

ÉTAT PRÉSENT

ARE WE READING WHAT MONTAIGNE WROTE?

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EB: two letters which for Montaigne specialists describe an object of almost venerable status in French Renaissance literature — the *exemplaire de Bordeaux*, a copy of the 1588 edition of Montaigne's *Essais* heavily annotated in the author's own hand. Prepared by the essayist between 1588 and his death in 1592 with a view to a new edition of his work, and now preserved, as the name suggests, in the Bibliothèque Municipale in Bordeaux, EB is a rare survivor in a print world that did not hesitate to destroy an author's copy once its usefulness had passed.¹ It has suffered from the ravages of time; when rebound in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, its margins were shaved by the binder's knife, cutting off the edges of a number of Montaigne's addenda, and it has taken astute editorial work (usually by recourse to the 1595 Gournay edition) to restore the missing words and letters. Editors from the early nineteenth century onwards recognized the importance of EB. It was, however, the twentieth century that saw in it the true source of Montaigne's text, an origin whose authority was uncontested.² Foremost among a number of important publications in the early 1900s, the so-called *Édition municipale* of the *Essais*, published by Fortunat Strowski, François Gebelin and Pierre Villey between 1906 and 1933, monumentalized the status of EB in five massive volumes that took as their base text the 1588 edition of the *Essais*, with the variants of the editions from 1580 onwards given at the bottom of each page, and Montaigne's post-1588 marginalia added in italics to distinguish them from the body of the printed text.³ This enterprise was remarkable, not only for its scale, but also for the dramatic nature of the collaboration: François Gebelin, who volunteered to fight in the Great War, was badly wounded in 1915 and sent in much of his contribution from a hospital bed, while Pierre Villey had been blind since the age of four and yet, until his tragic death in a

¹ For other survivors, though less rich in annotations, see Michel Simonin, 'Aux origines de l'édition de 1595', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 25 (1995), 313–43 (pp. 326–27).

² For a fuller account of editorial policy than is possible here, see Philippe Desan, 'Cinq siècles de politiques éditoriales des *Essais*', in his *Montaigne dans tous ses états* (Fasano, Schena Editore, 2001), pp. 121–91, and the same author's Introduction to his *Reproduction en quadrichrome de l'exemplaire avec notes manuscrites marginales des Essais de Montaigne (Exemplaire de Bordeaux)* (Fasano, Schena — Chicago, Montaigne Studies, 2002), pp. xxxv–xl.

³ *Les 'Essais' de Michel de Montaigne, publiés d'après l'Exemplaire de Bordeaux, avec les variantes manuscrites & les leçons des plus anciennes impressions*, ed. by Fortunat Strowski, François Gebelin and Pierre Villey, 5 vols (Bordeaux, Pech, 1906–33).

train crash in 1933, continued to produce a large number of scholarly works on Montaigne and editions of the *Essais*.

It was indeed Villey's more compact edition of the *Essais*, originally published in 1922–23, but re-edited by V.-L. Saulnier in 1965, that was to have lasting influence as a scholarly edition of Montaigne in the mid-twentieth century. It shared this privilege with the 'Pléiade' edition by Albert Thibaudet, re-edited by Maurice Rat. Both editions exhibit similar editorial features: Montaigne's addenda had their distinctive spelling and punctuation altered to fit in with the printer's typographical conventions of the 1588 edition; they were now integrated into the text, not kept separate as in the *Édition municipale*, and each element of the *Essais* was labelled A, B or C (or similar) to designate respectively the text of 1580–87, the text of 1588 and Montaigne's post-1588 addenda; each *essai* was also divided into paragraphs, a feature that was not present in original editions and that frequently distorted the work's meaning. These editorial principles were widely accepted and were reproduced in cheaper editions of the *Essais* such as Garnier-Flammarion and Folio. It was in such a composite form that Montaigne was known and used by generations of twentieth-century scholars, teachers, students and readers, even though the text thus established corresponded to none that had appeared in the essayist's lifetime nor even exactly to any that appeared immediately after his death.

By the 1990s, the limitations of this approach to editing the *Essais* became apparent. In a series of brilliant studies,⁴ André Tournon demonstrated that no modern edition had respected a most significant feature of EB: its unusual and deliberate punctuation. His close analysis of EB showed that, in addition to the hand-written 'allongeoils' that increased the length of the 1588 edition by approximately a third, Montaigne had made up to 9000 'retouches de segmentation', as Tournon termed them,⁵ following a principle of 'langage coupé' that was not an effect of chance, but part of the essayist's written instructions to his printer. With his characteristic combination of precision and acute attention to the workings of the *Essais*, Tournon re-sensitized us to the newly invigorated rhythms and cadences produced by Montaigne's segmentation of his work, with their 'effets de scansion', bold articulations and subtle shifts in emphasis resulting in re-defined balances and asymmetries. An example from a famous passage in 'Du repentir' will show this process at work:

⁴ 'Un langage coupé. . .', in *Writing the Renaissance: Essays on Sixteenth-Century French Literature in Honor of Floyd Gray*, ed. by Raymond C. La Charité (Lexington, French Forum Publishers, 1992), pp. 219–31; 'Syntaxe et scansion: l'énergie du "langage coupé" et la censure éditoriale', in *Montaigne et la rhétorique*, ed. by John O'Brien, Malcolm Quainton and James Supple (Paris, Champion, 1995), pp. 117–33; 'La segmentation du texte: usages et singularités', in *Éditer les 'Essais' de Montaigne*, ed. by Claude Blum and André Tournon (Paris, Champion, 1997), pp. 173–83; 'L'inquiétante segmentation des *Essais*', *Le Discours psychanalytique*, 18 (1997), 277–306; "'Ny de la ponctuation": sur quelques avatars de la segmentation autographe des *Essais*', *Nouvelle revue du seizième siècle*, 17/1 (1999), 147–59.

⁵ André Tournon, 'Réponses', *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Montaigne*, VIII^e série, no. 17–18 (janvier–juin 2000), 129–31 (p. 130).

Je ne peints pas l'estre. Je peints le passage: non un passage d'aage en autre [. . .], mais de jour en jour, de minute en minute. Il faut accommoder mon histoire à l'heure. [. . .]. C'est un contrerolle de divers et muables accidens et d'imaginationes irresoluës et, quand il y eschet, contraires: soit que je sois autre moy-mesme, soit que je saisisse les subjects par autres circonstances et considerations. Tant y a que je me contredits bien à l'adventure, mais la verité, comme disoit Demades, je ne la contredy point.⁶

Thus Villey-Saulnier. Here is EB:

Je ne peints pas l'estre. Je peints le passage: Non vn passage d'aage en autre . . . : mais de iour en iour, de minute en minute. Il faut accommoder, mon histoire à l'heure. [. . .]. C'est vn contrerolle de diuers & muables accidens, & d'imaginationes irresoluës. Et quand il y eschet, contraires: Soit que ie sois autre moymesme: Soit que ie saisisse les subiects, par autres circonstances, & considerations. Tant y a, que ie me contredits bien à l'adventure, Mais la verité, comme disoit Demades, ie ne la contredy point.⁷

The changes made by Montaigne to his own text transform the balanced periods of the previous version by re-inventing these sentences as short clausulae, thus giving greater prominence to the alternatives, contradictions and paradoxes that the essayist is discussing. In 1588, this passage set out those paradoxes as a fact for the reader's consideration. After 1588, the re-punctuation enables the reader to witness the means by which the paradoxes are discovered and not just presented, ending in the saying of Demades whose tensions Montaigne makes his own through the emphatic re-punctuation. In this example, as in countless others, re-punctuation slows the activity of reading, compelling us to pay attention to the grain of the text and the colouring of individual clauses and segments, so that thought in process is revealed by language in motion; the proliferation of capital letters, full stops, commas, colons and semi-colons makes the texture of the passage purposely less smooth, favouring sinewy sentences that modify their data as they proceed. Meaning in the Montaignean sentence is thus created by a perpetual *fuite en avant*, an opening-up of new vistas within the individual sentence or passage. No sentence by Montaigne can be taken for granted as a once-and-for-all product: it contains within itself the potential for its own disruption, as well as for its own *relance*.

Tournon's attentiveness to EB culminated in his own edition of the *Essais*, published in 1998.⁸ His policy in this edition is as controversial as it is striking. While carefully transcribing the EB addenda and alterations, particularly the devices of segmentation, he introduces two elements of punctuation not present in the original — the high stop, looking like the ancient Greek colon, and the dash. Moreover, he modernizes the spelling of the *Essais*, in the interests of accessibility for the present-day reader, but thereby erases the

⁶ *Les 'Essais' de Michel de Montaigne*, édition conforme au texte de l'exemplaire de Bordeaux, par Pierre Villey, rééditée sous la direction et avec une préface de V.-L. Saulnier (Paris, PUF, 1965), p. 805.

⁷ Desan, *Reproduction en quadrichrome*, ff. 350^v–351^r.

⁸ *Essais' de Michel de Montaigne*, ed. by André Tournon, 3 vols (Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1998).

orthographical differences of the sixteenth-century text, especially Montaigne's own spelling in the EB addenda (which twentieth-century editors had in any case also ignored). There are still paragraph divisions, though many fewer of them; at the same time, the ABC indications of different temporal layers within the text are now relegated to the margins, and so it becomes less easy to locate the precise point at which the text changes. Yet it must also be acknowledged that Tournon made much-needed corrections and updating to the notes and translation of Villey's edition; and his individual summaries of the intellectual content of each *essai* are masterpieces of incisive perspicacity.

A parallel challenge to twentieth-century editorial practice in respect of the *Essais* came from the late Michel Simonin. Building in part on the work of Richard Sayce and David Maskell, Simonin re-opened the whole question of the nature and purpose of EB and its relationship to the editions of 1595 onwards prepared by Marie de Gournay, Montaigne's 'fille d'alliance'.⁹ All previous editors had noticed the discrepancies between EB and the three states of the 1595 Paris *Essais*.¹⁰ Not unreasonably, it may seem, all had preferred the evidence of the essayist's own work and had taken EB to represent his definitive wishes, especially given the care with which he prepared it. However, it is generally accepted that EB was not the only copy bearing Montaigne's additions and alterations. There would have been at least another, either a second working copy (Céard) or a *mise au net* (Simonin) or *exemplar* (Desan),¹¹ which, it is agreed, was in fact the copy used for the printing of the 1595 edition.¹² This second copy is no longer extant, but it is not unreasonable to infer its existence. Indeed, for Simonin, the disparate states of the various textual witnesses of which Gournay endeavoured to make sense after Montaigne's death complicate the stemma of the *Essais* and relativize the status of EB. In other words, Simonin took Gournay's enterprise seriously. The fact that she laboured for forty years and more to produce an edition of the *Essais* with which she finally felt any satisfaction belied the notion that she was careless or inadequate. For Simonin, then, any purposeful scholarly discussion of the *Essais* had to be based on the 1595 Gournay edition; EB was at best a witness to that text, a draft on which Montaigne

⁹ Michel Simonin, 'Aux origines', pp. 313–43, reprinted in *Montaigne et Marie de Gournay*, ed. by J.-C. Arnould (Paris, Champion, 1997), pp. 7–51, and 'Montaigne, son éditeur et le correcteur devant l'exemplaire de Bordeaux des *Essais*', *Travaux de littérature*, 11 (1998), 75–93. The judicious appraisals of the 1595 edition by Sayce and Maskell are to be found in R. A. Sayce, 'L'édition des *Essais* de Montaigne de 1595', *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 36 (1974), 115–41, and David Maskell, 'Quel est le dernier état authentique des *Essais* de Montaigne?', *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 40 (1978), 85–103, and 'Montaigne correcteur de l'exemplaire de Bordeaux', *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Montaigne*, v^e série, nos. 25–26 (janvier–juin 1978), 57–71.

¹⁰ See the descriptions of the different states in R. A. Sayce and David Maskell, *A Descriptive Bibliography of Montaigne's 'Essais': 1580–1700* (London, The Bibliographical Society and MHRA, 1983), pp. 25–35, nos. 7A, 7A† and 7B.

¹¹ 'Exemplar' is Desan's term for the *mise au net*: see his 'L'Exemplar et l'exemplaire de Bordeaux', in *Montaigne dans tous ses états*, pp. 69–120, and his *Reproduction en quadricrome*, pp. xiii–xix.

¹² We know that Gournay did not see EB before the printing of the first state of the 1595 Paris edition.

seems to have continued to make additions and alterations even after the *mise au net* went off to the printer. EB was not in itself a definitive text.

Simonin intended to use the 1595 edition as the basis for the new 'Pléiade' Montaigne, of which he had been appointed the general editor. But while this project was under way, he died suddenly in November 2000. After an interim, the general editorship of this project passed to Jean Céard; that project is still in train. However, Céard had already entered the lists in this editorial controversy by publishing an edition of the 1595 *Essais*.¹³ Opening Céard's edition is a visual surprise and challenge. Although the spelling of the original has been modernized, and the text equipped with the usual scholarly apparatus, the page layout now no longer presents the piecemeal paragraphing of twentieth-century editors, but solid blocks of text relieved only by Montaigne's quotations from Latin.¹⁴ Such a way of printing a text was by no means unusual in Renaissance prose literature, yet it takes on a particular resonance in respect of the *Essais*. Sense is now no longer imposed by editorial diktat, but left to the reader, whose freedom of movement — in Montaigne's terms, freedom to judge — is paradoxically greater than if reading is 'guided' by artificially invented paragraph divisions. With the text as a single, continuously flowing entity, the reader's sense-making mechanisms are constantly sharpened into responsibilities and choices, and yet no *découpage* he or she makes need ever be exactly the same: different readings, conducted at different speeds and times, are permissible, long-range or localized as need be, in response to the dialogue that the text sets up between itself and its *destinataire*. The *Essais* thereby become a true collaborative adventure with the reader, who is now forcibly struck by the *Essais*' literary particularities — the polysemic 'mots en un coin' that Montaigne leaves for the diligent reader, organized into internal patterns and repetitions; the positioning and density of quotations; the relationship of an essay to its title; and, not least, the development of a Protean subjectivity articulated through a narrative *je* that enriches and complexifies the notions of *essai* and *expérience*.

Not all were convinced by Simonin's views, nor persuaded by Céard's championing of the 1595 edition, least of all Tournon. On two successive occasions, in 1999 and 2000, vigorous exchanges of views between Simonin and Tournon took place in the pages of the *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Montaigne*.¹⁵ Simonin argued that the textual tradition of the *Essais* pointed to a much larger and more complex problem than editors (including Tournon) had been willing to admit, and that it was mistaken to give automatic

¹³ *Montaigne: 'Les Essais'*, ed. by Denis Bjaï, Bénédicte Boudou, Jean Céard and Isabelle Pantin, 'La Pochothèque' (Paris, Livre de Poche, 2001).

¹⁴ The ABC layering of the text has also disappeared, as a modern interpolation.

¹⁵ André Tournon, 'L'Exemplaire et la copie', *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Montaigne*, VIII^e série, no. 13–14 (janvier–juin 1999), 71–77, responding to Simonin's 'Montaigne, son éditeur. . .'; the exchange was pursued in Michel Simonin, 'L'Exemplaire et l'édition posthume', *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Montaigne*, VIII^e série, no. 17–18 (janvier–juin 2000), 121–29; and André Tournon, 'Réponses', 129–31.

preference to EB in dealing with this issue. Tournon pointed out that Simonin's views depended partly on hypothesizing *ex silentio* and, as a corollary, on demoting a fully extant document that was verifiably in Montaigne's own hand. Meanwhile, two years later, a packed auditorium in the BNF was the forum for a full-scale debate between Tournon and Céard on the relative merits of their respective editorial approaches.¹⁶

'De pareil texte, il est évidemment exclu que jamais personne puisse donner une édition rendant toute autre superflue'. Saulnier's words in the 1965 Preface to his re-edition of Villey seem prescient,¹⁷ but he could hardly have anticipated that two of his own former pupils, Tournon and Simonin, would lead the way in contesting the editorial tradition that Villey represented. It is likely that that tradition will continue for some time yet, if only because there is no general agreement as to what might replace it or how, alternatively, it might be satisfactorily emended. With passionate arguments on all sides, the debate shows no sign of flagging. But one thing is clear: the story of Montaigne's *Essais* has become more polymorphous, challenging and intricate even than we knew it was. The certainties of twentieth-century scholarship already seem a long way behind us.

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¹⁶ 'Les deux visages des *Essais*', BNF, 9 February 2002; André Tournon, 'Du bon usage de l'édition posthume des *Essais*' and Jean Céard, 'Montaigne et ses lecteurs: l'édition de 1595', both presentations being available on line at the website of the Société Internationale des Amis de Montaigne (www.univ-lyon3.fr/cedic/montaigne/visagesessais.htm).

¹⁷ *Les 'Essais' de Michel de Montaigne*, p. v.