



Montaigne and the Great Conversation

Written and Illustrated
by Dan Stern

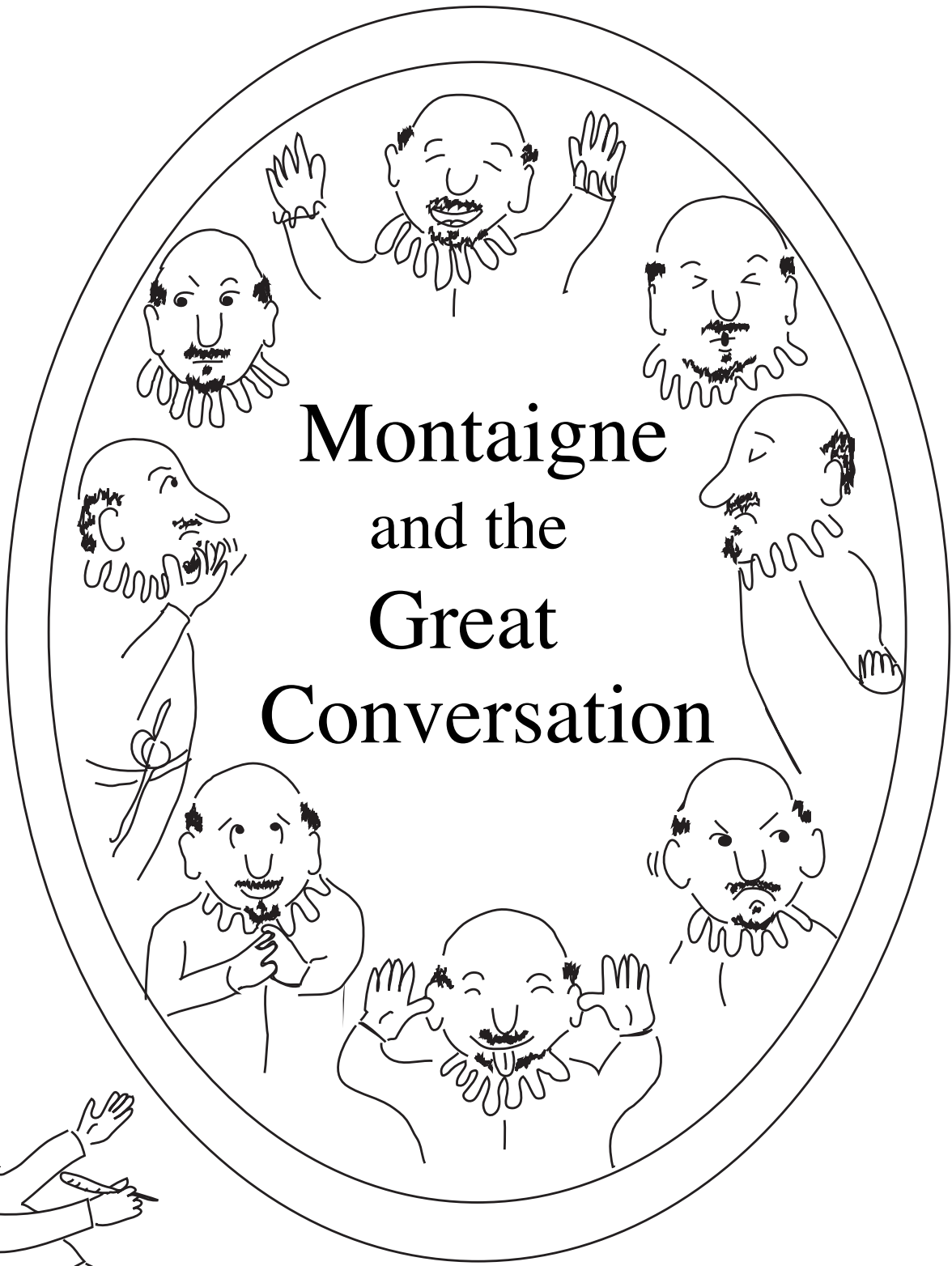
Montaigne and the Great Conversation





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email:
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This book is dedicated to my
wonderful, beautiful, loving
children, Lily and Benjamin!



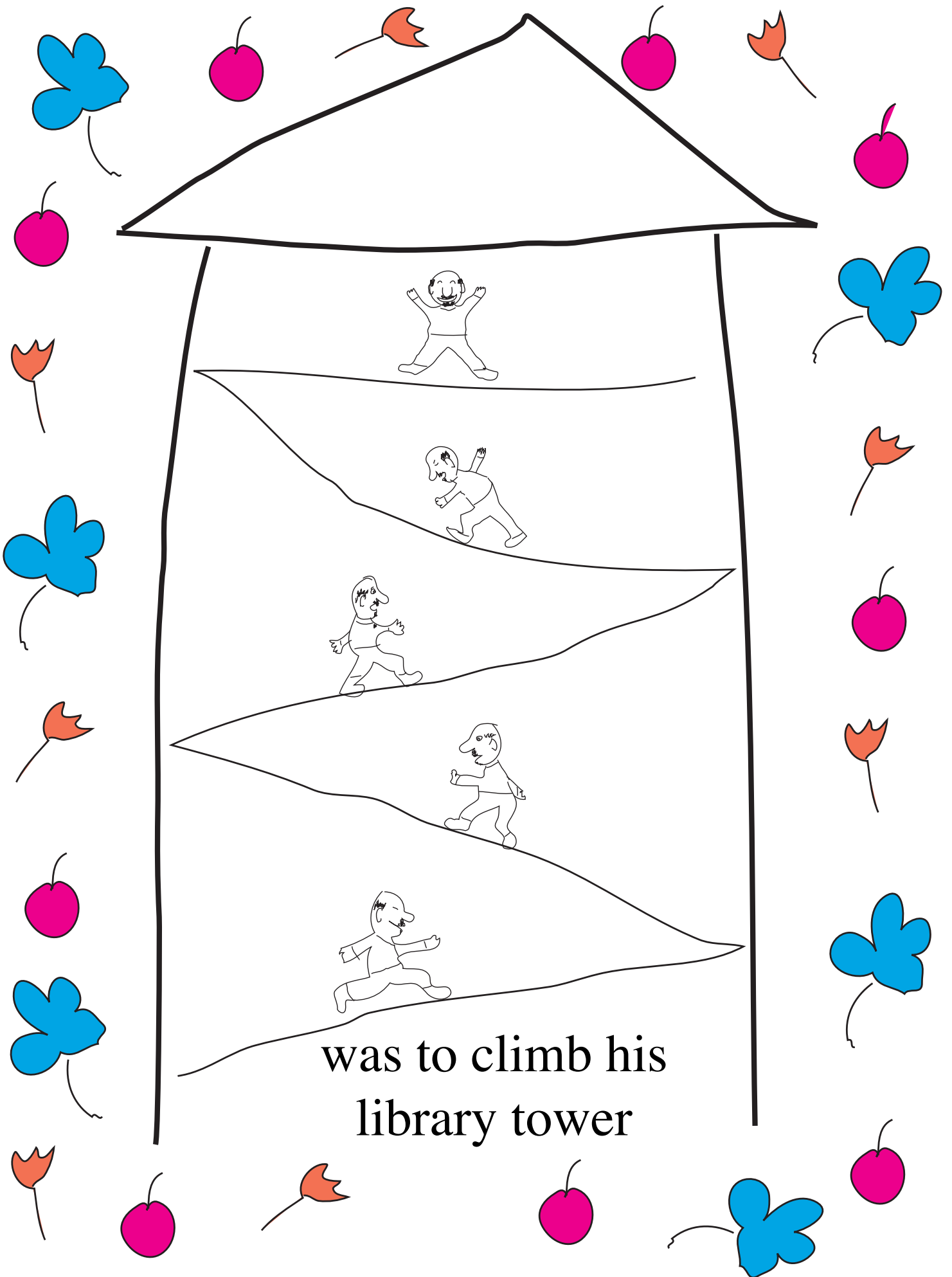
Montaigne
and the
Great
Conversation



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Montaigne's
greatest pleasure



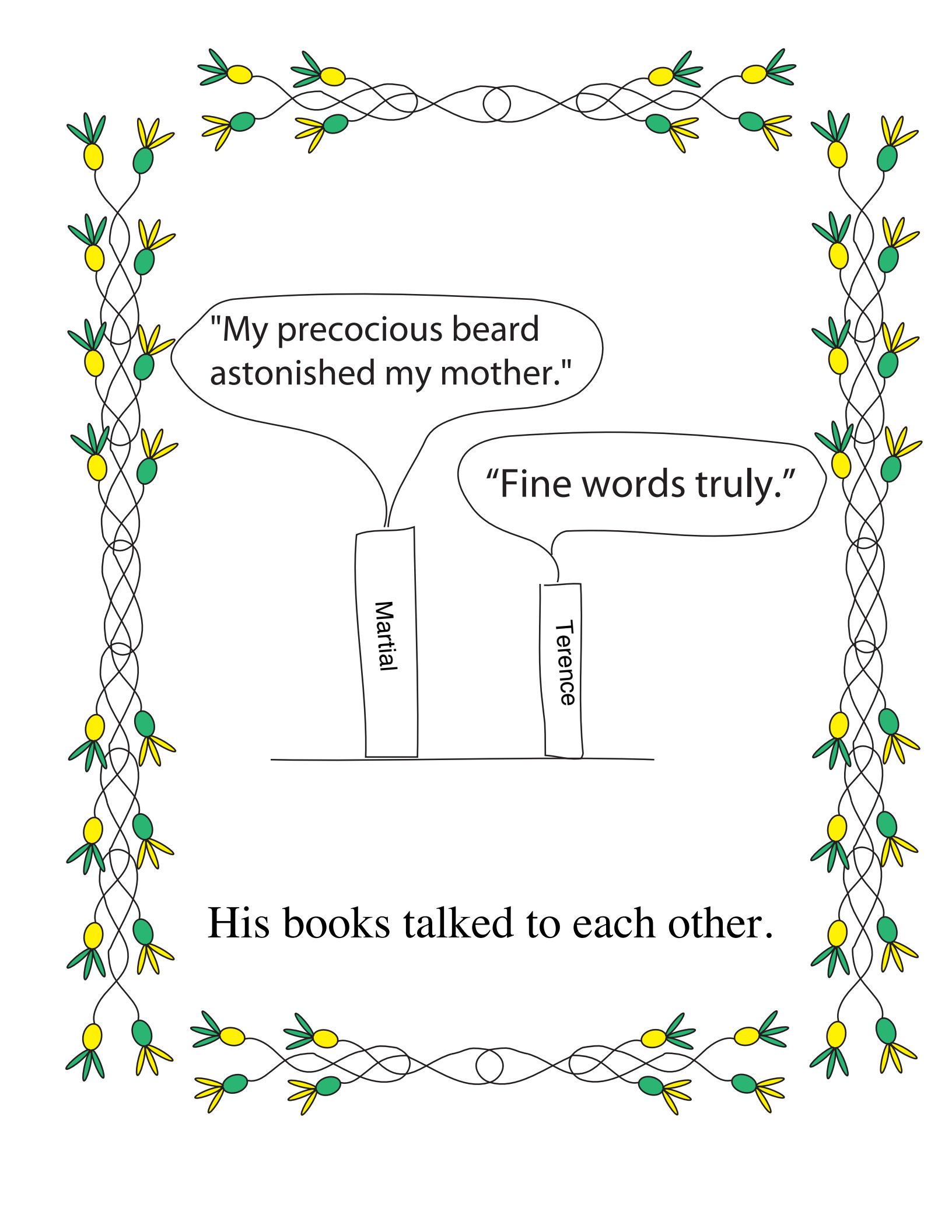
was to climb his
library tower



"We two talk alone."



His books talked to him.



"My precocious beard
astonished my mother."

"Fine words truly."

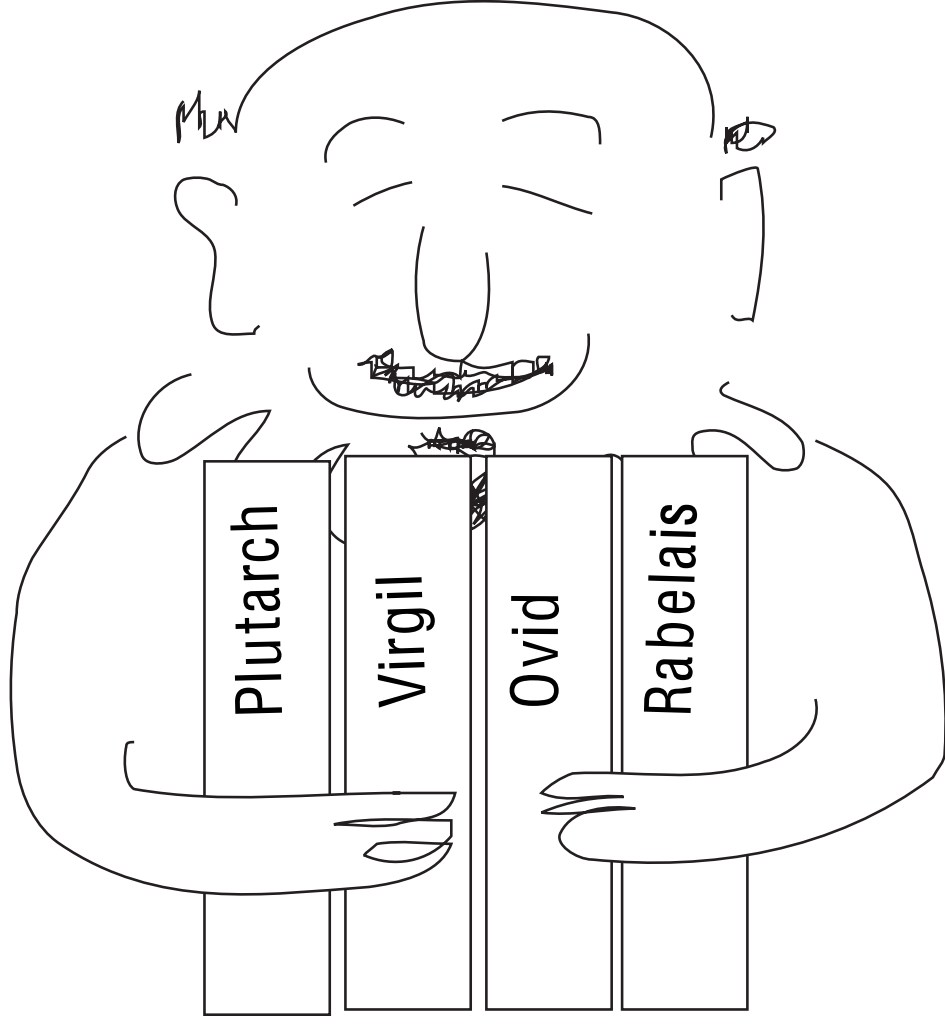
Marial

Terence

His books talked to each other.

I also love Lucan and enjoy his company.

I also love Lucan and enjoy his company.



His books were his friends.
And Montaigne was happy,

I also love Lucan and enjoy his company.

I also love Lucan and enjoy his company.

I was just this moment reading...

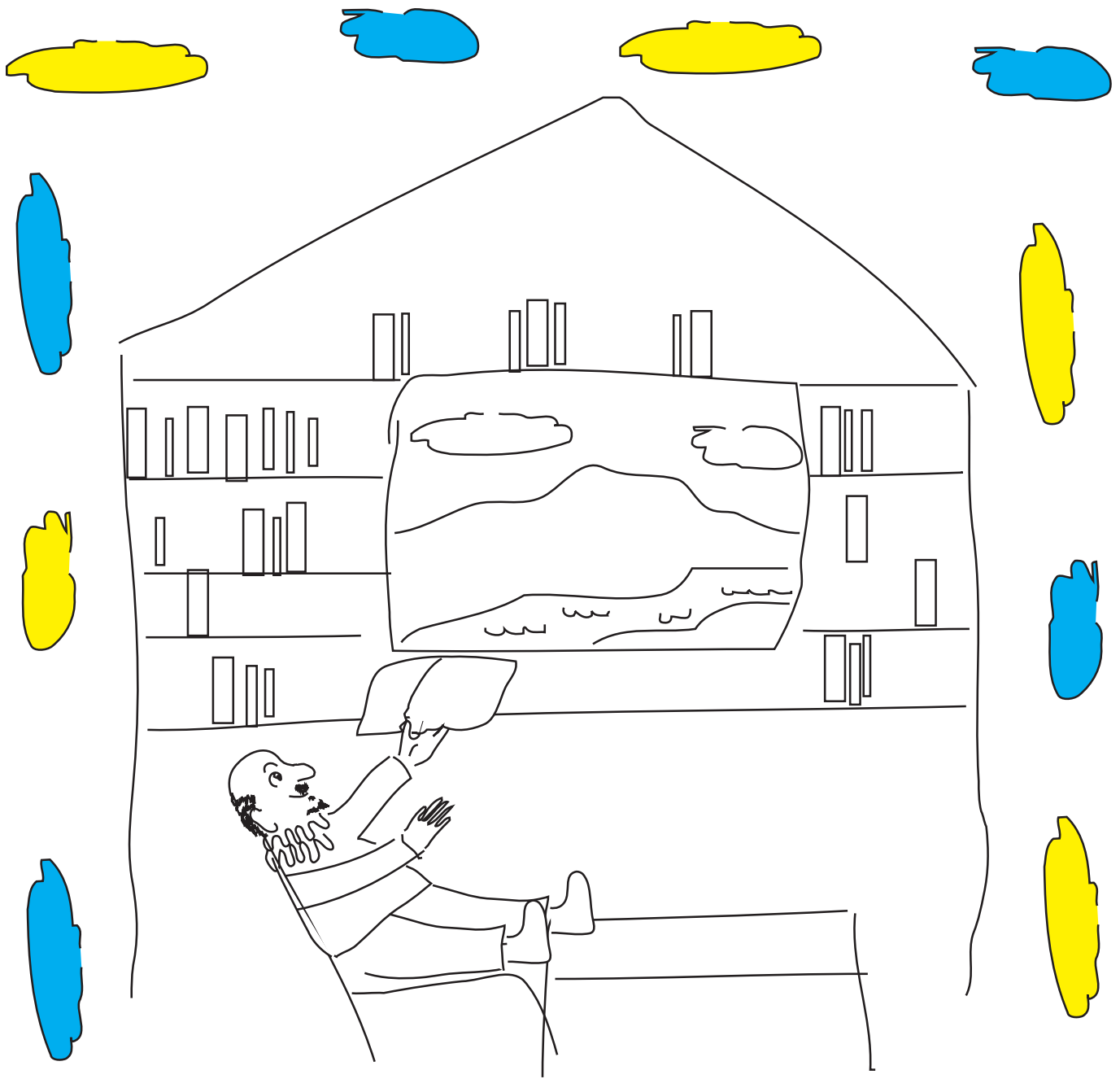
I want to tell you my experience in this matter...



I want to tell you my experience in this matter...

except for one thing:
he loved to talk, too.

I was just this moment reading...

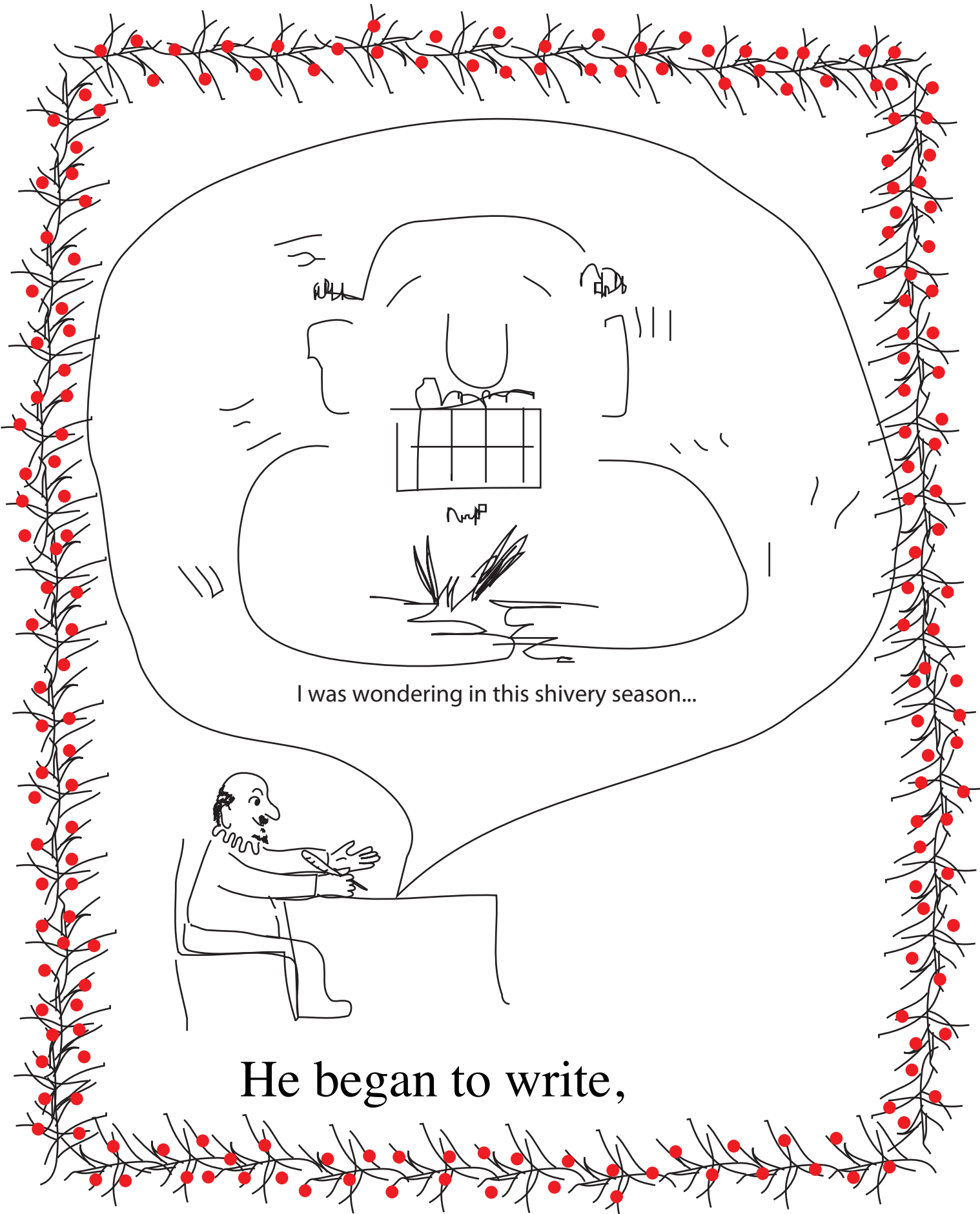


Every day he went to his library tower and listened to his books.

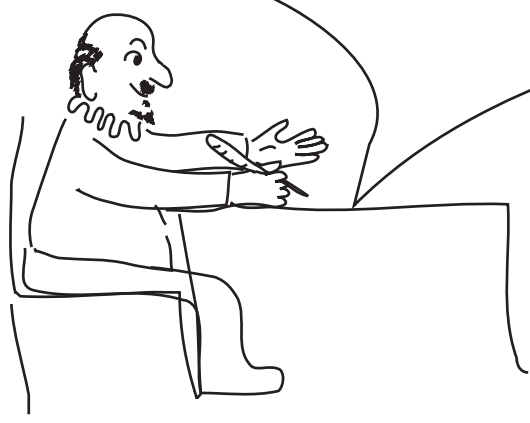


! Soon he was bursting with ideas. *
But how could he talk to his books?

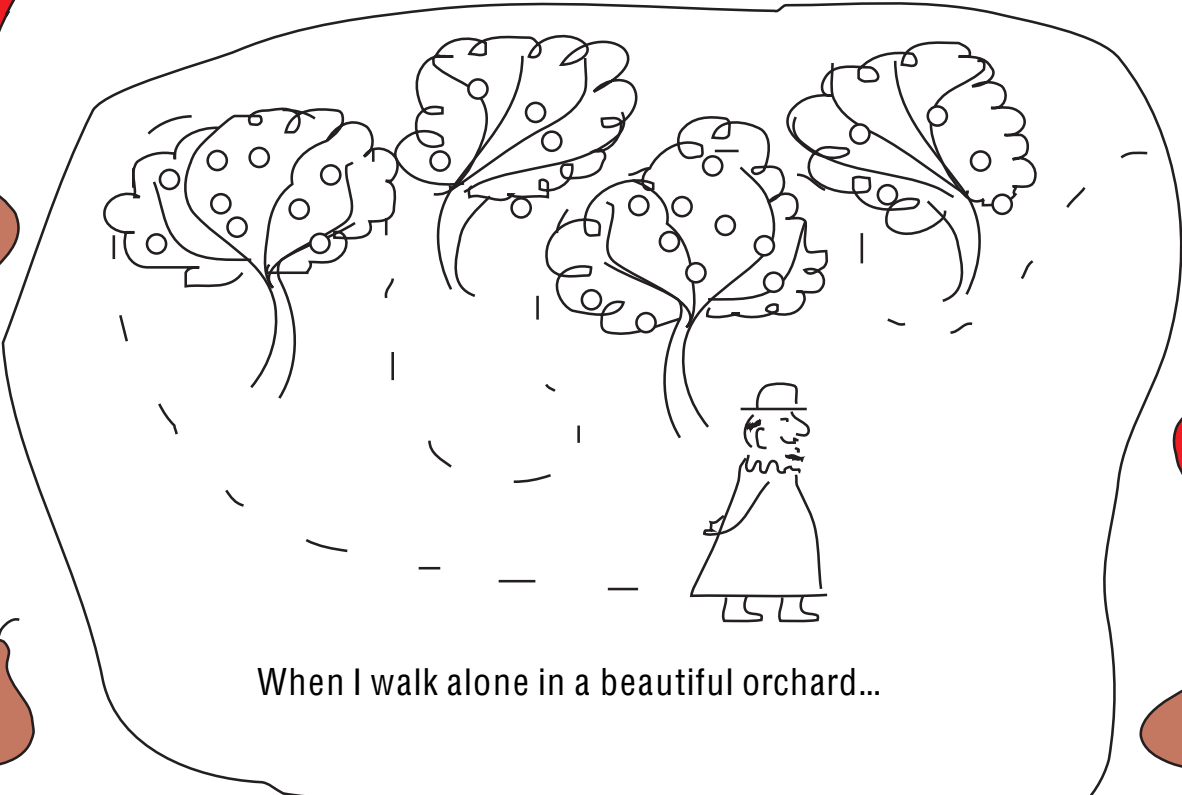
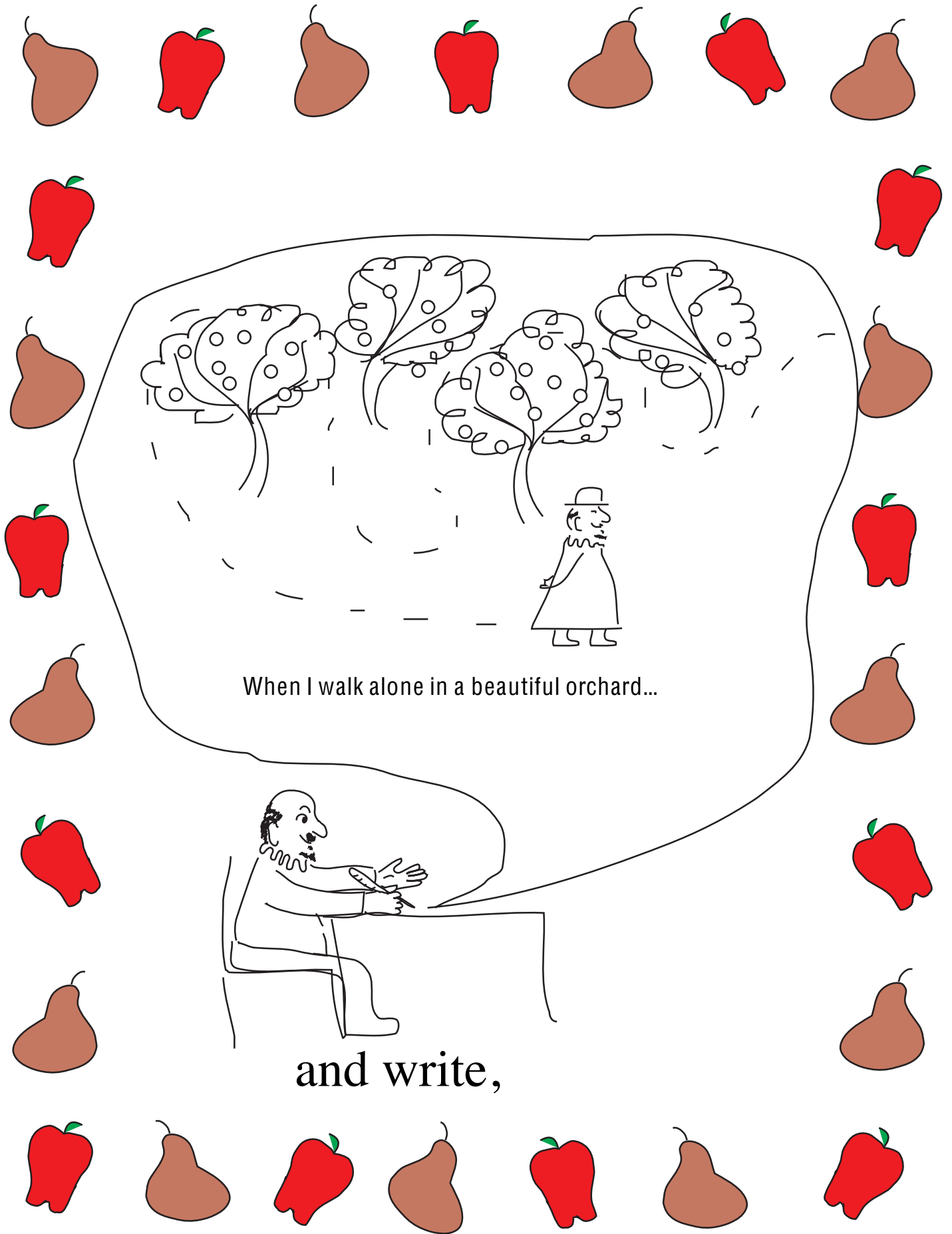




I was wondering in this shivery season...



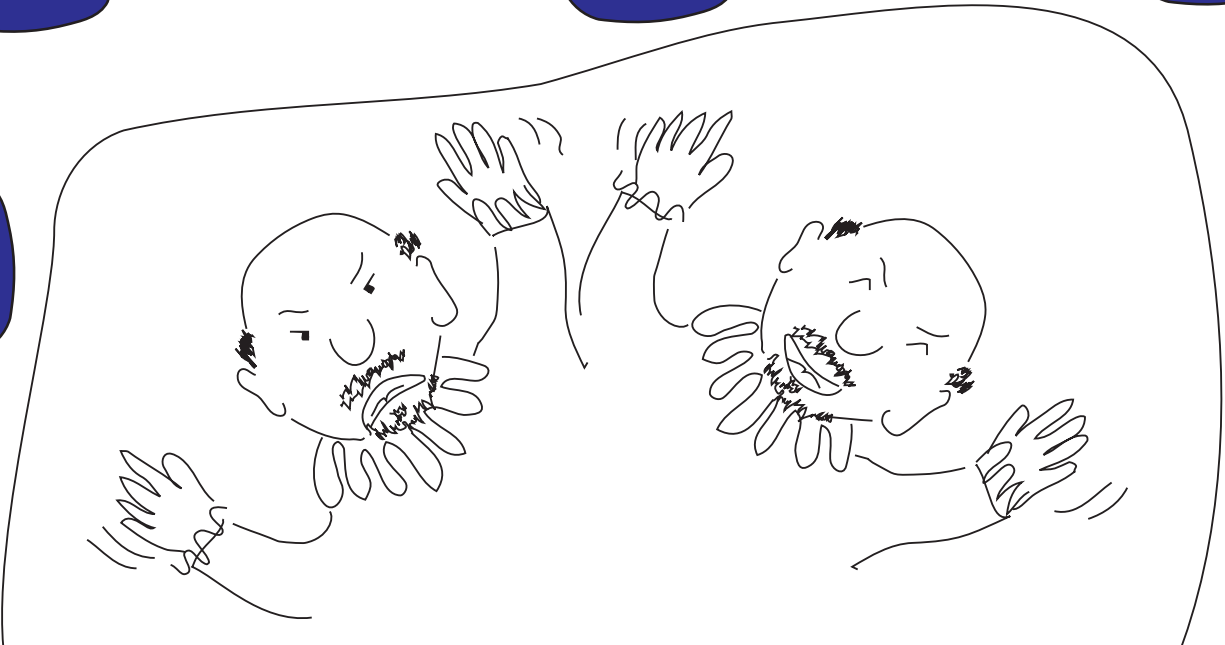
He began to write,



When I walk alone in a beautiful orchard...



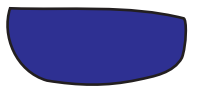
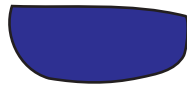
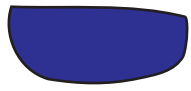
and write,



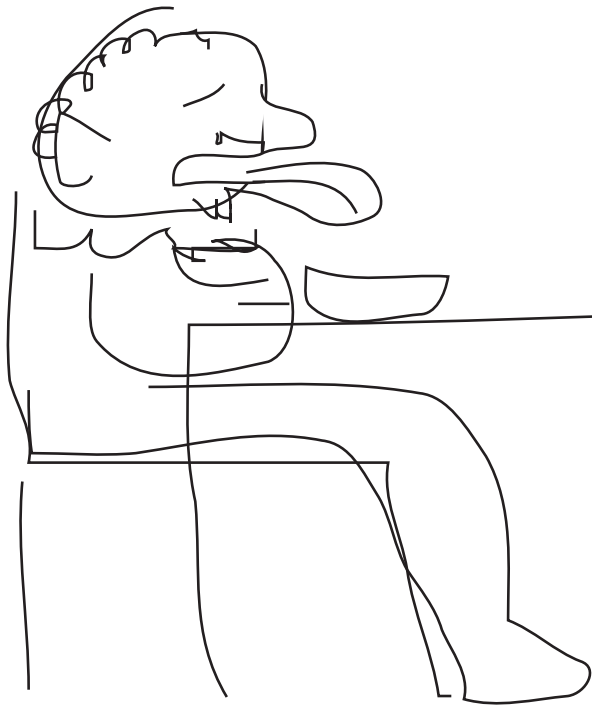
I find it very healthy and pleasant
to shout and argue before a meal...



and write.

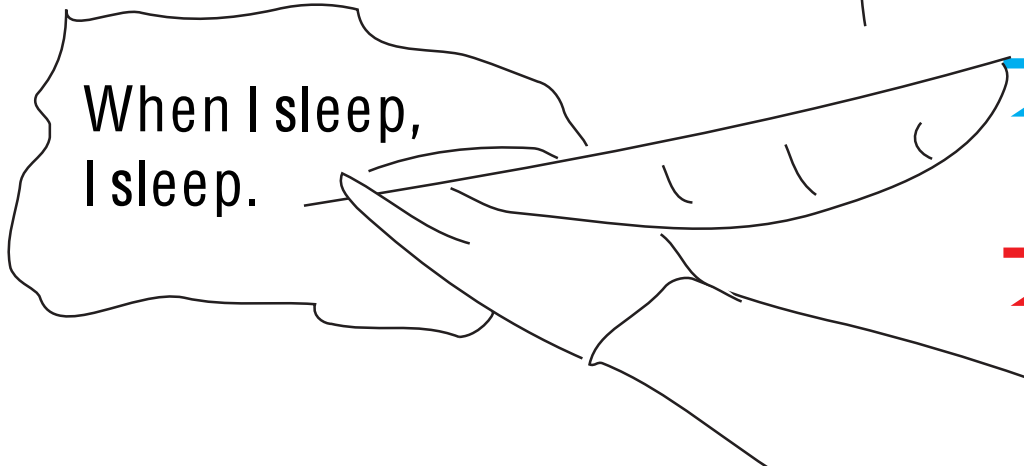
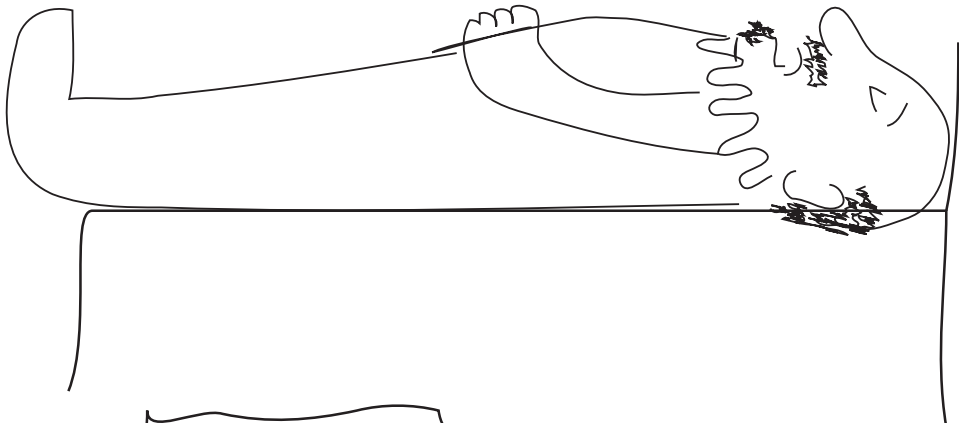
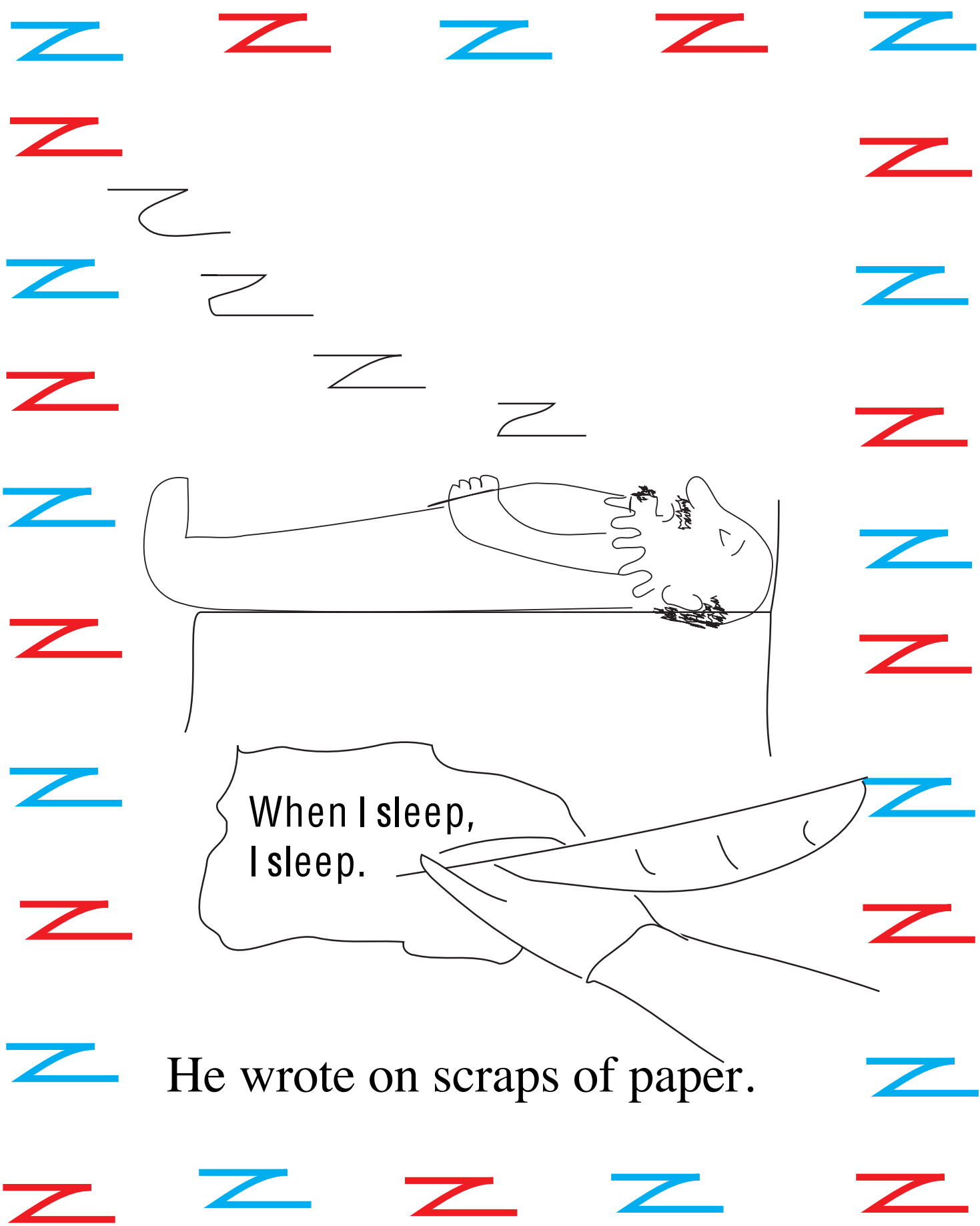


My father hated all kinds of sauces;

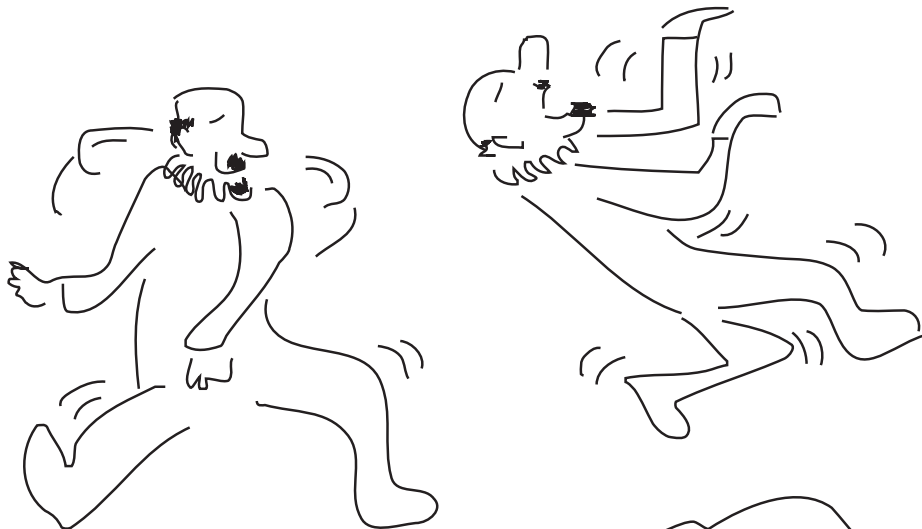


I love them all.



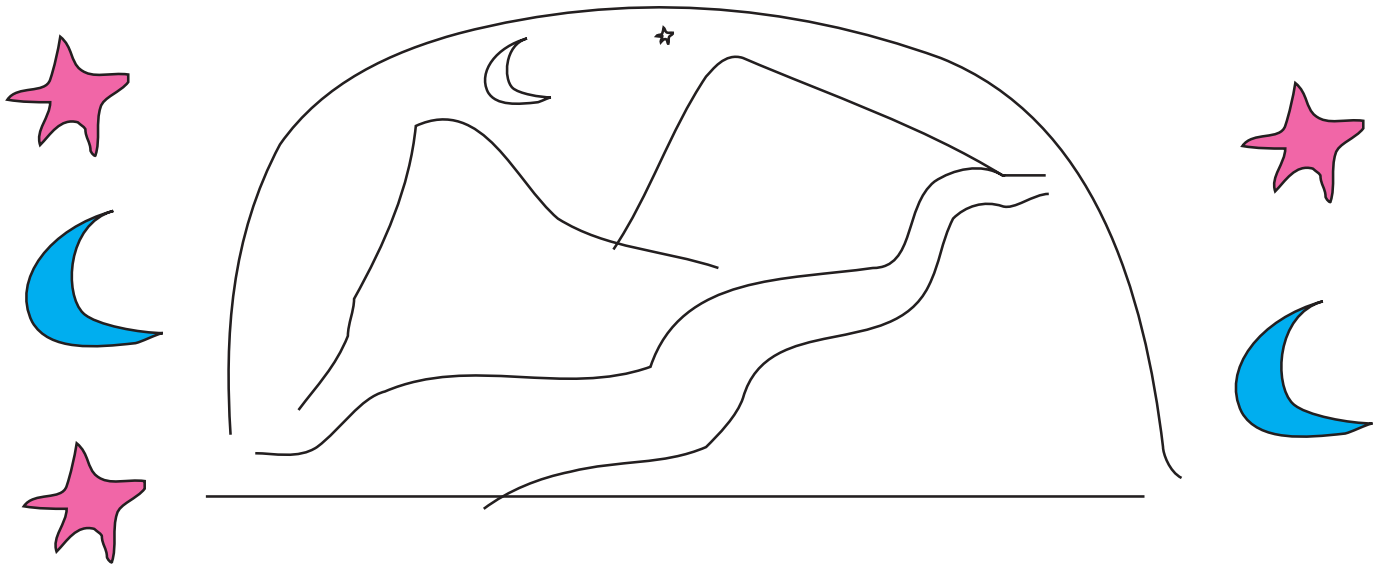


He wrote on scraps of paper.

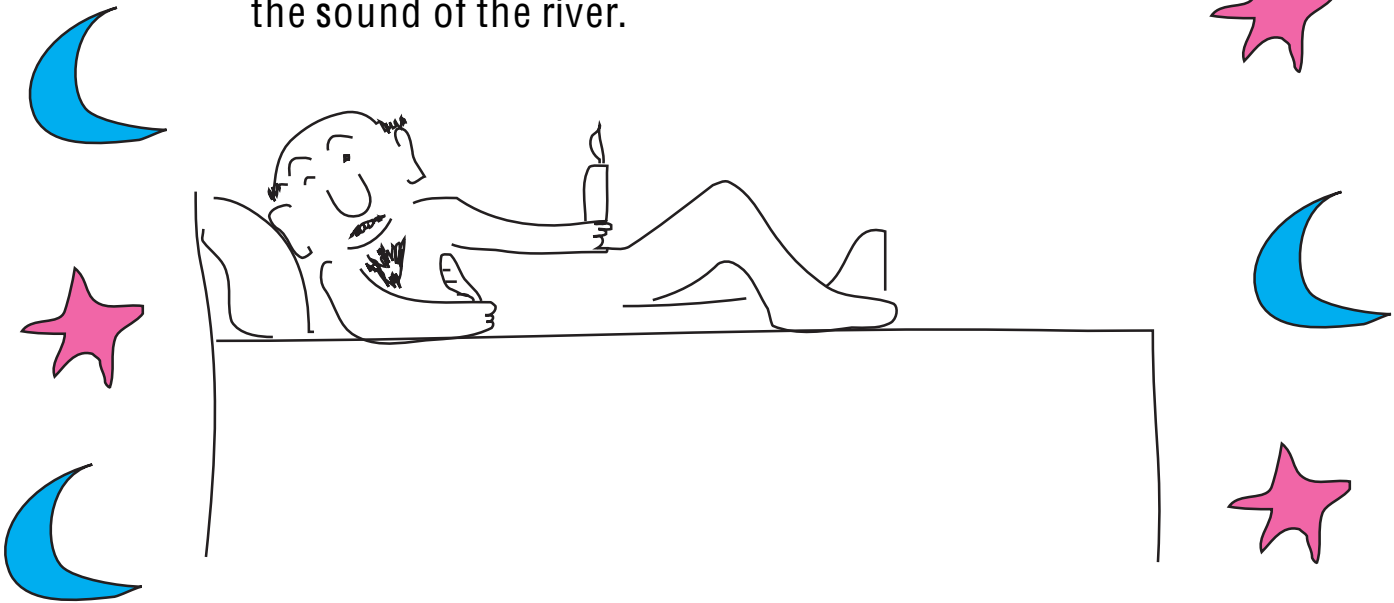


He wrote in the margins of books.



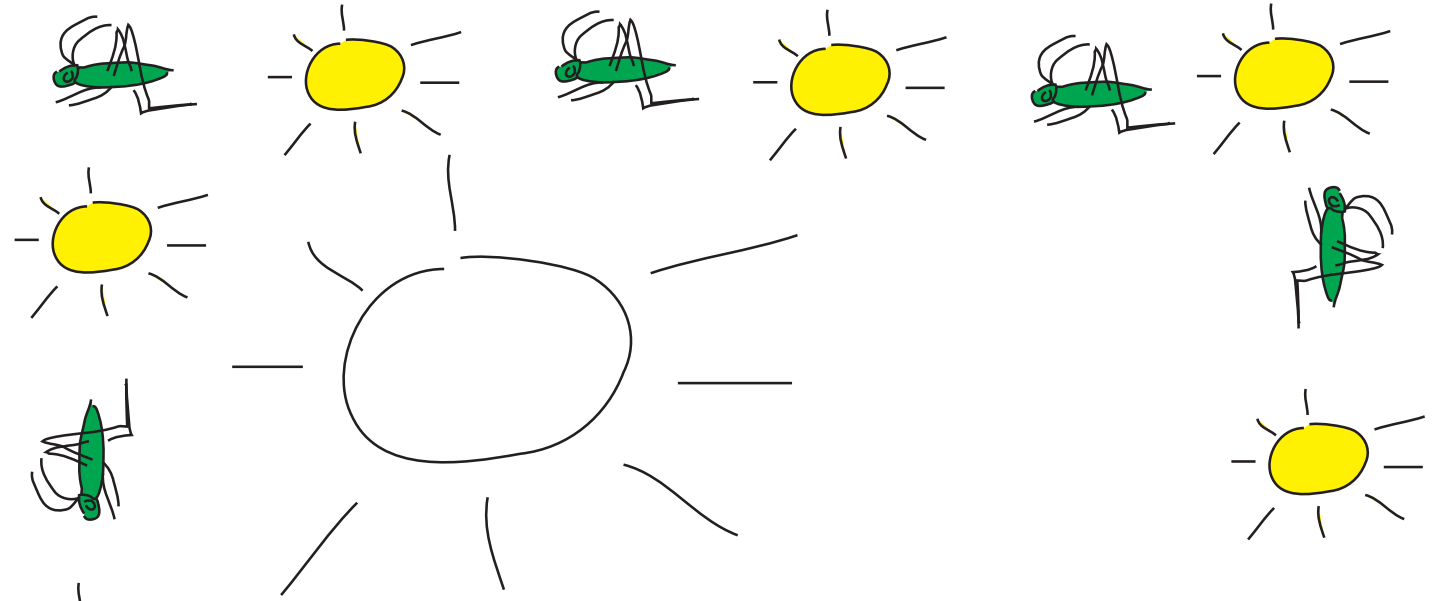


All night from my room I heard, very soft,
the sound of the river.



He wrote in the middle of the night

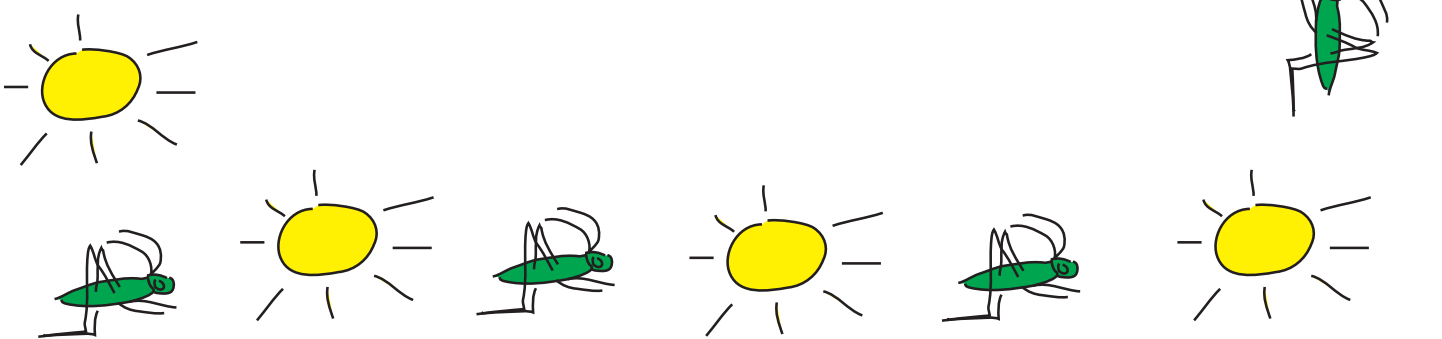


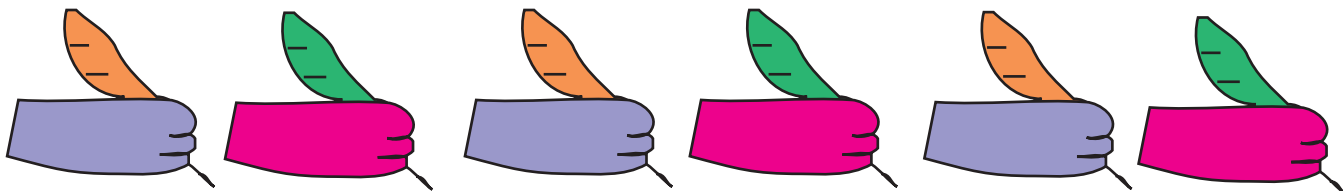


Just at this time we began to feel the heat and hear the grasshoppers.

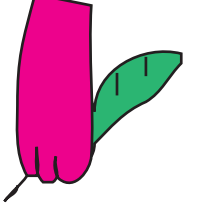
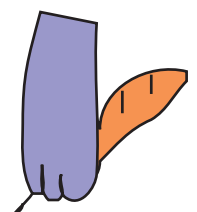
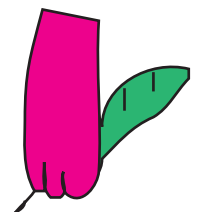
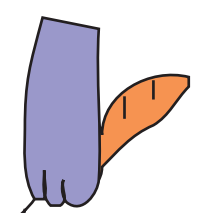
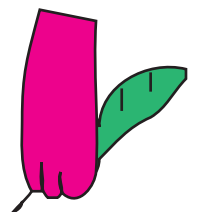
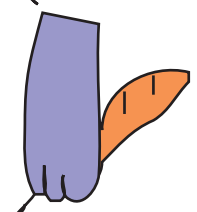


and while he rode his horse.

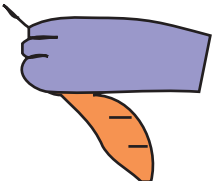
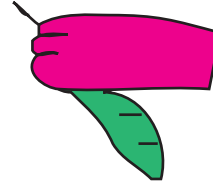
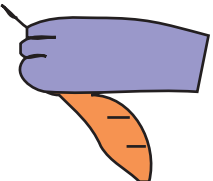
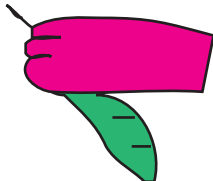
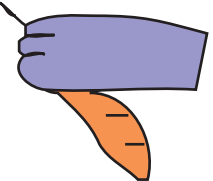
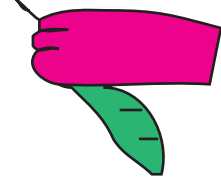
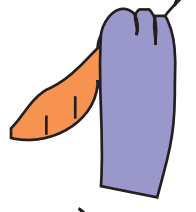
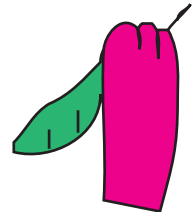
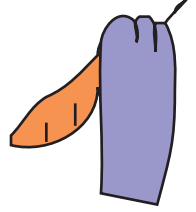
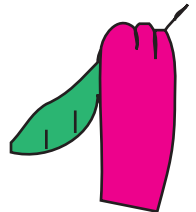
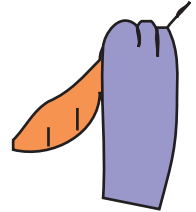
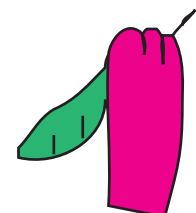
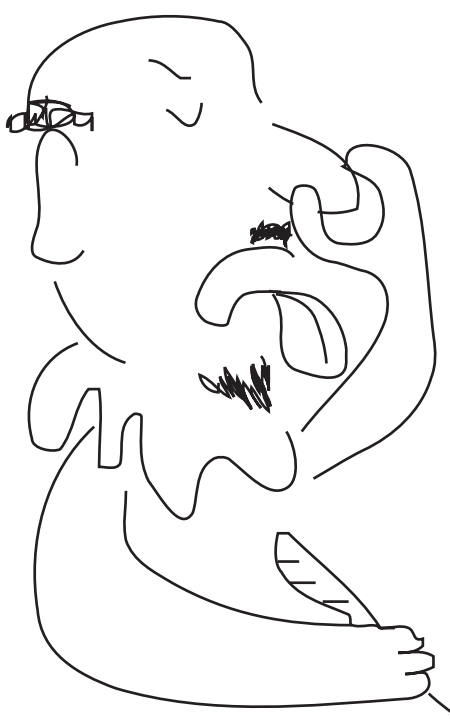




He wrote "I mostly scratch my ears, which are sometimes itchy on the inside."

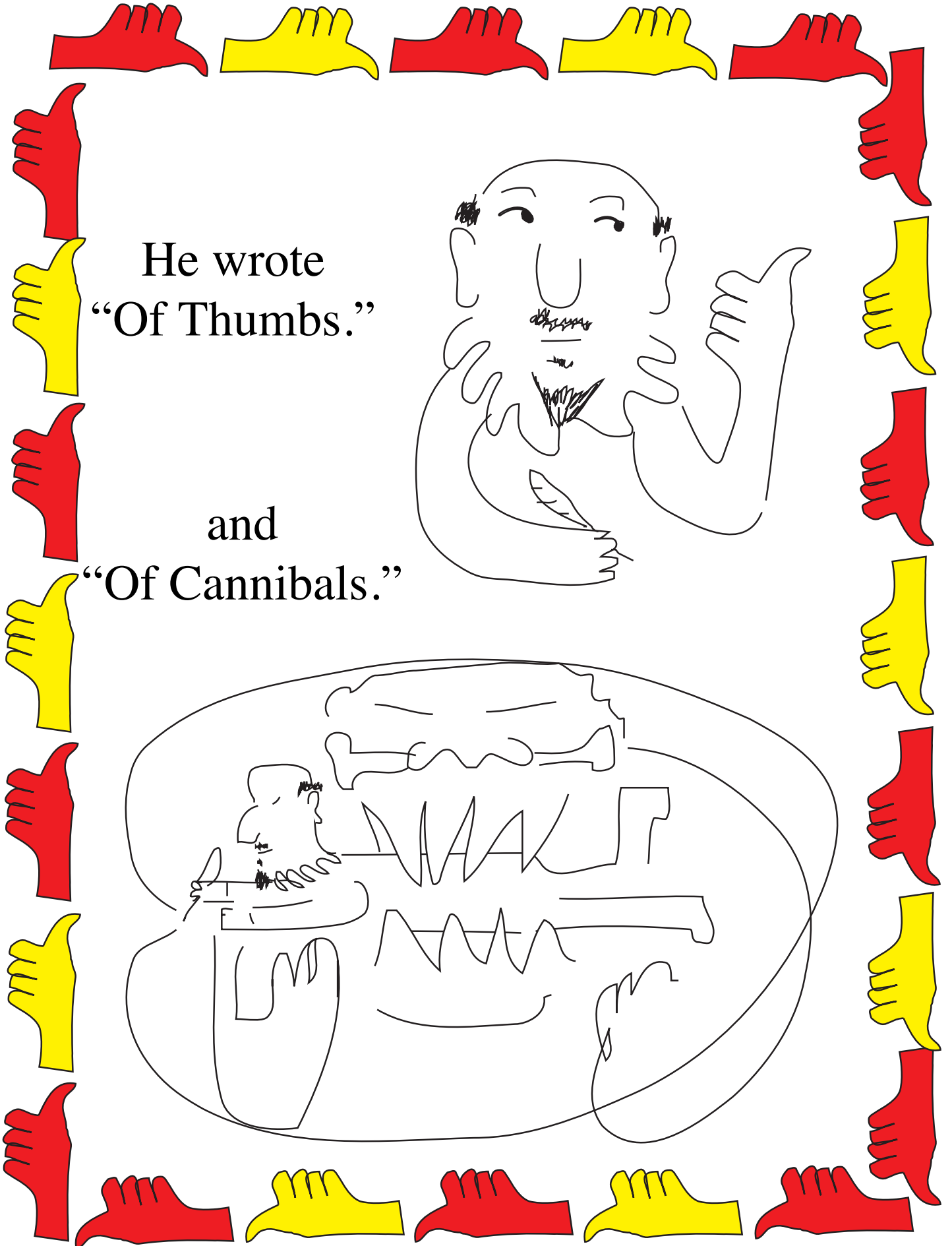
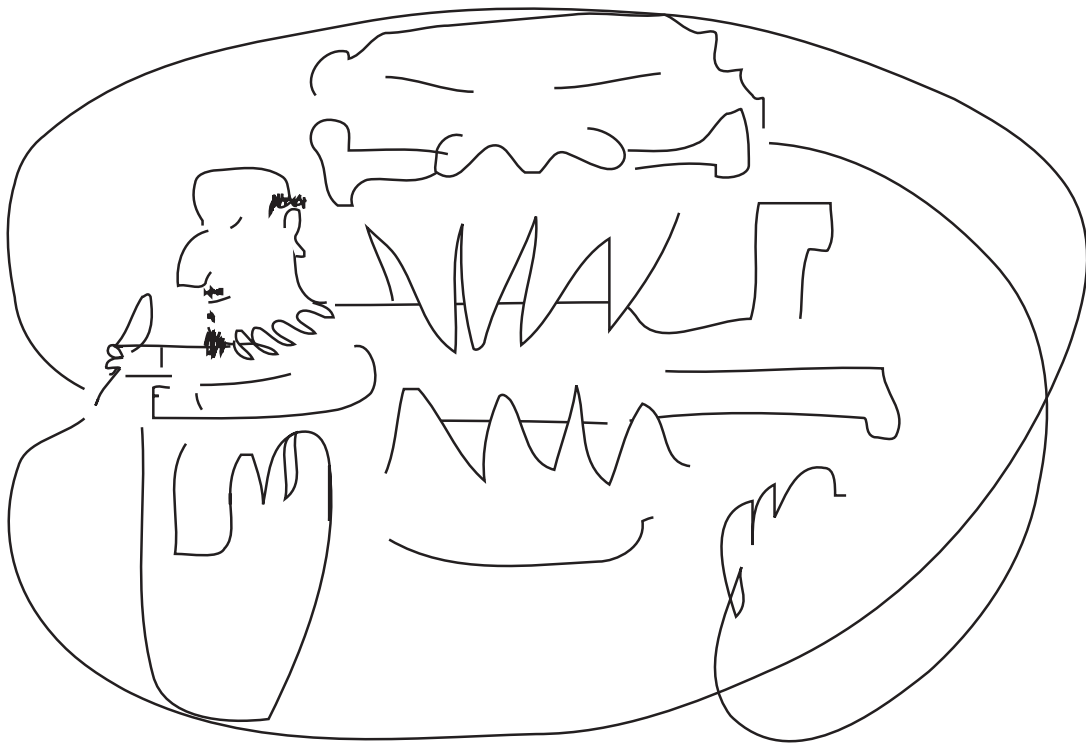


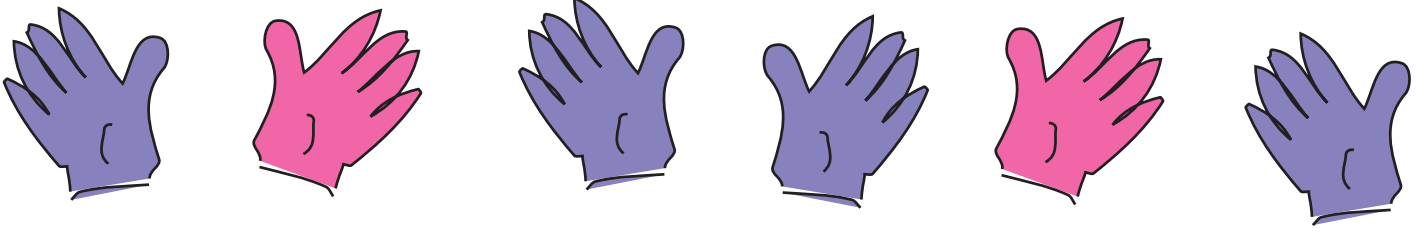
He wrote "Of Smells."



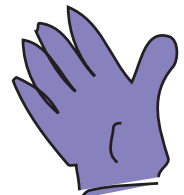
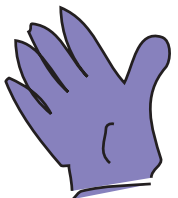
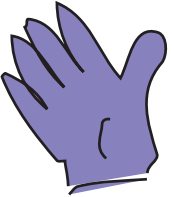
He wrote
"Of Thumbs."

and
"Of Cannibals."

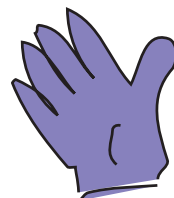
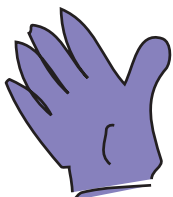


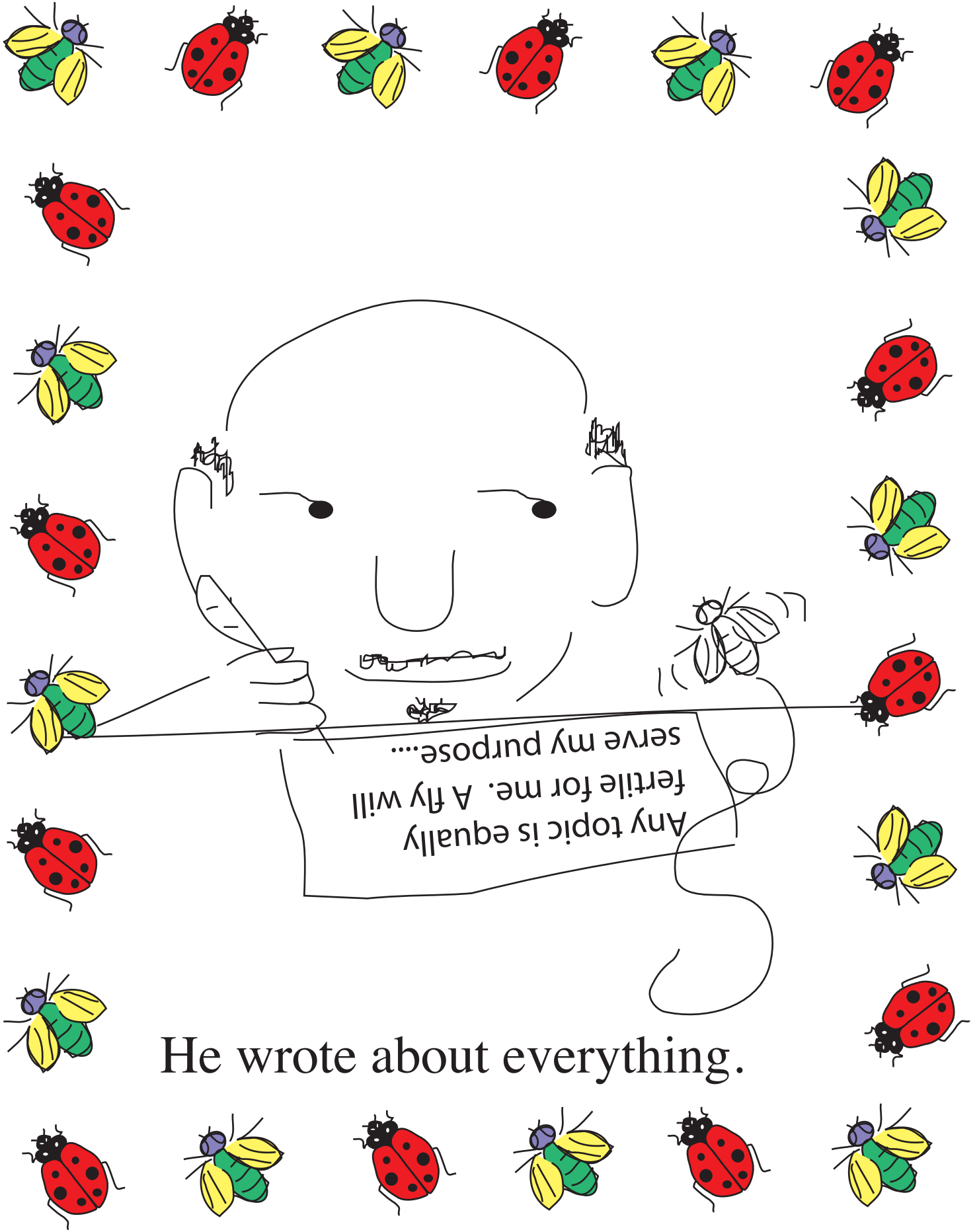


What do I know?



He wrote as he felt.

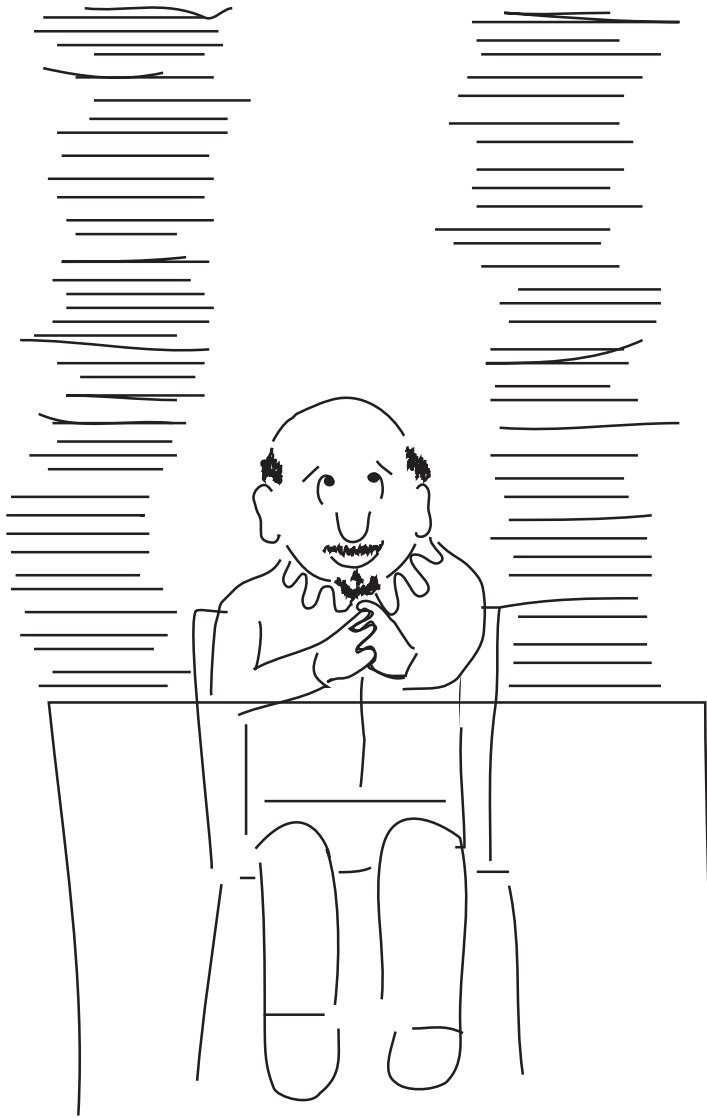




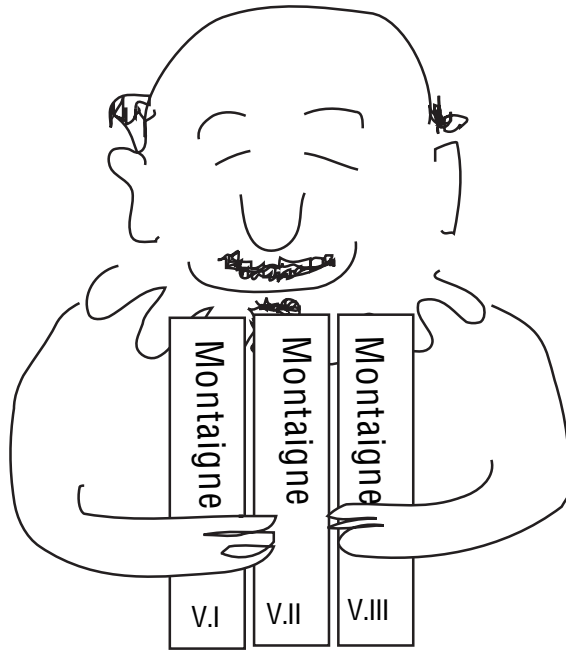
Any topic is equally
fertile for me. A fly will
serve my purpose...

He wrote about everything.

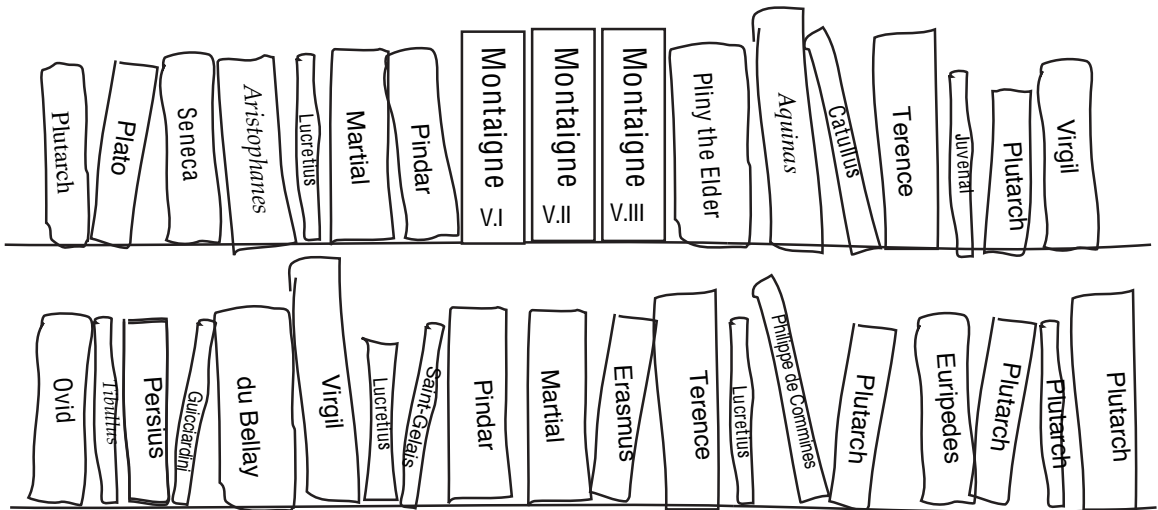
He wrote so much



Montaigne I.V
Montaigne II.V
Montaigne III.V
Montaigne I.V



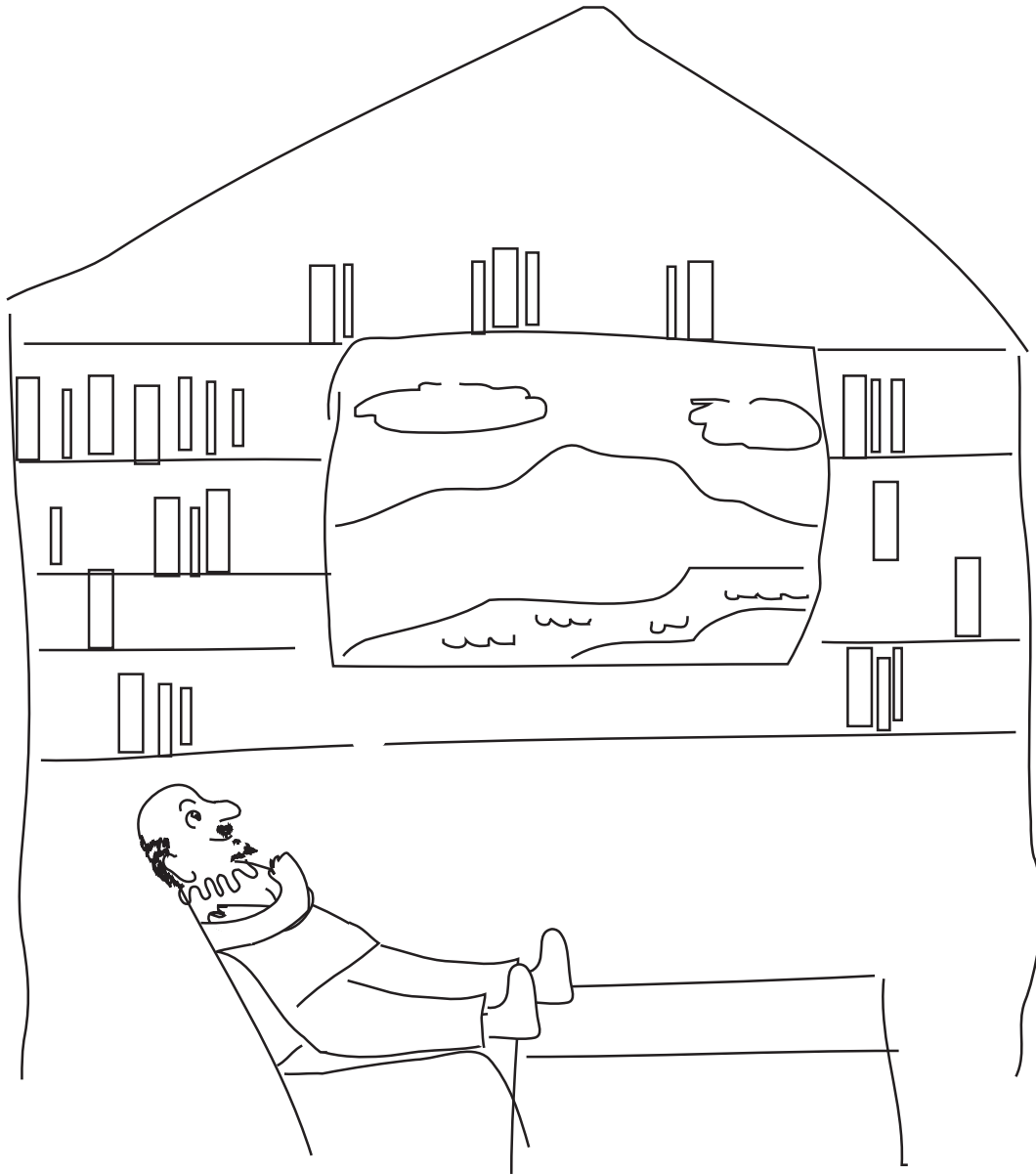
that soon he had
three books of his own
to place alongside his favorite authors.



Montaigne I.V
Montaigne II.V
Montaigne III.V
Montaigne I.V
Montaigne II.V
Montaigne III.V
Montaigne I.V
Montaigne II.V
Montaigne III.V

Montaigne I.V
Montaigne II.V
Montaigne III.V
Montaigne I.V
Montaigne II.V
Montaigne III.V
Montaigne I.V
Montaigne II.V
Montaigne III.V

Montaigne I.V
Montaigne II.V
Montaigne III.V
Montaigne I.V



At last Montaigne was truly happy.



Whatever language
my books speak,
I speak to them
in my own.

δκιλιελ υιοισυ
φκδφκ δουιδε
ζαα λδ/φρω.



Montaigne
V.III

Aristotele

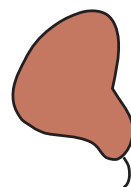
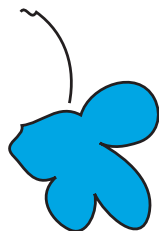
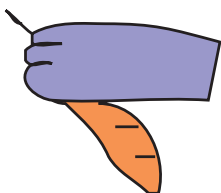
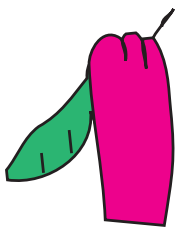
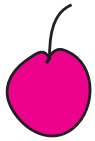
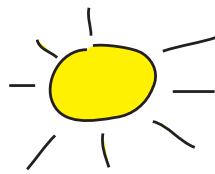


He was able to talk to his books,

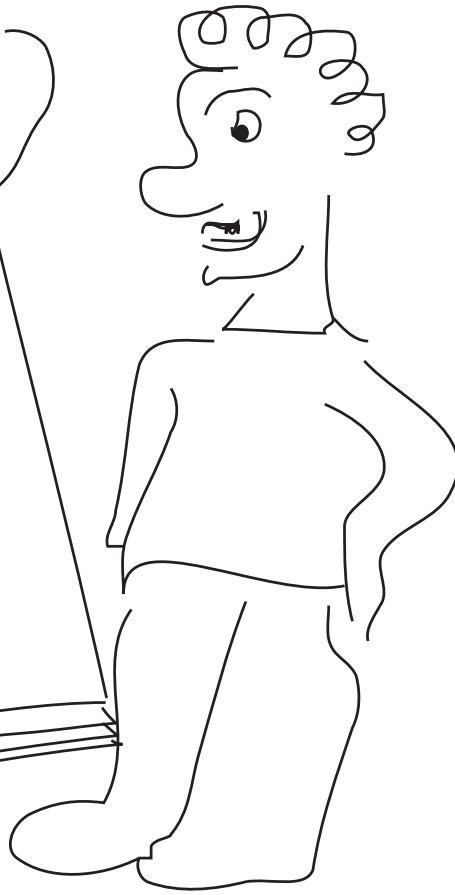
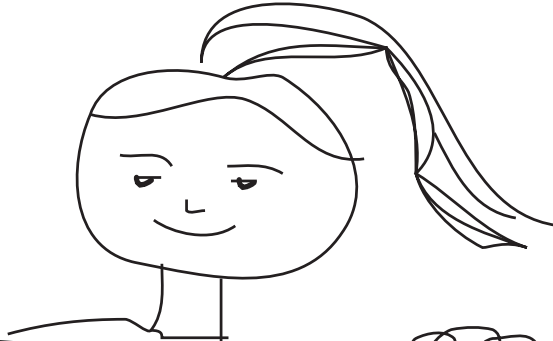
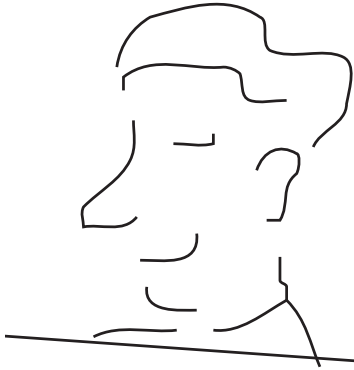
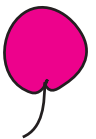
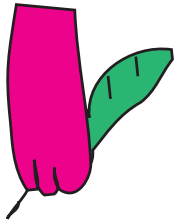
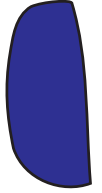
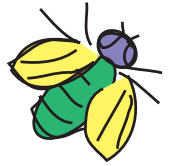
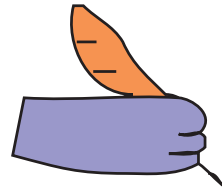
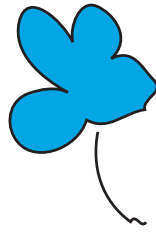
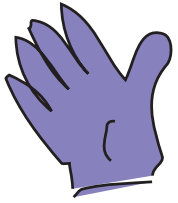


to his friends,



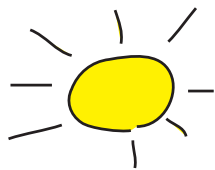
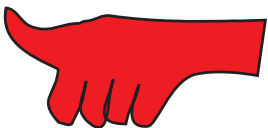


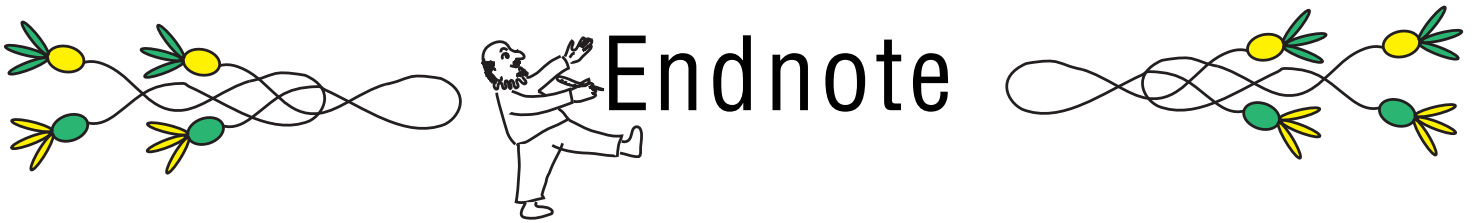
and to us, in a great



Amusing notion:
many things I would
not want to tell anyone,
I tell the public; and
for my most secret
knowledge and thoughts
I send my most faithful
friends to a booksellers
shop.

and neverending conversation.





Endnote

Michel de Montaigne was born and spent most of his life in a red-roofed manor on a windy hilltop in Bordeaux, France. The period during which he lived (1533-1592) was marked by almost continual war, religious strife, and devastating plagues. Yet in the midst of these turbulent times, Montaigne managed to find a sense of perspective, humor and peace.

Adviser to kings, twice mayor of Bordeaux, traveler, lawyer, husband and father, Montaigne led an active, full life. But his favorite place was his library tower: "My library, which is a handsome one among country libraries, is situated at one corner of my house....There I leaf through now one book, now another, without order and without plan....In my library I spend most of the days of my life and most of the hours of the day...There is my throne." His books were his friends and constant companions: "I do not travel without books, either in peace or in war...[they are] the best provision I have found for this human journey."

The Essays, written over the course of the last twenty years of Montaigne's life, seem to speak to the reader from just across the table instead of 400 years ago. They are filled with mischief, wonder and a love of life. "If anyone tells me that it is degrading the Muses to use them only as a plaything and a pastime, he does not know, as I do, the value of pleasure, play, and pastime. I would almost say that any other aim is ridiculous...Let the philosophers say what they will, the main thing at which we all aim, even in virtue itself, is pleasure. It amuses me to rattle in their ears this word, which they so nauseate to hear..." Montaigne plays with ideas, takes them for a walk, often wandering far from his original path. The effect is that of a sketch rather than a finished painting--"I do not portray being: I portray passing."-- loose, spontaneous, random, vivid, breathing, and alive.

My hope is that this book will serve as an introduction to Montaigne for both adults and children, planting a seed that may eventually take root. In the meantime Montaigne waits patiently, always ready for a good conversation.

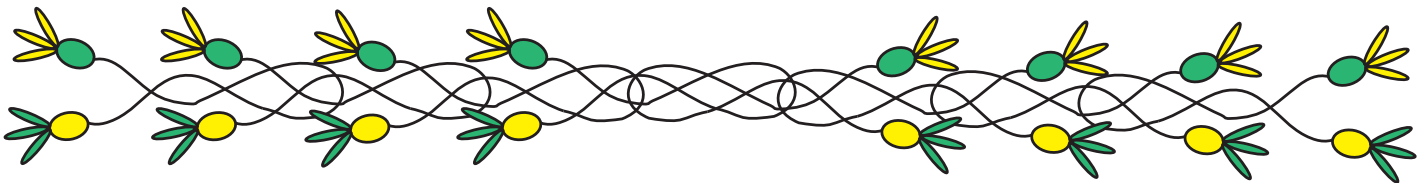




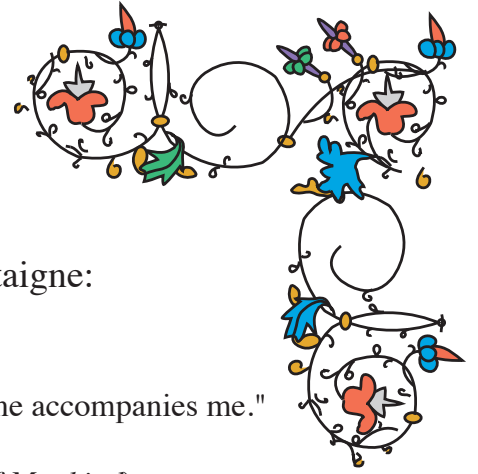
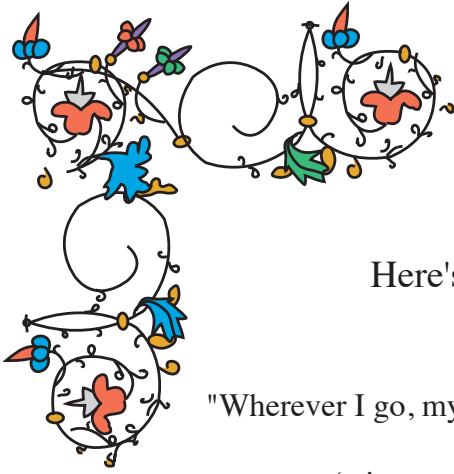
Photo illustration © 1995 by Dan Stern

Dan Stern's love affair with books began the moment he finally deciphered those mysterious black marks: standing outside his elementary school, proudly reading to his parents a sign, "No Parking 9:00 A.M. – 6:00 P.M." The son of a sculptor and a painter, he has always sought to combine words and images and considers children's books one of the highest forms of art.

Growing up in Santa Monica, California, he spent most of his free time devouring Santa Monica Public Library where he later worked as a page and served as "Page Emeritus" and President of the Friends of SMPL. While in college he took classes on illuminated manuscripts and "Topics in Book Illustration" and worked as a "book doctor," healing sick books in the bindery of the college library.

After graduating in 1982 from Haverford College with a major in music, and six months teaching English in Japan, he made his way to New York City. There a chance comment while visiting a friend who worked at Doubleday ("I just got a call from the children's book editor; she's looking for an assistant. Are you interested?") led to a revelation ("Oh, yeah! Children's books. *That's* what I want to do!"). He worked for two years in Doubleday's Books for Young Readers department, including six months as acting director. It was there that he began to amass his children's book collection, which he still adds to with alarming frequency.

Since that time he has continued to be involved in every aspect of children's books as a writer, illustrator, reviewer and People Editor of *The Bulletin of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators*. His work has been featured in the *Los Angeles Times* Book Review, *Publishers Weekly*, on National Public Radio's "Morning Edition," and he has been a consultant and lecturer for the National Conference of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators and the Getty Center for Education in the Arts.



Here's what people are saying about Montaigne:

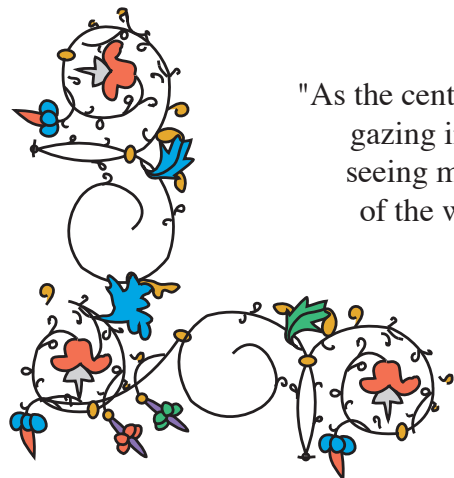
"Wherever I go, my copy of the Essais of Michel de Montaigne accompanies me."
— Hendrick Willem Van Loon
(winner of the first Newbery Medal for *The Story of Mankind*)

"I am rereading Montaigne; it is singular how full I am of that fellow!
We have the same tastes, the same opinions, the same way of life, the same manias.
There are people I admire more than him, but there are none I would call back
more gladly and have a better chat with."
— Flaubert

"Derived a little pleasure from life only with Montaigne, whom I am rereading rapidly
with a view to an anthology....but at times rapture stops me, and I wonder if ever human
writing has given me more amusement, satisfaction, and joy."
— Andre Gide while on a dull boat trip

"It seemed to me as if I myself had written the book, in some former life, so sincerely it
spoke to my thought and experience.... I know not anywhere a book that seems less written.....
Cut these words, and they would bleed; they are vascular and alive."
— Ralph Waldo Emerson

"Free association artistically controlled--this is the paradoxical secret of Montaigne's best essays.
One damned thing after another--but in a sequence that in some almost miraculous way develops
a central theme and relates it to the rest of human experience."
— Aldous Huxley



"As the centuries go by, there is always a crowd before that picture,
gazing into its depths, seeing their own faces reflected in it,
seeing more the more they look....He laid hold of the beauty
of the world with all his fingers. He achieved happiness."
— Virginia Woolf

