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Michel de Montaigne, *Apology for Raymond Sebond*. Translated with notes and introduction by Roger Ariew and Marjorie Grene. Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 2003. 184 pp. Notes and bibliography. \$29.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-87220-680-7; \$9.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-87220-679-3.

Review by Allan Tulchin, George Mason University.

Michel de Montaigne's *Essays*--a term which he essentially invented--are among the great classics of European literature, attracting generations of readers because they give a remarkably intimate view of the fascinating mind of their author, even though they are also quite difficult to read. The first major difficulty is that the *Essays* were greatly modified and expanded between the first edition of 1580 through the posthumous edition of 1595. Most modern editions of Montaigne include notations in the text to indicate when additions or changes occur--without these, the text is frequently incomprehensible. The second difficulty is that Montaigne's prose is dense with quotations in multiple languages, as well as literary and historical allusions. As a result, annotations are crucial to understanding Montaigne's text. Finally, Montaigne's prose is sinuous rather than declarative; a good translation should aim to preserve the fascination of his style without making it frustrating rather than seductive.

Montaigne's longest and most famous essay is the "Apology for Raymond Sebond" (Book II, chapter 12 of the *Essays*). I would recommend using it only with advanced undergraduates. If you have first-year students who can enjoy reading the "Apology," I can only say that I am very jealous. The argument in the "Apology" is that without being enlightened by Revelation, humanity cannot understand the world. But what is the most fun thing about reading any of Montaigne is being in the company of a sophisticated and original mind. Although Montaigne's conclusions in the "Apology" are somewhat conventional, his method of obtaining them is not. Nonetheless, were I to teach Montaigne, I would probably use other essays--on "Cannibals", for example, or on "Friendship," which highlight his more original views. But along with Hobbes, Montaigne is the great master of non-fictional prose in the early modern period. Whatever you choose to read of his works, it is hard to go wrong.

Despite the difficulty of the "Apology," it appears that this new edition of it is intended as a student edition; it is not especially suitable for scholarly use. There are already two major translations of Montaigne's *Essays* into English, both of which remain in print, by Donald Frame and M.A. Screech.[1] Frame's, first published nearly fifty years ago, is deservedly famous as a translation that preserves Montaigne's rhythms with remarkable integrity. Screech's uses a slightly more up-to-date English, and the "Apology" can be purchased separately.[2] Ariew and Grene provide a perfectly serviceable translation, although I do not find it superior to either of its predecessors. Ariew and Grene also provide subheadings to the text, largely following those in the Frame translation.

As noted above, any edition of Montaigne requires annotation for today's students, given the enormous wealth of allusions and quotations in his works. The translators should have had little difficulty providing notes, however, since the standard French edition of Montaigne, in the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, provides very helpful ones, which explain all allusions and give the source for all quotations. Here I would find fault with Ariew and Grene, since although they provide the source for all quotations, they do not give any other notes. For example, on page five of their translation, the source for a story about a Tartar king goes unexplained, as do references to a host of Greek philosophers on page seventy-seven. Should any students wonder who on earth is the mad Italian poet referred to on pages fifty-three and fifty-four, they will not learn the answer here. (It is Tasso). Screech's notes are even more copious than those of the Pléiade. (Frame, however, only gives the author of quotations, not the source, and no other notes). Ariew and Grene's introduction is reasonably competent, and their bibliography, if short, is well-chosen, although not annotated.

In short, as long as Screech is in print, I would recommend it over Grene and Ariew. It costs three dollars more, but the notes are worth the price. Ariew and Grene do, however, provide a viable alternative.

NOTES

[1] Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Works of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1948); Michel de Montaigne, *The Essays of Michel de Montaigne*, trans. M.A. Screech (London: Penguin, 1987).

[2] Michel de Montaigne, *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*, trans. M.A. Screech (London: Penguin, 1988).

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