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MIMESIS

THE REPRESENTATION OF REALITY
IN WESTERN LITERATURE

Fiftieth-Anniversary Edition

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TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

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Hist. Animal., mark them for the most silly and foolish animals in the world.)

So much for the everyday. But the seriousness lies in the joy of discovery—pregnant with all possibilities, ready to try every experiment, whether in the realm of reality or super-reality—which was characteristic of his time, the first half of the century of the Renaissance, and which no one has so well translated into terms of the senses as Rabelais with the language which he created for his book. That is why it is possible to call his mixture of styles, his Socratic buffoonery, a high style. He himself found a charming phrase for the high style of his book, which is itself an example of that style. It is taken from the art of fattening stock, we have already quoted it above: *ces beaux livres de haulte gresse*.

L'HUMAINE CONDITION

LES autres forment l'homme: je le recite; et en représente un particulier bien mal formé, et lequel si j'avoy à façonner de nouveau, je ferois vrayment bien autre qu'il n'est. Meshuy, c'est fait. Or, les traits de ma peinture ne fourvoyent point, quoiqu'ils se changent et diversifient. Le monde n'est qu'une branloire perenne. Toutes choses y branlent sans cesse: la terre, les rochers du Caucase, les pyramides d'Aegypte, et du branle public et du leur. La constance mesme n'est autre chose qu'un branle plus languissant. Je ne puis assurer mon object; il va trouble et chancelant, d'une yvresse naturelle. Je le prens en ce point, comme il est, en l'instant que je m'amuse à luy: je ne peinds pas l'estre, je peinds le passage; non un passage d'aage en autre, ou, comme dict le peuple, de sept en sept ans, mais de jour en jour, de minute en minute. Il faut accomoder mon histoire à l'heure; je pourray tantost changer, non de fortune seulement, mais aussi d'intention. C'est un contrerolle de divers et muables accidens, et d'imaginacions irresolues, et, quand il y eschet, contraires; soit que je soys autre moy-mesmes, soit que je saisisse les subjects par autres circonstances et considérations. Tant y a que je me contredis bien à l'aventure, mais la verité, comme disoit Demades, je ne la contredis point. Si mon ame pouvoit prendre pied, je ne m'essaierois pas, je me resoudrois; elle est tousjours en apprentissage et en espreuve.

Je propose une vie basse et sans lustre: c'est tout un; on attache aussi bien toute la philosophie morale à une vie populaire et privée, que à une vie de plus riche estoffe: chaque homme porte la forme entière de l'humaine condition. Les auteurs se comuniquent au peuple par quelque marque particuliere et estrangiere; moy le premier par mon estre universel, comme Michel de Montaigne, non comme grammairien, ou poete, ou jurisconsulte. Si le monde se plaint de quoy je parle trop de moy, je me plains de quoy il ne pense seulement pas à soy. Mais est-ce raison que, si particulier en usage, je pretende me rendre public en cognoissance? est-il aussi raison que je produise au monde, où la façon

et l'art ont tant de credit et de commandement, des effets de nature et crus et simples, et d'une nature encore bien foiblette? est-ce pas faire une muraille sans pierre, ou chose semblable, que de bastir des livres sans science et sans art? Les fantasies de la musique sont conduictes par art, les miennes par sort. Au moins j'ay cecy selon la discipline, que jamais homme ne traicta subject qu'il entendist ne congneust mieux que je fay celuy que j'ay entrepris, et qu'en celuy-là je suis le plus sçavant homme qui vive; secondement, que jamais aucun ne penetra en sa matiere plus avant, ni en esplucha plus particulièrement les membres et suites, et n'arriva plus exactement et plus plainement à la fin qu'il s'estoit proposé à sa besoingne. Pour la parfaire, je n'ay besoing d'y apporter que la fidelité: celle-là y est, la plus sincere et pure qui se trouve. Je dis vrai, non pas tout mon saoul, mais autant que je l'ose dire; et l'ose un peu plus en vieillissant; car il semble que la coutume concede à cet aage plus de liberté de bavasser et d'indiscretion à parler de soy. Il ne peut advenir icy, ce que je veoy advenir souvent, que l'artizan et sa besoigne se contrarient. . . . Un personnage sçavant n'est pas sçavant partout; mais le suffisant est partout suffisant, et à ignorer mesme; icy, nous allons conformément, et tout d'un train, mon livre et moy. Ailleurs, on peut recommander et accuser l'ouvrage, à part de l'ouvrier; icy, non; qui touche l'un, touche l'autre.

(Others form man; I describe him, and portray a particular, very ill-made one, who, if I had to fashion him anew, should indeed be very different from what he is. But now it is done. Now the features of my painting do not err, although they change and vary. The world is but a perennial see-saw. All things in it are incessantly on the swing, the earth, the rocks of the Caucasus, the Egyptian pyramids, both with the common movement and their own particular movement. Even fixedness is nothing but a more sluggish motion. I cannot fix my object; it is befogged, and reels with a natural intoxication. I seize it at this point, as it is at the moment when I beguile myself with it. I do not portray the thing in itself. I portray the passage; not a passing from one age to another, or, as the people put it, from seven years to seven years, but from day to day, from minute to minute. I must adapt my history to the moment. I may presently change, not only by chance, but also by intention. It is a record of diverse and change-

able events, of undecided, and, when the occasion arises, contradictory ideas; whether it be that I am another self, or that I grasp a subject in different circumstances and see it from a different point of view. So it may be that I contradict myself, but, as Demades said, the truth I never contradict. If my mind could find a firm footing, I should not speak tentatively, I should decide; it is always in a state of apprenticeship, and on trial.

I am holding up to view a humble and lustreless life; that is all one. Moral philosophy, in any degree, may apply to an ordinary and secluded life as well as to one of richer stuff; every man carries within him the entire form of the human constitution. Authors communicate themselves to the world by some special and extrinsic mark; I am the first to do so by my general being, as Michel de Montaigne, not as a grammarian or a poet or a lawyer. If the world finds fault with me for speaking too much of myself, I find fault with the world for not even thinking of itself. But is it reasonable that I, who am so retired in actual life, should aspire to make myself known to the public? And is it reasonable that I should show up to the world, where artifice and ceremony enjoy so much credit and authority, the crude and simple results of nature, and of a nature besides very feeble? Is it not like making a wall without stone or a similar material, thus to build a book without learning or art? The ideas of music are guided by art, mine by chance. This I have at least in conformity with rules, that no man ever treated of a subject that he knew and understood better than I do this that I have taken up; and that in this I am the most learned man alive. Secondly, that no man ever penetrated more deeply into his matter, nor more minutely analyzed its parts and consequences, nor more fully and exactly reached the goal he had made it his business to set up. To accomplish it I need only bring fidelity to it; and that is here, as pure and sincere as may be found. I speak the truth, not enough to satisfy myself, but as much as I dare to speak. And I become a little more daring as I grow older; for it would seem that custom allows this age more freedom to prate, and more indiscretion in speaking of oneself. It cannot be the case here, as I often see elsewhere, that the craftsman and his work contradict each other. . . . A learned man is not learned in all things; but the accomplished man is accomplished in all things, even in ignorance. Here, my book and I go hand in hand together, and keep one pace. In other cases we may

commend or censure the work apart from the workman; not so here. Who touches the one touches the other.) *The Essays of Montaigne*. Translated by E. J. Trechmann, Oxford University Press, 1927.

This is the beginning of chapter 2 of book 3 of Montaigne's *Essais*. In Villey's edition (Paris, Alcan, 1930), the pagination of which will be given in all our future references, the passage is found on page 39 of volume 3. It is one of those numerous passages in which Montaigne speaks of the subject matter of the essays, of his purpose of representing himself. He begins by emphasizing the fluctuations, the unstable and changeable nature of his material. Then he describes the procedure he employs in treating so fluctuating a subject. Finally he takes up the question of the usefulness of his venture. The train of reasoning in the first paragraph can easily be rendered in the form of a syllogism: I describe myself; I am a creature which constantly changes; ergo, the description too must conform to this and constantly change. We shall try to analyze how each member of the syllogism is expressed in the text.

"I describe myself." Montaigne does not say this directly. He brings it out through the contrast to "others" much more energetically and, as we shall see in a moment, in a more richly nuanced fashion than would have been possible by a mere statement. *Les autres forment l'homme, moy . . .*: here it becomes apparent that the contrast is twofold. The others shape, I relate (cf. a little further on: *je n'enseigne pas, je raconte*); the others shape "man," I relate "a man." This gives us two stages of the contrast: *forment—recite, l'homme—un particulier*. This *particulier* is himself; but that too he does not say directly but paraphrases it with his reticent, ironical, and slightly self-satisfied modesty. The paraphrase consists of three parts, of which the second has both a principal and a subordinate clause: *bien mal formé; si j'avoy . . . , je ferois . . . ; meshuy c'est fait*. The major premise of the syllogism, then, contains in its formulation at least three groups of ideas which build it up and interpret it in various forms of counter- or concurrent motion: 1. the others shape, I relate; 2. the others shape *man*, I tell of *one* man; 3. this one man (I) is "unfortunately" already formed. All this is gathered in one single rhythmic movement without the slightest possibility of confusion; and indeed almost completely without syntactic vincula, without conjunctions or quasi-conjunctive connectives. The coherence, the intellectual nexus established through

the unity of meaning and the rhythm of the sentence, is adequate by itself. To make this point clearer, let me supply some syntactic vincula: (*Tandis que*) *les autres forment l'homme, je le recite; (encore faut-il ajouter que) je represente un particulier ; ce particulier, c'est moi-même, qui suis, je le sais,*) *bien mal formé; (soyez sûrs que) si j'avais à le façonner de nouveau, je le ferais vraiment bien autre qu'il n'est. (Mais, malheureusement) meshuy c'est fait*. Of course my emendations are at best of approximate value. The nuances which Montaigne expresses by omitting them cannot be caught in full.

As for the minor premise (I am a creature subject to constant change), Montaigne does not express it at once. He leaves the logical continuity in the lurch and first introduces the conclusion, in the form of the surprising assertion: *Or, les traits de ma peinture ne fourvoyent pas, quoy qu'ils se changent et diversifient*. The word *or* indicates that the continuity has been interrupted for a new start. It serves at the same time to tone down the suddenness and surprisingness of the assertion. The word *quoique*, here sharply employed as a precise syntactic vinculum, brings the problem out in bold relief.

Now at last comes the minor premise, not directly but as the conclusion of a subordinate syllogism, which runs as follows: the world changes constantly; I am part of the world; ergo, I change constantly. The major premise is furnished with illustrations, and the way in which the world changes is analyzed as being twofold: all things undergo the general change and each its own in addition. Then follows a polyphonic movement introduced by the paradox about stability which is likewise but a form of slower fluctuation. Throughout this polyphonic movement, which takes up the entire remainder of the paragraph, the minor premise of the second syllogism, as self-evident, sounds but faintly. The two themes here intertwined are the minor premise and the conclusion of the main argument: I am a creature which constantly changes; ergo, I must make my description conform to this. Here Montaigne is at the center of the realm which is peculiarly his own: the play and counterplay between I and I, between Montaigne the author and Montaigne the theme; turns of expression equally rich in meaning and sound, and referring now to the one I, now to the other, most often to both, flow from his pen. We are left to choose which we prefer to consider the most precise, characteristic, and true and to admire the most; that on natural drunkenness, that on depicting change, the one on external change (*fortune*) and inner change (*intention*), the quotation from Demades, the contrast between

s'essayer and *se résoudre* with the beautiful image, *si mon âme pouvait prendre pied*. For each one and for all together what Horace said of completely successful works holds true: *decies repetita placebit*.

I hope this breaking up of the paragraph into syllogisms will not be found too pedantic. It shows that the structure of the thought in this lively passage, so rich in unexpected departures, is precise and logical; that the many movements which add, discriminate, go deeper, or sometimes even retreat concessively, serve to present the idea, as it were, in its practical application; that, furthermore, the order is repeatedly broken, that some propositions are anticipated, that others are altogether omitted so that the reader must supply them. The reader must cooperate. He is drawn into the movement of the thought, but at every moment he is expected to pause, to check, to add something. Who *les autres* are he must surmise; who the *particulier* is, likewise. The clause with *or* seems to take him far afield, and only after a time does he gradually understand what it is driving at. Then, to be sure, the essential point is presented to him in a wealth of formulations which carry away his imagination; but even then in such a way that he must still exert himself, for each of the formulations is so individualized that it has to be digested. None fits into a ready-made pattern of thought or discourse.

Although the content of the paragraph is intellectual and even rigorously logical, although what we have here is a keen and original intellectual effort to probe the problem of self-analysis, the vitality of the will to expression is so strong that the style breaks through the limits of a purely theoretical disquisition. I suppose anyone who has read enough of Montaigne to feel at home in the essays must have had the same experience as I. I had been reading him for some time, and when I had finally acquired a certain familiarity with his manner, I thought I could hear him speak and see his gestures. This is an experience which one seldom has with earlier theoretical writers as strongly as with Montaigne, probably with none of them. He often omits conjunctions and other syntactic connectives, but he suggests them. He skips intermediate steps of reasoning, but replaces what is lacking by a kind of contact which arises spontaneously between steps not connected by strict logic. Between the clauses *la constance mesme n'est autre chose . . .* and the following *je ne puis assurer mon object . . .*, a step is obviously missing, a clause which ought to state that I, the object I am studying, being a fragment of the world, must likewise be subject to the double change mentioned. Later on he says this in

detail, but even here he has created the atmosphere which provisionally establishes the contact and yet leaves the reader actively intent. Occasionally he repeats ideas which he considers important over and over in ever-new formulations, each time working out a fresh viewpoint, a fresh characteristic, a fresh image, so that the idea radiates in all directions. All these are characteristics which we are much more used to finding in conversation—though only in the conversation of exceptionally thoughtful and articulate people—than in a printed work of theoretical content. We are inclined to think that this sort of effect requires vocal inflection, gesture, the warming up to one another which comes with an enjoyable conversation. But Montaigne, who is alone with himself, finds enough life and as it were bodily warmth in his ideas to be able to write as though he were speaking.

This is related to the manner in which he endeavors to apprehend his subject, himself—the very manner, that is, which he describes in our paragraph. It is a ceaseless listening to the changing voices which sound within him, and it varies in elevation between reticent, slightly self-satisfied irony and a very emphatic seriousness which fathoms the ultimate bases of existence. The irony he displays is again a mixture of several motifs: an extremely sincere disinclination to take human beings tragically (man is *un subject merveilleusement vain, divers et ondoyant*, 1, 1, p. 10; *autant ridicule que risible*, 1, 50, p. 582; *le badin de la farce*, 3, 9, p. 434); a faint note of proudly aristocratic contempt for the writer's craft (*si j'étais faiseur de livres*, 1, 20, p. 162, and again, 2, 37, p. 902); finally, and this is the most important point of all, an inclination to belittle his own particular approach. He calls his book *ce fagotage de tant de diverses pièces* (2, 37, p. 850), *cette fricassée que je barbouille icy* (3, 13, p. 590), and once he even compares it to an old man's feces: *ce sont icy . . . des excremens d'un vieil esprit, dur tantost, tantost lasche, et toujours indigeste* (3, 9, p. 324). He never tires of emphasizing the artless, personal, natural, and immediate character of his writing, as though it were something he must apologize for, and the irony of this form of modesty does not always come out as clearly and completely as it does in the second paragraph of our text, which we shall analyze below. So much, for the present, on Montaigne's irony. It gives his style an extremely delightful flavor, and a flavor perfectly suited to his subject; but the reader should beware of becoming too entangled by it. He means it seriously and emphatically when he says that his representation, however changeable and diverse it is, never goes astray and that though perhaps at times he contradicts

himself, he never contradicts the truth. Such words mirror a very realistic conception of man based on experience and in particular on self-experience: the conception that man is a fluctuating creature subject to the changes which take place in his surroundings, his destiny, and his inner impulses. Thus Montaigne's apparently fanciful method, which obeys no preconceived plan but adapts itself elastically to the changes of his own being, is basically a strictly experimental method, the only method which conforms to such a subject. If one wishes to produce an exact and factual description of a constantly changing subject, one must follow its changes exactly and factually; one must describe the subject as one found it, under as many different experimental conditions as possible, for in this way one may hope to determine the limits of possible changes and thus finally arrive at a comprehensive picture.

It is this strict and, even in the modern sense, scientific method which Montaigne endeavors to maintain. Perhaps he would have objected to the pretentiously scientific-sounding word "method," but a method it is, and two modern critics—Villey (*Les Sources et l'Évolution des Essais de Montaigne*, 2nd edition, Paris, 1933, 2, 321) and Lanson (*Les Essais de Montaigne*, Paris, n.d., 265)—have applied the term to his activity, albeit not quite in the sense here envisaged. Montaigne has described his method with precision. In addition to our passage there are others worthy of note. Our paragraph makes it very clear that he is forced, and why he is forced, to adopt his procedure—he must adapt himself to his subject matter. It also explains the meaning of the title *Essais*, which might fittingly though not very gracefully be rendered as "Tests upon One's Self" or "Self-Try-Outs." Another passage (2, 37, p. 850) emphasizes the developmental principle which his procedure is intended to bring out and has an extremely characteristic conclusion which is by no means exclusively ironical: *Je veux représenter le progrès de mes humeurs, et qu'on voye chaque pièce en sa naissance. Je prendrais plaisir d'avoir commencé plus tost, et à reconnoître le train de mes mutations. . . . Je me suis envieilli de sept ou huit ans depuis que je commençay. Ce n'a pas esté sans quelque nouvel acquist. J'y ay pratiqué la colique, par la liberalité des ans: leur commerce et longue conversation ne se passe aysément sans quelque tel fruit. . . .* A still more significant passage (2, 6, pp. 93-94) states quite unironically and with that calm yet insistent earnestness which marks the upper limits of Montaigne's style—he never goes beyond this in stylistic elevation—how highly he thinks of his venture: *C'est*

une espineuse entreprinse, et plus qu'il ne semble, de suyvre une allure si vagabonde que celle de nostre esprit; de penetrer dans les profondeurs opaques de ses replis internes; de choisir et arrester tant de menus airs de ses agitations; et est un amusement nouveau et extraordinaire qui nous retire des occupations communes du monde, ouy, et des plus recommandées. Il y a plusieurs années que je n'ay que moy pour visée à mes pensées, que je ne contrerolle et estudie que moy; et si j'estudie autre chose, c'est pour soudain le coucher sur moy, ou en moy. . . .

These sentences are also significant because they indicate what limits Montaigne had set to his undertaking, because they state not only what he intends to do but also what he intends not to do, that is, to investigate the outer world. That interests him only as the setting and occasion for his own movements. With this we come to another form of his deceptive and reserved irony: his frequent asseverations of his ignorance and irresponsibility in regard to everything related to the outer world, which he likes best to designate as *les choses*: *A peine respondroy-je à autruy de mes discours qui ne m'en responds pas à moy . . . ce sont icy mes fantasies, par lesquelles je ne tasche point à donner à connoître les choses, mais moy. . . .* (2, 10, p. 152). These "things" are for him only a means of self-testing; they serve him only to *essayer ses facultés naturelles* (*ibid.*) and he does not feel it in any way his duty to take a responsible stand toward them. This too can best be stated in his own words: *De cent membres et visages qu'a chaque chose, j'en prens un. . . . J'y donne une poincte, non pas le plus largement, mais le plus profondément que je sçay . . . sans dessein, sans promesse, je ne suis pas tenu d'en faire bon, ny de m'y tenir moy mesme, sans varier quand il me plaist, et me rendre au doubte et à l'incertitude, et à ma maïstresse forme qui est l'ignorance . . .* (1, 50, p. 578). This passage alone suffices to show what this ignorance amounts to. Concealed behind self-irony and modesty there is a very definite attitude which serves his major purpose and to which he adheres with the charmingly elastic tenacity which is his own. Elsewhere he reveals to us even more clearly what this ignorance, his *maïstresse forme*, means to him. For he conceives of an *ignorance forte et genereuse* (3, 11, p. 493) and values it more highly than all factual knowledge because its acquisition requires greater wisdom than the acquisition of scientific knowledge. It is not only a means of clearing the way for him to the kind of knowledge which matters to him, that is, self-knowledge, but it also represents a direct way of reaching what is the ultimate goal of his quest, namely, right living: *le grand et*

glorieux chef d'œuvre de l'homme, c'est vivre à propos (3, 13, p. 651). And in this animated personality there is such a complete surrender to nature and destiny, that he considers it useless to strive for a greater knowledge of them than they themselves grant us to experience: *Le plus simplement se commettre à nature, c'est s'y commettre le plus sagement. Oh! que c'est un doux et mol chevet, et sain, que l'ignorance et l'incuriosité, à reposer une teste bien faicte!* (3, 13, p. 580); and a little before that he says: . . . *je me laisse ignorer et negligemment aller à la loy generale du monde; je la sçauray assez quand je la sentiray. . . .*

Deliberate ignorance and indifference in regard to "things" is part of his method; he seeks in them only himself. This one subject of his he tests by innumerable experiments undertaken on the spur of the moment; he illuminates it from every direction; he fairly encircles it. The result is not, however, a mass of unrelated snapshots, but a spontaneous apprehension of the unity of his person emerging from the multiplicity of his observations. In the end there is unity and truth; in the end it is his essential being which emerges from his portrayal of the changing. To track oneself down by such a method is in itself a way leading to self-possession: *l'entreprise se sent de la qualité de la chose qu'elle regarde; car c'est une bonne portion de l'effect, et consubstantielle* (1, 20, p. 148). At every moment of the continual process of change Montaigne possesses the coherence of his personality; and he knows it: *Il n'est personne, s'il s'escoute, qui ne descouvre en soy une forme sienne, une forme maïstresse* (3, 2, p. 52); or, in another passage: *les plus fermes imaginations que j'aye, et generalles, sont celles qui, par maniere de dire, nasquirent avec moy; elles sont naturelles et toutes miennes* (2, 17, pp. 652-653). To be sure, this *forme sienne* cannot be put into a few precise words; it is much too varied and too real to be completely contained in a definition. Yet for Montaigne the truth is *one*, however multiple its manifestations; he may contradict himself, but not truth.

No less a part of Montaigne's method is the peculiar form of his Essays. They are neither an autobiography nor a diary. They are based on no artfully contrived plan and do not follow chronological order. They follow chance—*les fantasies de la musique sont conduictes par art, les miennes par sort*. Strictly speaking it is "things" after all which direct him—he moves among them, he lives in them; it is in things that he can always be found, for, with his very open eyes and his very impressionable mind, he stands in the midst of the world. But he does

not follow its course in time—nor a method whose aim is to attain knowledge of one specific thing or of a group of things. He follows his own inner rhythm, which, though constantly induced and maintained by things, is not bound to them, but freely skips from one to another. He prefers *une alleure poetique, à sauts et à gambades* (3, 9, p. 421). Villey has shown (*Les Sources*, etc., 2, p. 3ff.) that the form of the Essays stems from the collections of exempla, quotations, and aphorisms which were a very popular genre in late antiquity and throughout the Middle Ages and which in the sixteenth century helped to spread humanistic material. Montaigne had begun in this vein. Originally his book was a collection of the fruit of his reading, with running commentary. This pattern was soon broken; commentary predominated over text, subject matter or point of departure was not only things read but also things lived—now his own experiences, now what he heard from others or what took place around him. But the principle of clinging to concrete things, to what happens, he never gave up, any more than he did his freedom not to tie himself to a fact-finding method or to the course of events in time. From things he takes the animation which saves him from abstract psychologizing and from empty probing within himself. But he guards himself against becoming subject to the law of any given thing, so that the rhythm of his own inner movement may not be muffled and finally lost. He praises this procedure very highly, especially in the ninth essay of book 3, from which we have quoted a few statements, and he cites Plato and other authors of antiquity as his models. His appeal to the authority of the many Platonic dialogues whose structure is apparently loose while their theme is not abstractly detached but embedded in the character and situation of the interlocutors, is doubtless not wholly unjustified; but it is beside the point. Montaigne is something new. The flavor of the personal, and indeed of a single individual, is present much more strikingly, and the manner of expression is much more spontaneous and closer to everyday spoken discourse, although no dialogue is involved. Then too, the description of the Socratic style in another passage in essay 12—we have referred to it in our chapter on Rabelais (p. 280)—exhibits a strongly Montaigne-colored Socrates. No philosopher of antiquity, not even Plato in his presentation of the discoursing Socrates, could write so directly out of the will of his own concrete existence, so juicily, so animally, and so spontaneously. And at bottom Montaigne knows this too. In a passage where he objects to his style being praised and asks the reader to concern himself only

with subject matter and meaning (1, 40, p. 483), he goes on to say: *Si suis je trompé, si gueres d'autres donnent plus à prendre en la matiere; et comment que ce soit, mal ou bien, si nul escrivain l'a semée ny gueres plus materielle, ny au moins plus drue en son papier.*

The second portion of the text quoted at the beginning of this chapter discusses the question whether his undertaking is justified and useful. This is the question to which Pascal, we know, gave so emphatic a negative answer (*le sot projet qu'il a de se peindre!*). Again both arrangement and expression are full of reservedly ironic modesty. It seems as though he himself had not quite the courage to answer the question with a clear affirmative, as though he were trying to excuse himself and plead extenuating circumstances. This impression is deceptive. He has already decided the question in his first sentence, long before he actually formulates it; and what later sounds almost like an apology (*au moins j'ay . . .*), unexpectedly turns into a self-affirmation so determined, so basic, and so conscious of its own idiosyncrasy that the impression of modesty and apologetic attitude vanishes completely. The order in which he presents his ideas is as follows:

1. I depict a lowly and unillustrious life; but that is of no consequence; even the lowliest life contains the whole of things human.

2. In contrast to others I depict no specialized body of knowledge, no special skill, which I have acquired; I present myself, Montaigne, in my entire person, and I am the first to do so.

3. If you reproach me with talking too much about myself, I reply by reproaching you with not even thinking about yourselves.

4. Only now does he formulate the question: Is it not presumptuous to wish to bring so limited an individual case to general and public knowledge? Is it reasonable that I should offer to a world which is only prepared to appreciate form and art, so undigested and simple a product of nature, and, to make matters worse, so insignificant a product of nature?

5. Instead of an answer he now gives these "extenuating circumstances": a) no one has ever been so fully versed in his subject as I am in mine; b) no one has ever gone so deeply into his subject, so far into all its parts and ramifications; no one has ever carried out his purpose so exactly and so completely.

6. To achieve this I need nothing but unreserved sincerity and of that I have no lack. I am a little hampered by conventions; at times I should like to go somewhat further; but as I grow older I permit myself certain liberties, which people are inclined to excuse in an old man.

7. In my case one thing at least cannot happen, as it does in the case of many a specialist: that man and work are not in accord; that one admires the work but finds the author a mediocrity in daily life—or vice versa. A man of learning is not learned in all fields; but a whole person is whole everywhere, including where he is ignorant. My book and I are one thing; he who speaks of the one speaks equally of the other.

This condensation shows the duplicity of his modesty; it shows it almost more clearly than the original text, because, being disconnected and dry, it lacks Montaigne's amiable flow of expression. But the original is definite enough. The contrast "I—the others," the malice toward specialists, and particularly the motifs "I am the first" and "no one has ever" cannot be missed and stand out more sharply at each re-reading of the passage. We will now discuss these seven points individually. This to be sure is a somewhat meager expedient, if only for the reason that the points intermingle and are hard to keep apart. But it is necessary if one desires to get out of the text everything that is in it.

The statement that he depicts a lowly and unillustrious life is grossly exaggerated. Montaigne was a great gentleman, respected and influential, and it was his own choice that he made only so moderate and reluctant a use of his political possibilities. But the device of exaggerated modesty, which he frequently employs, serves him to set the main idea in stronger relief: any random human destiny, *une vie populaire et privée*, is all he needs for his purpose. *La vie de Cesar*, he says elsewhere (3, 13, p. 580), *n'a point plus d'exemple que la nostre pour nous: et emperiere et populaire, c'est tousjours une vie que tous accidens humains regardent. Escoutons y seulement. . .* And then follows the famous sentence upon the *humaine condition* which is realized in any and every human being. With this sentence he has evidently answered the question of the significance and use of his undertaking. If every man affords material and occasion enough for the development of the complete moral philosophy, then a precise and sincere self-analysis of any random individual is directly justified. Indeed, one may go a step further: it is necessary, because it is the only way—according to Montaigne—which the science of man as a moral being can take. The method of listening (*escoutons y*) can be applied with any degree of accuracy only to the experimenter's own person; it is in the last analysis a method of self-auscultation, of the observation of one's own inner movements. One cannot observe others with the same exact-

ness: *Il n'y a que vous qui sçache si vous estes lasche et cruel ou loyal et devotieux; les autres ne vous voyent point, ils vous devinent par conjectures incertaines . . .* (3, 2, pp. 45-46). And one's own life, the life to whose movements one must listen, is always a random life, for it is simply one of the millions of variants of the possibilities of human existence in general. The obligatory basis of Montaigne's method is the random life one happens to have.

But then this random life of one's own must be taken as a whole. That is the portion of his declaration which we have listed above as point 2. It is a requirement one can easily understand. Every kind of specialization falsifies the moral picture; it presents us in but one of our roles; it consciously leaves in darkness broad reaches of our lives and destinies. From a book on Greek grammar or international law the author's personal existence cannot be known, or at best only in those rare cases where his temperament is so strong and idiosyncratic that it breaks through in any manifestation of his life. Montaigne's social and economic circumstances made it easy for him to develop and preserve his whole self. His needs were met halfway by his period, which had not yet fully developed for the upper classes of society the duty, the technique, and the ethos of specialized work, but on the contrary, under the influence of the oligarchic civilization of antiquity, strove for the most general and most human culture of the individual. Not one of his known contemporaries advanced in this direction so far as he did. Compared with him they are all specialists: theologians, philologists, philosophers, statesmen, physicians, poets, artists; they all present themselves to the world *par quelque marque particuliere et estrangiere*. Montaigne too, under the pressure of circumstances, was at times lawyer, soldier, politician; he was the mayor of Bordeaux for several years. But he did not give himself over to such activities; he merely lent himself for a time and subject to recall, and he promised those who laid tasks upon him *de les prendre en main, non pas au poulmon et au foye* (3, 10, p. 438). The method of using one's own random life in its totality as a point of departure for moral philosophy, for the examination of the *humaine condition*, is in pronounced contrast to all the methods which investigate a large number of individuals in accordance with some definite plan—with respect to their possessing or lacking certain traits, let us say, or to their behavior in certain situations. All such methods seem to Montaigne pedantic and empty abstractions. In them he cannot recognize man, that is, himself; they disguise and simplify and systematize so that the reality is lost. Mon-

taigne limits himself to the detailed investigation and description of one single specimen, himself, and even in this investigation nothing is further from his method than isolating his subject in any manner, than detaching it from the accidental conditions and circumstances in which it is found at a particular moment, in order to arrive at its real, permanent, and absolute essence. Any such attempt to attain to the essence by isolating it from the momentary accidental contingencies would strike him as absurd because, to his mind, the essence is lost as soon as one detaches it from its momentary accidents. For this very reason he must renounce an ultimate definition of himself or of man, for such a definition would of necessity have to be abstract. He must limit himself to probing and reprobing himself, and renounce any *se résoudre*. But he is the kind of man for whom such a renunciation is not difficult, for he is convinced that the total object of cognition cannot be expressed. Furthermore his method, despite its seeming vagaries, is very strict in that it confines itself to pure observation. It undertakes no search into general causes. When Montaigne cites causes, they are of an immediate kind and themselves susceptible to observation. On this point there is a polemic passage which is timely even today: *Ils laissent là les choses et s'amuse à traicter les causes: plaisans causeurs! La cognoissance des causes appartient seulement à celui qui a la conduite des choses, non à nous qui n'en avons que la souffrance, et qui en avons l'usage parfaitement plein selon notre nature, sans en penetrer l'origine et l'essence. . . . Ils comment ordinairement ainsi: Comment est ce que cela se fait? Mais se fait il? faudroit il dire . . .* (3, 11, p. 485). We have intentionally refrained in all these remarks on Montaigne's method from bringing up the almost inescapably associated technical terms of those modern philosophical methods which are related to his by affinity or contrast. The informed reader will supply these technical terms. We avoid them because there is nowhere a complete congruence, and precise qualifications would take us too far afield.

We have as yet said nothing concerning a few words which Montaigne, in describing his method of depicting his own random life in its totality for the purpose of investigating the *humaine condition*, puts in a syntactically prominent position. They are the words *moy le premier* and they confront us with the questions: Does he mean this seriously, and is he right? The first question can be answered summarily. He does mean to be taken seriously, for he repeats the assertion in various places. The theme "no one has ever," which follows a

little further on in our text, is only a variant of it, and another passage—part of which we have quoted above on page 292f.—the passage on the *amusement nouveau et extraordinaire . . . de penetrer dans les profondeurs de ses replis internes* is introduced in the following manner: *Nous n'avons nouvelles que de deux ou trois anciens qui ayent battu ce chemin; et si ne pouvons dire si c'est du tout en pareille maniere à cette-ci, n'en connoissant que leurs noms. Nul depuis ne s'est jeté sur leur trace . . .* (2, 6, p. 93). There is, then, no doubt that Montaigne, despite all his modesty and his ironical attitude toward himself, was serious in making this assertion. But is he right in it? Do we really have no comparable work from earlier times? I cannot help thinking of Augustine. Montaigne never mentions the *Confessions*, and Villey (*Les Sources*, 1, 75) assumes that he did not know them well. But it is not possible that he should not have been aware at least of the existence and the character of this famous book. Perhaps he rather shrank from the comparison; perhaps it is a perfectly genuine and unironical modesty that prevents him from establishing a relationship between himself and his method and the most important of the Fathers. And he is right when he says that it was not at all *en pareille maniere*. Both purpose and approach are very different. And yet there is no other earlier author from whom anything so basically important is preserved in Montaigne's method as the consistent and unreserved self-investigation of Augustine.

As for the third part of his statement (the rebuttal: you do not even think of yourselves), we may note that tacitly underlying it is the typically Montaignesque concept of "I myself." In the ordinary sense, the people here addressed do think a great deal of themselves, too much so indeed. They think of their interests, their desires, their worries, their information, their activities, their families, their friends. All this, for Montaigne, is not "themselves." All this is only a part of "I myself"; it can even lead—and generally it does lead—to an obscuration of the self and to the loss of it: that is to say, whenever the individual abandons himself so completely to one or to another or to several of these things that his present consciousness of his own existence in its entirety, that his full consciousness of a life distinctively his own, melts away in the process. The full consciousness of one's own life implies for Montaigne also full consciousness of one's own death. *Ils vont, ils viennent, ils trottent, ils dansent; de mort, nulles nouvelles* (1, 20, pp. 154-155).

Parts five and six of the statement—his doubt whether the publica-

tion of such a work is justified and the apologies he uses to meet that doubt—may be discussed together. The real answer to the question, he has given before. He poses it now only in order that he may once again bring out the unique characteristics of his undertaking, this time in a few excellently formulated antitheses (e.g. *particulier en usage* as against *public en cognoissance*, or *par art* as against *par sort*). The text is further significant because of the unexpected turn it takes from an apologetic formulation to a clear-cut admission of his awareness of his importance. This admission, introduced by the motif *jamais homme* or *jamais aucun*, reveals a new aspect of his method. To paraphrase: Never, he says, has any man been so fully master of his subject, nor pursued it so far into all its details and ramifications, nor accomplished his purpose so unqualifiedly. There may be a faint echo of self-irony in formulations like *en celui-là je suis le plus sçavant homme qui vive*, yet these sentences are an amazingly frank and clear and emphatic underlining of the uniqueness of his book. They go beyond the previously discussed *moy le premier* inasmuch as they reveal Montaigne's conviction that no branch of learning and no form of knowledge could possibly be acquired with as much exactness and comprehensiveness as self-knowledge. For him Know Thyself is not only a pragmatic and moral precept but an epistemological precept too. This is also the reason why he is so little interested in the knowledge which the sciences of nature furnish and why he has no trust in it. Only things human and moral are able to fascinate him. Like Socrates he could say that the trees teach him nothing; only the people in the city can do that. Montaigne even gives this thought a polemic barb when he speaks of those who take pride in their knowledge of natural science: *Puisque ces gens là n'ont pas peu se resoudre de la cognoissance d'eux mesmes et de leur propre condition, qui est continuellement presente à leurs yeux, qui est dans eux . . . , comment les croirois je de la cause du flux et du reflux de la riviere du Nil?* (2, 17, p. 605). However, the primacy of self-knowledge acquires a positive epistemological significance only in regard to the moral study of man; for in his study of his own random life Montaigne's sole aim is an investigation of the *humaine condition* in general; and with that he reveals the heuristic principle which we constantly employ—consciously or unconsciously, reasonably or unreasonably—when we endeavor to understand and judge the acts of others, whether the acts of our close associates or more remote acts which belong in the realms of politics or history. We apply criteria to them which we have derived from our own lives and

our own inner experience—so that our knowledge of men and of history depends upon the depth of our self-knowledge and the extent of our moral horizon.

Montaigne's interest in the lives of others was always most intense. To be sure, he cannot rid himself of a certain distrust for historians. He feels that they present human beings too exclusively in extraordinary and heroic situations and that they are only too ready to give fixed and consistent portraits of character: *les bons auteurs mesmes ont tort de s'opiniâtrer à former de nous une constante et solide contexture* (2, 1, p. 9). He thinks it preposterous to derive a concept of the whole individual from one or several climactic episodes of a life; what he misses is a sufficient regard for the fluctuations and alterations in a man's inner state: *pour juger d'un homme, il faut suivre longuement et curieusement sa trace* (2, 1, p. 18). He wants to experience man's everyday, normal, and spontaneous conduct, and for that his own environment, which he can observe in personal experience, is just as valuable to him as the material of history: *moy . . . qui estime ce siècle comme un autre passé, j'allègue aussi volontiers un mien amy que Aulu Gelle et que Macrobe . . .* (3, 13, p. 595). Private and personal occurrences interest him as much as or possibly even more than matters of state, and it is not even necessary that they should really have happened: *. . . en l'estude que je traite de noz mœurs et mouvemens, les témoignages fabuleux, pourvu qu'ils soient possibles, y servent comme les vrais: advenu ou non advenu, à Paris ou à Rome, à Jean ou à Pierre, c'est toujours un tour de l'humaine capacité* (1, 21, p. 194). All this concern with the experience of life in others passes through the filter of self-experience. We must not be misled by certain utterances of Montaigne's, as when he voices the warning that one should not judge others by oneself or deem impossible what one cannot imagine or what contradicts our own customs. This is referable only to people whose self-experience is too narrow and shallow, and the lesson one might draw from such utterances is simply a demand for greater elasticity and breadth in our inner consciousness. For Montaigne could give no other heuristic principle in the realm of historico-moral knowledge than self-experience, and there are several passages which describe his method from this point of view, for example the following: *Cette longue attention que j'employe à me considérer me dresse à juger aussi passablement des autres. . . . Pour m'estre, dès mon enfance, dressé à mirer ma vie dans celle d'autrui, j'ay acquis une complexion studieuse en cela* (3, 13, p. 585). *Mirer sa vie dans celle d'autrui*: in these words

lies the complete method of an activity which sets itself the goal of understanding the actions or thoughts of others. Everything else, the compilation of sources and testimonies, the factual critique and sifting of the data of tradition, is only auxiliary and preparatory labor.

The sixth of the points we have distinguished in Montaigne's statement is concerned with his sincerity: it is all that he needs to carry out his purpose, and he possesses it. He says so himself, and it is true. He is eminently sincere in all that concerns himself, and he would gladly (as he says here and in several other passages in the Essays, and even in his preface) be a little franker still; but the conventions of social conduct impose some limitation upon him. His critics, however, have at most found fault with his excess of sincerity, never with a lack of it. He speaks about himself a great deal, and the reader becomes acquainted with all the details not only of his intellectual and spiritual life but also of his physical existence. A great deal of information about his most personal characteristics and habits, his illnesses, his food, and his sexual peculiarities, is scattered through the Essays. There is, to be sure, a certain element of self-satisfaction in all this. Montaigne is pleased with himself; he knows that he is in all respects a free, a richly gifted, a full, a remarkably well-rounded human being, and despite all his self-irony he cannot completely conceal this delight in his own person. But it is a calm and self-rooted consciousness of his individual self, free from pettiness, arrogance, insecurity, and coquetry. He is proud of his *forme toute sienne*. But his delight in himself is not the most important nor the most distinctive motif of his sincerity, which applies equally to mind and body. Sincerity is an essential part of his method of depicting his own random life in its entirety. Montaigne is convinced that, for such a portrayal, mind and body must not be separated; and calmly, without accompanying his self-portrayal by any convulsive gestures, he gave his conviction practical form, with an openness and reality such as hardly anyone before him and very few after him attained. He speaks in detail of his body and his physical existence, because it is an essential ingredient of his self, and he has managed to pervade his book with the corporeal savor of his personality without ever arousing a feeling of surfeit. His bodily functions, his illnesses, and his own physical death, of which he talks a great deal in order to accustom himself to the idea of death, are so intimately fused in their concrete sensory effects with the moral-intellectual content of his book that any attempt to separate them would be absurd.

Connected with this in turn is the dislike which, as we mentioned

before, he entertains for the formal systems of moral philosophy. The things he holds against them—their abstraction, the tendency of their methodology to disguise the reality of life, and the turgidity of their terminology—can all be reduced in the last analysis to the fact that partly in theory and partly at least in pedagogical practice they separate mind and body and do not give the latter a chance to have its say. They all, according to Montaigne, have too high an opinion of man; they speak of him as if he were only mind and spirit, and so they falsify the reality of life: *Ces exquis subtilitez ne sont propres qu'au presche; ce sont discours qui nous veulent envoyer tous bastez en l'autre monde. La vie est un mouvement materiel et corporel, action imparfaite de sa propre essence, et desreglée; je m'emploie à la servir selon elle . . .* (3, 9, pp. 409-410).

The passages in which he speaks of the unity of mind and body are very numerous and reflect many different aspects of his attitude. At times his ironical modesty predominates: . . . *moy, d'une condition mixte, grossier . . . , si simple que je me laisse tout lourdement aller aux plaisirs presents de la loy humaine et generale, intellectuellement sensibles, sensiblement intellectuels* (3, 13, p. 649). Another extremely interesting passage throws light on his attitude toward Platonism and at the same time toward antique moral philosophy in general: *Platon craint nostre engagement aspre à la douleur et à la volupté, d'autant que (because) il oblige et attache par trop l'âme au corps; moy plutost au rebours, d'autant qu'il l'en desprend et descloue* (1, 40, pp. 100-101). Because for Plato the body is an enemy of moderation, seducing the soul and carrying it away; for Montaigne the body is naturally endowed with *un juste et modéré tempérament envers la volupté et envers la douleur*, while *ce qui aiguise en nous la douleur et la volupté, c'est la poincte de nostre esprit*. In our connection, however, the most important passages on this point are those which reveal the Christian-creatural sources of his view. In the chapter *de la présomption* (2, 17, p. 615) he writes:

Le corps a une grand' part à nostre estre, il y tient un grand rang; ainsi sa structure et composition sont de bien juste considération. Ceux qui veulent desprendre nos deux pièces principales, et les sequestrer l'un de l'autre, ils ont tort; au rebours, il les faut r'accupler et rejoindre; il faut ordonner à l'âme non de se tirer à quartier, de s'entretenir à part, de mespriser et abandonner le corps (aussi ne le scauroit elle faire que par quelque sin-

gerie contrefaite), mais de se r'allier à luy, de l'embrasser . . . , l'espouser en somme, et luy servir de mary, à ce que leurs effects ne paraissent pas divers et contraires, ains accordans et uniformes. Les Chrestiens ont une particuliere instruction de cette liaison; ils savent que la justice divine embrasse cette société et jointure du corps et de l'âme, jusques à rendre le corps capable des recompenses eternelles; et que Dieu regarde agir tout l'homme, et veut qu'entier il reçoive le chastiment, ou le loyer, selon ses merites.

And he closes with praise of the Aristotelian philosophy:

La secte Peripatetique, de toutes sectes la plus sociable, attribue à la sagesse ce seul soing, de pourvoir et procurer en commun le bien de ces deux parties associées; et montre les autres sectes, pour ne s'estre assez attachez à la considération de ce meslange, s'estre partialisées, cette-cy pour le corps, cette autre pour l'âme, d'une pareille erreur; et avoir escarté leur subject, qui est l'homme; et leur guide, qu'ils advouent en general estre Nature.

Another similarly significant passage occurs at the end of book 3, in the concluding chapter *de l'expérience* (3, 13, p. 663):

A quoy faire demembrons nous en divorce un bastiment tissu d'une si jointe et fraternelle correspondance? Au rebours, renouons le par mutuels offices; que l'esprit esveille et vivifie la pesanteur du corps, le corps arreste la legereté de l'esprit et la fixe. Qui velut summum bonum laudat animae naturam, et tamquam malum naturam carnis accusat, profecto et animam carnaliter appetit, et carnem carnaliter fugit; quoniam id vanitate sentit humana, non veritate divina [from Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 14, 5]. Il n'y a piece indigne de notre soin, en ce present que Dieu nous a fait; nous en devons conte jusques à un poil; et n'est pas une commission par acquit (roughly: offhand) à l'homme de conduire l'homme selon sa condition; elle est expresse, naifve et très-principale, et nous l'a le Createur donnée serieusement et severement . . . [Those who would renounce their bodies] veulent se mettre hors d'eux, et eschapper à l'homme; c'est folie; au lieu de se transformer en anges, ils se transforment en bestes; au lieu de se hausser, ils s'abattent. Ces humeurs transcendentales m'effrayent. . . .

That Montaigne's unity of mind and body has its roots in Christian-creatural anthropology could be demonstrated even without these testimonies. It is the basis of his realistic introspection; without it the latter would be inconceivable. But such passages (we might also adduce 3, 5, p. 219, with an important remark on the asceticism of the saints) go to show how conscious he was of the connection. He appeals to the dogma of the resurrection of the flesh and Bible texts. In this specific connection he praises the Aristotelian philosophy, of which otherwise he does not think very highly (*Je ne reconnais, chez Aristote, la plus part de mes mouvements ordinaires*). He cites one of the many passages where Augustine opposes the dualistic and spiritualistic tendencies of his time. He uses the contrast *ange-bête* which Pascal was to borrow from him. He might easily have added considerably to the number of Christian testimonies in support of his view. Above all he might have called upon the incarnation of the Word itself for support. He did not do so, although the idea undoubtedly occurred to him; in this connection it could not but force itself upon anyone brought up a Christian in Montaigne's day. He avoided the allusion, obviously intentionally, for it would automatically have given his statements the character of a profession of Christianity, which was far from what he had in mind. He likes to keep away from such ticklish subjects. But the question of his religious profession—which, by the way, I consider an idle question—has nothing to do with the observation that the roots of his realistic conception of man are to be found in the Christian-creatural tradition.

We now come to the last part of our text. It is concerned with the unity which in his case exists between the work and the author, in contrast to the specialists, who exhibit a fund of professional knowledge but loosely related to their person. He says the same thing, with some different nuances, in another passage (2, 18, p. 666): *Je n'ay pas plus fait mon livre que mon livre m'a fait: livre consubstantiel à son auteur, d'une occupation propre, membre de ma vie, non d'une occupation et fin tierce et estrangiere, comme tous autres livres*. Nothing need be added to that. But his malice against the erudite expert and against specialization requires some comment, with a view to determining the historical position of such utterances. The ideal of a non-specialized man, a man developed on all sides, reached humanism from both the theory and the example of antiquity, but the social structure of the sixteenth century did not permit its full realization. Furthermore, it was precisely the effort required by the rediscovery

of the heritage of antiquity which brought into existence a new type of humanist expert and specialist. Rabelais may still have been convinced that perfect personal culture was necessarily identical with the mastery of all branches of knowledge, that universality, then, was the sum of all specialized erudition. Possibly his surrealist program of education for Gargantua was meant to be taken seriously in this sense. In any case, it could not be achieved; and the scientific labor that had to be performed is now subjected, far more than in the Middle Ages, to a progressive specialization. In diametric contrast to this is the ideal of an all-around and uniformly perfected personality. This ideal was the more influential since it was not upheld by humanism alone; it was also supported by the late feudal idea of the perfect courtier, which was revived by absolutism and enriched by Platonizing tendencies. Then too, with the growth of wealth and the wider diffusion of elementary education, there was a great increase in the number of those—partly noblemen and partly members of the urban bourgeoisie—who, aspiring to participation in cultural life, required a form of knowledge which should not be specialized erudition. Thus there arose a non-professional, strongly social, and even fashionable form of general knowledge. It was, of course, not encyclopedic in range although it represents as it were an extract from all branches of knowledge, with a pronounced preference for the literary and for the aesthetic generally; humanism, indeed, was itself in a position to furnish most of the material. Thus arose the class of those who were later to be called "the educated." Since it was recruited from the socially and economically most influential circles, to whom good breeding and conduct in the fashionable sense, amiability in social intercourse, aptitude for human contact, and presence of mind meant more than any specialized competence; since in such circles, even when their origin was middle class, feudal and knightly value concepts were still dominant; since these were supported by the classicizing ideals of humanism insofar as the ruling classes of antiquity had also regarded preoccupation with art and science not as a professional matter but as *otium*, as an ornament indispensable for the man destined to the most general life and to political leadership: there soon resulted a sort of contempt for professional specialization. The scholar committed to a particular discipline and, in general, the individual committed to a particular profession or trade—the human individual who was fully absorbed in his specialized knowledge and revealed the fact in his behavior and in his conversation—was considered comic, inferior, and plebeian. This

attitude attained its fullest development with the French absolutism of the seventeenth century, and we shall have to speak of it in greater detail hereafter, since it contributed to no small extent to the ideal of a separation of styles which dominates French classicism. For the more general a man's culture and the less it recognizes a specialized knowledge and a specialized activity, at least as a point of departure for a more general survey of things, the further removed from the sphere of the concrete, the lifelike, and the practical will be the type of all-around perfection striven after.

In this development—although it certainly would not have been to his liking—Montaigne has an important place. His *homme suffisant* who is *suffisant* always, *même à ignorer*, is doubtless a predecessor of that *honnête homme* who—like Molière's marquises—need not have learned anything in particular in order to judge everything with fashionable assurance. After all, Montaigne is the first author who wrote for the educated stratum just described; by the success of the *Essays* the educated public first revealed its existence. Montaigne does not write for a particular class, nor for a particular profession, nor for "the people," nor for Christians; he writes for no party; he does not consider himself a poet; he writes the first work of lay introspection, and lo!, there were people—men and women—who felt that they were spoken to. Some of the humanist translators—especially Amyot, whom Montaigne praises for it—had prepared the way. Yet as an independent writer, Montaigne is the first. And so it is only natural that his ideas of personal culture are those adapted to that first stratum of educated people who were still eminently aristocratic and not yet obliged to do specialized work. To be sure, in his case this does not imply that his own culture and way of life became abstract, void of reality, remote from random everyday events, and "style-separating." Precisely the opposite is true. His fortunate and richly gifted nature required no practical duties and no intellectual activity within a specialized subject in order to remain close to reality. From one instant to the next, as it were, it specialized in something else; every instant it probed another impression and did so with a concreteness which the century of the *honnête homme* would certainly have considered unseemly. Or we might say: he specialized in his own self, in his random personal existence as a whole. Thus his *homme suffisant* is after all not as yet the *honnête homme*; he is "a whole man." Furthermore, Montaigne lived at a time when absolutism, with its leveling effect and consequent standardization of the form of life of the *honnête homme*, was not yet fully developed. This

is the reason why, though Montaigne occupies an important place in the prehistory of this form of life, he is still outside of it.

The text we have analyzed is a good point of departure for a conscious comprehension of the largest possible number of the themes and attitudes in Montaigne's undertaking, the portrayal of his own random personal life as a whole. He displays himself in complete seriousness, in order to illuminate the general conditions of human existence. He displays himself embedded in the random contingencies of his life and deals indiscriminately with the fluctuating movements of his consciousness, and it is precisely his random indiscriminateness that constitutes his method. He speaks of a thousand things and one easily leads to another. Whether he relates an anecdote, discusses his daily occupations, ponders a moral precept of antiquity, or anticipatorily savors the sensation of his own death, he hardly changes his tone; it is all the same to him. And the tone he uses is on the whole that of a lively but unexcited and very richly nuanced conversation. We can hardly call it a monologue for we constantly get the impression that he is talking to someone. We almost always sense an element of irony, often a very strong one, yet it does not in the least interfere with the spontaneous sincerity which radiates from every line. He is never grandiose or rhetorical; the dignity of his subject matter never makes him renounce an earthy popular turn of expression or an image taken from everyday life. The upper limit of his style is, as we noted above, the earnestness which prevails almost throughout our text, particularly in the second paragraph. It makes itself felt here—as it frequently does elsewhere—through boldly contrasted and usually antithetic clauses together with distinct and striking formulations. Yet sometimes there is an almost poetic movement too, as in the passage from 2, 6 which we quoted above on page 292f. The *profondeurs opaques* are almost lyrical, yet he immediately interrupts the long poetic rhythm by the energetic and conversational *ouy*. A really elevated tone is foreign to him, he wants none of it; he is made to be completely at ease on a level of tone which he himself characterizes as *stile comique et privé* (1, 40, p. 485). This is unmistakably an allusion to the realistic style of antique comedy, the *sermo pedester* or *humilis*, and similar allusions occur in large numbers. But the content he presents is in no sense comic; it is the *humaine condition* with all its burdens, pitfalls, and problems, with all its essential insecurity, with all the creatural bonds which confine it. Animal existence, and the death which is inseparable from it, appear in frightening palpability, in gruesome suggestiveness.

No doubt such a creatural realism would be inconceivable without the preparatory Christian conception of man, especially in the form it took during the later Middle Ages. And Montaigne is aware of this too. He is aware that his extremely concrete linking of mind and body is related to Christian views of man. But it is also true that his creatural realism has broken through the Christian frame within which it arose. Life on earth is no longer the figure of the life beyond; he can no longer permit himself to scorn and neglect the here for the sake of a there. Life on earth is the only one he has. He wants to savor it to the last drop: *car enfin c'est nostre estre, c'est nostre tout* (2, 3, p. 47). To live here is his purpose and his art, and the way he wants this to be understood is very simple but in no sense trivial. It entails first of all emancipating oneself from everything that might waste or hinder the enjoyment of life, that might divert the living man's attention from himself. For *c'est chose tendre que la vie, et aysée à troubler* (3, 9, p. 334). It is necessary to keep oneself free, to preserve oneself for one's own life, to withdraw from the all-too binding obligations of the world's affairs, not to tie oneself down to this, that, or the other: *la plus grande chose du monde c'est de sçavoir estre à soy* (1, 39, pp. 464-465). All this is serious and fundamental enough; it is much too high for the *sermo humilis* as understood in antique theory, and yet it could not be expressed in an elevated rhetorical style, without any concrete portrayal of the everyday; the mixture of styles is creatural and Christian. But the attitude is no longer Christian and medieval. One hesitates to call it antique either; for that, it is too rooted in the realm of the concrete. And still another point must here be considered. Montaigne's emancipation from the Christian conceptual schema did not—despite his exact knowledge and continuous study of antique culture—simply put him back among the ideas and conditions among which men of his sort had lived in the days of Cicero or Plutarch. His newly acquired freedom was much more exciting, much more of the historical moment, directly connected with the feeling of insecurity. The disconcerting abundance of phenomena which now claimed the attention of men seemed overwhelming. The world—both outer world and inner world—seemed immense, boundless, incomprehensible. The need to orient oneself in it seemed hard to satisfy and yet urgent. True enough, among all the important and at times as it were more than life-sized personages of his century, Montaigne is the calmest. He has enough of substance and elasticity in himself, he possesses a natural moderation, and has little need of security since it always reestablishes itself spon-

taneously within him. He is further helped by his resignedly negative attitude toward the study of nature, his unswerving aspiration toward nothing but his own self. However, his book manifests the excitement which sprang from the sudden and tremendous enrichment of the world picture and from the presentiment of the yet untapped possibilities the world contained. And—still more significant—among all his contemporaries he had the clearest conception of the problem of man's self-orientation; that is, the task of making oneself at home in existence without fixed points of support. In him for the first time, man's life—the random personal life as a whole—becomes problematic in the modern sense. That is all one dares to say. His irony, his dislike of big words, his calm way of being profoundly at ease with himself, prevent him from pushing on beyond the limits of the problematic and into the realm of the tragic, which is already unmistakably apparent in let us say the work of Michelangelo and which, during the generation following Montaigne's, is to break through in literary form in several places in Europe. It has often been said that the tragic was unknown to the Christian Middle Ages. It might be more exact to put it that for the Middle Ages the tragic was contained in the tragedy of Christ. (The expression "tragedy of Christ," is no modern license. It finds support in Boethius and in Honorius Augustodunensis.) But now the tragic appears as the highly personal tragedy of the individual, and moreover, compared with antiquity, as far less restricted by traditional ideas of the limits of fate, the cosmos, natural forces, political forms, and man's inner being. We said before that the tragic is not yet to be found in Montaigne's work; he shuns it. He is too dispassionate, too unrhetoical, too ironic, and indeed too easy-going, if this term can be used in a dignified sense. He conceives himself too calmly, despite all his probing into his own insecurity. Whether this is a weakness or a strength is a question I shall not try to answer. In any case, this peculiar equilibrium of his being prevents the tragic, the possibility of which is inherent in his image of man, from coming to expression in his work.