

*Lectures du Troisième Livre des "Essais" de Montaigne.* Philippe Desan, ed. Champion Classiques Essais 26. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2016. 382 pp. €15.

*"Je suis moi-même la matière de mon livre": Lecture du livre III des "Essais."* Frank Lestringant.

Cours. Mont-Saint-Aignan: Presses universitaires de Rouen et du Havre and CNED, 2016. 212 pp. €13.

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The stated goal of this new collection of articles on the third book of Montaigne's *Essais* is to "treat all chapters equally, in order to not repeat the hierarchy and common patterns of interpretation" (preface, n.p.). Edited by Philippe Desan, the volume offers readings of all thirteen chapters of the third book by American and European Montaigne scholars, preceded by two articles—one authored by Desan himself, the other by Jean Balsamo—that both deal with the genesis of the third book and the reasons for why it differs in form and content from the first two books of the *Essais*.

In his article "On the Nature of the Third Book of the *Essais*," Desan links the particular features of this book, namely an increased emphasis on the private self with an apparent retreat from politics, to the historical context of the French Wars of Religion, and more particularly to Montaigne's stalled political career in the 1580s. Complementing Desan's thesis that Montaigne's "rejection of history represents a literary posture rather than a reality" (14), Jean Balsamo explains the peculiar features of the third book with regard to contemporary editorial practices. He shows Montaigne to be highly aware of editorial constraints and argues that Montaigne was forced to present a new text in 1588 because the printer's right to the previous edition of the first and second books had expired. Even if not shared by all Montaigne scholars, Balsamo's hypothesis on Montaigne's use of a secretary to whom he dictated a first autograph version of his texts invites new interpretations of the *Essais*. His remark that "the conversation with the book was thus a conversation with the secretary" (34) is an implicit response to another tradition of reading the *Essais* as the continuation of Montaigne's interrupted conversation with his friend Étienne de La Boétie, and merits to be developed further in the future.

The articles that are devoted to the thirteen individual chapters of the third book develop their arguments by linking Montaigne's text to contemporary cultural practices and ideas, or by exploring intertextual connections to classical authors. Articles that establish connections between a given topic in Montaigne and current discussions remain an exception, such as Jan Miernowski's essay about "De l'expérience" (*Essais* 3.13), a piece that contains some thought-provoking, albeit passing, remarks on consciousness and finitude in recent accounts of artificial and human intelligence. More representative of the volume as a whole are approaches that situate Montaigne's text within the framework of Renaissance politics, practices, and ideas, such as the article by Bruno Meniel

who suggests that when praising prudential wording in the chapter “Des boitoux” (*Essais* 3.11), “Montaigne transposes into the intellectual domain” a practice recommended to judicial investigators in the sixteenth century (327).

Despite a staggering number of important interpretations that the chapters of Montaigne’s third book have received, a few contributors to this volume manage to truly shed new light on them. Among these, Amy Graves Monroe’s interpretation of the chapter “Des cochés” (*Essais* 3.6) is particularly remarkable for its originality. Basing her argument on the ambiguity of the French title word *coches* (which could designate both coaches and sows), Graves Monroe shows how the image of the sow occurs in Montaigne’s text at several instances, and how it connects to key texts of political philosophy despite its playful use by Montaigne. Ultimately, she argues, the leitmotif of the sow expresses “the difficulty of seeing . . . the slightest evidence of man’s superiority over animals,” a theme that has been little explored by scholars writing on this chapter (213).

Despite a similar title, Frank Lestringant’s monograph on Montaigne’s third book varies immensely in goal, approach, and targeted audience from the collection of scholarly articles edited by Desan. Published as part of a book series in which established scholars introduce students to canonical works of French literature, and possibly to help them prepare the *agrégation* examination to become teachers in the public education system, Lestringant’s book is clearly not geared toward Montaigne specialists. Divided into four sections, it first provides a condensed overview of Montaigne’s life (section 1) and discusses the various meanings of the term *essai* (section 2), before addressing some key questions in the interpretation of Montaigne’s work, such as the role of skepticism, the mind-body connection, and Montaigne’s position during the religious and political conflicts of his time (section 3, somewhat misleadingly entitled “La bibliothèque des *Essais*”). Section 4—which, at 110 pages, is the longest part of the book—is devoted to a reading of selected chapters of the third book of the *Essais*. The book concludes with an overview of Montaigne reception from the seventeenth to the mid-twentieth century.

Lacking a preface or introduction, Lestringant’s book has no stated goal, but we learn from the back cover that it “analyzes some of the most famous parts of the third book.” Out of the thirteen chapters of Montaigne’s third book, Lestringant indeed chooses those that have received most attention to date. His selection is somewhat uneven: out of the eight chapters singled out for discussion, five are discussed very briefly (most analyses taking up no more than four pages), while a discussion of “De la physionomie” (*Essais* 3.12) covers twenty-six pages and that of “Des cochés” (*Essais* 3.6) extends to forty-eight pages. Lestringant’s analysis of these chapters is brilliant, connecting his reading of Montaigne to the two major fields of Renaissance studies in which he has been a leading figure for several decades, i.e., European encounters with the New World and literary accounts of the French Wars of Religion.

The most valuable parts of Lestringant's book—his interpretation of Montaigne's "Des coches" and "De la physionomie," as well as his reflections on André Gide as reader of Montaigne—are condensed versions of work previously published in monographs. Since this book does not lay claim to scholarly innovation but is meant to help students read Montaigne, it deserves praise for its concise and learned introduction; the first three sections of the book can be used to familiarize novice readers with Montaigne's life and its historical context, with his writing style, and with major trends in past and current Montaigne research. The section of Lestringant's book devoted to the actual reading of Montaigne's essays, however, ultimately does not serve the purpose of the book as well as it might; it is much rather a reflection of the author's own scholarly interests—compelling as these are—than a well-balanced, comprehensive introduction to the various themes in the third book of Montaigne's *Essais*. The fact that Lestringant's book was hastily put together once Montaigne appeared on the list of literary works to be read for the French agrégation examination in 2016 is also visible from editorial oversights: in places, quotations and footnotes are mismatched (37), the same Montaigne quotation is repeated within two successive sentences (34), and long passages in the various sections of the book are repeated without the slightest variation (45–46, 137).

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*Poètes moralistes du Moyen Âge allemand, XIIIe–XVe siècle.*

Danielle Buschinger.

Recherches littéraires médiévales 23. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2017. 440 pp. €59.

It might be a little unusual to review a book dedicated to late medieval German didactic poets in this journal, but since Danielle Buschinger, a well-known senior scholar in medieval German literature, traces this genre well into the fifteenth century, we still find ourselves within the same chronological framework. Since the early thirteenth century, many German poets turned to the topic of social, religious, philosophical, moral, and ethical criticism. Buschinger introduces us to this fairly large group of poets and discusses their backgrounds, their intentions, themes, and ideas, but there are no new observations, and we could easily rely on the relevant *Verfasserlexikon*, for instance. Some of the best known poets were Der Wilde Alexander, Boppe, Frauenlob, Der Marner, Der Meißner, Oswald von Wolkenstein, Rumelant von Sachsen, or Süßkint von Trimberg.

Buschinger summarizes all the relevant data and focuses, especially, on the individual themes treated by those poets. The major issues are the political situation in the Holy Roman Empire, the relationships among people (friendship, love, longing for a