Humanity and the life of language:
From the « Two Cultures » to Montaigne's
« *institution des enfants* »

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L'humanité et la vie de la langue : des « Two Cultures » à Montaigne « de l'institution des enfans »

Résumé

Cet article propose une analyse du débat entre C. P. Snow et F. R. Leavis à propos des « Two Cultures » – ou la guerre des lettres et des sciences – qui a eu lieu pendant les années cinquante et soixante; il suggère que derrière les propos de Leavis se cache une conceptualisation distincte, voire unique, de l' « humain ». Pour Leavis, l'humain n'est ni un genre ni une catégorie stable ; il s'agit plutôt d'une activité littéraire, d'une forme de lecture, et des effets phénoménologiques d'une telle activité. Mais cette manière de lire dite « humaine » n'est pas décrite clairement dans le texte de Leavis ; la dernière partie de cet article propose donc une lecture de *De l'Institution des enfans* de Montaigne, le chapitre où Montaigne – souvent vu comme l'inventeur de la subjectivité contemporaine, (post-)moderne, ou « (post-)humaine » – traite explicitement des thèmes pédagogiques discutés par Snow et Leavis, et qui offre des indices concrets d'une lecture qui répond sensiblement à la capacité des mots à rendre humain, à faire vivre.

Mots-clés : C. P. Snow, F. R. Leavis, les « Two Cultures », post-Humanisme, Michel de Montaigne

Summary

This article analyses the often aggressive discussion between C. P. Snow and F. R. Leavis about the « Two Cultures » – what might otherwise be termed the « war of literature and science » – which took place in the 1950s and 1960s. It suggests that behind Leavis's strident attack lurks a novel, even unique, understanding of the « human ». For Leavis, the « human » is neither a genre, nor a stable category, but a literary activity; a mode of reading and its phenomenological effects. But the precise qualities of this « human » response to language are often unclear from Leavis's implications; the final section of this article thus analyses Montaigne's *De l'Institution des enfans*, the chapter where Montaigne – often seen as the inventor or anticipator of contemporary, post-modern or post-human subjectivity - explicitly deals with the kind of pedagogical themes discussed by Snow and Leavis, and which offers concrete signs of the kind of reading which might respond sensibly to words which live and make live.

Key words : C. P. Snow, F. R. Leavis, the « Two Cultures », post-Humanism, Michel de Montaigne

Introduction

This three-part essay rereads the « Snow-Leavis controversy » – the origin of the term « two cultures » which still marks discussions of the arts' relation with the sciences – in terms of contemporary debates exploring the word « human » and its variants (humanism, humanity, humanitarianism), and asks if the present era might best be termed « post-human ». It argues first F. R. Leavis's virulent attack on C. P. Snow's « The Two Cultures » is not so much a straightforward defence of the arts as a fundamentally different concept of the « human ». While Leavis never quite explicitly formulates this, he implies throughout that « humanity » is not a stable entity but a timebound activity. Humans are more, and differently, « human » from one moment to another. And they are most intensely human in the activity of reading literary language. Indeed, the literary value of texts, we could derive from Leavis's argument, can be quantified and evaluated in precisely these « humanising » effects. Leavis's implied (and perhaps unwitting) reconception of the ontology of the « human » as dynamically verbal, not statically substantive, is seen in the second part as a contribution to discussions concerning the « post-human », recently summarized in Stefan Herbrechter's valuable *The Posthuman: A Critical Analysis*. It argues the « humanism » disavowed by the most radical « post-humanists » has little to do in its bloated universalism with Leavis's nimbler, verbal understanding of the concept. Leavis's intuitions about the « human » as something dynamic, changeable, linguistic – but no less existent for all that – seem to resist the most radically nihilistic modes of « post-humanist » thought (which loosely incorporate and overlap with post-modernism and post-structuralism). When called upon to actually define and articulate what he means by the human, however, Leavis's argumentation is sometimes fuzzy. The third part of the essay thus seeks to address this problem – and thus contribute to debates about whether Montaigne presciently anticipated key strands of contemporary thought – by reading *De l'Institution des enfans*: Montaigne's most forthright engagement with the kinds of pedagogical issues disputed so bitterly by Snow and Leavis, and a chapter centrally concerned with the humanizing potential of reading literature. Critics like Stephen Toulmin have noted texts from Montaigne's period make thinkable certain fusions of science and literary discourse, simply because they precede the kinds of divisions Snow talks about.[1] But Montaigne's text may also address certain blind spots in Leavis's arguments about just *how* language may « humanise »; the open-ended form of his *Essais* seems self-consciously to perform language, demonstrating its own content as an engaged, verbal self-portrait.[2] Montaigne's text thus exemplifies what Leavis only describes: a real-time written testimony of the effects on a « human » of reading: of living language. In this, Montaigne demonstrates more than Leavis the idea of the human as literary performance, an idea Leavis is forced to discover under pressure from Snow.

Snow's « Two Cultures » and Leavis's verbal humanism

The « Snow-Leavis controversy » refers to F. R. Leavis's scathing 1962 Richmond Lecture « Two Cultures? The significance of C. P. Snow », in response to C. P. Snow's 1959 Rede lecture « The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution », which has since gone through over thirty reprints and is still well-known today.[3] The chief arguments of Snow's lecture are well known. First, there are « *two cultures* » in contemporary British intellectual life: one Snow attributes to « *literary intellectuals* » (e.g. Snow, 1998:4); the other to « *physical scientists* » (e.g. Snow, 1998:4). Second, these « two cultures » are polarized, incomprehensible to each other, « [t]*here seems* […] *to be no place where the cultures meet* » (Snow, 1998:16). Third, the « [literary] *intellectuals* » – called by Snow « *natural Luddites* » – ignore if not actively resist the « *scientific revolution currently helping the material betterment of the human race* » (Snow, 1998:22). Fourth, this imbalance in the education system – especially at the stage of University scholarship examinations and after – will have dire effects for Great Britain's future geopolitical and economic position: a topic of special concern in Snow's Cold War reality. « *I believe* », Snow claims, « *the Russians have judged the situation sensibly. They have a deeper insight into the scientific revolution than we have, or than the Americans have* » (Snow, 1998:36).

For Leavis, however, « *the argument of Snow's Rede lecture is* […] *incomparably more loose and inconsequent than any I myself* […] *should permit in a group discussion I was conducting, let alone a pupil's essay* » (Leavis, 2013:60).[4] This withering attack on Snow's argumentative structure is motivated: the way Snow yokes the « two cultures » together – making them commensurable so as better to contrast them – silently reduces the arts to science's negative corollary, depriving the arts of any independent existence, silently compelling any potential defence of the arts to rely on Snow's reductive terms.[5] This is precisely what Leavis refuses to do. If, for example, Snow complains (on no other basis than personal anecdote) that « *literary intellectuals* » cannot explain to him the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics: « *something which is about the scientific equivalent of* Have you read a work of Shakespeare's? » (Snow, 1998:15), then Leavis retorts: « *There is* no *scientific equivalent of that question; equations between orders so disparate are meaningless* » (Leavis, 2013:73). Correspondingly, Snow's caricature of the « *literary intellectual* » is condemned by one of the twentieth century's most important literary intellectuals as « *the enemy of art* and *life* » (Leavis, 2013:61).

Leavis's attack on the bases of Snow's pseudo-opposition between the arts and the sciences, carried out so as to re-establish the terms' independent values, is paralleled by that on Snow's pseudo-opposition between the « *tragic* » « *individual condition* » (« *each of us is alone* », « *each of us dies alone* », Snow, 1998:6) – catered for by the « Luddite » « *literary intellectual* » – and the « *social condition* », marked by « *social hope* », as advanced by the scientist. For Leavis this opposition quite simply makes no sense.

What is the « social condition » that has nothing to do with the « individual condition »? What is the « social hope » that transcends, cancels or makes indifferent the inescapable tragic condition of each individual? Where, if not in individuals, is what is hoped for – a non-tragic condition, one supposes – to be located? (Leavis, 2013:65)

Exposing the underlying (and often problematic) implications of Snow's parallel dichotomies – art vs. science, individual vs. social – Leavis warns against instrumentalising the individual from school onwards as mere contributor to Snow's « *scientific revolution* ».[6] The implied focus on « *productivity (the supremely important thing)* », the « *standard of living* », « *wages* », « *salaries and what you can buy with them* » is for Leavis « *not enough – disastrously not enough* » (Leavis, 2013:71). This is because it « *cannot be regarded by a* fully human mind *as a matter for happy contemplation* » (Leavis, 2013:72, my emphasis). For Leavis, then, Snow's argument – relying on stereotypes, caricatures and false dichotomies ultimately to reduce arts to entertainment, individual to contributor – is nothing less than dehumanization. Indeed, Snow's arguments' very success seems worryingly to prove this very process. What Leavis repeatedly attacks as Snow's clichéd writing – a kind of conformist linguistic passivity observed also in « *the Sunday papers* » or « *British Council* » publications – mirrors and encourages an identically unthinking acceptance in its readers (Leavis 2013:55,57). Leavis's dismissive terms (« *nullity* » « *negligibility* », « *nought* » « *ignorant* », e.g. Leavis 2013:56) thus function only incidentally as personal affronts; they function primarily to stress Snow's perfect, camouflaged assimilation into a dehumanizing culture.[7] Likewise, Leavis's subtitle, « *The* Significance *of C. P. Snow* » (my emphasis), plays on several understandings of the word: Leavis attacks not so much Snow himself (despite frequent accusations to the contrary) but how he signifies (argumentatively, linguistically) and what he signifies (culturally); he is a worrying signifier in and of a culture which is losing its humanity. By telling people what they want to hear, Snow's success is its and its readers' own condemnation.

Developing these warnings about precisely the kind of « scientific revolution » Snow urges – where even the advantages, like « *reduced hours of work, and the technological resources that make your increasing leisure worth having* » may lead to boredom, emptiness, even alcoholism – « humanity » is retained as a kind of haven, or enclave.[8]

The advance of science and technology means a human future of change so rapid and of such kinds, of tests and challenges so unprecedented, of decisions and possible non-decisions so momentous and insidious in their consequences, that mankind – this is surely clear – will need to be in full intelligent possession of its full humanity (and « possession » here means, not confident ownership of that which belongs to us – our property, but a basic living deference towards that to which, opening as it does into the unknown and itself unmeasurable, we know we belong). (Leavis, 2013:73)

Leavis's « full humanity » thus makes a virtue of its own mystery and elusiveness; he urges not Snow-like « confident ownership » of humanity, but « deference » to it. This « deference » is based on a curious but important epistemological paradox: « humanity » « opens out » into the « unknown » and « unmeasureable », but « we » nonetheless « know » we belong to it. Humanity is therefore in this example a mysterious mode of knowing, less a species-being (*pace* Marx), than a species-intuition, which despite – or even because of – its sub-rational, instinctive nature (« unknown », « unmeasurable »), may guide a humane response to historical change.

This sense of 'humanity' as not so much a property or attribute (as might be commonly imagined), but as a (not-quite-conscious?) agency, skill, or ability, comes through more strongly when Leavis urges:

What we need, and shall continue to need not less, is something with the livingness of the deepest vital instinct; as intelligence, a power – rooted, strong in experience, and supremely human – of creative response to the new challenges of time; something that is alien to either of Snow's cultures. (Leavis, 2013:73)

And, Leavis suggests, the idea of humanity as an intuitive mode of knowing (which is still knowing), a 'vital instinct' (which may be sharpened), a 'power' (which may be strengthened and tested), may be taught in the form of literary language: « *the living creative response to change in the present* » (Leavis, 2013:106). If language deconstructs Snow's pseudo-opposites 'individual' and 'social' – no one individual invents language, of course, but it is nonetheless the only way of expressing one's distinctiveness to oneself and others – then it is through (literary) language that Leavis seeks to develop the university: its individual students, its social role.[9] For Leavis, the ideal university is « *more than a collocation of specialist departments*[, it is] *a centre of* human *consciousness: perception, knowledge, judgment and responsibility* » (Leavis, 2013:75, my emphasis).[10] And this consciousness can emerge in and as the act of literary criticism. « [A]*ll that makes us human* », Leavis claims with astonishing boldness, belongs to the « *third realm* »: his term for the mode of knowledge – such as the collective reading of a poem – which has no easily identifiable location or centre, which is « *neither merely private and personal nor public in the sense that it can be brought into the laboratory or pointed to* » (Leavis, 2013:74). The generation of real ideas in literary discussion that no one discusser would have reached independently highlights the flaws of Snow's facile dichotomy between social and individual; « *the re-creative response of individual minds to the black marks on the page* » likewise tests and elicits for Leavis humanizing critical judgement: a « *collaborative-creative process […] of individuals who collaboratively renew and perpetuate what they parti-cipate in – a cultural community or consciousness* » (Leavis, 2013:74). The relationship between consciousness and (literary) language – the way words live and make live – thus

informs, perhaps even defines, Leavis's understanding of the « human » in a time of bewildering technological advance: literary art is « great » in so far as it humanizes its readers by articulating and encouraging the individual and collective exercise of critical judgement.

Leavis's verbal humanism in a post-human world

The sheer intensity of Leavis's attack stems not then, ultimately, from a defence of « literature » as such but from the necessarily « human » effects that only literature can afford. Snow's dichotomy of liberal intellectualism and instrumentalised « social » progress quite simply ignores that specifically human fulfillment which comes from working with the language which binds us all and of which literature is the supreme exemplar. Whether Leavis was fully conscious of this or not, it is precisely his anger at Snow which accentuates, if not gives rise to, a surprising understanding of the « human »: the « human » exists in a dynamically verbal, rather than statically substantive, ontological mode. The human emerges as the act of reading the « poem », a necessarily dynamic and time-bound activity « *in the minds* », rather than the static, materially existent « *black marks on the page* ». For Leavis, « human » seems surprisingly to function as a verb (« to human »?): a real-time working with language.

Such an implicitly « verbal » understanding of the human seems surprisingly to resist the various assaults on the term levied in and by Paul Ricœur's « hermeneutics of suspicion », Max Weber's « disenchanted » modernity, or Jean-François Lyotard's postmodern incredulity towards « meta-narratives », all of which envisage language as opposite to, not constitutive *of*, the « human ». Lacanian psychoanalysts hold our « human » sense of ourselves is a mere fantasy sent by a mocking unconscious « *structured like a language* »; Michel Foucault claims « man » is simply a discursive term which has served its historical purpose and is destined to be erased (Foucault, 1966:398); Althusserian Marxists dismiss « human » consciousness as the internalized, « interpellated » manifestation of capitalist persuasion; Derridean deconstructionists say the truth of 'human' existence is internally differentiated and endlessly deferred (« différance »). To these specifically poststructuralist challenges, Stefan Herbrechter notes, might be added those raised by precisely the « *advance of science and technology* » that Leavis warned would necessitate « *full and intelligent possession of our humanity* »: geneticists hold we are determined by our DNA; our identities are diffused online; progressive reliance on technology has led, via the trope of the cyborg, to the increasing prevalence and plausibility of ideas raised by the transhumanist movement (Herbrechter, 2013:*passim*).[11]

These serious issues lend perhaps extra relevance to Leavis's challenging insistence on the real, if fragile or temporary, presence of the « human », especially when in literary studies the concept has been attacked as a byword for conservative, transhistorical generalization. Catherine Belsey's and Jonathan Dollimore's 1980s critiques of (respectively) « liberal humanism » and « essentialist humanism » are still instructive, Herbrechter argues, for more recent « post-human » thinking. « Liberal humanism », Belsey argues, is made up of two, related fallacies. First, the fantasy that the individual is free (« liberal ») and autonomous fallaciously dismisses powerful constitutive forces like language or the unconscious. Second, such « human » « autonomy » is held to be truthful eternally (« human nature ») when it in fact corresponds only with a particular historical moment, i.e. that dominated by the « free » market of high-capitalist (neo) liberalism.[12] Likewise, what Dollimore attacks as « essentialist humanism » presupposes the illusory « *idea of the autonomous, unified self-generating subject* » (Dollimore, 2003:155). Such a pre-judgement of the human risks however under-valuing the kinds of active, judicious critical power Leavis passionately attributes to the reading human in the literary « third space ». Leavis's attack on Snow moreover parallels – even though the value of the « human » is reversed – Dollimore's more recent attack on « aesthetic humanism », where the arts are slotted into a particular (and tamely innocuous) place, role and function in and by a more powerful socio-cultural structure. « Aesthetic humanism » – the tacit, unspoken preconception that the arts and humanities exist exclusively to make humans « better' » or more « humane » – is for Dollimore one of the « *obsolete, complacent and self-serving clichés of the culture industry* » (Dollimore 2004:xxii). For Leavis, however, the « human » is precisely the only thing that stops the likes of Snow reducing aesthetic response to such cliché.[13]

It may seem surprising at this point to undertake an analysis of a four-hundred-year old text – Montaigne's *De l'Institution des enfans* – but I do so for the following reasons. As noted above, Leavis is often compelled in his deferential discussions of the « human » to employ vague terms (« *unmeasureable* » « *unknown* »), leaving his argument open to risks of emptiness; Montaigne's comparable portrayal, however, illustrates more fully (if often implicitly) just how the « human » might be envisaged not as a mere reactionary stereotype but as a dynamic linguistic engagement, especially in a pre-Snow historical period where the arts and the sciences were not so rigidly or dichotomously opposed. The analysis is also intended to contribute to the overlapping debates as to whether Montaigne anticipates contemporary thinking on subjectivity, and whether he may be recruited as a « post-modern » sceptic *avant la lettre* (Lyotard claims for example « *il me semble que l'essai (Montaigne) est postmoderne* » Lyotard, 1982:367): Montaigne's appeal to and performative portrayal of the human as a particular response to language seems to nuance, even rebut, Lyotard's claim.

« *Au service de nostre vie* »: living language in *De l'Institution des enfans*

« *Montaigne. That such a man wrote has truly augmented the joy of living on this earth.* » (Nietzsche, 1997: 135)

In a famous manuscript addition to *De l'Institution des enfans*, Montaigne offers his reader a kind of summary of his own reading strategies:

Je n'ay dressé commerce avec aucun livre solide, sinon Plutarque et Seneque, où je puyse comme les Danaïdes, remplissant et versant sans cesse. J'en attache quelque chose à ce papier ; à moy, si peu que rien. (Montaigne, 2004: 146C)[14]

It is implied that Montaigne's modesty – he learns frustratingly little from Plutarch and Seneca, « attaching » their teachings only to the paper before him, not himself – propels 'sans cesse' his continuous activities of reading and writing: if Montaigne ever felt he had learnt enough from his reading such activity would stop. The incessantly cyclical patterning afforded by the watery imagery seems to map onto the chapter's overarching structure. The essay finds itself turning, if not in circles, then in spirals: multiple returns to the same topic – ideal education – do not lead Montaigne back to the same conclusions. In a discernible first « movement » Montaigne considers the possibility of language to train the young student as a passive recipient; in its second, he urges the importance of the student himself taking the initiative; that he himself can use language actively. Here the broad figurative and structural continuums – filling and pouring, reading and writing, assimilation and use – seem broadly constituent of and necessitated by an overarching link of language with life: perhaps the essay's central concern. This analysis traces a variety of strategies Montaigne employs to cement this connection in the reader's mind: his markedly frequent use of alimentary imagery to describe the « intake » of language – the topos of « innutrition » – sets up a loose contextual structure which informs his explicit discussions (and uses) of classical citation, as well as the way he blurs differences between words and actions, seeing both as commonly communicative in a gentlemanly community's shared 'grammar' of values.

Montaigne's link of language with life helps explain why he deploys so liberally alimentary tropes to describe linguistic/epistemological intake: the language through which education is relayed ideally forms an actual part of the living student. Such an ideal is implied as Montaigne regrets he « *n'a gousté des sciences que la crouste premiere* » (Montaigne, 2004:146A); describes his love of books in terms of « *goust* », (sometimes replaced by « *appétit* »), '*gouster*', or '*gourmander*' (e.g. Montaigne, 2004: 150A, VS155A, VS175A); deems pre-edited, abridged paraphrases as « *moëlle et […] substance toute maschée* » (Montaigne, 2004:160A); and refers repeatedly to texts as « *viande* » (Montaigne, 2004:151A, 170A). This alimentary imagery enables Montaigne to articulate educational precepts: it is important, say, for the student to « *allécher l'appétit* »

(Montaigne, 2004:177A), or for the tutor to « *ensucrer les viandes salubres à l'enfant et enfieler celles qui luy sont nuisibles* » (Montaigne, 2004:166A). Such imagery also helps Montaigne specify the positive effects of reading not only on the reader's understanding, as might be assumed (« *abreuver l'entendement* », Montaigne, 2004:159A), but also on the soul (« *l'ame trouve où mordre où se paistre* », Montaigne, 2004:160A), and even on the material body: stories of « *magnanimité et force de courage* » can have an effectively psychosomatic effect on the « *muscles* », « *espessure de la peau et durté des os* » (Montaigne, 2004:153C); he urges that young students « *emboiv*[ent] [les] *humeurs* [des Anciens] », Montaigne, 2004:151A). Montaigne thus by moments likens verbal with humoral transmission. These links of language with food or the material body apply even when couched in negative terms. Montaigne dismisses poor writing for example as « *décharnée* » (Montaigne, 2004:160A), a « fleshless » language illustrated later by Heracleon le Megarien's parody of « Demetrius le Grammairien » and linguistic over-codification. Heracleon mocks those who argue if « *ballo* » has or not a double l, or « *cherchent la derivation des comparatives* cheiron *et* beltion*, et des superlatives* cheiriston *et* beltiston » (Montaigne, 2004:160A). Montaigne's use of alimentary imagery to describe the lively and life-giving reading he counsels thus accompanies classical examples – Heracleon and Demetrius's story is from Plutarch – which demonstrate such reading in their relevant and resourceful deployment.

Montaigne's notions of learning as a form of nutrition are informed by his explicit discussions of allusion and citation and figured by the way he himself cites prior texts, especially as he comes to rewrite and augment the chapter. From the chapter's earliest version Montaigne famously uses from Seneca 26th epistle the image of a bee (the « apiary » topos) to describe ideal reading as nourishingly empowering:

> *Les abeilles pillotent deçà delà les fleurs, mais elles en font apres le miel, qui est tout leur* ; *ce n'est plus thin ny marjolaine: Ainsi les pieces empruntées d'autruy, il les transformera et confondera, pour en faire un ouvrage tout sien: à sçavoir son jugement.* (Montaigne, 2004:152A)

The apiary topos develops the use of alimentary imagery while making thinkable like Leavis's « third space » a vital resonance between mind and language: the ideal, nutritious « absorption » of a text is inseparable from the reader's intelligently independent use of that text.[15] Montaigne hints at just such an active synergy as he says: « *J'ay leu en Tite-Live cent choses que tel n'y a pas leu. Plutarque en y a leu cent, outre ce que j'y ay sceu lire, et, à l'adventure, outre ce que l'autheur y avoit mis* » (Montaigne, 2004:156C). As a cognitive process, reading elicits actual qualities beyond the text itself. The chapter's most conspicuous quotations from classical sources often express such lively thought, especially Horace's « *sapere aude!* » (« *dare to be wise!* » *Epistles*, 1.2). This passage, which remains in the chapter from the A-Text onwards, occupies a

broadly central position in its first version, standing out as the longest of seven A-text citations, (all from Horace, save a line from Dante's *Inferno*) and the only A-text citation which benefits from detailed and extensive recontextualisation. In later versions a lengthy manuscript addition « announces » the citation much more fully, reflecting on themes of self-management, the influence of Socrates, and multiple senses of the word « liberal »: « Entre les arts liberaux, commençons par l'art qui nous faict libres » (Montaigne, 2004:159C). Horace's statement about thought and freedom thus seems to have played on Montaigne's mind throughout the chapter's meditation and composition. Comparable themes – youth, malleability, movement, free expression – mark also the ten additional citations he busily sprinkles through the 1588 B-text of the chapter (as through his whole book), such as Horace's « *vitamque sub dio et trepidas agat / In rebus* »: « *let him live in open air, and ever in movement about something* » (Montaigne, 2004:153B). Such a context informs Montaigne's inventive neologisms (e.g. « *ergotisme* » for a clichéd turn of logic, Montaigne, 2004:160A), frequent revisions, and handwritten marks, not recorded often in the accepted scholarly editions but now accessible via the University of Chicago online scans of the « Exemplaire de Bordeaux »: Montaigne's annotated copy of his *Essais*. Examples of such revisions include him crossing out « *son jugement* » and replacing it with « *sa vie* », when he discusses the main profits of education (Chicago image 0055v), or an effusively long C-Text addition, outlining the « *vertue* » such an education might afford, which breathlessly leaves out any commas between the listed values. (Chicago image 0060). As Terence Cave famously argues in his still-powerful 1979 study *The Cornucopian Text*, then, Montaigne probes the difference between « loquicitas » (empty, verbose profusion where nothing is expressed) and « copia » (where matter, conversely, finds full expression). And to address the question satisfactorily is to accept a paradox which confounds the conventional dichotomy between language's passive absorption and active use: to do the one properly is to do the other competently. This comes through not only on the surface of the crystallized text – as in formulations like « *sçavoir par coeur n'est pas sçavoir* » (Montaigne, 2004:152C) – but also in the restlessly busy amendments, additions and re-marks surrounding Montaigne's engagements with classical material.

The question of linguistic ownership is therefore discussed explicitly on the level of individual formulations but also « essayed », with characteristic perseverance and to provocative effect. Intertwining with and superimposed over Montaigne's discussions (and exemplary deployments) of active reading is a parallel, if loosely and sporadically constructed, argument, positing education broadly as an analogy: the right response to language is instructively akin to right conduct. Acts are communicative – intelligible as « right » or « wrong » – because they take place within a grammar-like consensual structure of meaning. This structure is, admittedly, elastic. Indeed, Montaigne mocks

with pointed reference to Aristotelian and scholastic terminology those who break « *ce grand monde* » down overly rigidly into « *especes soubs un genre* » (Montaigne, 2004:157A); right conduct, like the bee's transformation of pollen into honey, contributes actively, even creatively, to the rules which frame it. Poetry's formalization of language is for Montaigne a key example. His regretful tone at Plato's dismissal of the study of « *les sciences lettrées, il* [...] *semble ne recommander particulièrement la poesie que pour la musique* » (Montaigne, 2004:166C) is consistent with his praise of poetry elsewhere in the chapter and, albeit more ambiguously, elsewhere in the *Essais*. But poetry is emphatically not an entirely free mode of utterance; it must by contrast interact, even antagonistically, with its formal constraints.

[T]*out ainsi que la voix, contrainte dans l'*étroit canal d'*une trompette, sort plus aigue et plus forte, ainsi me semble il que la sentence, pressée aux pieds nombreux de la poesie, s'eslance bien plus brusquement et me fiert d'une plus vive secousse.* (Montaigne, 2004:146A)

Poetry aligns words into « *pieds nombreux* » : their rhetorical and syntactical patterns intersect in various, even antagonistic ways with the rules of versification. These ostensible « limits » only make the « life » of language come through all the clearer. Likewise, living well, in the shadow of mortality, is envisageable for Montaigne as « poetic » in so far as it depends on an engagement with rules of « *meurs* » and « *sens* »:

Car il me semble que les premiers discours dequoy on luy doit abreuver l'entendement, ce doivent estre ceux qui reglent ses meurs et son sens, qui luy apprendront à se connoistre, et à sçavoir bien mourir et bien vivre. (Montaigne, 2004:160A)

Montaigne's use of variously alimentary imagery, demonstration of successful reading in (and as) his allusively citational writing, and varying uses of analogy, thus strive cumulatively to make an « art de vivre » thinkable as a kind of corporeal extension of reading well. Unlike Snow and Leavis, then, Montaigne is thus able to use « science » and (liberal) « arts » more or less interchangeably (Montaigne, 2004:160C): both activities exert energy judiciously according to, and via, variously elastic constraints; and this exercise of judgement becomes easier with training precisely because it strengthens and nourishes such judgement. This contextualizes and helps explain why, say, Montaigne mirrors the (markedly similar) terms « *philologous* » (« *curieux d'apprendre les choses* ») and « *logophilous* » (« *qui n'avoyent soing que du langage* ») as if they were positive and negative inversions of the same, continuous activity (Montaigne, 2004:173A). It also explains his express likening of books with real-world situations: « *Or, à cet apprentissage, tout ce qui se presente à nos yeux sert* de livre suffisant: *la malice d'un page, la sottise d'un valet, un propos de table, ce sont autant de nouvelles matieres*' (Montaigne, 2004:152A, my emphasis).

It is perhaps instructive then that one of Montaigne's most strident appeals to such a kind of « art de vivre » takes the form not of an argument or aphorism but, as in Plutarch's *Lives* (praised elsewhere, Montaigne, 2004:156A) an embodied, personal example known to Montaigne through his reading: Socrates. Perhaps more than coincidentally, this passage, which praises Socrates in the context of travel, and how it improves one's judgement, also contains a clustered trio of emphatic uses of the word 'humain', a word which occurs only three times elsewhere in the whole of the rest of the chapter.

Il se tire une merveilleuse clarté, pour le jugement humain, de la frequentation du monde. Nous sommes tous contraints et amoncellez en nous, et avons la veue racourcie à la longueur de nostre nez. On demandoit à Socrates d'où il estoit. Il ne respondit pas: D'Athenes; mais: Du monde. Luy, qui avoit son imagination plus plaine et plus estandue, embrassoit l'univers comme sa ville, jettoit ses connoissances, sa société et ses affections à tout le genre humain, non pas comme nous qui ne regardons que sous nous. Quand les vignes gelent en mon village, mon prebstre en argumente l'ire de Dieu sur la race humaine, et juge que la pepie en tienne des-jà les Cannibales. A voir nos guerres civiles, qui ne crie que cette machine se bouleverse et que le jour du jugement nous [tient] prent au collet, sans s'aviser que plusieurs pires choses se sont veues, et que les dix mille parts du monde ne laissent pas de galler le bon temps cependant? (Montaigne, 2004:157A)

The « monde », famously invoked by Socrates in the context of his citizenry, seems to function here in two interrelated senses: first, the sum total of the human population and its habitats; secondly, the location where thoughts or acts are ultimately evaluated as right and wrong. Montaigne's mockery of his locals' conviction that frozen vines or (admittedly more seriously) the French religious wars are signs of apocalypse is, after all, based on the wider perspective he is able to adopt. Travel is therefore an intellectual displacement as well as a purely physical one; the markedly cognitive terms with which Montaigne describes it (« *frotter et limer son* cervelle *contre celle d'autruy* », Montaigne, 2004:153A, my emphasis) invites the idea that it exposes the traveler-student to many more grammar-like social structures in and with which he may judge his conduct as correct. The traveller's knowledge of the Socratic « monde », then, sees geographical displacement in terms surprisingly reminiscent of Leavis's notion of the « human »: an exercise of literary or linguistic judgement which figures right conduct in terms of a universal collective.

Conclusion

This essay has argued that underlying F. R. Leavis's response to C. P. Snow's famous and widely-read lecture on the « Two Cultures » is less a straightforward defence of the arts than an attack on how Snow opposes them straightforwardly with the sciences. In this, Leavis parallels Jonathan Dollimore's later attack on wider cultural attempts to localize, restrict and pigeonhole the arts in terms of a singular function or role. But while Dollimore sees such attempts as based on a lazily universalizing stereotype of the « human » – the idea art makes you more « humane » is thus inherently reactionary – Leavis sees reading's « humanising » effects as precisely the only thing that can resist Snow's reductively instrumentalising divisions of specifically « artistic » or « scientific » intellectual endeavour. It was noted, however, that Leavis, when called upon to define and articulate just what he means by the « human », often concedes a certain termino-logical or argumentative fuzziness at the price of a modest « deference »: we « know we belong » to « the human », but any further elaboration on this idea, and precisely how it corresponds to the reading of literature, is often obscure. It was suggested that insights from Montaigne could be useful here, not least because he wrote in and to a culture where intellectual endeavour was arranged and aligned in ways radically different from ours. The discussion of Montaigne's *De l'Institution des enfans* traced his use of alimentary imagery to see language as a form of nourishment, surveyed his busy, restless additions and revisions, examined his explicit discussions (and implicit demonstrations) of his own modes of reading, and saw his praise of Socrates as emble-matic of « *la race humaine* » as a culmination of a sustained figurative chain whereby text and world were seen as analogies of each other: as poetry relies for its meaning on the ways its syntactic, rhetorical or semantic qualities and structures correspond (or not) with versificatory conventions, so conduct relies for its meaning on how it corresponds (or not) with socio-cultural frameworks, of which the understanding may be enriched by travel. Socrates' citizenry of the « *monde* » (rather than just Athens), is thus supremely « humain » because of the encompassing way it is willing to negotiate cognitively, judiciously, within these overlapping, grammar-like social structures. So, while Montaigne does not make impossible claims about language's ability to adopt super-linguistic modes of existence, his metaphorical, rhythmical, and figurative techniques *do* work, collectively, to stress how language, and the reality of which that language's living, human reader is a part, are surprisingly close structural analogues. Even the chapter's overall argumentive arc, which moves like his « apiary » image from questions of passive language absorption to questions of active language use, likewise elicits in its myriad and often confusing digressions precisely the kind of readerly engagement his chapter strives strenuously and everywhere to advocate. Montaigne's neologisms, redrafts, and analogies thus all emerge as elements of a search to open out

the individual and collective (co-)operations of words, to struggle within and against his language's semantic, syntactical, metaphorical, cultural, and imitative resources, to put his finger on an intimately intuited truth: a willingness to make words live. In this, Montaigne reveals tantalizing horizons for studying and thinking about literary language in the 'post-human' twenty-first century.

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Notes

1. See Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Toulmin 1990)

2. Montaigne, of course, is a humanist in the Renaissance sense: following the *trivium* and *quadrivium* he makes instructive use of texts from antiquity in order to solve contemporary political and intellectual problems. *De l'Institution des enfans* – Montaigne's most express analysis of humanist education, as the title suggests (although these themes are a common preoccupation

of the whole book) – is for example indebted to Plutarch's *On the education of children*. See for discussions of Renaissance humanism the essays assembled in the *Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism* (ed. Kraye 1996), and, more specifically on Montaigne's Renaissance humanism, Bernard Jolibert, *Montaigne: L'Éducation humaniste* (Jolibert 2009), and Hubert Vincent, *Éducation et scepticisme chez Montaigne* (Vincent 2000).

3. John Brockman edited a collection of essays published in 1995 – « The Third Culture » – a term taken up by Slavoj Žižek and others; and the fiftieth anniversary of the « Snow-Leavis » controversy was commemorated in the years 2009-12 by a small but impassioned set of publications. Chief among these is Guy Ortolano's exhaustive history of the debate *The Two Cultures Controversy: Science, Literature and Cultural Politics in Post-war Britain* (Ortolano 2009). The collection of essays *From Two Cultures to No Culture*, commissioned by the centre-right think-tank Civitas (Furedi *et al* 2010), saw in the discussion a gloomy prognosis of the « dumbing down » it attributed more or less exclusively to Tony Blair's New Labour education policy, especially Blair's ambition of getting more young people into university. The exchange's enduring topicality was also been demonstrated by excellent re-editions of Snow's and Leavis's lectures – including their follow-up statements over the debate – by Stefan Collini, himself a thoughtful and outspoken critic of successive governments' education policies (Collini 1998, Collini 2013).

4. The way Snow builds his arguments lead him to some poorly justified and plainly inaccurate predictions: he sees the « *disparity between rich and poor* » disappearing by 2000 because « *It's just not on* » (Snow, 1998:42). Roger Kimball rightly complains of « *gulfs, gaps, chasms, caesurae* » in Snow's logic (Furedi *et al* 2010:35). For example, and despite the odd mention of a possible « third culture », Snow entirely ignores (say) philosophy as a genuine bridge between « the two cultures ». Snow's terminology is « *slippery* », even a « *terrible muddle* » (Furedi *et al* 2010:35). His lecture's often conversational tone often makes it seem more like a set of anecdotes than a coherent case; the tendency to generalize from scant or anecdotal evidence is clear. Snow says for example literary intellectuals are « *Luddites* » and scientists have « *the future in their bones* » (Snow, 1998:10). But he demonstrates his claims less through detailed statistical reference – though Snow does mention a survey of « *thirty to forty thousand scientists* » (Snow, 1998:11) – than personal experiences. He meets « *W. L. Bragg in the buffet on Kettering station on a very cold morning in 1939* » (Snow, 1998:1); G. H. Hardy remarks to him « *in mild puzzlement* » that the term « intellectual » never seems to pertain to scientists (Snow, 1998:4); yet more troublingly, a nameless « *scientist of distinction* » suggests to him that ninety percent of writers brought « *Auschwitz that much nearer* » (Snow, 1998:7): a suggestion Snow later refutes, but only reservedly.

5. A proviso might be noted here: Snow indeed temporarily entertains the idea of a « third culture », but ultimately rejects it (Snow, 1998:9); he regrets this, however, and anticipates the arrival of such a culture in his 1963 *The Two Cultures: A Second Look* (see Snow, 1998:70 *et seq*).

6. « *Industrialisation is the only hope of the poor* », Snow proclaims; to reject it is to « *go without much food, see most of your children die in infancy, despise the comforts of literacy, accept twenty years off your own life* » (Snow, 1998:25). Regardless of the fact that globalised capitalist industrialization in 2014 has only led to deepening inequality, Snow's radical polarity between literary intellectualism (he condescendingly dismisses their imagined « *aesthetic revulsion* » via metonymic reference to *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau, Snow, 1998:25) and mass starvation, as if you cannot have one without the other, is for Leavis disastrous.

7. The sheer aggressiveness of some of Leavis's comments elsewhere lends weight to the oft-made criticism that his lecture was quite simply an *ad hominem* attack: see the essay by Raymond Tallis in the Civitas volume. But this vigorous urgency is often inseparable from an anxious, repeated stress on the « human ». Consider as an example the following passage: « *Of history, of the nature of civilization and of the history of its recent developments, of the human history of the Industrial Revolution, of the human significances entailed in that revolution, of literature, of the nature of that kind of collaborative human creativity of which literature is the type, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that Snow exposes complacently a complete ignorance* » (Leavis, 2013:54)

8. At one point, for example, Leavis regretfully cites the example a French study, which observes that leisure time is as strenuously organized as work time (Leavis, 2013:72).

9. At one point Leavis states: « *I mentioned language because it is in terms of literature that I can most easily make my meaning plain, and because of the answer that seems to me called for by Snow's designs on the university* » (Leavis, 2013:74).

10. Leavis recalls he only chose to retort to Snow in the first place as he realized, while marking Cambridge scholarship exams that « *sixth-form masters were making their bright boys read Snow as doctrinal, definitive and formative – and a good examination investment* » (Leavis, 2013:56). The word « investment » is to my mind loaded: it recalls the calculatedness inherent in Snow's notion of knowledge, as well as the dry predictability and self-interest in that of his idea of collective advance.

11. See for a representative example of transhumanist texts and positions (eds) More and Vita-More, *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

12. I extrapolate these connotations from Belsey's own definition, liberal humanism « *proposes that the subject is the free, unconstrained author of meaning and action, the origin, of history.* [He or she is] *unified, knowing and autonomous* » (Belsey 1985:8).

13. Note in this regard how Leavis expressly attacks Snow's style as a novelist as an « *advancing swell of cliché* » (Leavis, 2013:64).

14. Page numbers following citations from Montaigne refer to the Villey-Saulnier edition of the *Essais* and specify for information the successive versions of the text composed in and after Montaigne's lifetime: the 1580 edition (« A »), 1588 edition (« B ») and the hand-written amendments of the « Exemplaire de Bordeaux », later published posthumously in 1592 (« C »).

15. See for a more sustained discussion of Montaigne's citational strategies see Christine Brousseau-Beuermann, *La Copie de Montaigne: Étude sur les citations dans les* Essais (Brousseau-Beuermann 1989).