

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

# ESSAYS

**Book 2 · Chapter 15**

Translation by John Florio (1603, Public domain) · Last updated on January 5, 2024

HYPERESSAYS is a project to create a modern and accessible online edition of the *Essays* of Michel de Montaigne. More information at [www.hyperessays.net](http://www.hyperessays.net)

FLORIO-2-15-20250106-191131



## That our desires are increased by difficultie

THERE IS NO REASON but hath another contrarie unto it, saith the wisest partie of Philosophers. I did erewhile ruminare upon this notable saying, which an ancient writer aleadgeth for the contempt of life. *No good can bring us any pleasure, except that, against whose losse we are prepared: In æquo est dolor amissæ rei, & timor amittendæ, Sorrow for a thing lost, and feare of loosing it, are on an even ground.* Meaning to gaine thereby, that the fruition of life, cannot perfectly be pleasing unto us, if we stand in any feare to loose it. A man might neverthesse say on the contrarie part, that we embrace and clasp this good so much the harder, and with more affection, as we perceive it to be lesse sure, and feare it should be taken from us. For, it is manifestly found, that as fire is rouzed up by the assistance of cold, even so our wil is whetted on by that which doth resist it.

*Si nunquam Danaen habuisset ahenea turris,  
Non esset Danae de Iove facta parens.*

*If Danae had not beene clos'd in brazen tower  
Iove had not clos'd with Danae in golden shower.*

And that there is nothing so naturally opposite to our taste, as satietie, which comes from ease and facilitie, nor nothing that so much sharpneth it, as rarenes and difficultie. *Omnium rerum uoluptas ipso quo debet fugare periculo crescit. The delight of all things encreaseth by the danger, whereby it rather should terrifie them that affect it.*

*Galla nega satiatur amor nisi gaudia torquent.*

*Good wench, deny, my love is cloyed,  
Unlesse joyes grieve, before enjoyed.*

To keep love in breath and longing, *Lycurgus* ordained, that the married men of *Lacedemonia* might never converse with their wives, but by stealth, and that it should be as-great an imputation and shame to finde them laid together, as if they were found lying with others. The difficultie of

assignments or matches appointed, the danger of being surprised, and the shame of ensuing to morrow,

*& languor, & silentium,  
Et latere petitus imo spiritus.*

*And whispering voice, and languishment,  
And breath in sighes from deepe sides sent.*

are the things that give relish and tartnes to the sawce. How many most lasciviously-pleasant sports, proceede from modest and shamefast manner of speech, of the daliances and workes of love? Even voluptuousnes seekes to provoke and stirre it selfe up by smarting. It is much sweeter when it itcheth, and endeared when it gauleth. The curtezan *Flora* was wont to say, that she never lay with *Pompey*, but she made him carrie away the markes of hir teeth.

*Quod petiere, premunt arcè faciuntque dolorem  
Corporis, & dentes inlidunt sæpe labellis:  
Et stimuli subsunt, qui instigant lædere idipsum  
Quodcumque est, rabies unde illæ germina surgunt,*

So goes it every where: *Rarenes and difficultie giveth esteeme unto things.* Those of *Marca d'Ancona* in *Italie*, make their voves, and goe on pilgrimage rather unto *Saint James* in *Galicia*, and those of *Galicia* rather unto our *Ladie of Loreto*. In the countrie of *Liege*, they make more accoumpt of the Bathes of *Luca*; and they of *Tuscanie* esteeme the Baths of *Spawe* more then their owne: In *Rome* the fence-schools are ever full of French-men, when few Romanes come unto them. Great *Cato*, as well as any else, was even cloyed and distasted with his wife, so long as she was his owne, but when another mans, then wished he for hir, and would faine have lickt his fingers at hir. I have heretofore put forth an old stalion into a race,<sup>1</sup> who before did no sooner see or smell a Mare, but was so lustie, that no man could rule him, nor no ground hold him; ease and facilitie, to come to his owne when he list, hath presently quailed his stomake, and so cloyed him, that he is wearie of them: But toward strange Mares, and the first that passeth by his pasture, there is no hoe with him, but sodainly he returnes to his old wonted neighings, and furious heat. Our apetite doth contemne and passe over what he hath in his free choise and owne possession, to runne after, and pursue what he hath not.

*Transuolat in medio posita, & fugientia captat.*

*It over-flies what open lies,  
Pursuing onely that which flies.*

*To forbid us any thing, is the readie way to make us long for it.*

*nisi tu seruare puellam  
Incipis, incipiet desinere esse meam.*

*If you begin not your wench to enshrine,  
She will begin to leave-off to be mine.*

And to leave it altogether to our will, is but to breede dislike and contempt in us; So that *to want, and to have store, breedeth one selfe same inconvenience.*

*Tibi quod super est, mihi quod deficit, dolet.*

*You grieve because you have to much;  
It griev's me that I have none such.*

Wishing and injoying trouble us both a like. The rigor of a mistris is yrkesome, but ease and facilitie (to say true) much more; forasmuch as discontent and vexation procede of the estimation wee have of the thing desired, which sharpen love, and set it afire: Whereas *Satietie begets distaste*: It is a dull, blunt, wearie, and drouzie passion.

*Si qua uolet regnare diu, contemnat amantem.*

*If any list long to beare sway,  
Scorne she hir lover, ere she play.*

*contemnite amantes,  
Sic hodie ueniet, si qua negauit heri,*

*Lovers, your lovers skorne, contemne, delude, deride;  
So will she come to day, that yesterday denide.*

Why did *Poppea* devise to maske the beauties of hir face, but to endere them to hir lovers? Why are those beauties veiled downe to the heeles, which all desire to shew, which all wish to see? Why doe they cover with so many lets, one over another, those parts, where chiefly consisteth our pleasure and theirs? And to what purpose serve those baricadoes, and verdugalles, wherewith our women arme their flankes, but to allure our appetite, and enveagle us to them by putting us off?

*Et fugit ad salices, & se cupit antè uideri*

*She to the willow's runs to hide,  
Yet gladly would she first be spide.*

*Interdum tunica duxit operta moram.*

*She cover'd with hir cote in play,  
Did sometime make a short delay.*

Whereto serveth this mayden-like bashfullnesse, this wilfull quaintnesse, this severe countenance, this seeming ignorance of those things, which they know better than our selves, that goe about to instruct them, but to encrease a desire, and endear a longing in us, to vanquish, to gourmandize, and at our pleasure, to dispose all this squemmish ceremony, and all these peevish obstacles? For, it is not only a delight, but a

glory to beesot and debauch this dainty and nice sweetnesse, and this infantine bashfulnesse, and to subject a marble and sterne gravitie to the mercy of our flame. It is a glory (say they) to triumph over modesty, chastity and temperance: and who disswadeth Ladies from these partes, betraieih both them and himselfe. It is to be supposed, that their hart yerneth with feare, that the sound of our wordes, woundeth the purity of their eares, for which they hate us, and with a forced constraint, agree to withstand our importunitie. Beauty with all hir might, hath not wherewith to give a taste of her self without these interpositions. See in *Italie*, where most, and of the finest beauty is to be sold, how it is forced to seek other strange meanes and suttile devises, arts and trickes, to yeeld hir self pleasing and acceptable: and yet in good sooth, do what it can, being venall and common, it remaineth feeble, and is even languishing. *Even as in vertue, of two equall effects, we hold that the fairest, and worthiest, wherein are proposed more lets, and which affoordeth greater hazards.* It is an effect of Gods providence, to suffer his holy Church, to be vexed and turmoyled, as we see, with so many troubles and stormes, to rouze, and awaken by this contrast and strife the godly and religious soules, and raise them from out a lethall security, and stupified slumber, wherein so long tranquility had plunged them. If wee shall counterpoize the losse we have had, by the number of those, that have strayed out of the right way, and the profite that accrueth unto us, by having taken hart of grace, and by reason of combate raised our zeale and forces; I wot not whether the profite doth surmount the losse. We thought to tie the bond of our marriages the faster, by remooving all meanes to dissolve them, but by how much faster, that of constraint hath bin tyed, so much more hath that of our will and affection bin slacked and loosed: Whereas on the contrary side, that, which so long time held marriages in honour and safety in *Rome*, was the liberty to breake them who list. They kept their wives the better, forsomuch as they might leave them; and when divorces might freely be had, there past five hundred yeares and more, before any would ever make use of them.

*Quod licet, ingratum est, quod non licet, acrius urit,*

*What we may doe, doth little please.*

*It woormes us more, that hath lesse ease.*

To this purpose might the opinion of an ancient Writer be adjoyned that torments doe rather encourage vices, than suppress them; that they beget not a care of well-doing, which is the work of reason and discipline, but only a care not to be surprized in doing evill.

*Latius excisæ pestis contagia serpunt.*

*Th'infection of the plague nigh-spent,*

*And rooted out, yet further went.*

I wot not whether it be true, but this I know by experience, that policie was never found to bee reformed that way. The order and regiment of manners dependeth of some other meane. The Greeke stories, make mention of the Agripians, neighbouring upon *Scithia*, who live without any rodde or staffe

of offence, where not onely, no man undertakes to buckle with any other man, but whosoever can but save himself there (by reason of their virtue and sanctity of life) is as it were in a Sanctuary: And no man dares so much as touch him. Manie have recourse to them, to attone and take up quarrels and differences, which arise amongst men elsewhere. There is a Nation, where the enclosures of Gardens and Fields, they intend to keep several, are made with a seely twine of cotton, which amongst them is found to be more safe and fast, then are our ditches and hedges. *Furem signata sollicitant, Aperta effractarius præterit. Things sealed up sollicite a thiefe to breake them open: Whereas a common burglayer will passe by quietly things that lie open.* Amongst other meanes, ease and facility dooth haply cover and sence my house from the violence of civill warres: Inclosure and fencing draws-on the enterprise; and defiance, the offence. I have abated and weakned the souldiers designe, by taking hazard and al meanes of military glory from their exploite, which is wont to serve them for a title, and steade them for an excuse. What is performed coragiously, at what time justice lieth dead, and law hath not hir due course, is ever done honorably. I yeeld them the conquest of my house dastardly and tletcherous. It is never shut to any that knocketh. It hath no other guardian or provision but a Porter, as an auncient custome, and used cerimony, who serveth not so much to defend my gate, as to offer it more decently and courteously to all commers. I have nor watch nor sentinell, but what the Starres keepe for mee. That Gentleman is much to blame, who makes a shew to stand upon his garde, except he be very strong indeede. Who so is open on one side; is so every where. Our Fore-fathers never dreamed on building of frontire Townes or Castles.

The meanes to assaile (I meane without batterie, and troopes of armed men) and to surprise our houses, encrease dayly beyond the meanes of garding or defending. Mens wits are generally exasperated and whetted one that way. An invasion concerneth all, the defence none but the rich. Mine was sufficiently strong, according to the times when it was made. I have since added nothing unto it that way; and I would feare the strength of it, should turne against my selfe. Seeing a peaceable time will require we shall unfortifie them. It is dangerous not to be able to recover them againe, and it is hard for one to be assured of them. For, concerning intestine broiles, your owne servant may be of that faction you stand in feare of. And where religion serveth for a pretence, even aliances and consanguinitie become mistrustfull under colour of justice. Common rents cannot entertaine our private garisons. They should all be consumed. We have not wherewith, nor are we able to do it, without our apparant ruine, or more incommodiously, and therewithall injuriously, without the common peoples destruction. The state of my losse should not be much worse. And if you chance to be a looser, your owne friends are readier to accuse your improvidence and unhedinesse, then to moane you, and excuse your ignorance and carelesnesse, concerning the offices belonging to your profession. That so many strongly-garded houses have beene lost, whereas mine continueth still, makes mee suspect they were overthrowne, onely because they were so diligently garded. It is that which affoordeth a desire, and ministreth a pretence to the assailant. All gards beare a shew of warre; which if God be so pleased may light upon me. But so it is, I will never call for it. It is my sanctuary or retreat to rest my selfe from warres. I endeavour to free this corner from the publike storme, as I doe another

corner in my soule. Our warre may change forme, and multiply and diversifie how and as long as it list; but for my selfe I never stirre. Amongst so many baricaded and armed houses, none but my selfe (as farre as I know) of my qualitie, hath meerey trusted the protection of his unto the heavens: for I never removed neither plate, nor hangings, nor my evidences. I will neither feare, nor save my selfe by halfes. If a full acknowledgement purchaseth the favour of God, it shall last me for ever unto the end: if not, I have continued long enough, to make my continuance remarkeable, and worthy the registering. What? Is not thirtie yeares a goodly time?

---

NOTES

- 1 Montaigne wrote *J'ay chassé au haras un vieil cheval...* Florio later corrected his translation to say *I have heretofore put forth an old stalion to soile...*