

## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



Desan, Philippe, ed. The Oxford Handbook of Montaigne

John McClelland

Volume 40, numéro 4, automne 2017

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1086079ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v40i4.29281>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (imprimé)

2293-7374 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

McClelland, J. (2017). Compte rendu de [Desan, Philippe, ed. The Oxford Handbook of Montaigne]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 40(4), 195–198. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v40i4.29281>

© Canadian Society for Renaissance Studies / Société canadienne d'études de la Renaissance; Pacific Northwest Renaissance Society; Toronto Renaissance and Reformation Colloquium; Victoria University Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2017

Cet document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

éerudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

Finally, Cornelius ends his study with a brief examination of Richard Niccols's revision of the *Mirror for Magistrates* and his addition of a history of Edward II. In many ways, we come full circle; Niccols's Edward II is closest to Marlowe's and represents a king who prioritizes his relationship with Gaveston. However, Niccols also represents a king who is angry and bitter about his treatment at the hands of disloyal barons. Cornelius ends this overview by suggesting that Niccols's own work is proof of Marlowe's own positive representation of Edward and how that legacy has taken firm hold in the English imaginary.

Cornelius ends his thorough study of the characterization of Edward II in Renaissance literature with an invitation to think about how his representation has invited creation. Edward's legacy, his very memory, is retained because of his same-sex love. As Cornelius points out, we remember Edward because he *is* gay; we identify with Edward because he could not stay silent. That public declaration echoes through history. Edward II proves to be a site of queer resistance that makes him—and Cornelius's study—significant as we continue to reclaim and rediscover our queer history and its deep roots.

CHRISTOPHER MICHAEL ROMAN

Kent State University

**Desan, Philippe, ed.**

***The Oxford Handbook of Montaigne.***

Oxford Handbooks. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. Pp. xx, 813. ISBN 978-0-19-021533-0 (hardcover) US\$150.

Following close after the English translation of his Montaigne biography, Philippe Desan has assembled a team of American, French, and British scholars to produce a voluminous handbook analyzing Montaigne and his work. Desan tells us in the introduction that this is the first Oxford Handbook to be devoted to a French author, and the choice in this case is obvious. Probably more than any writer other than Shakespeare, Montaigne is a publishing business unto himself. There have been more than three hundred editions of his work, and more than one thousand books have examined and explained his life and his works, some of them bestsellers. The number of scholarly and journalistic

articles is now beyond counting. The *Essais* have been transliterated into modern French and translated into more than forty languages. On this basis alone, it is fair to say that Montaigne is deserving of this accolade.

The volume consists of an introduction (by Desan) plus forty-two qualitatively unequal chapters (two by Desan) averaging eighteen to twenty pages and grouped into three quantitatively uneven parts: eighteen essays on the "Historical Montaigne," four on the "Reception of Montaigne," and the remaining twenty-four on "Modern and Global Montaigne." This last, largest section, addressed to a general, less academic audience, "is turned towards the future, seeking to establish a link between Montaigne's *Essays* and issues and problems directly relevant to our modern times and in an age of global ideology" (13). A final, short section is devoted to "Bibliographic and Research Resources."

The forty authors recruited by Desan were reportedly given free rein—though the presence of his biography is palpable—and there is thus some overlap and latent disagreement from one chapter to the next, a result neither unexpected nor displeasing in a book about an author who was avowedly repetitive and self-contradicting. The list of contributors includes many senior and mid-career scholars with established reputations and, thankfully, a considerable number of junior academics who bring a fresh dimension to the commonplaces that have long beleaguered Montaigne studies. Quotations from the *Essais* and the *Journal de voyage* are taken from the Frame translations, with the original French quoted from the Villey-Saulnier and Rigolot editions, respectively, in the footnotes. Some of the chapters were originally drafted in French and translated—not always accurately (behind some awkward or incorrect English phrases one can perceive the French original.)

The first seven chapters concentrate on the familiar themes of Montaigne's formative influences: the family's ambitious ascension out of the commercial bourgeoisie into the minor nobility; his intellectual relationship to humanist thought; education and play-acting at the Collège de Guyenne and, prior to that, his early childhood spent among the local peasants and domestic servants; the reading and translation of Sebond's *Theologia naturalis*; the friendship with La Boétie (not altogether altruistic, in this reading); his participation in public life; and, finally, the Wars of Religion, present in the *Essais* but often anodized as "troubles" and "confusion," and subjectivized through the repeated use of the introductory formulas "Moy, j'ay veu..." and "J'ay veu de mon tems..."

The second seven contributions reverse the focus, tracing Montaigne's entry into the world beyond his immediate self: first in the form of the widespread (and often textually distorted) diffusion of his *Essais*; then as a real traveller to Italy (a trip perhaps less politically motivated than Desan would have it); and finally as an armchair traveller both to the new world—"Des cannibales" is here inserted into a heretofore neglected literary context—and to the past and present through reading the historians and memorialists. In this persuasive interpretation, Montaigne mined their texts not for history but for cases of exemplary behaviour, good or bad.

The following two chapters, on Montaigne's political and philosophical thought, raise debatable issues. Montaigne certainly had ideas as to whether the state should be a republic or a monarchy, and ideas that broached the thorny topic of ethics. But these were scattered (if nonetheless coherent) ideas and not a body of thought. It is only because we admire Montaigne's wisdom that we want to turn him into a theorist comparable to Machiavelli or Bacon. The final chapter in this section—Montaigne as early modern, modern, or post-modern—concludes that he is so completely different that he can be fitted into all three categories.

The four chapters on the "Reception of Montaigne" bring us back onto more solid ground, tracing first in statistical form the editions and readers of Montaigne in France and those outside France who read him in translation; then, in more analytical form, his reception in the English-speaking world. The section closes with chapters on old warhorses—Montaigne and Shakespeare, Montaigne and Descartes—and brings fresh light and thought to these topics.

The final group of twenty-four chapters synthesizes Montaigne's reflections on a variety of topics, covering ostensibly "issues and problems directly relevant to our modern times" and aimed at a general audience. Many of them do indeed fit that categorization—"Self," "Justice and Law," "Violence," "Virtue and Ethics," "Faith and Religion," "Truth and Skepticism," "Animals," "Empathy," "Friendship," "Gender," "Aging," and "Health and Death"—but others, such as "Language," "Style," "Rhetoric," "Reading," "Alterity," and "Monsters and Monstrosity," seem more to concern a narrower, scholarly public. Chapters on "Free Thinking," "Memory," "Curiosity," and "Imagination" deal with subjects now somewhat old-fashioned. One is surprised to find a chapter on "Women" but not one on "Men," and a chapter on "Love" but not

one on “Sex”—admittedly a minor topic in the *Essais*, but they were put on the *Index librorum prohibitorum* in 1676 on the grounds of obscenity.

This is obviously a book that the reader delves into as the need arises. Not all of the chapters present convincing arguments, but they are all learned, they are all informative, and they all make us think about Montaigne in ways that diverge from tradition. Most importantly, they are almost all stimulating to read.

JOHN MCCLELLAND

Victoria College, University of Toronto

### **Erasmus, Desiderius.**

#### ***L'éducation du prince chrétien (ou l'art de gouverner).***

Traduit du latin par Anne-Marie Greminger et présenté par Jean-Christophe Saladin.

Miroir des Humanistes. Paris : Les Belles Lettres, 2016. 260 p. ISBN 978-2-251-34610-6 (broché) 25 €.

C'est un texte précieux et resté longtemps sans traduction en langue française qu'offrent, dans la collection Miroir des humanistes, Anne-Marie Greminger et Jean-Christophe Saladin. Ce texte, c'est l'*Institutio principis christianis*, traduit ici par la formule « l'Éducation du prince chrétien », mais qui aurait pu être aussi intitulé l'*Institution du prince chrétien* ou la *Formation du prince chrétien*. C'est d'ailleurs cette dernière appellation qu'a préféré très récemment Mario Turchetti qui est le premier à avoir proposé en 2015 une traduction française intégrale de cet ouvrage majeur du prince des humanistes (Paris : Classiques Garnier, 446 p.). Soulignons la joie des érasmiens français qui n'avaient jusqu'à présent aucune traduction disponible de cette œuvre fondatrice et qui, en l'espace de quelques mois, disposent de deux éditions de grande qualité !

Composé par Érasme en janvier 1516 à l'intention du jeune Charles de Gand qui s'apprêtait à devenir roi d'Espagne, ce court traité cherche à agir sur le comportement quotidien du prince. Car ce jeune Charles, qui obtiendra le titre d'empereur en 1519 sous le nom de Charles Quint, a entre ses mains la vie et la mort de très nombreux européens et Érasme, en bon conseiller politique, s'emploie à lui fournir des conseils précis pour l'aider à diriger son royaume