Robertho Gay  
MONT (Remodeling The Environment)

Prof. John Little

Summer Reading Assignment Outline

07/11/12

Paper Assignment 1

Although receiving the information on the summer assignment, and reading the reason for why it was chosen by the Dean of the Class of 2016 I decided to not do the summer assignment. The information that I received did not inspire me to learn more about Montaigne, or read the Bakewell book. I read a portion of the book, but ultimately did not finish the reading. Speaking strictly for myself, I would say it was an unsuccessful reading assignment. After doing some of the reading, I found it tiresome, irrelevant, and inconclusive. These factors played a vital role in my reason for not completing the book. I was quickly disengaged the first few pages of the Bakewell book.

I found the book easy to read, but while reading found it challenging to stay awake. The book’s inability to spark my interest did not serve well for the goal of engaging my thoughts as a reader. Therefore defeating the purpose of helping me adopt or understand some of the guidelines that Montaigne had during his lifetime. The purpose of the book, according to the information that was sent out to the class of 2016 through the mass email by Dean Pacco, was to help the incoming class figure out who they are. It was unclear to me what the book had to with spending four years at an institution to learn a trade. In my failure to recognize the relevance between the book and the journey that I would undertake for the next four years of my life, I lost interest.

There was also the question of irrelevance. While reading my book I found myself searching for small similarities between Montaigne’s points on “How to Live” and the teachings from my classes. I was only able to make a connection with the first reading for my Montserrat class; the essay on Cannibals, a work of Montaigne’s. In the essay of Cannibals, Montaigne describes the fear that mankind has for the unknown, and our hastiness towards labeling the unknown as “barbaric”. This he concludes renders men incapable of looking inward and recognizing their own imperfections. This theory is also described in Bakewells interpretation of Montaigne’s several other essays. Later on I realized the goal was not necessarily to find the relevance within our courses, but instead to find the relevance within our own ways of living. This recognition did not come from hours of contemplation, but instead came from understanding what I had learned from the few pages that I read.

Grasping the point of the book was challenging to me. The reason for stories that were provided within the reading eluded me. After loosing his best friend, Montaigne, became more reluctant to open to people around him. This information might have been very helpful for clarification in another part of the book, but it incurred more confusion then clarity in the “Keep a private room behind the shop” chapter of the book. But after thinking about it, it made a lot of sense for Montaigne to have a place of solitude to deal with the death of his friend or other problems that might arise in his life.

Although this book might be of great help to the incoming class of 2016 over the course of the four years, and all throughout life, I think that the summer reading assignment was unsuccessful. At first it was hard to determine the point, contents from the book to me seemed misplaced, and the relevance of the book was elusive. Personally I can’t think of a book that would both engage and teach students how to live a life, but I do believe that summer reading assignments should be explored a little more. Hopefully as time goes on the summer reading assignments will include books which students are eager to read.