidus*, with a stumble at his own threshold, and *Aufidius* with a justle against the door, as he entred the Council Chamber. And betwixt the very Thighs of Women, *Cornelius Gallus* the *Prætor*, *Tigillinus* Captain of the Watch at *Rome*, *Ludovico* Son of *Guido de Gonzaga* Marquis of *Mantua*, and (of worse example) *Speusippus*, a *Platonick* Philosopher, and one of our *Popes*. The poor Judge *Bebius*, whilst he repriv'd a Criminal for eight days only, was himself condemn'd to death, and his own day of Life was expir'd. Whilst *Caius Julius* the Physician was anointing the Eyes of a Patient, Death clos'd his own; and, if I may bring in an Example of my own Blood; A Brother of mine, Captain *St. Martin*, a young man, of three and twenty years old, who had already given sufficient testimony of his Valour, playing a match at Tennis, receiv'd a blow of a Ball a little above his right Ear, which, though it was without any manner of sign of Wound, or depression of the Skull, and though he took no great notice of it, nor so much as sate down to repose himself, he nevertheless died within five or six hours after, of an Apoplexy occasion'd by that blow. Which so frequent and common Examples passing every day before our Eyes, how is it possible a man should disingage himself from the thought of Death; or avoid fansying that it has us every moment by the Collar? What matter is it, you will say, which way it comes to pass, provided a man does not terrifie himself with the expectation? For my part, I am of this mind, that if a man could by any means avoid it, though by creeping under a Calves skin, I am one

that should not be ashamed of the shift: all I aim at is, to pass my time pleasantly, and without any great Reproach, and the Recreations that most contribute to it, I take hold of, as to the rest, as little glorious and exemplary as you would desire.

*prætulerim delirus inersque uideri,
Dum mea delectam mala me, uel denique fallant,
Quàm sapere, & ringi.*

*A Fool, or Coward, let me censur'd be,
Whilst either Vice does please, or cozen me,
Rather, than be thought wise, and feel the smart
Of a perpetual aking, anxious Heart.*

But 'tis folly to think of doing any thing that way. They go, they come, they gallop and dance, and not a word of Death. All this is very fine, but withall, when it comes either to themselves, their Wives, their Children, or Friends, surprizing them at unawares, and unprepar'd, then what torment, what out-cries, what madness and despair! Did you ever see any thing so subdu'd, so chang'd and so confounded? A man must therefore make more early tryal of it; and this brutish negligence, could it possibly lodge in the Brain of any man of Sense (which I think utterly impossible) sells us its merchandize too dear. Were it an Enemy that could be avoided, I would then advise to borrow Arms even of Cowardize it self to that effect: but feeling it is not, and that it will catch you as well flying, and playing the Poltron, as standing to't like a man of Honour.

*Nempe & fugacem persequitur uirum,
Nec parcat imbellis iuuentæ
Poplitibus timidoque tergo.*

*No speed of foot prevents Death of his prize,
He cuts the Hamstrings of the man that flies;
Nor spares the tender Stripling's back, does start
To out-run the distance of his mortal Dart*

And seeing that no temper of Arms is of proof to secure us,

*Ille licet ferro, cautus se condat, & ære
Mors tamen inclusum protrahet inde caput.*

*Shell thee with Steel or Brass, advis'd by dread
Death from the Cask will pull thy cautious Head*

let us learn bravely to stand our ground, and fight him. And to begin to deprive him of the greatest Advantage he has over us, let us take a way quite contrary to the common course. Let us disarm him of his Novelty and Strangeness, let us converse, and be familiar with him, and have nothing so frequent in our thoughts as Death; Let us upon occasions represent him in all his most dreadful shapes to our imagination; at the stumbling of a Horse, at the falling of a Tile, at the lest prick with a Pin, let us presently consider, and say to our selves, Well, and what if it had been Death it self? and thereupon let us encourage and fortifie our selves. Let us evermore amidst our jollity and Feasting, set the remembrance of

our frail condition before our Eyes, never suffering our selves to be so far transported with our Delight, but that we have some intervals of reflecting upon, and considering how many several ways this Jollity of ours tends to Death, and with how many dangers it threatens it. The *Egyptians* were wont to do after this manner, who in the height of their Feasting and Mirth, caus'd a dried Skeleton of a Man to be brought into the Room to serve for a *Memento* to their Guests.

*Omnem crede diem tibi diluxisse supremum,
Grata superveniet, quæ non sperabitur hora.*

*Think every day, soon as the day is past,
Of thy Lives date, that thou hast liv'd the last;
The next day's joyful Light thine Eyes shall see,
As unexpected, will more welcome be.*

Where Death waits for us is uncertain; let us every where look for him. The Premeditation of Death is the Premeditation of Liberty; who has learnt to die has forgot to serve. There is nothing of Evil in Life, for him who rightly comprehends, that Death is no Evil: to know how to die delivers us from all Subjection and Constraint. *Paulus Æmylius* answer'd him whom the miserable King of *Macedon*, his Prisoner, sent to entreat him that he would not lead him in his Triumph, *Let him make that Request to himself*. In truth, in all things, if Nature do not help a little, it is very hard for Art and Industry to perform any thing to purpose. I am in my own Nature not melancholick, but thoughtful; and there is nothing I have more continually entertain'd my self withall than the Imaginations of Death, even in the gayest and most wanton time of my Age.

Jucundum cum atas florida uer ageret,

Of florid Age in the most pleasant Spring.

In the Company of Ladies, and in the height of Mirth, some have perhaps thought me possess'd with some jealousy, or meditating upon the Uncertainty of some imagin'd Hope, whilft I was entertaining my self with the Remembrance of some one surpriz'd a few days before with a burning Fever of which he died returning from an Entertainment like this with his Head full of idle Fancies of Love and Jollity, as mine was then, and that for ought I knew the same Destiny was attending me.

Jam fuerit, nec post unquam reuocare licebit.

*But now he had, a Being amongst Men,
Now gone, and ne'er to be recall'd agen.*

Yet did not this Thought wrinkle my Forehead any more than any other. It is impossible but we must feel a sting in such Imaginations as these at first; but with often revolving them in a Man's Mind, and having them frequent in our Thoughts, they at last become so familiar as to be no trouble at all: otherwise, I for my Part should be in a perpetual Fright and Frenzy; for never Man was so distrustful of his Life, never Man so indifferent for its Duration. Neither Health, which I have hitherto ever enjoyed very strong and vigorous, and very seldom interrupted, does

prolong, nor Sickness contract my Hopes. Methinks I scape every minute, and it eternally runs in my Mind, that what may be done to morrow may be done to day. Hazards and Dangers do, in truth, little or nothing hasten our end; and if we consider how many more remain and hang over our Heads, besides the accident that immediately threatens us, we shall find that the Sound and the Sick, those that are abroad at Sea, and those that sit by the Fire, those who are engag'd in Battle, and those who sit idle at home, are the one as near it as the other: *Nemo altero fragilior est: nemo in crastinum sui certior*, No Man is more, frail than another: no more certain of the morrow. For any thing I have to do before I die, the longest leisure would appear too short, were it but an Hours Business I had to do. A Friend of mine the other day turning over my Table-Book, found in it a Memorandum of something I would have done after my Decease, whereupon I told him, as it was really true, that though I was no more than a League's distance only from my own House, and merry and well, yet when that thing came into my Head, I made haste to write it down there, because I was not certain to live till I came home. As a man that am eternally brooding over my own thoughts, and who confine them to my own particular Concerns, I am upon the matter at all hours as well prepar'd as I am ever like to be, and Death, whenever he shall come, can bring nothing along with him I did not expect long before. We should always (as near as we can) be booted and spurr'd, and ready to go, and above all things to take care at that time to have no business with any one but a man's self:

Quid breui fortes jaculamur æuo Multa?

*Why cut'st thou out such mighty Work, vain man?
Whose Life's short date's compriz'd in one poor span?*

For we shall there find work enough to do, without any need of Addition; One complains, more than of Death, that he is thereby prevented, of a glorious Victory; another, that he must die before he has married his Daughter, or settled, and provided for his Children; a third seems only troubled that he must lose the society of his beloved Wife; a fourth, the conversation of his Son, as the principal Concerns of his Being. For my part, I am, thanks be to God, at this instant in such a condition, that I am ready to dislodge, whenever it shall please him, without any manner of regret. I disengage my self throughout from all Worldly Relations, my leave is soon taken of all but my self. Never did any one prepare to bid adieu to the World more absolutely and purely, and to shake hands with all manner of Interest in it, than I expect to do. The dearest Deaths are the best.

*miser o miser (aiunt) omnia ademit
Una dies infesta mihi tot præmia uitæ;*

*Wretch that I am (they cry) one fatal day
So many joys of Life has snatch'd away.*

And the Builder,

*manent (dit il.) opera interrupta, minæque
Murorum ingentes, æquataque machina Cælo.*

*Stupendous Piles (says he) neglected lie,
And Tow'rs whose Pinacles do pierce the Sky.*

A man must design nothing that will require so much time to the finishing, or at least with no such passionate desire to see it brought to Perfection. We are born to action.

Cum moriar medium folvar & inter opus.

*When Death shall come, he me will doubtless find
Doing of something that I had design'd.*

I would always have a man to be doing, and, as much as in him lies, to extend, and spin out the Offices of life; and then let Death take me planting Cabages, but without any careful thought of him, and much less of my Garden's not being finished. I saw one die, who at his last gasp seem'd to be concern'd at nothing so much, as that Destiny was about to cut the thread of a Chronicle History he was then compiling, when he was gone no farther than the fifteenth or sixteenth of our Kings.

*Illud in his rebus non addunt, nec tibi carum
Jam desiderium rerum, superinfidet una.*

*They tell us not that dying we've no more
The same desires and thoughts that heretofore.*

We are to discharge our selves from these vulgar and hurtful Humours and Concerns. To this purpose it was, that men first appointed the places of Sepulture, and Dormitories of the dead, near adjoining to the Churches, and in the most frequent places of the City, to accustom (says *Lycurgus*) the common People, Women and Children, that they should not be startled at the sight of a dead Coarse; and to the end, that the continual Objects of Bones, Graves, Monuments, and Funeral Obsequies should put us in Mind of our frail condition.

*Quinetiam exhilarare uiris conuiuia cæde
Mos olim, & miscere epulis spectacula dira
Certatum ferro, sæpe & super ipsa cadentum
Pocula, respersis non parco sanguine mensis.*

*'Twas therefore that the Ancients at their Feasts
With tragick Objects us'd to treat their Guests,
Making their Fencers with their utmost spite,
Skill, Force, and Fury, in their presence fight,
Till streams of Blood of those at last must fall.
Dash'd o'er their Tables, Dishes, Cups and all.*

And as the *Egyptians* after their Feasts were wont to present the Company with a great Image of *Death*, by one that cry'd out to them, *Drink and be merry, for such shalt thou be when thou art dead*; so it is my Custom to have *Death* not only in my Imagination, but continually in my Mouth; neither is there any thing of which I am so inquisitive, and delight to inform my self, as the manner of mens Deaths, their Words, Looks, and Gestures; nor any places in History I am so intent upon; and it is manifest enough,

by my crowding in Examples of this kind, that I have a particular fancy for that Subject. If I were a Writer of Books, I would compile a Register with a Comment of the various Deaths of men, and it could not but be useful, for who should teach men to die, would at the same time teach them to live. *Dicearchus* made one, to which he gave that Title; but it was design'd for another, and less profitable end. Peradventure some one may object, and say, that the pain and terror of dying indeed does so infinitely exceed all manner of imagination, that the best Fencer will be quite out of his Play when it comes to the Push: but let them say what they will, to premeditate is doubtless a very great Advantage; and besides, is it nothing to come so far, at least, without any visible Disturbance or Alteration? But moreover, Nature her self does assist and encourage us. If the Death be sudden and violent, we have not leisure to fear; if otherwise, I find, that as I engage further in my Disease, I naturally enter into a certain loathing, and disdain of Life. I find I have much more ado to digest this Resolution of dying when I am well in Health than when sick languishing of a Fever; and by how much I have less to do with the Commodities of Life, by reason I even begin to lose the use and Pleasure of them, by so much I look upon Death with less Terror and Amazement; which makes me hope, that the further I remove from the first, and the nearer I approach to the latter, I shall sooner strike a bargain, and with less Unwillingness exchange the one for the other. And, as I have experimented in other Occurrences, that, as *Cæsar* says, things often appear greater to us at distance than near at hand, I have found, that being well, I have had Diseases in much greater Horror than when really afflicted with them. The Vigour wherein I now am, and the Jollity and Delight wherein I now live, make the contrary Estate appear in so great a disproportion to my present condition, that by Imagination I magnifie and make those inconveniences twice greater than they are, and apprehend them to be much more troublesome, than I find them really to be, when they lie the most heavy upon me, and I hope to find Death the same. Let us but observe in the ordinary changes and Declinations our Constitutions daily suffer, how Nature deprives us of all sight and sense of our bodily decay. What remains to an old man of the vigour of his Youth and better days?

Heu senibus uitæ portio quanta manet?

*Alas, to men, of youthful Heat bereft,
How small a Portion of Life is left?*

Cæsar, to an old weather-beaten Souldier of his Guards, who came to ask him leave that he might kill himself, taking notice of his wither'd Body, and decrepid motion, pleasantly answer'd, *Thou fansiest then that thou art yet alive*. Should a man fall into the Aches and impotencies of Age, from a spritely and vigorous Youth on the sudden, I do not think Humanity capable of enduring such a change: but Nature, leading us by the hand, an easie, and as it were, an insensible pace, step by step conducts us to that miserable condition, and by that means makes it familiar to us, so that we perceive not, nor are sensible of the stroak then, when our Youth dies in us, though it be really a harder Death, than the final Dissolution of a languishing Body, which is only the Death of old Age; forasmuch as the Fall is not so great from an uneasie Being to none at all, as it is from a spritely and florid Being to one that is unweildy and Painful. The Body,

when bow'd beyond its natural spring of Strength, has less Force either to rise with, or support a Burthen; and it is with the Soul the same, and therefore it is, that we are to raise her up firm and erect against the Power of this Adversary: for as it is impossible she should ever be at rest, or at Peace within her self, whilst she stands in fear of it; so if she once can assure her self, she may boast (which is a thing as it were above Humane Condition) that it is impossible that Disquiet, Anxiety, or Fear, or any other Disturbance, should inhabit, or have any Place in her.

*Non uultus instantis tyranni
Mente quatit folida, neque Auster
Dux inquieti turbidus Adriæ,
Nec fulminantis magna Jouis manus.*

*A Soul well settled is not to be shook
With an incensed Tyrant's threatning Look;
Nor can loud Auster once that Heart dismay,
The ruffling Prince of stormy Adria;
Nor yet th' advanced hand of mighty Jove,
Though charg'd with Thunder, such a Temper move.*

She is then become Sovereign of all her Lusts and Passions, Mistress of Necessity, Shame, Poverty, and all the other Injuries of Fortune. Let us therefore, as many of us as can, get this Advantage, which is the true and sovereign Liberty here on Earth, and that fortifies us wherewithal to defie Violence and Injustice, and to contemn Prisons and Chains.

*in Manicis, &
Compedibus, sævo te sub custode tenebo.
Ipse Deus simul atque uolam, me soluet, opinor,
Hoc sentit, moriar: mors ultima linea rerum est.*

*With rugged Chains I'll load thy Hands and Feet
And to a surly Keeper thee commit;
Why let him shew his worst of Cruelty,
God will, I think, for asking, set me free:
Ay, but he thinks I'll die; that Comfort brings,
For Death's the utmost Line of Humane things.*

Our very Religion it self has no surer humane Foundation than the Contempt of Death. Not only the Argument of Reason invites us to it; for why should we fear to lose a thing, which being lost, can never be miss'd or lamented? but also seeing we are threatned by so many sorts of Death, is it not infinitely worse eternally to fear them all, than once to undergo one of them? And what matter is it when it shall happen, since it is once inevitable? To him that told *Socrates, the thirty Tyrants have sentenc'd thee to Death; and Nature them*, said he. What a ridiculous thing it is to trouble and afflict our selves, about taking the only Step that is to deliver us from all Misery and Trouble? As our Birth brought us the Birth of all things, so in our Death is the Death of all things included. And therefore to lament and take on, that we shall not be alive a hundred Years hence, is the same Folly as to be sorry we were not alive a hundred Years ago. Death is the beginning of another Life. So did we weep, and so much it cost us to enter into this, and so did we put off our former Veil in entring into it. Nothing

can be grievous that is but once, and is it reasonable so long to fear a thing that will so soon be dispatch'd? Long Life and short, are by Death made all one for there is no long, nor short, to things that are no more. *Aristotle* tells us, that there are certain little Beasts upon the Banks of the River *Hypanis*, that never live above a day: they which die at eight of the Clock in the Morning, die in their Youth, and those that die at five in the Evening, in their extreamest Age: which of us would not laugh to see this Moment of Continuance put into the consideration of Weal or Woe? The most, and the least of ours in comparison of Eternity, or yet to the Duration of Mountains, Rivers, Stars, Trees, and even of some Animals, is no less ridiculous. But Nature compels us to it; *Go out of this World, says she, as you enter'd into it; the same Pass you made from Death to Life, without Passion or Fear, the same, after the same manner repeat from Life to Death.* Your Death is a part of the Order of the Universe, 'tis a part of the Life of the World.

*Inter se mortales mutua uiuunt,
Et quasi cursores uitae lampada tradunt.*

*Mortals amongst themselves by turns do live,
And Life's bright Torch to the next Runner give.²*

'Tis the Condition of your Creation; Death is a part of you, and whilst you endeavour to evade it, you avoid your selves. This very Being of yours that you now enjoy is equally divided betwixt Life and Death. The day of your Birth is one days advance towards the Grave.

Prima, quae uitam dedit, hora, carpsit.

*The Hour that gave of Life the benefit,
Did also a whole Hour shorten it.*

Nascentes morimur, finisque ab origine pendet.

*As we are born, we die, and our Life's end
Upon our Life's beginning does depend.*

All the whole time you live you purloin from Life, and live at the expence of Life it self, the perpetual work of our whole Life is but to lay the foundation of Death; you are in Death whilst you live, because you still are after Death, when you are no more alive. Or it you had rather have it so, you are dead after Life, but dying all the while you live; and Death handles the dying much more rudely than the dead. If you have made your profit of Life, you have had enough of it, go your way satisfied.

Cur non ut plenus uitae conuiuia recedis.

*Why should'st thou not go like a full gorg'd Guest,
Sated with Life, as he is with a Feast?*

If you have not known how to make the best use of it, and if it was unprofitable to you, what need you care to lose it, to what end would you desire longer to keep it?

*cur amplius addere quæris
Rursum quod pereat malè & ingratum occidat omne?*

*And why renew thy time, to what intent
Live o'er again a Life that was ill spent?*

Life in it self is neither good nor evil, it is the Scene of good or evil, as you make it; and, if you have liv'd a day, you have seen all; one day is equall, and like to all other days; there is no other Light, no other Shade, this very Sun, this Moon, these very Stars, this very Order and Revolution of things, is the same your Ancestors enjoy'd, and that shall also entertain your Posterity.

*Non alium uidere patres, aliumue nepotes
Aspicient:*

*Your Grandsires saw no other things of old,
Nor shall your Nephews other things behold.*

And come the worst that can come, the distribution and variety of all the Acts of my Comedy, is perform'd in a Year. If you have observ'd the Revolution of the four Seasons, they comprehend, the Infancy, Youth, Virility, and old Age of the World. The Year has play'd his part, and knows no other way, has no new Farce, but must begin and repeat the same again; it will always be the same thing.

Uersamur ibidem, atque insumus usque.

*Where still we plot, and still contrive in vain;
For in the same state still we do remain.*

Atque in se sua per uestigia uoluitur annus.

*By its own footsteps led, the Year doth bring
Both ends together in an annual Ring.*

Time is not resolv'd to create you any new Recreations.

*Nam tibi præterea quod machiner, inueniamque;
Quod placeat, nihil est: eadem sunt omnia semper.*

*More pleasures than are made Time will not frame,
For to all times, all things shall be the same.*

Give place to others, as others have given place to you. Equality is the Soul of Equity. Who can complain of being comprehended in the same Destiny wherein all things are involv'd? Besides, live as long as you can, you shall by that nothing shorten the space you are to lie dead in the Grave; 'tis all to no purpose; you shall be every whit as long in the condition you so much fear, as if you had died at Nurse.

*licet quotuis, uiuendo uincere secla,
Mors æterna tamen, nihilominus illa manebit.*

*And live as many Ages as you will,
Death ne'ertheless shall be eternal still.*

And yet I will place you in such a condition as you shall have no reason to be displeas'd;

*In uera nescis nullum fore morte alium te
Qui possit uiuus tibi te lugere peremptum.
Stansque jacentem.*

*When dead, a living self thou canst not have
Or to lament, or trample on thy grave.*

Nor shall you so much as wish for the Life you are so concern'd about.

*Nec sibi enim quisquam tum se uitamque; requirit,
Nec desiderium nostri nos afficit ullum.*

*Life, nor our selves we wish in that Estate,
Nor Thoughts of what we were at sirst create.*

Death were less to be fear'd than nothing, if there could be any thing less than nothing.

*multo mortem minus ad nos esse putandum,
Si minus esse potest quam quod nihil esse uidemus.*

*If less than nothing any thing can shew,
Death then would both appear, and would be so.*

Neither can it any way concern you, whether you are living or dead: living, by reason that you are still in being; dead, because you are no more. Moreover, no one dies before his Hour; and the Time you leave behind was no more yours, than that was laps'd, and gone before you came into the World; nor does it any more concern you.

*Respice enim quam nil ad nos anteacta uetustas
Temporis æterni fuerit.*

*Look back and tho Times past eternal were,
In those before us yet we had no share.*

Where-ever your Life ends it is all there; neither does the Utility of living consist in the length of days, but in the well husbanding and improving of Time, and such an one may have been who has longer continued in the World than the ordinary Age of Man; that has yet liv'd but a little while. Make use of Time while it is present with you. It depends upon your Will, and not upon the number of Days, to have a sufficient length of Life. Is it possible you can imagine never to arrive at the Place towards which you are continually going? and yet there is no Journey but hath its end. But if Company will make it more pleasant, or more easie to you, does not all the World go the self same way?

omnia te uita perfuncta sequentur.

*When thou art dead, let this thy Comfort be,
That all the World, by turn, must follow thee.*

Does not all the World dance the same Brawl that you do? Is there any thing that does not grow old as well as you? A thousand Men, a thousand Animals, and a thousand other Creatures, die at the same Moment that you expire.

*Nam nox nulla diem, neque noctem aurora secuta est,
Quæ non audierit mistos uagitibus ægris
Ploratus mortis comites, & funeris atri.*

*No Night succeeds the Day, nor Mornings Light
Rises to chase the sullen Shades of Night,
Wherein there is not heard the dismal Groans
Of dying Men, mix'd with the woful moans
Of living Friends, as also with the Cries
And Dirges fitting fun'ral Obsequies.*

To what end should you endeavour to avoid, unless there were a possibility to evade it? you have seen Examples enough of those who have received so great a benefit by Dying, as thereby to be manifestly deliver'd from infallible Miseries; but have you Talkt with any of those who have feared a Disadvantage by it? It must therefore needs be very foolish to condemn a thing you neither experimented in your own Person, nor by that of any other. Why (says *Nature*) dost thou complain of me and Destiny? Do we do thee any wrong? Is it for thee to govern us, or for us to dispose of thee? Though peradventure thy Age may not be accomplish'd, yet thy Life is. A Man of low Stature is as much a man as a Gyant; neither Men, nor their Lives, are measur'd by the Ell. *Chiron* refus'd to be immortal, when he was acquainted with the Conditions under which he was to enjoy it, by the God of time it self, and its Duration, his Father *Saturn*. Do but serioussy consider how much more insupportable an immortal and painful Life would be to man than what I have already design'd him. If you had not Death to ease you of your Pains and Cares, you would eternally curse me for having depriv'd you of the Benefit of Dying. I have, 'tis true mix'd a little Bitterness with it, to the end, that seeing of what Conveniency and Use it is, you might not too greedily and indiscreetly seek and embrace it: and that you might be so establish'd in this Moderation, as neither to nauseate Life, nor have an Antipathy for dying, which I have decreed you shall once do, have temper'd the one and the other betwixt Pleasure and Pain: and 'twas I that first taught *Thales*, the most eminent of all your *Sages*, that to Live and to Die were indifferent; which made him very wisely answer him who ask'd him, Why then he did not die? because (says he) *it is indifferent*. The Elements of Water, Earth, Fire, and Air, and the other Parts of this Creation of thine, are no more the Instruments of thy Lise than they are of thy Death. Why dost thou fear thy last day, it contributes no more to thy dissolution than every one of the rest? The last Step is not the cause of lassitude, it does but confess it. Every Day travels towards Death, the last only arrives at it. These are the good Lessons our Mother Nature teaches. I have often consider'd with my self whence it should proceed, that in War the Image of Death, whether we look upon it as to our own particular danger, or that of another, should without Comparison appear less dreadful than at

home in our own Houses, (for if it were not so, it would be an Army of whining Milk-sops) and that being still in all Places the same, there should be notwithstanding much more Assurance in Peasants, and the meaner sort of People, than others of better Quality and Education. and do verily believe, that it is those terrible Ceremonies and Preparations wherewith we set it out, that more terrifie us than the thing itself; a new quite contrary way of living, the Cries of Mothers, Wives and Children, the Visits of astonish'd and afflicted Friends, the Attendance of pale and blubber'd Servants, a dark Room set round with burning Tapers, our Beds environed with Physicians and Divines; in sum, nothing but Ghostliness and Horror round about us, render it so formidable, that a Man almost fancies himself dead and buried already. Children are afraid even of those they love best, and are best acquainted with, when disguised in a Vizor, and so are we; the Vizor must be removed as well from Things as Persons; which being taken away, we shall find nothing underneath but the very same Death that a mean Servant, or a poor Chamber-maid, died a day or two ago, without any manner of Apprehension or Concern. Happy therefore is the Death that deprives us of the leisure to prepare things requisite for this unnecessary Pomp, a Pomp that only renders that more terrible which ought not to be fear'd, and that no Man upon Earth can possibly avoid.

NOTES

- 1 *Henry II of France*, running against *Montgomery*.
- 2 Alluding to the *Athenian* Games, wherein those that run a Race carried Torches in their Hands; and the Race being done, deliver'd them into the Hands of those who were to run next.