

# **THE FRENCH RENAISSANCE AND ITS HERITAGE**

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Essays Presented to Alan M. Boase

Edited by  
D. R. Haggis

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Volume 1

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Pour Prof. Boase Marc  
Chagall.



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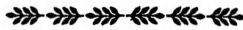


*essays presented to*

Alan M. Boase

*M.A., PH.D., Officier de la Légion d'Honneur  
Professor Emeritus of French in  
the University of Glasgow*

*by Colleagues, Pupils  
and Friends*



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*Erratum*

*p. xi The first line on this page should be read as  
the first line on p. xii*

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DRAWING BY MARC CHAGALL PRESENTED TO  
ALAN BOASE  
*frontispiece*

PHOTOGRAPH OF ALAN BOASE  
*facing page ix*





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## Alan Martin Boase



A SCHOLAR'S LIFE cannot be resumed in the few dates, titles and places which indicate his various offices and publications; but certain deductions may be made from them.

In the case of ALAN BOASE, the retiring Marshall Professor of French in the University of Glasgow, who held that Chair from 1937 to 1965, it is not unimportant to note that his family, while originating in part from Cornwall, was long associated with Scotland. His father, Norman Boase, C.B.E., was a distinguished citizen, being President of the universally famous golf club at St Andrews, and his son is no mean golfer, as well as inheriting something of his father's capacity for affairs. It will also be noted that ALAN BOASE, being born in 1902, was one of that remarkable generation which had to consolidate and further the achievements of those predecessors who had founded the first schools of modern languages in our universities. As such modern subjects then had little status or tradition behind them, only men of unusual capacities could carry out this task.

ALAN BOASE had the good fortune of enjoying all the benefits of such venerable institutions as Eton, the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and the Sorbonne. Yet it is fitting that a scholar whose mind and temperament inclined him from the start to become a devotee of Montaigne, should have refused to take these or any other advantages for granted. While appreciating what Eton could provide, he kept his mind open to other conceptions of education, and to more experimental types of school. Although

his career at New College, Oxford, was outstanding, he remained sceptical of the emphasis laid there on conventional philological studies, and he was right in reducing or modifying that element of French teaching in Glasgow, while always discovering the best-qualified staff to do it. Proceeding to Trinity College, Cambridge, for his postgraduate work under the late H. F. Stewart, he was fortunate in coming into direct contact with such original thinkers of his own generation as I. A. Richards and F. R. Leavis, and this inspired him to give a new impulse and direction to the teaching of French, comparable with that which has revolutionized English Studies in the universities in our time. Finally, at both Oxford and Cambridge he learnt to respect the tutorial and seminar systems, and their tradition of giving the undergraduate the utmost personal contact with his supervisor.

After these profitable years of study, instead of retreating to some comfortable academic haven, he ventured into the provinces, teaching first at Sheffield (1929–36), where he met his gifted wife, Grizelle Forster, the daughter of the late Professor E. S. Forster of that University. He did not come to Glasgow without professorial experience, having first occupied the Chair of French in the University College of Southampton.

ALAN BOASE thus assumed the Marshall Chair, not only with an academic and professional background of the highest order, but with matured views on the nature and orientation of French Studies. His lively and keenly pursued interests, not only in his own special field of the Renaissance, but also in education, the drama, the fine arts, history, politics, contemporary writing, enabled him to survey and dominate the entire range of his subject as few professors were then, or are now, capable of doing. While he could, and did, build upon the scholarly basis laid down by his predecessor, Professor Martin, for whose work he had every respect, he had also to take into account the type of recruitment and the degree-structures that already existed. His pupils ought to be eternally grateful for the way in which he insisted that as much attention must be given to the 'Ordinary' student as to any other. He had a most difficult task in extending and maintaining

achievement ought to give pause to those who are in any way such teaching in small groups, in a rapidly expanding department. At the same time, by introducing a wide variety of optional subjects, he was able to provide some of those advantages which, as they demand great personal initiative as much as close personal supervision, had hitherto been the privilege of Oxford and Cambridge. Recognition was not slow to come to him for such efforts, in the award he received of the decoration of the Légion d'Honneur; or his election as Dean of his Faculty; or his part as a founder and President of the now indispensable Association of Professors of French; or the visiting professorships that he has held abroad.

It is evident that long before his regretted retirement ALAN BOASE had fully achieved most of the things he had set out to do, through the shaping of a Department of French Studies which can set an example to the universities in Britain and to those in many other countries, in its coherence, originality and modernity. At the same time he brought great honour to the University of Glasgow through the variety and quality of his numerous publications. While having proved himself, at an early age, to be a high authority on Montaigne, his most original contribution was thought, in France, to be his discovery of a most important and hitherto unknown poet, Jean de Sponde, whose poems and meditations he edited and expounded as no other French or British scholar could have done. Equally at home in contemporary French literature, his contribution to *France: A Companion to French Studies* was a model of what such scholarly essays ought to be. Quick to realize that a judicious choice of poems might be an act of criticism of the first order, he produced his comprehensive anthologies of French poetry, to which he gave many years of careful thought, and which have reformed and redirected taste in this domain throughout the country, both in the schools and in the universities.

The little that has been said here is enough to show that ALAN BOASE's academic adventure was as complete and as successful as any scholar's life can hope to be. His modesty over such a real

ambitious. Glasgow has every reason to be proud of the devoted service of an unusually thoughtful, unusually sensitive, and unusually imaginative scholar and educator, who so profoundly respected and so honestly employed the gifts with which he found himself endowed. It is now our turn to respect those gifts. It is fitting, now, that some of those who are qualified to appreciate his qualities should join together in paying a tribute which he has so well deserved from the community of scholars. This we can only do in that humble form which is traditional in the academic world, but which is never perfunctorily offered. Those who have contributed to or supported this collection, and those who were his colleagues or pupils, or both, wish him, not retirement – a vain hope for one who will wither age, rather than yield to it – but the leisure and health which will enable him to give further evidence of his acute, spontaneous, and always generous mind. Of what has gone before, we can only say, in Samuel Johnson's words,

*Nihil quod tetigit non ornavit.*

F.H.S.

# List of Major Publications

## by Alan M. Boase



*THE FORTUNES OF MONTAIGNE. A History of the Essays in France, 1580–1669*, London, Methuen, 1935.

### EDITIONS

Montaigne, *Selected Essays*, edited by Arthur Tilley and A. M. Boase, Manchester University Press, 1934. (Revised edition 1954, with additional Essays, and new Preface by Alan M. Boase.)

Jean Cocteau, *La Machine infernale* (with a Preface by Alan M. Boase), London, Nelson, 1944.

Sponde, *Sonnets et Stances de la Mort*, introduction de Alan Boase, Paris, Corti, 1948.

Sponde, *Poésies*. Texte établi par Alan Boase et François Ruchon. Avec une 'Etude sur les poésies de Jean de Sponde' par Alan Boase, Geneva, Cailler, 1949.

Sponde, *Méditations, avec un Essai de Poèmes chrétiens*. Introduction de Alan Boase, Paris, Corti, 1954. (This long introduction includes a section, pp. xiii–xcix, on 'La Vie de Sponde'.)

### ANTHOLOGIES

*The Poetry of France. From André Chénier to Pierre Emmanuel*. An Anthology with Introduction and Notes by Alan M. Boase, London, Methuen, 1952.

*List of Publications by Alan M. Boase*

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*The Poetry of France*. Vol. I: 1400–1600. An Anthology with Introduction and Notes by Alan M. Boase, London, Methuen, 1964.

*The Poetry of France*. Vol. III: 1800–1900. An Anthology with Introduction and Notes by Alan M. Boase, London, Methuen, 1967.

ARTICLES

‘Montaigne annoté par Florimond de Raemond’, *Revue du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, XV (1928), pp. 237–78.

‘Then Malherbe came’, *The Criterion*, X (1930–1), pp. 287–306.

‘Un lecteur hollandais de Montaigne: Pieter van Veen’, in: *Mélanges offerts à M Abel Lefranc*, Paris, Droz, 1936, pp. 408–17.

‘Montaigne et la sorcellerie’, *Humanisme et Renaissance*, II (1935), pp. 402–21.

‘French Literature: the Twentieth Century’, in: *France: A Companion to French Studies*, ed. R. L. Graeme Ritchie, London, Methuen, 1937, pp. 352–401. (Fifth edition, revised, 1951, includes additional section on ‘The Last Ten Years’.)

‘Jean de Sponde, un poète inconnu’, *Mesures*, V, no. 4 (15 October 1939), pp. 127–51.

‘Poètes anglais et français de l’époque baroque’, *Revue des sciences humaines*, XIV (1949), N.S. fasc. 55–6, pp. 155–84.

‘Mr Turnell’s Criticism’, *Scrutiny*, XVI (1949), pp. 250–9.

‘Du nouveau sur Jean de Sponde’, *Mercure de France*, CCCXII, no. 1056 (1 August 1951), pp. 641–7.

‘The Interpretation of *Les Lettres persanes*’, in: *The French Mind. Studies in honour of Gustave Rudler*, ed. Will Moore, Rhoda Sutherland and Enid Starkie, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1952, pp. 152–69.

‘Tradition and Revaluation in the French Anthology, 1692–1960’, in: *Essays presented to C. M. Girdlestone*, University of Durham, 1960, pp. 51–63.

*List of Publications by Alan M. Boase*

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- 'The Definition of Mannerism', in: *Proceedings of the Third Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association, 21–26 August 1961, Utrecht, 's Gravenhage*, Monton, 1962, pp. 143–55.
- 'Tradition et révision de valeurs dans l'anthologie française (1692–1960)', *Annales de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines d'Aix*, xxxvi (1962), pp. 31–47.
- 'Critiques français, critiques anglais, ce qui les divise. Réponse à Yves Bonnefoy. Communication de Alan Boase (Glasgow) XV<sup>e</sup> Congrès de l'Association, le 26 juillet 1963', *Cahiers de l'Association internationale des Études françaises*, no. 16 (March 1964), pp. 157–65.
- 'Le grand madrigalier', in: *De Ronsard à Breton, recueil d'essais. Hommages à Marcel Raymond*, Paris, Corti, 1967, pp. 85–89.
- 'The Early History of the *Essai* Title in France and Britain', in: *Studies in French Literature presented to H. W. Lawton by colleagues, pupils and friends*, Manchester University Press, 1968, pp. 67–73.



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## Gide's *Essai sur Montaigne*: an assessment



IF THERE IS one fact about Gide's *Essai sur Montaigne* which is not in dispute, it is that it was intended to figure in a history of literature being prepared by André Malraux. Gide twice notes the fact in his diary at the time when he is working on the project. Albert Thibaudet corroborates it in an article written in advance of the date of publication of the *Essai*.<sup>1</sup> Louis Martin-Chauffier confers upon it the authority of a painstaking and knowledgeable editor.<sup>2</sup> Günter Krebber works it, with scholarly diligence, into a worthy study of Gide's criticism.<sup>3</sup> It is as though the parable of the widow's mites had run away with its audience. For the other fact which is just as certain is that, when the *Tableau de la Littérature française* at last appeared,<sup>4</sup> it did not include Gide's *Essai*.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Nouvelles littéraires*, samedi, 30 mars 1929, 'Montaigne et André Gide'.

<sup>2</sup> *Œuvres complètes d'André Gide*, t. XV, p. ix.

<sup>3</sup> *Untersuchungen zur Ästhetik und Kritik André Gides* (Geneva, 1959), p. 109.

<sup>4</sup> *Tableau de la Littérature française. XVII<sup>e</sup> – XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles. De Corneille à Chénier* (Paris, 1939).

<sup>5</sup> The reader may wish to be reminded that Gide's criticism of Montaigne comprises the following texts:

- (a) the *Essai sur Montaigne*, which we take to be the centre-piece;
- (b) *Suivant Montaigne*, published shortly before the *Essai*, in the June number of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, 1929. The two were then incorporated in a single volume (J. Schiffrin, Ed. de la Pléiade, Paris, 1929);
- (c) the preface to a Montaigne anthology which Gide prepared at the request of an American publisher in 1939. Several firms shared the copyright: we quote from *Les Pages immortelles de Montaigne* (Ed. Corrêa, Paris, 1939).

The measure of agreement among the various texts is such that, except in our references, we do not distinguish between them.

There is an obvious explanation in the period of literary history – *De Corneille à Chénier* – which the 1939 *Tableau* sets out to cover. But it would be interesting to know when and for what reasons the decision was taken to limit the volume in this way. Did Gide precipitate the decision by publishing his contribution independently? Or was the decision to publish independently consequent on a change in the original plan? Neither is likely. Gide speaks about ‘l’étude sur Montaigne que j’ai promise à Malraux’ on the 14th of September 1928;<sup>1</sup> he is correcting the proofs on the 29th of January 1929;<sup>2</sup> Thibaudet’s article appears on the 30th of March; the Pléiade edition of the *Essai sur Montaigne* carries an *achevé d’imprimer* of the 10th of June. There is no room here for a change of plan. The implication is rather that by publishing the *Essai* in advance of the corporate effort, and Thibaudet’s article in advance of the *Essai*, it was intended to awaken interest in a forthcoming literary event.

But if such was the intention, then the *Essai* would have had to make a very deep impression on the public to be possessed of a very long memory, for the effect to have been achieved. For it was only in 1939 that something like the original project came to fruition. Here again, a piece of literary history is missing. M. André Vandegans, discussing the schemes initiated by Malraux when he became a close associate of the *N.R.F.*, writes:

Enfin, dès 1928, il s’occupa de dresser le fameux *Tableau de la littérature française*, qui ne sera achevé que onze ans plus tard: on avait sans doute eu du mal à réunir toutes les collaborations que réclamait cette oeuvre collective.<sup>3</sup>

The suggestion makes up in plausibility what it lacks in precision. Whatever the reason, it seems likely that, as the delay grew longer, less importance would be attached to the connection between the *Essai* and the proposed history, until it was felt that there was no point in distorting any shape which the other contributions

<sup>1</sup> *Journal* (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1948), p. 887.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 911.

<sup>3</sup> *La jeunesse littéraire d’André Malraux* (J.-J. Pauvert, sans lieu, 1964), p. 271.

could assume – *De Corneille à Chénier*, for example – in order to accommodate it.<sup>1</sup>

Behind the *Essai*, an initiative of Malraux; behind its separate publication, a publicity motive: the study which emerged in these circumstances might be expected to stand in a loose relationship to its author, but such is not the case. Gide began by being oppressed by the obligation to write on Montaigne:

Mon horizon est tout obstrué par ce roman que j'ai promis à l'Amérique (*L'École des Femmes*) . . . puis par ce portrait de Montaigne pour l'*Histoire de la Littérature* de Malraux. Il me tarde de n'avoir plus devant moi que . . . moi-même.<sup>2</sup>

On further reflection, however, it seemed to him that he might write about Montaigne without losing sight of current preoccupations:

A dire vrai, ce livre (*L'École des Femmes*) ne m'intéresse guère . . . Il ne se relie pas étroitement à mes préoccupations actuelles, auxquelles je pourrais plus facilement donner vent dans l'étude sur Montaigne . . . où sans doute je trouverai prétexte légitime à exprimer quelques-unes des considérations qui me tiennent le plus à cœur.<sup>3</sup>

The speed with which he was able to complete the task – still talking about it in the future in mid-September, correcting the proofs in January – leads one to suppose that he was right, and that the subject lent itself to his mood of self-absorption. Thus the obligation became an opportunity, and Gide, if he did not propose, must have welcomed the idea that the *Essai* might be published without delay. For besides being a work of criticism, it was a manifesto, as a remark in the diary makes clear:

<sup>1</sup> The volume published by Gallimard in 1962 – *Tableau de la Littérature française. De Rutebeuf à Descartes* – must be supposed to stand in fairly tenuous relationship to anything that was planned for the earlier period some thirty years beforehand. The text of the *Essai sur Montaigne* is, however, reproduced there in something like the context for which it was intended.

<sup>2</sup> *Journal*, p. 886.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 887.

Corrigé les épreuves de mon *Montaigne*. A le relire il me paraît que je m'y suis montré soucieux de ne rien forcer; que ma propre position, devant la philosophie que je dégage des *Essais*, va paraître bien incertaine. Pourtant, la période des hésitations est passée; mais combien ce que je voudrais à présent me paraît difficile à dire.<sup>1</sup>

What Gide aimed at, via his *Montaigne*, was some statement of ultimate wisdom, or at any rate, of *his* ultimate wisdom, such as he found in Book III of the *Essais*, by which time Montaigne,

parfaitement maître, non de lui-même (il ne le sera jamais et ne peut l'être), mais de son sujet, ne tâtonne plus; il sait ce qu'il veut dire . . . et il le dit excellemment . . .<sup>2</sup>

Although we believe that Gide, for all his grumbling, was peculiarly ready to write about Montaigne at the time when he did, this is not to suggest that his interest in Montaigne, relative to the date of publication of the *Essai*, was a recent or sudden development. Any such notion can be dismissed on the strength of the Indexes to the two Pléiade volumes of the *Journal*, together with the *Index détaillé des 'Œuvres complètes d'André Gide.'*<sup>3</sup> Frieda S. Brown has found enough encouragement in the mentions which Gide makes in his diary, between 1904 and 1906, of reading the *Essais*, to devote an article to 'Montaigne and Gide's *La Porte étroite*'.<sup>4</sup> She dwells longer on the component parts of the title considered separately than she does on their relationship to one another, but the conclusion, that Alissa's spiritual quest and end provide 'strong testimony for the truth of Montaigne's observation that men cannot transcend their limitations',<sup>5</sup> would seem to be valid.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, beside the probability that the moral line of *La Porte étroite* tends toward a Montaigne-type conclusion, there is the fact that several of the ideas expressed, in the *Essai, Suivant*

<sup>1</sup> *Journal*, p. 911.

<sup>2</sup> *O.C.*, t. XV, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Justin O'Brien; Asnières-sur-Seine, 1954.

<sup>4</sup> *PMLA*, vol. LXXXII, no. 1, March 1967, pp. 136-41.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>6</sup> Gide would, of course, also be familiar with Pascal's version of Montaigne's thoughts on the subject: 'le malheur veut que qui fait l'ange fait la bête'.

Montaigne, or the preface to the 1939 anthology, had been formulated at an earlier date, sometimes much earlier. Gide's objection to the *Apologie*, for example: that the vivacity of Montaigne's style is lost in the effort of systematic composition, is noted among the *Feuillets* or groups of undated fragments which he inserts at intervals in the *Journal*.<sup>1</sup> Also in the *Feuillets* is the quotation from Saint-Évremond, comparing Plutarch unfavourably with Sallust or Montaigne in the matter of their understanding of human complexity.<sup>2</sup> And in a diary entry, the notion of a martyred Gide-Montaigne after the manner of Dostoevsky's parable of the Grand Inquisitor.<sup>3</sup> So that, while there is reason to think that Gide attached particular importance to the effort to situate himself relative to Montaigne in the winter of 1928–9, there is no doubt but what the *Essai* represents the fruit of long acquaintance.

The frame of mind in which Gide, in 1928, approaches the task of writing about Montaigne – 'je trouverai prétexte légitime à exprimer quelques-unes des considérations qui me tiennent le plus à cœur'<sup>4</sup> – is such that no one would be very much surprised if his conclusions were suspect. We are all agreed that the critic's first duty is to extract himself from his inner maze and to focus on the product of another mind. When is there ever a legitimate pretext for doing otherwise? While we savour these general truths, we ought however to consider Gide's terms of reference. Thibaudet, in his article in the *Nouvelles littéraires*, explains the theory behind the forthcoming volume thus:

L'idéal eût été de faire écrire le chapitre sur chaque auteur par son successeur ou son Epigone actuel . . .

And when the *Tableau* at last appears, the same guiding principle is enunciated in the preface – a preface written, not, as one might

<sup>1</sup> *Journal*, pp. 353–4. Although printed in the *Journal* between the consecutive entries for 1911 and 1912, this particular *Feuille*t might date from 1906, when – diary entry of 21 mars – we find him 'patiently advancing' in the *Apologie*.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 662.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, 30 novembre (1924), p. 796.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 887.

expect, by Malraux, but by Gide. (The reversal of roles is complete: Malraux figures as a contributor, with an essay on Laclos, while Gide provides the introductory comment which would normally be furnished by the editor. Why the latter? Would such a volume without the voice of Gide have been like a Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer film without the lion?) Gide explains the rationale of the volume in such a way as to make his subjective approach to the study of Montaigne seem unexceptionable:

Chaque historien de la littérature a plus ou moins grand souci de considérer chaque auteur dans ses rapports avec son temps; de dénoncer des filiations, des influences; d'établir telles corrélations subtiles, telles motivations qui nous livrent enfin cet auteur, toutes pensées liées, beaucoup moins indépendant et original qu'il n'avait pu d'abord nous paraître et se croire lui-même . . .

Notre propos est tout différent. Le seul rattachement que nous ayons cherché, dans la galerie de portraits que voici, c'est celui du peintre au modèle: l'effet d'une prédilection.<sup>1</sup>

We are bound to say that the description of a possible effect of literary history seems fair, though no more than Gide do we imagine that literary history can be dispensed with. More important, however, is the alternative which he proposes. In the situation he describes, the need for the critic to strive for understanding through objectivity does not arise. The understanding is intuitive, exists prior to the critical effort, guarantees its success. On the one hand, we may judge that this kind of argument is fraught with the difficulties which bother Icarus:

Je n'extrais du plus beau syllogisme que ce que j'y avais mis d'abord. Si j'y mets Dieu, je l'y retrouve.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, in support of the view that critics of Montaigne are born, not made, Gide might refer us to the case of Pierre Hamp, in whose company he travels, together with Paul Desjardins, to Morocco, in 1923:

<sup>1</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Romans* (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1958), p. 1435, *Thésée*.

Ce qui fait que Hamp ne m'exaspère pas d'avantage, c'est qu'il exaspère encore bien plus Desjardins. C'est son assurance qui choque ; il n'est point sot, mais il ne laisse habiter son esprit par rien que d'indubitable . . . On voudrait lui faire lire Montaigne, et l'on désespère de lui lorsqu'on apprend qu'il a pour livre de chevet les *Essais*.<sup>1</sup>

The *Essai sur Montaigne* and the *Tableau* set out from the assumption that certain insights may be granted to men of a certain cast of mind which are not the necessary perquisites of other men practising a particular discipline. He would be a presumptuous scholar who was not willing at least to entertain the notion.

In reality, of course, Gide exaggerates the difference between a subjective and a scholarly approach. At the beginning of the *Essai* he tenders a disclaimer the sense of which is broadly that of his remarks in the preface to the *Tableau* quoted above. He will leave it to scholars, he says, to determine the historical importance of Montaigne, and to say whether,

peut-être, avant lui, Erasme n'avait point posé les premières bases d'une humaine sagesse dont les peuples encléricalisés de l'Europe avaient en ce temps grand besoin. *Tel que je suis, je le prends tel qu'il est.*<sup>2</sup>

The *naïveté* of Gide's approach, which we are to infer from his 'Tel que je suis . . .', is altogether relative. Immensely well read, he was perfectly capable of situating Montaigne in a historical perspective. He was familiar with Pascal's reactions to Montaigne, with those of Sainte-Beuve and Emerson. His own appreciation of Montaigne the man and the stylist shows unmistakably that he had assimilated, whether consciously or not, the lessons of the Romantic reappraisal of the essayist. He was familiar also with the work of Pierre Villey, and had adopted Villey's central thesis of a development in Montaigne's thought: Stoic, Pyrrhonist, Epicurean. If he paid less attention to the Bordeaux text, it was from choice and not from ignorance. It would be a mistake therefore to

<sup>1</sup> *Journal*, p. 756.

<sup>2</sup> *O.C.*, t. XV, pp. 3-4; my italics.

suppose that Gide, in disclaiming any special competence, denies the need for information.

There is no reason why we should not accept the *Essai* on the terms on which it is offered to us. Thibaudet indeed, to whose scholarly concern with Montaigne the Pléiade edition and posthumously published study amply testify, positively welcomes the sort of criticism – ‘partial et partiel’ – which the *Essai* represents. His argument deserves to be reproduced :

L'essai de Gide pourrait s'appeler *Montaigne et les problèmes gidiens*. Et voilà un dessein que j'approuve pleinement. Nous ne manquons pas d'excellents livres où Montaigne est étudié pour lui-même de manière historique et critique. Au besoin le grand travail de M. Pierre Villey dispenserait des autres. Mais une autre critique montaigniste a été fondée par l'auteur ou les auteurs, quels qu'ils soient, de *l'Entretien avec M. de Saci*. Pascal ne s'intéresse dans Montaigne que dans la partie où il peut profiter et pascaliser, laissant le reste de côté. *L'Entretien avec M. de Saci* c'est un *Montaigne et les problèmes pascaliens* . . . Si nous possédions douze ou quinze *Montaigne et moi*, à la manière de Pascal et de Gide, quel trésor et quels recoupements!<sup>1</sup>

A part of the interest of such studies would be proportional to the affection and esteem in which we held the figure of the commentator: there would still be ‘celui qu'on gobe’, as they used to say in the novels of Gyp, and ‘celui qu'on ne gobe pas’, but objections of principle would fall away. Not all of Thibaudet's readers have been convinced, however, for it is precisely an objection of principle which is brought by the only other scholar who has made a systematic attempt to evaluate Gide's criticism of Montaigne.

Günter Krebber, in his concluding chapter, represents Gide's sympathy for Montaigne as being on a par with his sympathy for Dostoevsky and for Goethe. These authors were for years his spiritual companions and advisers. In consequence, when he wrote about them what he had to say was inseparably bound up with some of the most personal elements of his thought. This is

<sup>1</sup> *Nouvelles littéraires*, samedi, 30 mars 1929.

borne out by a diary entry of 1922, at the time when he was lecturing on Dostoevsky:

tout ce que je trouve le moyen de dire à travers Dostoïevsky et à l'occasion de lui, me tient à cœur et j'y attache une grande importance. Ce sera, tout autant qu'un livre de critique, un livre de confessions, pour qui sait lire; ou plutôt: une profession de foi.<sup>1</sup>

Quoting this remark, Herr Krebber comments:

Die Gefahr einer solcher Kritik ist, dass sie zum Selbstporträt wird. Gide ist, wie früher gezeigt wurde, in seinen Montaigne-Essays dieser Gefahr erlegen, nicht aber in den Dostojewsky-Vorträgen und den Aufsätzen über Goethe.<sup>2</sup>

That the weakness of the Montaigne criticism had earlier been demonstrated is perhaps to claim too much. Three arguments had been advanced: (a) factors tending to limit the extent of Gide's sympathy with other authors were absent in the case of Montaigne; here, sympathy extended 'bis zur beinahe problemlosen Identifizierung';<sup>3</sup> (b) a summary of the contents of the *Essai sur Montaigne* enables us to recognize 'Angelpunkte den Moralkritik Gides';<sup>4</sup> (c) Gide preferred to read the *Essais* not in the Bordeaux version of the text but in the version of 1588; his account of Montaigne is based overwhelmingly on Book Three as it appeared in the 1588 edition. If we accept that (a) and (b) are accurate, it is still not clear why they constitute objections: there is no obvious reason why the state of affairs described in (a) should give rise to inferior criticism in the case of Montaigne, while the state of affairs described in (b) merely confirms the initial assumption – that there exists a family resemblance between Gide and Montaigne. The third argument looks to be more serious, but is unsupported by any discussion of what Gide might have neglected in Montaigne, so that we wonder whether Herr Krebber has spotted a major fault or a minor inconsistency: a selective approach to the

<sup>1</sup> *Journal*, p. 733.

<sup>2</sup> G. Krebber, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 111.