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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO
MONTAIGNE

Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592) is the author of a rich and varied philosophical and literary output which was influential in his lifetime and has continued to capture the attention of thinkers up to the present day. He made important philosophical contributions to ethics and skepticism, and his *Essays* had a significant impact on literary form. This volume brings together newly commissioned chapters on the full range of his work, and considers his relationship to his time and his lasting influence on other thinkers. New readers will find this the most convenient and accessible guide to Montaigne currently available. Advanced students and specialists will find a conspectus of recent developments in the interpretation of Montaigne.

ULLRICH LANGER is Professor of French and Senior Fellow, Institute for Research in the Humanities at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

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What I chiefly portray is my cogitations, a shapeless subject that does not lend itself to expression in actions. It is all I can do to couch my thoughts in this airy medium of words. Some of the wisest and most devout men have lived avoiding all noticeable actions. My actions would tell more about [chance] than about me. They bear witness to their own part, not to mine, unless it be by conjecture and without certainty: they are samples which display only details. I expose myself entire: my portrait is a cadaver on which the veins, the muscles, and the tendons appear at a glance, each part in its place. One part of what I am was produced by a cough, another by a pallor or a palpitation of the heart – in any case dubiously. It is not my deeds that I write down; it is myself, it is my essence.

“Of Practice” (Montaigne, *Essays*, II.6, F274, V379)

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Ullrich Langer

NOTE ON THE TEXT

All references to Montaigne's *Essays* in this volume are to the page number in the translation by Donald M. Frame, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), designated as *F*, and to the page number in the French edition by Pierre Villey, revised by Verdun-L. Saulnier (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965, and reprinted in the series "Quadrige"), designated as *V*. Occasionally the chronological "layer" of the text is indicated, as follows: A (the first edition of 1580, the first two books); B (the edition of 1588, in three books); C (Montaigne's handwritten annotations after 1588, on all three books). Square brackets indicate emendations of the Frame translation by the authors of the chapters.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1533 Birth of Michel, son of Pierre Eyquem and Antoinette de Louppes, at the castle of Montaigne, on a noble estate bought by his great-grandfather Ramon, a wealthy merchant. The child learns Latin with a German tutor.
- 1539–48 Humanistic studies at the *Collège de Guyenne* in Bordeaux.
- 1556–57 Works at the *Cour des Aides* in Périgueux.
- 1557–70 Counselor at the *Chambre des Enquêtes* of the *Parlement* of Bordeaux.
- 1558 Encounters fellow jurist and future friend Etienne de La Boétie (see *Essays*, I.28) at the *Parlement* of Bordeaux.
- 1563 Death of La Boétie.
- 1565 Marries Françoise de la Chassigne, daughter of a wealthy bourgeois and parliamentarian Bordeaux family.
- 1568 Death of his father, Pierre. Michel is heir to the title and the estate of Montaigne. Throughout his life, he refers to himself as Michel de Montaigne.
- 1569 Montaigne publishes his translation of Raymond Sebond's *Liber creaturarum* (otherwise known as the *Natural Theology*) (see *Essays*, II.12).
- 1570 Publishes his edition of the works of Etienne de La Boétie.
- 1571 In February, he “retires” to his estate, to devote his time to its management and to his writings. His daughter Léonor is born in September. In October, he is received in the Order of Saint Michel.

Chronology

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- ca. 1572–3 Begins composition of the *Essays*.
 1574 Charged with a diplomatic mission to the royal army.
 1577 Montaigne becomes *gentilhomme de la chambre* of Henri de Navarre.
 1578 Begins to suffer from kidney stones.
 1580 Publication of the first two books of the *Essays*. Referred to as [A].
 1580–81 Travels to Switzerland, Germany, Austria, and Italy (his travel journal will be published under the title *Journal de voyage de Montaigne* in 1774).
 1581 Elected mayor of Bordeaux for a two-year term; he will be re-elected for another two-year term in 1583.
 1582 Second edition of the *Essays*, with minor additions.
 1583 Montaigne is involved in negotiations between the king and the leader of the Protestants, Henri de Navarre.
 1584 Henri de Navarre visits Montaigne in his castle and spends two nights.
 1585 First the civil wars, then the plague ravage the Périgord region.
 1588 Publishes a further edition of the *Essays*, with the substantial addition of the third book, and various additions to the chapters of the first two books. Referred to as [B]. Montaigne travels to Paris to have his book printed; on the way he is robbed by bandits. He is briefly imprisoned in the Bastille by the ultra-Catholic *Ligueurs*. He meets Marie de Gournay, who becomes a friend and will act as editor of a posthumous edition of the *Essays*.
 1588 Return to his estate in December. He demonstrates his loyalty to the crown in the civil conflicts.
 1592 Death of Montaigne. He leaves behind a copy of the 1588 edition of the *Essays*, covered with marginal and intra-linear annotations, called the *Exemplaire de Bordeaux*. Referred to as [C]. A copy of this annotated book is edited and published in 1595 by Marie de Gournay. The *Exemplaire de Bordeaux* serves as the basis for modern editions.