

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

ESSAYS

Front Matter



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To the Reader

A READER, this is an honest book. It warns you straight away that I wrote it only with myself and those around me in mind, never once considering what use you could have for it or how interesting it would make me look. I would not have the strength for that kind of work. I wrote it for my family and my friends so that once I am gone (which may be soon) they may find in it again remnants of my personality and thoughts, and remember me in a more complete and life-like way. Had I been seeking public attention, I would have c made myself look better and presented myself more carefullyA . But I want you to see me as I am, in a plain, natural, and ordinary way, free of c pretense A and artifice. I am the one depicted here. My faults and my very self are exposed for all to see, at least as much as public conventions will let me. Had I lived among those nations, which (they say) still live under the sweet liberty of nature's primitive laws, I assure you I would easily have painted myself quite fully and quite naked. So, reader, here I am, the subject of my book, and I see no reason why you should spend your free time on so unimportant and pointless a topic. Farewell, then; from Montaigne,¹ c March 1st, 1580.²

NOTES

- 1 Michel de Montaigne's estate, near Bergerac, France.
- 2 This is the date Montaigne wrote on his annotated copy of the *Essays*, the "Bordeaux Copy." The printed text shows "June 12, 1588."