



Born in Périgord, educated at Bordeaux, given a German tutor who spoke to him only in Latin - "I was six years old before I understood more of French than of Arabic." Early friendship with Etienne de la Boétie, who dies 1563 during plague. 1568, Montaigne's father dies, Michel inherits estate, retires to library on third floor of tower of château. There he writes his ESSAIS, "divers et ondoyant" (leisurely and diverse).

Montaigne's skepticism is embodied in his motto - "QUE SAIS-JE?" - which was engraved on his seal and inscribed on the ceiling of his library. It derives from Socrates OUDEN OIDA ("I know nothing") and underscores the fallibility of human reason and the relativity of human science. It is reflected in other Montaigne mottos: "~~Too~~ pro and con are both possible" -- "Maybe it is and maybe it isn't" -- "I conclude nothing, I comprehend nothing, I suspend judgment, I merely examine."

"Men are tormented by the opinions they have about things, not by the things themselves."

OF CANNIBALS: "Eating dead people is less barbarous than torturing live ones."

Montaigne gives rise to skeptical age of satire and the Enlightenment: Rousseau, Diderot, Voltaire. Saint-Beuve calls Montaigne "Le Français le plus sage qui ait jamais existé."

TO THE READER

Reader, this is an honest book. It warns you from the outset that in it I have set myself no goal but a domestic and private one. I have had no thought of serving either you or my own glory.
...

If I had written to seek the world's favor, I should have bedecked myself better, and should present myself in a studied posture. I want to be seen here in my simple, natural, ordinary fashion, without strain or artifice; for it is myself that I portray...

Thus reader I am myself the subject of my book; you would be unreasonable to spend your leisure on so frivolous and vain a subject.

MONTAIGNE March 1 / 1580