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Michel de Montaigne

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from Wikipedia: Michel Eyquem de Montaigne (French: 28 February 1533 - 13 September 1592) was one of the most influential writers of the French Renaissance, known for popularizing the essay as a literary genre. He became famous for his effortless ability to merge serious intellectual exercises with casual anecdotes and autobiography-and his massive volume *Essais* contains, to this day, some of the most widely influential essays ever written. Montaigne had a direct influence on writers all over the world, including René Descartes, Blaise Pascal, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Friedrich Nietzsche, Eric Hoffer, Isaac Asimov, and possibly on the later works of William Shakespeare. In his own lifetime, Montaigne was admired more as a statesman than as an author. The tendency in his essays to digress into anecdotes and personal ruminations was seen as detrimental to proper style, and his declaration that, 'I am myself the matter of my book', was viewed by his contemporaries as self-indulgent. In time, however, Montaigne would come to be recognized as embodying, perhaps better than any other author of his time, the spirit of freely entertaining doubt which began to emerge at that time. He is most famously known for his skeptical remark, 'Que sçay-je?' ('What do I know?', in Middle French; directly rendered *Que sais-je?* in modern French). Remarkably modern even to readers today, Montaigne's attempt to examine the world through the lens of the only thing he can depend on implicitly-his own judgment-makes him more accessible to modern readers than other authors of the Renaissance.

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