David Quint. *Montaigne and the Quality of Mercy: Ethical and Political Themes in the Essais*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998. Pp. xviii, 172.

David Quint has written a new book defining the ethics of Montaigne's *Essais*, in particular as they relate to the civil wars of his time. The book is thus quite different from earlier literary studies of the essayist, which Quint refers to as "deconstructionist" in his Preface. Quint also shies away from some perpetual literary questions about the self-portrait, preferring instead to see Montaigne not as a philosopher isolated in his tower, but rather very much in relation to political figures and events of his time. The book is not a work of social history, however. Quint's approach is one of close reading of the text of the *Essais* themselves.

The Preface summarizes the book and makes clear some of Quint's positions which will be elaborated in the chapters to come. Among these is the concept of an "ethics of accommodation," to which Quint sees Montaigne increasingly adhering, as we move through the *Essais* from 1572 to the essayist's death in 1592. This "ethics of accommodation" provides a lesson or corrective for members of the "noblesse d'épée," whom Montaigne will chastise throughout the *Essais*, for their culture of cruelty and revenge.

Professor Quint sees a moral argument developing through the *Essais*, and through the A, B and C material of the book (the strata indicating the date of composition for sections of individual essays), and thus he seems to follow the "evolutionary" theory of earlier Montaigne scholars such as Pierre Villey and Donald Frame. But Quint does not simply go through the chapters in order, preferring to group them, rather, by themes which themselves evolve in a logical progression, moving from behaviors criticized by Montaigne to those which he proposes or advocates. Quint, therefore, shows that there is a continuing and developing argument in the *Essais*.

Each chapter opposes two principal essays on a particular theme, although Quint also occasionally brings one or two additional essays to bear on the subject under discussion. Thus the book is quite selective, preferring to treat a few essays in depth, rather than summarizing the whole *oeuvre*. This approach has the virtue of giving a clear focus to Quint's book, although critics might contend that many chapters not treated could contain contradictory arguments. But this is one of the perils of all Montaigne scholarship.

Chapter One elaborates the themes of clemency and revenge in I,1 and I, 24. These two essays are linked by the presence of the word "divers" in their titles: Quint is very sensitive to the way in which Montaigne sees several sides to most ethical questions. While I,1 asks how to seek clemency effectively, I,24 looks at the opposite question, whether to grant it. Both essays find that clemency generally works better than cruelty, although not always. Quint carefully follows the development of Montaigne's thought from A to B to C in this chapter, showing the essayist to move beyond his earlier stoical values of strength, fortitude, inflexibility, etc.

Chapter One is a masterpiece of careful attention to complex argumentation, and to the nuances of Montaigne's word choices.

Chapter Two treats the opposing theme of cruelty, in II,11 and II,27. Quint here shows Montaigne to criticize the "culture of cruelty" (p. 44) which he finds in the contemporary warrior class, as evidenced not only in the civil wars but also in such practices as hunting and duelling. Quint emphasizes Montaigne's differences from Machiavelli, unlike some earlier scholars like David Schaefer, who saw similarities between the two thinkers. Cruelty, in Montaigne's view, may actually result from cowardice rather than from bravery.

Chapter Three develops two examples of extreme cruelty: cannibalism (I,31) and gladiatorial combat (II, 23). Quint's approach to "Des Cannibales" is quite original — instead of seeing Montaigne as a proto-anthropologist or precursor of Rousseau, like many earlier scholars, Quint shows the discussion of cannibals to lead the reader back to the civil wars in France. Rather than idealizing the cannibals, Quint finds Montaigne to emphasize their stoicism, a characteristic which the essayist calls into question in this essay and elsewhere.

The final chapter moves to Montaigne's positive program, defining the essayist's "ethics of yielding," which Quint proposes as Montaigne's alternative to the "culture of cruelty" which he sees around him. III,8 and III,12 are the principal essays discussed here. While the former proposes the dialectical model of conversation as preferable to the more frequent mode of bloody competition, the latter essay idealizes yielding as a form of heroism in itself. Socrates is again suggested as a model (as in II,11, where he was opposed to Cato). But Quint shows that now Montaigne himself may appear as an alternative to Socrates. Finally, the essayist urges his king to practice the ethics of submission and clemency.

This book is carefully structured and eloquently argued. Quint does tend to re-create the essays, by quoting passages which support his argument, while at times leaving out the context which may go in a different direction. In this way he occasionally falls prey to the practice, described in the Preface, of the philosophical method which "depends on passages removed from contexts" (p. xiii). But unlike the scholars he criticizes, Quint follows very carefully the twists and turns of the arguments he quotes (sometimes at great length). Another minor flaw is the lack of a bibliography, which means that in order to track down a complete reference given earlier, one must re-read all the notes.

David Quint's argument for Montaigne's "ethics of clemency" is, finally, a convincing one, and one which is applicable to the modern world as well as to that of the French Renaissance.

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