

Montaigne as an essayist essay sample

Literature



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Introduction:-

Michel de Montaigne the famous essayist is considered as the great French essayist was born 28th February, 1533. His father was a merchant and had occupied many municipal offices in Bordeaux in France. His mother was descended from a family of Spanish Jews. The third son of his parents, Michel became head of the family through the death of the elder two. Montaigne's father had made a hobby of education but the various methods to teach him Latin and Greek Mechanically ended in failure and he was sent to the famous college de Guinne at Bordeaux, where his masters were exceptionally scholar. But left studies and college at thirteen and began n to study law at Toulouse.

Literary creative works:-

Six years later he became the Counselor in the Bordeaux Parliament. In 1571, he retired to Montaigne to take up is abode there. He decided to retire to a life of study and contemplation. During this time he read a lot, wrote a lot, dictated a lot and meditated and annotated so many books. H was a voracious reader and the work that he wrote during this period was of infinitely greater importance than anything written by him before. He joined army for some time and visited Paris and occasionally traveled for health reason and sometimes for pleasure. In falling health, he visited most of the Central and North Italy. He became famous man of letters and was elected as the Mayor of his Bordeaux. But during his office as the Mayor he continued writing essays and literary creative works.

The leader of a new school

Montaigne wrote three books of Essays and revised them during his later life.

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As an essayist he was the leader of a new school in letters and morals and he wrote the first essays. He became very popular in his own country and his influence on literature was immense. He found so many followers not only in France but in England also. Even the famous essayist Francis Bacon and William Shakespeare came under his influence. In England the early popularity of Montaigne was made possible by Florio's translation of the essays. The third book is more confident and balanced attaining a doctrine of acceptance of nature perfectly expressed in these words: "As, David Engel states, " Montaigne essays perceive a central admission of much Renaissance thinking: to make a human kind the focus of study, to research earthly and everyday matter; and not to argue about blueprints for heavens."

Wisdom and thought:-

The essays of Montaigne are entertaining soliloquy on any random topic that comes into his head. He has his own style and method of writing essays. There had been so many persons with their insight but there was nobody like him with such abundance of thought. All his essays are very interesting and full of wisdom and thought. His essays are never dull, never insincere and have the genius to make the reader care for all that he cares for.

Style and language:-

In matter and manner of style and even language Montaigne's position in French literature is of the greatest importance. His model in this respect was Plutarch and he himself admits that Plutarch's treatise, Jacques Amyot was his master in point of vocabulary and style. Montaigne followed his models with his characteristic independence. His is the language of

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conversation transferred to books. His writing has no enthusiasm, no aspiration but quite contented, self-respecting and lucid. The principal characteristic of his prose style is its remarkable ease and flexibility.

Humour:- .

The chief merit of his essays does not lie merely in his style. It is the method or rather the manner of his thinking, of which style is the garment, which has now his great reputation and popularity and his great influence on the world. He was basically and eminently a humorist. His only parallel being is perhaps Charles Lamb.

Diverse subjects

Most of his essays have diverse subjects. Even their titles are of the most diverse character. He uses a lot of quotation in his essays every frequently. His essays reveal Montaigne as a man of insatiable intellectual curiosity, kindly and sagacious, condemning pedantry and lying, but tolerant of an easy morality. After the premature death of his friend La Boetie, he is much occupied with the subject of death in his essays. Most of his essays have been translated at least five times into English. The first to attempt them was the Italian Protestant refugee John Florio, the friend of Sir Philip Sidney and possibly of Shakespeare. He deals with various theme of abstract nature in his essays. In Book I deals wit “ On Idleness’, “ On Liars”, “ On the power of Imagination’”, “ on the Education of Children, “ On friendship”. In book II he discusses in detail the subjects like “ On books”, On Cruelty” and In Book III he deals with ‘ on Repentance”, “ On the Art of conversation”.

Point of Matter and form

Montaigne's main plan in writing of his essays was that of a table book or journal. The earlier essay, those of the first two books, differs from the later in length in this third book. The first two books containing about 93 essays appeared in 1580. The third book of his essays was published in 1588 together with the former ones considerable revised. The new essays in the third book differ from the older ones in length and subject matter. By this time he was very much mature and had a lot of experience of life around him. The influence of this third book is remarkable both in point of matter and in point of form. He has not only perfected but has also invented a literary form. It had no fore runner in modern literature and no direct ancestor in the literature of classical time. Most of his essays are full of humour.

Illustrations:-

Montaigne's humour proceeded out of his original and independent way of view things and he there saw how absurd and ridiculous many things in people's life were. Along with his humour in his essay, he has given very effective illustrations from his own partial life and experience. Every illustration has its own point and effect in his general arguments like friendship, lying by people, doing nothing and idleness, on the art of conversation, people just our action and intention, and the way we educate our children and so on. He gives illustrations from the ancient times and modern times in very fascinated way. He makes his essay lively with the help of his imagination.

Conclusion:-

In the four centuries since he wrote, views of Montaigne have changed much as he did himself. His contemporaries deplored his self-portrait and admired his stoical sentential. The 17th century saw mainly the skeptic, and gentleman adhering to the rules of good manners. Jean Jacques Rousseau and later Romantics were drawn to his self portrait and his free pre-Neoclassical style. Saint Beuve in the 19th century was struck by his natural independent morality: this and the universality of his self portrait have impressed the last century of readers. In the 20th century, he is fully recognized in all his aspects as a great writer, and his public is world wide. Most of his readers see him as friend, mentor and master of the essay of the “art of being truthful” and of the art of loving. To conclude it would be congruous for me to quote, F. P. Bowman, “he was the 16th century Man, and his problems concerns and patterns of thoughts are those of his century... Montaigne was not a Transcendent a historical thinker.”