Anabella Pérez September 13, 2012

Professor Little

Modeling the Environment

Paper Assignment 1

Montaigne is known for his intellectual speculations that have led him to talk about his different approaches to life through his own experiences. After reading “On Cannibals” I discovered how important it was to Montaigne for people to question everything they encountered in order to find their way through life. It is intriguing to understand living ones way of life through the ideas of another person. The Montaigne essay makes you question whether one really found how to live their life or if one is still trying to understand the different things that life has to offer. Life is about venturing out in the world and learning new things from one’s own experiences. Montaigne seemed like an individual who was very open to his surroundings and figured that accepting the world as it was would contradict his spirit of freedom. Although Montaigne’s ideas are quite interesting, one can argue that his ideas are biased because they vary from one individual to another. Montaigne’s ideas can be applied to some people than for others or his ideas can be applied in different ways.

I personally haven’t found my way of life, but I know as I grow older through my own personal experience I can find out how to live my life. Coming to Holy Cross has opened a new chapter in my life, and lead me to interpret things at a different angle. This new chapter perhaps can help me learn how to live, but then again this question that Montaigne asked many times will always have different answers according to different interpretations of the meaning of life. Therefore, although Montaigne’s essay is quite interesting it is also controversial; because his essays are based on speculations which make me question his ideas, but also allow me to create my own interpretations of living my life. “On Cannibals” was also an interesting piece of writing, but then again it was based on secondary sources. Therefore, he resembled the Victorian anthropologists who learned about culture through secondary sources not knowing whether their informants were being truthful about the data collected. Montaigne’s conclusions about the cannibals in Brazil could however be valuable because he did have many valuable resources to arrive on his conclusions about these groups of people.

The idea of summer reading is not bad at all, but it does create internal conflicts. By internal conflicts I mean that the students fight with themselves to get their assignment done and they find that there is no fun in having an assigned reading that might not appeal to their interest, especially in the summer. It can even be argued that this whole idea of venturing out and discovering ones surrounding is being limited by a summer reading assignment. The reason being is because students think that time is being taken away from one discovering the world when being assigned readings that might not spark interest. Even though students should encounter writers like Montaigne the modern world perhaps might want to be given choices when it comes to summer assignments. For examples some students might enjoy the reading while others might one to do a voluntary project that carry out the themes found in Montaigne’s book.

Rebekah Nathan, an anthropologist professor at the University of North Arizona, did a study on freshman life at her university. She enrolled herself as a student to fully understand and experience firsthand the life of a freshman. During her freshman year her class was also assigned a summer reading that would later on be discussed in small groups and later one converted into a writing assignment. Nathan noticed that once class started and the professor asked questions on the assigned books a good percentage of the student did not read it. She went around asking students the reasons why they didn’t read the book and many answered that it was because “it was abstract and impractical, and they didn’t learn anything related to their interest.” (Nathan, 230) We can relate this scenario with the reading assigned this summer, not every student will appeal to the reading because they might not connect with the author’s main message or there is no interest in the particular reading assigned.

Something more appealing to a student than a summer assignment would be a student being told to go out into their community and try to make a difference. Therefore, as mentioned before it would be more reasonable for students to be provided with choices when it comes to summer assignments because choices always tend to provide some sort of interest to the students. Whether it’s through service or volunteering this sort of assignment can also make us, as Holy Cross students, live out the mission statement of our school which says to “find the meaning of life and history” and “to be open to new ideas.” All this can still relate to Montaigne’s question on how to live, but instead of reading how to live our life we would actually be doing it if we were to be assigned a voluntary project. The way we live life now will change years from now, but as we grow older we get closer to defining the life we live. Until then, this question of how one lives is and can remain an open question until we find the answer to it.

Montaigne really focus on the individual going out into the world and asking questions as to why things are the way they are. It is important to question anything that affects us because we are part of this world and we should have a right to know the reasons why things are the way they are. Montaigne writing an essay on cannibals in a particular part in Brazil is a great example of him discovering a group of people that Europeans claimed to be known as savages. He investigated why this name was associated with the Brazilian natives and he was able to learn that his own paper classified them as savages because they thought their behaviors were strange, not normal, and different from their own. If Montaigne hadn’t made this investigation and question the Europeans thoughts then these associations about the Brazilian natives would not have been clarified.

Montaigne’s essays on how to live show us that one must be truthful to oneself in order to live properly. One cannot live life without questioning its true meanings because then one will be living without knowing what is true and what is false. Although living life many be applied differently for many people one can conclude that Montaigne has open a chapter to his readers so that they can start thinking how to live there life.