

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

ESSAYS



Book 1 · Chapter 19

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That to Philosophie, is to learne how to die

CICERO saith, that to *Philosophie* is no other thing, then for a man to prepare himselfe to death: which is the reason, that studie and contemplation doth in some sort withdraw our soule from us, and severally employ it from the body, which is a kind of apprenticeship and resemblance of death; or else it is, that all the wisdom and discourse of the world, doth in the end resolve upon this point, to teach us, not to feare to die. Truly either reason mockes us, or it onely aymeth at our contentment, and in fine, bends all hir travel to make us live wel, and as the holy Scripture saith, *at our ease*. All the opinions of the world conclude, that pleasure is our end, howbeit they take divers meanes unto, and for it, else would men reject them at their first coming. For, who would give eare unto him, that for it's end would establish our paine and disturbance? The dissensions of philosophicall sects in this case, are verball: *Transcurramus solertissimas nugas*: Let us runne over such over-fine fooleries, and subtile trifles. There is more wilfulnesse and wrangling among them, then pertaines to a sacred profession. But what person a man undertakes to act, he doth ever therewithall personate his owne. Although they say, that in vertue it selfe, the last scope of our ayme is voluptuousnes. It pleaseth me to importune their eares still with this word, which so much offends their hearing: And if it imply any chiefe pleasure or exceeding contentments, it is rather due to the assistance of vertue, then to any other supply, voluptuousnes being more strong, sinnowie, sturdie, and manly, is but more seriously voluptuous. And we should give it the name of pleasure, more favorable, sweeter, and more naturall; and not terme it vigor, from which it hath his denomination. Should this baser sensuality deserve this faire name, it should be by competencie, and not by privilege. I finde it lesse void of incommunities and crosses, than vertue. And besides that, hir taste is more fleeting, momentarie, and fading, she hath hir fasts, hir eves, and hir travels, and both sweate and blood. Furthermore she hath particularly so many wounding passions and of so severall sorts, and so filthie and lothsome a societie waiting upon hir, that shee is equivalent to penitencie. Wee are in the wrong, to thinke hir incommunities serve hir as a provocation, and seasoning to hir sweetnes, as in nature one contrarie is vivified by another contrarie: and to say, when we come to vertue, that like successes and difficulties over-whelme it, and yeeld it austere and inaccessible. Where as much more properly then unto

voluptuousnes, they ennobled, sharpen, animate, and raise that divine and perfect pleasure, which it mediates and procureth us. Truly he is very unworthie hir acquaintance, that counter-ballanceth hir cost to his fruit, and knowes neither the graces nor use of it. Those who goe about to instruct us, how hir pursuite is very hard and laborious, and hir jouissance well pleasing and delightfull: what else tell they us, but that she is ever unpleasant and yrksome? For, what humane meane did ever attaine unto an absolute enjoying of it? The perfectest have beene content but to aspire and approach hir, without ever possessing hir. But they are deceived; seeing that of all the pleasure we know, the pursute of them is pleasant. The enterprise is perceived by the quality of the thing, which it hath regard unto: for it is a good portion of the effect, and consubstantiall. That happines and felicitie, which shineth in vertue, replenisheth hir approaches and appurtenances, even unto the first entrance and utmost barre. Now of all the benefites of vertue, the contempt of death is the chiefest, a meane that furnisheth our life with an ease-full tranquillitie, and gives us a pure and amiable taste of it: without which every other voluptuousnes is extinguished. Loe, here the reasons why all rules encounter and agree with this article. And albeit they all leade us with a common accord to despise grieffe, povertie, and other accidentall crosses, to which mans life is subject, it is not with an equall care: as well because accidents are not of such a necessitie, for most men passe their whole life without feeling any want or povertie, and other-some without feeling any grieffe or sicknes, as *Xenophilus* the musition, who lived a hundred and sixe yeares in perfect and continuall health: as also if the worst happen, death may at all times, and whensoever it shall please us, cut off all other inconveniences and crosses. But as for death, it is inevitable.

*Omnes eodem cogimur, omnium
Versatur urna, serius, ocius
Sors exitura, & nos in æter-
num exitium impositura cymbæ.*

*All to one place are driv'n, of all
Shak't is the lot-pot, where-hence shall
Sooner or later drawne lots fall,
And to deaths boate for aye enthrall.*

And by consequence, if she make us affeard, it is a continuall subject of torment, and which can no way be eased. There is no starting-hole will hide us from hir, she will finde us wheresoever we are, we may as in a suspected countrie starte and turne here and there: *quæ quasi saxum Tantalus semper impendit*: Which evermore hangs like the stone over the head of *Tantalus*: Our lawes doe often condemne and send malefactors to be executed in the same place where the crime was committed: to which place, whilst they are going, leade them along the fairest houses, or entertaine them with the best cheere you can,

*non Siculae dapes
Dulcem elaborabunt saporem:
Non auium, citharæque cantus
Somnum reducent.*

*Not all King Denys daintie fare,
Can pleasing taste for them prepare:
No song of birds, no musikes sound
Can lullabie to sleepe profound.*

Doe you thinke they can take any pleasure in it? or be any thing delighted? and that the finall intent of their voyage being still before their eyes, hath not altered and altogether distracted their taste from all these commodities and allurements?

*Audit iter, numerátque dies, spatióque viarum
Metitur uitam, torquetur peste futura.*

*He heares his journey, count's his daies, so measures he
His life by his waies length, vex't with the ill shall be.*

The end of our cariere is death, it is the necessarie object of our aime: if it affright us, how is it possible we should step one foote further without an ague? The remedie of the vulgar sorte is, not to thinke on it. But from what brutall stupiditie may so grosse a blindnes come upon him? he must be made to bridle his Asse by the taile,

Qui capite ipse suo instituit vestigia retro.

*Who doth a course contrarie runne
With his head to his course begunne.*

It is no marvell if he be so often taken tripping, some doe no sooner heare the name of death spoken of, but they are afraide, yea the most part will crosse themselves, as if they heard the Divell named. And because mention is made of it in mens wils and testaments, I warrant you there is none will set his hand to them, till the Phisitian have given his last doome, and utterly forsaken him. And God knowes, beeing then betweene such paine and feare, with what sound judgement they endure him. For so much as this sillable sounded so unpleasantly in their eares, and this voice seemed so ill boding and unluckie, the Romans had learned to allay and dilate the same by a Periphrasis. In lieu of saying, he is dead, or he hath ended his daies, they would say, he hath lived. So it be life, be it past or no, they are comforted: from whom we have borrowed our phrases *quondam*, *alias*, or *late such a one*. It may happily be, as the common saying is, the time we live, is worth the mony we pay for it. I was borne betweene eleven of the clocke and noone, the last of Februarie 1533. according to our computation, the yeare beginning the first of Januarie. It is but a fortnight since I was 39. yeres old. I want at least as much more. If in the mean time I should trouble my thoghts with a matter so farre from me, it were but folly. But what? we see both young and olde to leave their life after one selfe-same condition. No man departs otherwise from it, then if he but now came to it, seeing there is no man so crazed, bedrell, or decrepite, so long as he remembers *Mathusalem*, but thinkes he may yet live twentie yeares. Moreover, seely creature as thou art, who hath limited the end of thy daies? Happily thou presumest upon Physitions reports. Rather consider the effect and experience. By the common course of things, long since thou livest by extraordinarie favour. Thou hast alreadie over-past the ordinarie tearmes of common life: And

to prove it, remember but thy acquaintances and tel me how many more of them have died before they came to thy age, then have either attained or outgone the same: yea and of those that through renoune hath ennobled their life, if thou but register them, I will lay a wager, I will finde more that have died before they came to five and thirty yeares, then after. It is consonant with reason and pietie, to take example by the humanity of *Jesus Christ*, who ended his humane life at three and thirtie yeares. The greatest man that ever was, being no more then a man, I meane *Alexander* the great, ended his dayes, and died also of that age. How many severall meanes and wayes hath death to surprise us.

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

*A man can never take good heede,
Hourely what he may shunne and speede.*

I omit to speake of agues and pleurisies; who would ever have imagined, that a Duke of *Brittanie* should have beene stifled to death in a throng of people, as whilome was a neighbour of mine at *Lyons*, when Pope *Clement* made his entrance there? Hast thou not seene one of our late Kings slaine in the midst of his sportes? and one of his ancestors die miserably by the chocke of an hog? *Eschilus* fore-threatned by the fall of an house, when he stood most upon his guard, stricken dead by the fall of a Tortoise shell, which fell out of the tallans of an Eagle flying in the ayre? and another choaked with the kernell of a grape? And an Emperour die by the scratch of a combe, whilst hee was combing his head? And *Aufidius* with stumbling against the Consull-Chamber doore as he was going in thereat? And *Cornelius Gallus* the Prætor, *Tigillinus* Captaine of the Romane watch, *Lodowike* sonne of *Guido Gonzaga*, Marquis of *Mantoa*, end their dayes betweene womens thighs? And of a farre worse example *Speusippus* the Platonian Philosopher, and one of our Popes? Poore *Rebius* a judge, whilst he demurreth the sute of a plaintife but for eight dayes, beholde his last expired; And *Caius Julius* a Phisition, whilst hee was annoynting the eyes of one of his patients, to have his owne sight closed for ever by death. And if amongst these examples, I may adde one of a brother of mine, called Captaine *Saint Martin*, a man of three and twentie yeares of age, who had alreadie given good testimonie of his worth and forward valor, playing at tennis, received a blow with a ball, that hit him a little above the right eare, without apparance of any contusion, bruse, or hurt, and never sitting or resting upon it, died within six houres after of an Apoplexie, which the blow of the ball caused in him. These so frequent and ordinary examples, hapning, and being still before our eyes, how is it possible for man to forgoe or forget the remembrance of death? and why should it not continually seeme unto us, that she is still ready at hand to take us by the throate? What matter is it, will you say unto me, how and in what manner it is, so long as a man doe not trouble and vex himselfe therewith? I am of this opinion, that howsoever a man may shrowd or hide himselfe from hir darte, yea were it under an oxe-hide, I am not the man would shrinke backe: it sufficeth me to live at my ease; and the best recreation I can have, that doe I ever take; in other matters, as little vaine glorious, and exemplare as you list.

*prætulerim delirus inérsque uideri,
Dum mea delectent mala me, vel denique fallant,
Quàm sapere & ringi.*

*A dotard I had rather seeme, and dull,
So me my faults may please, make me a gull,
Than to be wise, and beat my vexed scull.*

But it is folly to thinke that way to come unto it. They come, they goe, they trot, they daunce: but no speech of death. All that is good sport. But if she be once come, and on a sodaine and openly surprise, either them, their wives, their children, or their friends, what torments, what out-cries, what rage, and what dispaire doth then overwhelme them? sawe you ever any thing so drooping, so changed, and so distracted? A man must looke to it, and in better times fore-see it. And might that brutish carelesnesse lodge in the minde of a man of understanding (which I finde altogether impossible) she sels us her ware at an over deere a rate: were she an enemie by mans wit to be avoided, I would advise man to borow the weapons of cowardlines: but since it may not be: and that be you either a coward or a runaway, an honest or valiant man, she overtakes you,

*Nempe & sugacem persequitur uirum,
Nec parcat imbellis iuuentæ
Poplitibus, timidóque tergo.*

*She persecutes the man that flies,
She spares not weake youth to surprise,
But on their hammes and backe turn'd, plies.*

And that no temper of cuirace may shield or defend you,

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

*Though he with yron and brasse his head empale,
Yet death his head enclosed thence will hale.*

Let us learne to stand, and combate hir with a resolute minde. And beginne to take the greatest advantage she hath upon us from hir, let us take a cleane contrary way from the common, let us remove hir strangenes from hir, let us converse: frequent, and acquaint our selves with hir, let us have nothing so much in minde as death, let us at all times and seasons, and in the ugliest manner that may be, yea with all faces shapen and represent the same unto our imagination. At the stumbling of a horse, at the fall of a stone, at the least prick with a pinne, let us presently ruminare and say with our selves, what if it were death itselfe? and thereupon let us take heart of grace, and call our wits together to confront hir. Amiddest our bankets, feasts, and pleasures, let us ever have this restraint or object before us, that is, the remembrance of our condition, and let not pleasure so much mislead or transport us, that we altogether neglect or forget, how many waies, our joyes, or our feasting, be subject unto death, and by how many hold-fasts shee threatens us and them. So did the Ægyptians, who in the midst of their banquetings, and in the full of their greatest cheere,

caused the anatomie of a dead man to be brought before them, as a memorandum and warning to their guests.

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

*Thinke every day shines on thee as thy last,
Welcome it will come, whereof hope was past.*

It is uncertaine where death looks for us; let us expect hir everie where: the premeditation of death, is a fore-thinking of libertie. He who hath learned to die, hath unlearned to serve. There is no evill in life, for him that hath well conceived, how the privation of life, is no evill. To know how to die, doth free us from all subjection and constraint. *Paulus Æmilius* answered one, whom that miserable king of *Macedon* his prisoner sent to entreate him, he would not leade him in triumph, let him make that request unto himselfe. Verily, if Nature afforde not some helpe, in all things, it is very hard that arte and industrie should goe farre before. Of my selfe, I am not much given to melancholy, but rather to dreaming and sluggishnes. There is nothing wherewith I have ever more entertained myselfe, than with the imaginations of death, yea in the most licentious times of my age.

Iucundum, cùm ætas florida uer ageret.

*When my age flourishing
Did spend it's pleasant spring.*

Being amongst faire Ladies, and in earnest play, some have thought me busied, or musing with my selfe, how to digest some jealousie, or meditating on the uncertaintie of some conceived hope, when God he knowes, I was entertaining my selfe with the remembrance of some one or other, that but few daies before was taken with a burning fever, and of his sodaine end, comming from such a feast or meeting where I was my selfe, and with his head full of idle conceites, of love, and merry glee; supposing the same, either sicknes or end to be as neere me as him.

Iam fuerit, nec post, unquam reuocare licebit.

*Now time would be, no more
You can this time restore.*

I did no more trouble my selfe or frowne at such a conceite, then at any other. It is impossible, we should not apprehend or feele some motions or startings at such imaginations at the first, and comming sodainely upon us: but doubtlesse, hee that shall manage and meditate upon them with an impartiall eye, they wil assuredly, in tract of time, become familiar to him: Otherwise for my part, I should be in continuall feare and agonie; for no man did ever more distrust his life, nor make lesse account of his continuance: Neither can health, which hitherto I have so long enjoyed, and which so seldome hath bin crazed, lengthen my hopes, nor any sicknesse shorten them of it. At every minute me thinkes I make an escape. And I uncessantly record unto my selfe, that whatsoever may bee done another day, may be effected this day. Truely hazards and

dangers do little or nothing approach us at our end: And if we consider, how many more there remaine, besides this accident, which in number more than millions seeme to threaten us, and hang over us, we shall find, that bee we sound or sicke, lustie or weake, at sea or at land, abroad or at home, fighting or at rest, in the midst of a battell or in our beds, she is ever alike neere unto us. *Nemo altero fragilior est, nemo in crastinum sui certior.* No man is meaker then other; none surer of himselfe (to live) till to morrow. Whatsoever I have to doe before death, all leasure to ende the same, seemeth short unto me, yea were it but of one houre. Some body, not long since turning over my writing tables, found by chance a memorial of something I would have done after my death. I told him (as in deede it was true,) that being but a mile from my house, and in perfect health and lustie, I had made hast to write it, because I could not assure my selfe I should ever come home in safety; As one that am ever hatching of mine owne thoughts, and place them in my selfe: I am ever prepared about that which I may be: nor can death (come when she please) put me in mind of any new thing. A man should ever, as much as in him lieth, be ready booted to take his journey, and above all things, looke he have then nothing to do but with himselfe.

*Quid breui fortes iaculamur æuo
Multa?*

*To aime why are we ever bold,
At many things in so short hold?*

For then we shal have worke sufficient, without any more accrease. Some man complaineth more that death doth hinder him from the assured course of an hoped-for victorie, than of death itself; another cries out, he should give place to hir, before he have married his daughter, or directed the course of his childrens bringing up; an other bewaileth he must forgoe his wives company: another moaneth the losse of his children the chiefest commodities of his being. I am now, by meanes of the mercy of God, in such a taking, that without regrett or grieving at anie worldly matters, I am prepared to dislodge, whensoever he shall please to call me: I am everie where free: my farewell is soone taken of all my friendes, except of my selfe. No man did ever prepare himselfe to quit the world more simply, and fully, or more generally spake of all thoughts of it, then I am fully assured I shall doe. The dearest deaths are the best.

*Miser ô miser (aiunt) omnia ademit,
Vna dies infesta mihi tot præmia vitæ:*

*O wretch, O wretch, (friends cry) one day,
All joies of life hath ta'ne away:*

And the builder,

*maneant (saith he) opera interrupta, minæque
Murorum ingentes.*

*The workes unfinisht lie,
And walles that threatned hie.*

A man should designe nothing so long afore hand, or at least with such an intent, as to passionate himselfe to see the end of it; we are all borne to be doing.

Cùm moriar, medium soluar & inter opus.

*When dying I my selfe shall spend,
Ere halfe by businesse come to end.*

I would have a man to be dooing, and to prolong his lives offices, as much as lieth in him, and let death seize upon me, whilst I am setting my cabiges, carelesse of her darte, but more of my unperfect garden. I sawe one die, who being at his last gaspe, uncessantly complained against his destinie, and that death should so unkindly cut him off in the middest of an historie which he had in hand, and was now come to the fifteenth or sixteenth of our Kings.

*Illud in his rebus non addunt, nec tibi earum,
Iam desiderium rerum super insidet vna.*

*Friends adde not that in this case, now no more
Shalt thou desire or want things wisht before.*

A man should rid himselfe of these vulgare and hurtfull humours. Even as churchyards were first placed adjoyning unto churches, and in the most frequented places of the Cittie, to enure (as *Lycurgus* said) the common people, women and children, not to be skared at the sight of a dead man, and to the end that continuall spectacle of bones, skulls, tombes, graves, and burials, should forewarne us of our condition, and fatall end.

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

*Nay more, the manner was to welcome guests,
And with dire shews of slaughter to mixe feasts
Of them that fought at sharpe, and with boards tainted
Of them with much blood, who o're full cups fainted.*

And even as the Ægyptians after their feastings and carowsings, caused a great image of death to be brought in and shewed to the guests and by-standers, by one that cried aloude, *Drinke and be mery, for such shalt thou be when thou art dead*: So have I learned this custome or lesson, to have alwayes death, not only in my imagination, but continually in my mouth. And there is nothing I desire more to be informed of, then of the death of men: that is to say, what words, what countenance, and what face they shew at their death; and in reading of histories, which I so attentively observe. It appeareth by the shuffling and hudling up of my examples, I affect no subject so particularly as this. Were I a composer of bookes, I would keepe a register, commented of the diverse deaths, which in teaching men to die, should after teach them to live. *Dicearcus* made one of that title, but of an other and lesse profitable end. Some man will say to me, the effect exceedes the thought so farre, that there is no fence so

sure, or cunning so certaine, but a man shall either loose or forget, if he come once to that point; let them say what they list: To premeditate on it, giveth no doubt a great advantage: and is it nothing, at the least to goe so farre without dismay or alteration, or without an ague? There belongs more to it: Nature herselfe lends us her hand, and gives us courage. If it be a short and violent death, we have no leasure to feare it; if otherwise, I perceive that according as I engage my selfe in sicknesse, I doe naturally fall into some disdain and contempt of life. I find that I have more adoe to digest this resolution, that I shall die when I am in health, then I have, when I am troubled with a feaver: forsomuch as I have no more such fast hold on the commodities of life, whereof I beginne to loose the use and pleasure, and view death in the face with a lesse undanted looke, which makes me hope, that the further I go from that, and the neerer I approach to this, so much more easily doe I enter in composition, for their exchange, Even as I have tried in many other occurrences, which *Cesar* affirmed, that often somethings seeme greater, being farre from us, then if they bee neere at hand: I have found that being in perfect health, I have much more beene frighted with sicknesse, then when I have felt it. The jollitie wherein I live, the pleasure and the strength, make the other seeme so disproportionable from that, that by imagination I amplifie these commodities by one moytie, and apprehend them much more heavy and burthensome, then I feelee them when I have them upon my shoulders. The same I hope will happen to me of death. Consider wee by the ordinary mutations, and dayly declinations, which we suffer, how Nature deprives us of the sight of our losse and empairing: what hath an aged man left him of his youthes vigor, and of his forepast life?

Heu senibus vitæ portio quanta manet!

*Alas to men in yeares, how small
A parte of life is left in all?*

Cesar to a tired and crazed Souldier of his guard, who in the open streete came to him, to beg leave, he might cause himselfe to be put to death; viewing his decrepite behaviour, answered pleasantly: *Doest thou thinke to be alive then?* Were man all at once to fall into it, I doe not thinke we should be able to beare such a change, but being faire and gently led on by her hand, in a slowe, and as it were unperceived descent, by little and little, and step by step, she roules us into that miserable state, and day by day seekes to acquaint us with it. So that when youth failes in us, we feelee, nay we perceive no shaking or transchange at all in our selves: which in essence and veritie is a harder death, then that of a languishing and irkesome life, or that of age. Forsomuch as the leap from an ill being, unto a not beeing, is not so dangerous or steeple; as it is from a delightfull and flowrishing beeing, unto a painefull and sorrowfull condition. A weake bending, and faint stooping bodie hath lesse strength to beare and undergoe a heavy burden: So hath our soule. She must be rouzed and raised against the violence and force of this adversarie. For, as it is impossible, she should take any rest whilest shee feareth: whereof if she be assured (which is a thing exceeding humane condition) she may boast that it is impossible, unquietnes, torment, and feare, much lesse the least displeasure should lodge in hir.

*Non vultus instantis tyranni
Mente quatit solida, neque Auster,
Dux inquieti turbidus Adriæ,
Nec fulminantis magna Iovis manus.*

*No urging tyrants threatning face,
Where minde is sound can it displace,
No troublous wind the rough seas Maister,
Nor Joves great hand the thunder-caster.*

She is made Mistris of hir passions, and concupiscence, Lady of indulgence, of shame of povertie, and of all fortunes injuries. Let him that can, attaine to this advantage: Herein consists the true and Sovereigne libertie, that affords us meanes wherewith to jeast and make a scorne of force and in justice, and to deride imprisonment, gives, or fetters.

*in manicis, &
Compedibus, sæuo te sub custode tenebo.
Ipse Deus simul atque uolam, me soluet: opinor,
Hoc sensit moriar, mors ultima linearum est.*

*In gyves and fetters I will hamper thee,
Under a Tayler that shall cruell be:
Yet, when I will, God me deliver shall,
He thinkes, I shall die: death is end of all.*

Our religion hath had no surer humane foundation, then the contempt of life. Discourse of reason doth not only call and summon us unto it. For why should wee feare to loose a thing, which being lost, cannot be moaned? but also, since wee are threatned by so many kinds of death, there is no more inconvenience to feare them all, then to endure one: what matter is it when it commeth since it is unavoidable? *Socrates* answered one that told him, The thirty Tyrants have condemned thee to death; *And Nature them*, said he. What fondnesse is it to carke and care so much, at that instant and passage from all exemption of paine and care? As our birth brought us the birth of all things, so shall our death the ende of all things. Therefore is it as great follie to weepe, we shall not live a hundred yeares hence, as to waile wee lived not a hundred yeares agoe. *Death is the beginning of another life*. So wept we, and so much did it cost us to enter into this life; and so did wee spoile us of our ancient vaile in entring into it. Nothing can be grievous that is but once. Is it reason so long to feare, a thing of so short time? Long life or short life is made all one by death. For long or short is not in things that are no more. *Aristotle* saith, there are certaine little beasts amongst the river *Hispanis* that live but one day; she which dies at 8. a clocke in the morning, dies in her youth, and she that dies at 5. in the afternoon, dies in hir decrepitude, who of us doth not laugh, when we shal see this short moment of continuance to be had in consideration of good or ill fortune? The most and the least in ours, if we compare it with eternitie, or equall it to the lasting of mountaines, rivers, stars, and trees, or any other living creature, is no lesse ridiculous. But nature compels us to it. *Depart* saith she, *out of this world, even as you came into it. The same way you came from death, to death returne without passion or amazement, from life to death: your death is but a peece of the worlds order, and but a parcell of the worldes life.*

*inter se mortales mutua uiuunt,
Et quasi cursores uitæ lampada tradunt.*

*Mortall men live by mutuall entercourse:
And yeeld their life-torch, as men in a course.*

Shal I not change this goodly contexture of things for you? It is the condition of your creation: death is a part of your selves: you flie from your selves. The being you enjoy, is equally shared between life and death. The first day of your birth doth aswell addresse you to die, as to live.

Prima quæ vitam dedit, hora, carpsit.

*The first houre, that to men
Gave life, strait, cropt it then.*

Nascentes morimur, finisque ab origine pendet:

*As we are borne we die; the end
Doth of th'originall depend.*

All the time you live, you steale it from death: it is at hir charge. The continuall work of your life, is to contrive death; you are in death, during the time you continue in life: for, you are after death, when you are no longer living. Or if you had rather have it so, you are dead after life: but during life, you are still dying: and death doth more rudely touch the dying, then the dead, and more lively and essentially. If you have profited by life, you have also bin fed thereby, depart then satisfied.

Cur non ut plenus uitæ conuiuia recedis?

*Why like a full-fed guest,
Depart you not to rest?*

If you have not knowne how to make use of it: if it were unprofitable to you, what neede you care to have lost it? to what end would you enjoy it longer?

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

*Why seeke you more to gaine, what must againe
All perish ill, and passe with griefe or paine?*

Life in it selfe is neither good nor evill: it is the place of good or evill, according as you prepare it for them. And if you have lived one day, you have seene all: one day is equall to all other daies: There is no other light, there is no other night. This Sunne, this Moone, these Starres, and this disposition, is the very same, which your forefathers enjoyed, and which shall also entertaine your posteritie.

*Non alium uidere patres: aliūm nepotes
Aspicient.*

*No other sawe our Sires of old,
No other shall their sonnes behold.*

And if the worst happen, the distribution and varietie of all the acts of my commoditie,¹ is performed in one yeare. If you have observed the course of my foure seasons; they containe the infancie, the youth, the virilitie, and the olde age of the world. He hath plaied his part: he knowes no other wilines belonging to it, but to begin againe, it will ever be the same, and no other,

Versamur ibidem, atque insumus usque,

*We still in one place turne about,
Still where² we are, now in, now out.*

Atque in se sua per uestigia uoluitur annus.

*The yeare into it selfe is cast
By those same steps, that it hath past.*

I am not purposed to devise you other new sports.

*Nam tibi præterea quod machinor, inueniámque
Quod placeat, nihil est, eadem sunt omnia semper.*

*Else nothing, that I can devise or frame
Can please thee, for al things are still the same.*

Make roome for others, as others have done for you. *Equalitie is the chiefe ground-worke of equitie, who can complaine to be comprehended where all are contained?* So may you live long enough, you shall never diminish any thing from the time you have to die: it is bootelesse; so long shall you continue in that state, which you feare, as if you had died being in your swathing-clothes, and when you were sucking.

*licet, quod uis, uiuendo uincere secla,
Mors æterna tamen, nihil ominis illa manebit.*

*Though yeares you live, as many as you will,
Death is eternall, death remaineth still.*

And I will so please you, that you shall have no discontent.

*In uera nescis nullum fore morte alium te,
Qui possit uiuus tibi te lugere peremptum,
Stánsque iacentem.*

*Thou know'st not, there shall be not other thou,
When thou art dead indeede, that can tell how
Alive to waile thee dying, standing to waile thee lying.*

Nor shall wish for life, which you so much desire.

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

*For then none for himselfe himselfe or life requires:
Nor are we of our selves affected with desires.*

Death is lesse to be feared then nothing, if there were any thing lesse,
then nothing.

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

*Death is much lesse to us, we ought esteeme,
If lesse may be, then what doth nothing seeme.*

Nor alive, nor dead, it doth concerne you nothing. Alive, because you are:
Dead, because you are no more. Moreover, no man dies before his houre.
The time you leave behinde was no more yours, then that which was
before your birth, and concerneth you no more.

*Respice enim quàm nil ad nos anteacta uetustas
Temporis æterni fuerit,*

*For marke, how all antiquitie fore-gone
Of all time e're we were, to us was none.*

Wheresoever your life endeth, there is it all. The profit of life consistes
not in the space, but rather in the use. Some man hath lived long, that
hath had a short life. Follow it whilst you have time. It consists not in
number of yeares, but in your will, that you have lived long enough. Did
you thinke you should never come to the place, where you were still
going? There is no way but hath an end. And if company may solace you,
doth not the whole world walke the same path?

omnia te uita perfuncta sequenter.

*Life past, all things at last
Shall follow thee as thou hast past.*

Doe not all things move as you doe, or keepe your course? Is there any
thing growes not olde together with your selfe? A thousand men, a
thousand beasts, and a thousand other creatures die in the very instance
that you die.

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

*No night ensued daie light: no morning followed night
Which heard not moaning mixt with sick-mens groaning
With deaths and funeralles joyned was that moaning.*

To what end recoil you from it, if you cannot goe backe? You have seene
many who have found good in death, ending thereby many many

miseries. But have you seene any that hath received hurt thereby? Therefore is it meere simplicity to condemne a thing you never proved, neither by your selfe nor any other. Why doest thou complaine of me and of destinie?³ Although thy age be not come to hir periode, thy life is. A little man, is a whole man, as well as a great man. Neither men nor their lives are measured by the Ell. *Chiron* refused immortalitie, being informed of the conditions thereof, even by the God of time and of continuance, *Saturne* his father. Imagine truely how much an ever-during life would be lesse tollerable and more painefull to a man, then is the life which I have given him. Had you not death, you would then uncessantly curse, and cry out against me, that I had deprived you of it. I have of purpose and wittingly blended some bitternes amongst it, that so seeing the commoditie of it's use, I might hinder you from over greedily embracing, or indiscreetly calling for it. To continue in this moderation, that is neither to flie from life, nor to runne to death (which I require of you) I have tempered both the one and other betweene sweetenes and sowrenes. I first taught *Thales* the chiefest of your Sages and Wise men, that to live and die, were indifferent, which made him answer one very wisely, who asked him, wherefore he died not; *Because*, saith he, *it is indifferent. The water, the earth, the aire, the fire, and other members of this my universe, are no more the instruments of thy life, then of thy death. Why fearest thou thy last day? He is no more guiltie, and conferreth no more to thy death, then any of the others. It is not the last step that causeth wearines: it onely declares it. All daies march towards death, onely the last comes to it.* Beholde here the good precepts of our universall mother Nature. I have oftentimes bethought my selfe whence it proceedeth, that in times of warre, the visage of death (whether we see it in us or in others) seemeth without all comparison much lesse dreadfull and terrible unto us, then in our houses, or in our beds, otherwise it should be an armie of Phisitians and whiners, and she ever being one, there must needes bee much more assurance amongst contrie-people and of base condition, then in others. I verily beleieve, these fearefull lookes, and astonishing countenances wherewith we encompassse it, are those that more amaze and terrifie us then death: a new forme of life: the out-cries of mothers; the wailing of women and children; the visitation of dismaid and swooning friends: the assistance of a number of pale-looking, distracted, and whining servants; a darke chamber: tapers burning round about; our couch beset round with Phisitians and Preachers; and to conclude, nothing but horror and astonishment on every side of us: are we not alreadie dead and buried? The very children are afraid of their friends, when they see them masked; and so are we: The maske must as well be taken from things, as from men, which being removed, we shal finde nothing hid under it, but the verie same death, that a seely varlet, or a simple maide-servant, did lately suffer without amazement or feare. Happie is that death, which takes all leasure from the preparations of such an equipage.

NOTES

- 1 “commoditie” is a mistake which subsequent editions correct. Montaigne wrote “comedy.”
- 2 Another typo. “where” should be “there.”
- 3 Two lines are dropped in the first edition of Florio’s translation which are restored in subsequent ones: “Doe we offer thee any wrong? is it for thee to direct us, or for us to governe thee?”