

ESSAY

Montaigne and the rise of modern cultural diplomacy

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Abstract

In the troubling sixteenth century political and religious turmoil in Europe - and particularly in France - the cosmopolitan personality of Michel de Montaigne is not only indicative for acknowledging the more and more meddling resources of culture within the realm of politics, but is also explanatory for reforming and expanding the instruments of traditional diplomacy. Specifically, the consequential insights of Montaigne's post-Renaissance humanist stance highly impacted upon certain salient developments in the field of cultural diplomacy that could be analytically framed as i) a personal imprint on reforming political culture(s) tantamount to a conspicuous signature in the field of cultural pedagogy, and ii) a commendable approach to cultural pluralism, and an influential *modus operandi* in the practice of cultural relations. The present study purports to reflect upon the rise of modern cultural diplomacy through highlighting the impact of the above-mentioned traits on further developments of the field in one of the most characteristic figures of early modernity, Michel de Montaigne.

Keywords

Montaigne, cultural diplomacy, cultural pluralism, cultural relations, cultural ecumenism, international relations

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Montaigne, the (cultural) diplomat

Within the confinements of early modern diplomatic practices and international relations, the French intellectual humanist Michel de Montaigne stands as an exemplary figure of innovative trends and developing paths, mostly consistent with a momentous crisis in the field of diplomatic responsiveness to the troublesome historical events of sixteenth century Europe and particularly France. An outstanding forerunner of modern cultural diplomacy, Michel de Montaigne inaugurates a notable and longstanding tradition of European intellectual-diplomats, encompassing famous personalities such as Descartes, Voltaire, Diderot or Hugo - to mention but a few in the case of France only - whose commitment to diplomatic affairs have brought about the sophistication of diplomatic agency *per se*, and have also been referential about a certain *cultural turn* of diplomatic affairs and, to a certain extent, the *cultural rehabilitation* of international relations.¹

Neither a career diplomat properly, nor carrying out his public duties in the mainstream spirit of traditional diplomatic conventions, Montaigne genuinely opened new paths of reflection upon the instrumental role of culture within routine diplomatic activities. He eminently contributed to the operation of modern cultural diplomacy as a complementary exercise to the narrow and old-fashioned understanding of both the jargon and agency of traditional and secret diplomacy in international relations. Curiously enough, the hermeneutic and exegetic efforts of scholars and researchers have mostly focused on highlighting Montaigne's excellence and influence on humanistic culture and post-Renaissance development of literary modernity, while giving a rather minor consideration for his consequential role in opening new cultural and behavioural paths in the field of international relations. In addition to extensive philological examination and assessment of his literary legacy and/or cultural interpretations and critical contextualization of his *Essays*, a comprehensive investigation of Montaigne's inspiring contribution from the standpoint of cultural international relations is unaccounted for and rather restricted to historical biographies recounting his political life. This study aims to construct Montaigne's profile as a pioneering personality of early cultural diplomacy, with a view to concoct the complex puzzle of recurrent meanings in the field, ultimately related to his activism and legacy. Moreover, the present inquiry does not only stand as an explanation of how a cultural way of life could significantly impregnate political behavior, but also purports to identify actual dimensions and tools of cultural diplomacy in Montaigne. Considering the historical context of international relations in the sixteenth century, the present investigation puts to work some recent historical and literary studies of Montaigne through the lens of the cultural history of diplomacy and suggests that contemporary practices in the field of diplomacy should follow Montaigne's creed and commitments to diplomatic facts.

¹ M. Fumaroli, *La diplomatie de l'esprit. De Montaigne à La Fontaine* (Paris: Hermann, 1994).

Notwithstanding Montaigne's personal inclination towards solitude and self-didacticism, his bona fide activism as a *cultural attaché* and his specific commitment to the idea of *public service* should become inspirational for present and future generations of (cultural) diplomats. It is probably accurate to maintain that Montaigne's influence as a cultural diplomat surpasses his political career and routine public responsibilities both as a magistrate in the Parliament of Bordeaux (1557–1570) and his two terms as mayor of Bordeaux (1581–1585). Consequently, certain approaches in the field of diplomacy are highly relevant and explanatory for contemplating on Montaigne's performance as an outstanding cultural diplomat: his participation in *household and curia*, his activism as *messenger and emissary* in various conjunctures, and - last, but not least - his role as *facilitator, mediator and negotiator*. In all these circumstances, Montaigne plainly exerted his skills with "tact, dissimulation and interested service"² and predominantly used his vast cultural capital to achieve punctual ends in various diplomatic encounters. Specifically, Montaigne's household activities included dinners with the French official ambassador in Rome and the spokesman cardinal of the Roman Catholic League, among other meetings with French and Papal representatives. His liaisons to curia events encompassed unofficial consultations, discussions on momentous cultural policies and/or tactics for religious conflict mediation.³ As messenger and emissary, Montaigne dutifully played several roles: connecting person between the Parliament of Bordeaux and the Royal Court of France, loyal Kingman in the attempt to defend Catholicism and to tackle the destructive religious warfare with Protestants within a highly repressive context of religious bigotry in sixteenth century France,⁴ royal counselor⁵ and high-level unofficial envoy.⁶ Finally, as facilitator, mediator and negotiator, Montaigne earned his reputation as a moderate and educated man, who could alleviate the frictions between Catholic and Protestant leaders, on the one hand, and between the French royal court and the Pope, on the other. In the above-mentioned contexts and

² J. O'Neill, *Essaying Montaigne: A Study of the Renaissance Institution of Writing and Reading* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001), 162.

³ On the plethora of Montaigne's involvement in diplomatic activities, see W. Boucher, *The School of Montaigne in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 266.

⁴ For a brief and illuminating account of the entire political and religious environment of sixteenth century France, see U. Langer, "Montaigne's political and religious context," in *The Cambridge Companion to Montaigne*, ed. U. Langer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 10–15; As a diplomat properly, one could find Montaigne's membership in the delegation of the French embassy in Rome; the cultural humanist even hoped to be appointed ambassador to Venice in the 1580s (see D.M. Frame, *Montaigne's Discovery of Man: the Humanization of a Humanist* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955)).

⁵ Even if uncertain, Montaigne's participation at the royal marriages between the Duke of Savoy and Margaret of France, and between Philip II of Spain and Elisabeth, the daughter of French King Henri II, on April 3, 1559, were possible, considering the French King's appreciation of Montaigne as a valuable cultural counselor (P. Desan, *Montaigne: A Life*, trans. S. Rendall (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017), 84). In recognition of his merits in cultural diplomacy, Montaigne was appointed "gentilhomme ordinaire de la chambre du roi", around 1575 (Desan, *Montaigne*, 86).

⁶ See G.R. Berridge, *Diplomacy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 223–234.

other diplomatic encounters, Montaigne took a predominantly cultural command of his commitments, as a truly cosmopolitan figure of cultural diplomacy in Europe. Until the proper institutionalization of cultural diplomacy in nineteenth century Europe,⁷ one could grasp the instantiations of Montaigne's approaches to cultural diplomacy in accordance to nowadays versatile meanings in both the theory and practice of the field.⁸

In the following sections, I examine this working hypothesis through a synoptic investigation of Montaigne's contribution to certain transformations in the realm of French (and European) political culture tantamount to his conspicuous cultural pedagogy, and his forward-looking thoughts on cultural pluralism, doubled by a commendable *modus operandi* in the field of cultural relations, respectively. The underlying presupposition of this investigation is that, beyond the liberal and juridical agency of Montaigne in diplomatic matters and public duties,⁹ there is a more significant and substantive self-commitment to *cultural agency* in Montaigne that both informed his activism and opened prospective resources of cultural diplomacy, in "a bit dissonant [fashion] from [his contemporary] ways".¹⁰ Eventually, the present essay stands for a synopsis of Montaigne's manifold commitments to the practice of

⁷ The first professionalized institution in the field of cultural diplomacy was Alliance Française, created in 1883.

⁸ Apart from a rigid and merely positivist understanding which renders the applicability and pertinent meanings of cultural diplomacy to cultural policies properly, the multifaceted ways through which its concepts have durably permeated the practices and language of both diplomacy and international relations amount to an intricate narrative of subtle developments that go beyond stereotypical and linear interpretations. Preceding by a long shot the belated institutionalization and professionalization of the field, groundbreaking actions and styles of early modern cultural diplomats – Montaigne included – have significantly contributed to the gradual growth in complexity of both the practices and the vocabulary of the present-day domain of cultural diplomacy. Concepts such as cultural pluralism, cultural tourism and cultural relations – to which Montaigne consistently devoted to – currently belong to the core canon of cultural diplomacy. Out of the multifarious perspectives on the recent impact of culture in the field of diplomacy, I would consider, for instance, certain salient works of the 1990s: M. Fumaroli, *L'Etat Culturel: Une Religion Moderne* (Paris: Fallois, 1999); J. McGuigan, *Culture and the Public Sphere* (New York: Routledge, 1996); R. Fox, *Cultural Diplomacy at the Crossroads. Cultural Relations in Europe and the Wider World* (London: The British Council, 1999); More recently, in the 2000s, works such as: S. Riordan, *The New Diplomacy: Themes for the 21st Century* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003); P. Norris and R. Inglehart, *Cosmopolitan Communications: Cultural Diversity in a Globalized World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); H. du Cros and B. McKercher, *Cultural Tourism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015) revamp the conceptual intersections between culture and diplomacy, inspired and anticipated by early modern pioneers of cultural diplomacy. Moreover, the concept of international cultural relations, epitomized by Montaigne's thankworthy contribution to diplomacy, has turned into the paragon of a germane interdisciplinary idiom (see, for instance, R.N. Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); *Culture and Foreign Policy*, ed. V.M. Hudson (London: Lynne Rienner, 1997); *Culture and International Relations*, ed. J. Chay (New York: Praeger, 1990); *Return of Culture and Identity in International Relations Theory*, eds. Y. Lapid and F. Kratochwil (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1996)).

⁹ F. Green, *Montaigne and the Life of Freedom* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 89–140.

¹⁰ M. de Montaigne, *The Complete Works: Essays, Travel Journal, Letters* (New York and Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 731.

cultural diplomacy, and, accordingly, does not purport to achieve scrupulous results, neither in regard to a detail-oriented analysis of his works, nor by thorough conceptual investigation of his approaches in the field of diplomacy. It goes without saying that this type of overview is just a vector for more systematic and comprehensive assessments of Montaigne's impact upon further developments in the history of diplomacy, and of his instructive legacy for future generations of cultural diplomats.

Montaigne's cultural ecumenism

From the standpoint of the present investigation, not only in his groundbreaking collection of *Essays*, but also in his *Travel Journal* and *Letters*,¹¹ Michel de Montaigne's practical skepticism and epistemic relativism were useful methodological tools for coping with contrarities, crises and frictions of his time. Specifically, in line with present purposes, Montaigne fundamentally remarked a sweeping crisis of tactical moves and procedures in the field of international relations and diplomacy, as sheer unresponsiveness and impotence in regard to settlement of catastrophic political and religious strife, especially in France.¹² Rooted in the new cultural impetuses of the intellectual mindset of the age, both skepticism (e.g., in Descartes, Pascal or Vico) and relativism (inspired by the scientific spirit of Nicholas of Cusa, Copernicus or Giordano Bruno) have highly contributed to the dissolution of the Renaissance ethos and the emergence of post-Renaissance modern cultures in Europe.¹³ One of the most competent scholars on Montaigne, Pierre Villey, included the personality of Montaigne on the prestigious list of cutting-edge reformers at the dawn of modernity, eulogizing him as one of the outstanding cultural humanists, positivists and pedagogues, in line with the liberalizing spirit of the age.¹⁴ Secularism, paradigmatic changes in the realm of knowledge and the awareness in regard to the instrumental role of culture in real life informed the dominating spirit of the

¹¹ Out of the vast number of editions, translations and commented versions of Montaigne's works worldwide, I use the English monumental Everyman's Library edition - M. de Montaigne, *The Complete Works: Essays, Travel Journal, Letters*, 7th ed. trans. D.M. Frame with an Introduction by S. Hampshire (New York and Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003); Within the limited and rather synoptic view of the present essay, a thorough analysis of Montaigne's writings could not be achieved: the references to his works are rather illustrative than systematic, and the relevant episodes of his diplomatic activity – in the works of biographers and intellectual historians – are indicated for side explanations of the historical contexts only. Other perspectives may also illuminate on both the personality of Montaigne and his time, but they would have complicated the substance and purposes of this text.

¹² J.B. Schneewind, *Moral Philosophy from Montaigne to Kant* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 16, 17.

¹³ D.L. Sedley, *Sublimity and Skepticism in Montaigne and Milton* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 19.

¹⁴ Alongside his authoritative interpretation of Montaigne's essays, P. Villey thoughtfully investigated Montaigne's insights in a transformative age in his works *Montaigne et François Bacon* (Paris: Revue de la Renaissance, 1913) and *L'Influence de Montaigne sur les Idées Pédagogiques de Locke et de Rousseau* (Paris: Hachette, 1911).

sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe. The new ethos generated favourable transformations of political cultures and mentalities with a view to embrace multiculturalism, moral relativism and epistemological uncertainty.¹⁵ Unmistakably, Montaigne was not only a prominent representative of this movement in Western cultural history, but also one of the leading promoters of the cultural turn in public life and societal affairs.

One could discover piecemeal suggestions for a consistent interpretation of Montaigne's reverberation concerning the above-mentioned transformations precisely through a close reading of the insights composing the famous collection of *Essays*. Having acknowledged the fact that the act of reading the *Essays* presupposes a previous familiarization with specific issues in the fields of state businesses, military science and diplomatic affairs,¹⁶ Montaigne explicitly delved into a genuine exercise in *cultural ecumenism* by endorsing self-referentiality as a moral experiment of understanding "the other": his ruminations about human fallibility through confronting others' political cultures have ascertained the prominence of Montaigne as the first modern ethnographer¹⁷ and anthropologist.¹⁸ In fact, in his foreword "To the Reader" of the *Essays*, Montaigne explicitly mentions his "respect for the public",¹⁹ thoroughly committing himself to pursue an experiment of honest *cultural exchanges* with other people, regardless of civilizations, social statuses, times and places. Eventually, Montaigne achieved this methodological prerequisite by a careful consideration²⁰ of others within his ventures in cultural pedagogy and in full recognition of variances and specificities of political cultures. One valuable and explanatory facet of cultural ecumenism is plainly visible in Montaigne's extensive insights on customs ("coustume") throughout his works: from food cultures and clothes in distant times and spaces, to military, juridical, architectural and religious (ancient and contemporary) traditions. Dominated by naiveté and frankness, ideological freedom of expression, back-and-forth vacillation of thought, arbitrary

¹⁵ J. Starobinski, *Montaigne in Motion*, trans. A. Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

¹⁶ R. Eden, "The Introduction of Montaigne's Politics," *Perspectives on Political Science* 20, no. 4 (1991): 216, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10457097.1991.9944493>.

¹⁷ C. Lévi-Strauss, *From Montaigne to Montaigne*, trans. R. Bononno (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 25.

¹⁸ C. Ginzburg, "Montaigne, cannibals and grottoes," *History and Anthropology* 6, no. 2–3 (1993): 129, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02757206.1993.9960827>; "When the antiquarians curiosity shifted from Greeks and Romans towards civilizations geographically distant, ethnography emerged. In this crucial intellectual transition, Montaigne played a crucial role" (Ginzburg, "Montaigne," 146).

¹⁹ Montaigne, *The Complete Works*, 2.

²⁰ See Z. Zalloua's interpretation of Montaigne's careful and responsible consideration of the other as the very "recognition of the other as an object of care or caritas" (*Montaigne and the Ethics of Skepticism* (Charlottesville: Rookwood Press, 2005), 3, 4). In this sense, one could contemplate on Montaigne's *cultural missionaryism*.

arrangement of subject-matters, playful anecdotes and vague titles, and ample and heterogeneous quotations from (especially) Latin classics, Montaigne's speculations on habits, customs, manners and morals can serve a two-way-street cultural agenda. One side of his narrative works suggestively to express Montaigne's reluctance to take for granted the cultural validity of customs that could inflict upon freedom of judgment; the other side could probably endorse the effectiveness of customs and traditions as a commendable cultural understanding of politics and political cultures. By and large, Montaigne's meditation on the role of cultural artifacts and traditions stands for a seminal experiment in cultural pedagogy, very much consistent with current perspectives on the origins of cultural policies. Moreover, Montaigne purposely envisaged a progressive model for the education of young generations, based on meaningful cultural exchanges and encounters.²¹

In various periods of his life, one could find the exemplary figure of Montaigne as *cultural facilitator*: as councilor in the Parliament of Bordeaux, in the late 1550s, Montaigne promoted local policies in the field of education (e.g., development policies at his *alma mater* Collège de Guyenne, or his diligence to enhance the prestige of the college through the naturalization of the Portuguese humanist André de Gouvêa as principal);²² later on, we find out about Montaigne's dedication to cultural tutoring for the children of Diane de Foix, Countess of Gurson,²³ not to mention his cultural transactions with the Vatican Library, during his mission as a high-level personal envoy of the French king in Rome, between 1580–1581.²⁴ Montaigne's *Essays* could be properly assessed as cultural products designed for "conversation and reformation"²⁵ of traditional political and diplomatic practices. His *Travel Journal* could be read as the application of a new *modus operandi* in the field of cultural diplomacy, and the *Letters* could be deemed to the obliteration of classical *sagesse* in diplomatic matters, including ingenious approaches of ceremonial communication and tactics as "a fundamental aspect of diplomatic practice in the late sixteenth

²¹ See Montaigne's essay, "Of the Education of Children," in *The Complete Works*, 129–160; In another essay, "Of Age," 287–289, Montaigne deals with the issue of cultural pedagogy in terms of acquiring "fresh contacts", apart from inherited mentalities and practices, in order to tackle the most pressing contexts and events of his age (see also C. Skenazi, *Aging Gracefully in the Renaissance: Stories of Later Life from Petrarch to Montaigne* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 91). This remark speaks up about Montaigne's commitment to the new path of cultural diplomacy as an effective instrument to balance conflicts in international relations and diplomatic affairs, or as the most plausible way out from religious warfare.

²² P. Bonnefon, *Montaigne: l'Homme et l'Oeuvre* (Bordeaux: G. Gounouilhou, 1893), 25; Expressly referring to Montaigne's role as cultural facilitator, W. Boutcher depicted him as "a noble patron of frankness and freedom" (*School of Montaigne*, 60).

²³ See Montaigne, "Of the Education," in *The Complete Works*, 129–133.

²⁴ Boutcher, *The School of Montaigne in Early Modern Europe*, 264; For a meticulous account of Montaigne's diplomatic experience in Rome, see especially Montaigne, "Travel Journal," in *The Complete Works*, 1112–1270.

²⁵ Boutcher, *The School of Montaigne in Early*, 32.

century”.²⁶ Montaigne’s innovative undertaking of cultural diplomacy has not only paved the way for new forms of achieving diplomatic goals with cultural means, but has also led to a *de facto* breach within the jurisdiction and standard idiom of traditional diplomacy founded on secrecy, strategic negotiation and realist-driven resolution. Incongruent with famous contemporary treatises in political theory, authored by Machiavelli or Hobbes, Montaigne’s works employed the refined vocabulary of cultural ecumenism in cogitations about justice and law, reinterpretation of (public) virtue, plea for religious tolerance and the understanding of the political as a genuine expression of cultural experience.²⁷

Cultural pluralism and cultural relations in Montaigne

If cultural ecumenism in Montaigne reveals the efforts of the French humanist to reform the political cultures of his age, characterized by violence, cruelty, intolerance, deep factionalism and even barbarianism,²⁸ his approaches to cultural pluralism and cultural relations unveil the activism of Montaigne in order to instill a new ethos in the fields of diplomacy and international relations. In brief, Montaigne *the cultural reformer* is doubled by Montaigne *the diplomatic agent*. In the latter respect, Montaigne’s advocacy of cultural pluralism and his pursuit of cultural relations, respectively, are relevant advancements in the field of early modern cultural diplomacy in Europe.

To defend *cultural pluralism* in a historical context dominated by a permanent state of outright belligerence was tantamount to act in order to abate dogmatism, authoritarianism, fanaticism of religious persecutions and momentary illusions of political domination. Moreover, in order to promote the progressive idea of cultural pluralism in the strenuous contexts of sixteenth century international politics, it was imperative to move beyond gentle cultural criticism, and prove the futility of contemporary diplomatic arrangements. In this way, Montaigne actively advocated the idea of cultural diversity, and ultimately encouraged political change. The following explanatory occurrences claim that Montaigne epitomized all these forms

²⁶ Boutcher, *The School of Montaigne in Early*, 181; Historians and literary theorists have provided quite insightful perspectives on the subtle interconnections between the literary and diplomatic cultures in the age of early modern humanism, in their attempt to explain the “close resonances between the representational and performative nature of the two activities” and to explain how and to what extent the experience of writing has impacted upon diplomatic agency and perceptions regarding diplomatic practices (T.A. Sowerby and J. Craigwood, “Introduction: Literary and Diplomatic Cultures in the Early Modern World,” in *Cultures of Diplomacy and Literary Writing in the Early Modern World*, eds. T.A. Sowerby and J. Craigwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 3).

²⁷ B. Fontana, *Montaigne’s Politics: Authority and Governance in the Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

²⁸ See Montaigne’s illuminating comments on cruelty, tyranny, intolerance and violence as traits of early modern barbarianism in the essays “Of Cannibals,” 177–182 and “Of Cruelty,” in *The Complete Works*, 372–386.

of agency during his practice of cultural diplomacy in the troublesome environment of sixteenth century international relations.

Accordingly, cultural criticism in Montaigne stood for the soft version of what the post-Renaissance humanist had seized as a deep cultural crisis of his time. His persuasive critiques of modern barbarity, injustice, bigotry, as well as his contemplation on the nature of European colonization²⁹ were not enough to surmount the critical situation of early modern civilization in Europe, whereby factions and frictions, values, morals and ideals were at odds with the stirring liberal and secular spirit in politics and societies. Recent (ideological) interpretations of Montaigne as the early champion of cultural relativism delineate his type of cultural criticism at the harbinger of its post-Marxist and post-modern species.³⁰

However, it was more than what Montaigne's cultural criticism could possibly convey. Basically, his more or less digressive endorsement of cultural pluralism emerged as a peculiar type of intellectual jeremiad against the frailties and irresoluteness of international relations and diplomatic negotiations. The solution of cultural pluralism was envisaged as the only way out of the anti-diplomatic ambience of the age,³¹ for Montaigne strongly moved to spreading the idea of diversity of human kind. In this way, sound arguments in defense of cultural diversity - convincingly disseminated through his entire works - functioned as a kind of methodological tool used to promote cultural pluralism as the antidote to international politics stalemate. Montaigne took his mission of promoting a program of cultural dialogue seriously, by popularizing his travel experiences in Germany, Switzerland and Italy,³² and specifically authenticating local customs, living traditions, and cultural habits of the various communities he encountered. The pivotal creed of his cultural diplomacy agenda precisely pointed to the idea that only mutual understanding between cultures and straightforward cultural communication could contribute to overcoming political and religious intolerance, dogmatism and violence. Moderation, tact, honesty and natural curiosity were germane qualities in Montaigne's exemplary conduct in cultural diplomacy, even if - considering at least two circumstances of his experience - such an unconventional commitment to cultural diplomacy generated hardships: once, Montaigne had to confront theological censorship because of the confiscation of his writings at the city gates in Rome; post hoc, he was arrested by

²⁹ Montaigne, "Of Coaches," in *The Complete Works*, 831–849; Commenting upon the deep cultural gap in the age of Montaigne and the unresponsiveness of both ancient and Reformation resolutions to political, religious and diplomatic crises, R. Launay uses the suggestive metaphor of the "two saddles" (*Savages, Romans, and Despots: Thinking about Others from Montaigne to Herder* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press), 36, 37).

³⁰ N.B. Johnson, "Cannibals and Culture: the Anthropology of Michel de Montaigne," *Dialectical Anthropology* 18 (1993): 155, 156; Scholars and researchers have identified the conceptual pillars of 'otherness, strangeness and foreignness' at the core of Montaigne's cultural relativism.

³¹ See T. Hampton, *Fictions of Embassy: Literature and Diplomacy in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 62–71.

³² Frame, *Montaigne's Discovery*, 110–119.

order of the Roman Catholic League - and immediately released - precisely for his moderate stance in the negotiation of peace between Catholics and Protestants.³³ Unequivocally, diplomatic tact and moderation³⁴ were quintessential qualities that propelled Montaigne as momentous cultural mediator in the internal disputes for power and religious strife in France, on the one hand, and suitable envoy of the Pope in the relationship with secular kingdoms.³⁵

Ultimately, Montaigne gave a tremendously important impetus to the emerging practices in the field of cultural diplomacy through his tireless agency in the area of *cultural relations*. Specifically, his *Travel Journal* still stands as a valuable repository of instructive experience and good practices: the trope of travel in Montaigne has become the paragon of critical thinking, liberation from traditional constrictions of the “old ways”, and opening of new horizons in diplomacy through the medium of culture. It is probably accurate to assess the *Travel Journal* as Montaigne’s diplomatic testament of vivid encounters, insightful cultural and medical tourism, and cosmopolitan intersubjective exchanges.³⁶ Montaigne’s compelling admonition - “polish [your] brains by contact with those of others”³⁷ stands as the basic motto for his approach in the area of cultural relations: in his view, meaningful contact and instructive exchanges should prevail over institutional reform in education and/or scientific excellence. Moreover, his correspondence significantly contributed to the creation of a solid network of human connections and cultural relations, within the crucial (cultural) context of the shift from manuscript culture to printed culture.³⁸

³³ M.E. Gregory, *Free Will in Montaigne, Pascal, Diderot, Rousseau, Voltaire and Sartre* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012), 38; Elsewhere, Gregory specifically mentions that Montaigne’s views on tolerance and moderate conduct were derived from his strong belief in cultural diversity (*Free Will in Montaigne*, 30), probably prompting his innovative agenda in cultural diplomacy.

³⁴ Despite intransigent service and honest loyalism to Catholicism and the French king, Montaigne and his best friend Etienne la Boétie neither approved, nor supported the witch-hunting and massacres against Protestants (Desan, *Montaigne*, 90).

³⁵ As a relationship builder in secular matters, one could mention, for instance, his mediation skills in achieving the diplomatic rapprochement between the parties of Navarre and the king of France (see D. Maskell, “Montaigne mediateur entre Navarre et Guise,” *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance* 41 (1979): 541–553); as Papal emissary in religious matters, Montaigne’s foreignness could have been quite useful in the strategic attempts to achieve a balance of power between the Spanish and the Habsburg monarchies, to promote good offices between the Pope and the French representation in Rome, and even to reclaim his Roman Catholic renewal in order to reassure the Pope of his loyal services (Boutcher, *The School of Montaigne*, 268, 269). In recognition of Montaigne’s merits as a genuine cultural attaché, Pope Gregory XIII granted him citizenship of Rome in 1581 (Boutcher, *The School of Montaigne*, 72). By and large, Montaigne’s agency for the promotion of cultural moderation, tolerance and peace has been recognized by historians and cultural critics alike as the very strategy to stop political and religious wars (see E. Bonora, “Peace and Religion,” in *A Cultural History of Peace in the Renaissance*, ed. I. Lazzarini (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 72).

³⁶ P. Desan, one of the most competent monographers of Montaigne’s life and achievements, ascribed a predominant political and diplomatic significance to Montaigne’s cultural tourism (*Montaigne*, 620).

³⁷ Montaigne, *The Complete*, 136.

³⁸ Boutcher, *School of Montaigne*, 15.

By and large, one intellectual historian of the sixteenth century astutely observed that the humanistic writings of the age epitomized “acts of hospitality and conviviality, of information trade and exchange”,³⁹ decisively impacting upon the rise of early cultural diplomacy in Europe.

Montaigne’s legacy in cultural diplomacy

Inveterate approaches in the interpretation and analysis of traditions, texts and historical facts have resulted in two basic types of dealing with the subject-matters of analyses/interpretations: on the one hand, there is the “poeticist” (i.e., productive, in the sense of Aristotle) or the discovery pattern of analysis/interpretation that either brings innovatory information, or illuminate on rather inexplicit or hermetic pieces of knowledge, based on some sort of discharge in regard to historical/textual evidence; on the other, there is the so-called contextualist analysis/interpretation grounded on “translations” of the subject-matter into “hospitable idioms”,⁴⁰ fashionable renderings of the past and/or critical scrutiny (often) informed by ideological thrust. Whatever the case, the value of perspectivist readings goes beyond sterile disputes regarding what types of scientific explorations are valid, remaining that only robust methodological justifications should be disclosed as sufficient criteria for deciding on the relevance of various analyses/interpretations. The present “construction” of Montaigne aims to shed a light upon the explicit discovery of the historical and textual Montaigne as a pioneering cultural diplomat in line with the first pattern of investigation, and to canvass the actuality of Montaigne from the fashionable standpoint and vocabulary of cultural diplomacy in line with the second type of approach.

Either way, Montaigne’s precepts and legacy in the field of cultural diplomacy have made room for a plethora of readings in regard (but not limited) to: i) his practical commitment to a cultural type of diplomatic activism in international relations; ii) his lucid criticism of traditional diplomacy and political cultures of his age, and iii) his ideological mindset in confronting the characteristic political, religious and cultural discords of sixteenth century Europe. Accordingly, at least three possibilities of accommodating Montaigne’s works and achievements to the contemporary vocabulary of cultural diplomacy might be effective in order to endorse his relevance and leverage in the field: i) a *behavioral and pragmatic* reading of his cultural agency as mediator, attaché, facilitator, relationship builder, unofficial envoy and/or cultural preceptor and tutor; ii) a *post-modern and cultural* reading of Montaigne as a forerunner of cultural criticism and cultural pluralism/multiculturalism, and

³⁹ P. White, “From commentary to translation: figurative representations of the text in the French Renaissance,” in *The Culture of Translation in Early Modern England and France, 1500–1660*, eds. T. Demetriou and R. Tomlinson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 71–85.

⁴⁰ F. Green, “Reading Montaigne in the twenty-first century,” *The Historical Journal* 52, no. 4 (2009): 1085, 1086, http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0018246X0999015X.

iii) an ideological and contextualist reading of his contribution to the emergence of modern political approaches especially in the area of cultural policies, respectively. Among other (probable) complementary interpretations, all these three methodological appropriations of Montaigne are to be found in the present-day language of the “umbrella concept” of cultural diplomacy.

On the one hand, the behavioral and pragmatic approach has become instrumental in postulating different types of cultural agency and standards of good practices/offices in cultural diplomacy. On the other, the multifarious activism of Montaigne authenticated present-day professional profiles and institutional arrangements in the field. This model of interpretation further illustrated how the narrow understanding of culture as an ancillary political tool has expanded to encompass the diversity of cultural functions in the field of international relations that have refined cultural diplomacy as an autonomous and distinct set of practices. Moreover, the emblematic figure of Michel de Montaigne in the fields of international public and cultural diplomacy has become inspirational for the emergence of non-governmental organizations and think tanks, such as the Paris-based Institut Montaigne, founded in 2000.⁴¹

A certain identification of Montaigne at the roots of European cultural criticism has nurtured a tradition of epistemological relativism and methodological skepticism characterized by political dissent, power distrust and basic rejection of mainstream learning.⁴² Very much in the spirit of Montaigne’s views on cultural diplomacy as a way of dismantling mainstream traditional undertakings in the field, the interpretation of his works⁴³ as paragons of cultural criticism has led to considering him the founding father of multiculturalism, cultural relativism, ethnography, functionalism and structuralism.⁴⁴ At the climax of the intellectual tradition of cultural criticism, the postmodern *sagesse* associated with the cultural deconstruction of the political has not only inspired an intellectual paradigm of traditional power politics rejection, but also shaped both the theories and practices of cultural diplomacy as new patterns of thinking about the nature of power, effectiveness of cooperation and negotiation, and/or a certain “cultural turn” in international relations.

Last but not least, Montaigne’s legacy has been claimed inside certain “ideological battlefields”: competing political readings mostly vacillate between assessing Montaigne as a defender of legal conservatism due to his preeminent views on the importance of cultural liberation from dogmatism, authoritarian dominance and

⁴¹ “Notre Mission,” Institut Montaigne, accessed October 29, 2021, <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/qui-sommes-nous>.

⁴² See, for instance, A. Compagnon’s reading of Montaigne as a suspicious master in regard to standardized forms of knowledge *Le Seconde Main, ou le Travail de la Citation* (Paris: Seuil, 1979), 299.

⁴³ One commentator characterized the *Essays* as a “book to think with”, precisely pointing to Montaigne’s critical insights and impactful influence on the intellectual movement of cultural pluralists (T. Cave, *How to Read Montaigne* (London: Granta Books, 2007)).

⁴⁴ Lévi-Strauss, *From Montaigne*, 58, 59.

fanaticism, and his subsumption to a social liberal tradition based on his advocacy of the values of pluralism and equalitarianism.⁴⁵ Mixed readings identified his views at the crossroads between social conservatism and liberal individualism.⁴⁶ One way or another, basically all cultural activists nowadays may recite their ideological pledge as a lucid self-acknowledgement of their accountability to their cultural mentor Michel de Montaigne.

Data availability

No data are associated with this article.

⁴⁵ Two divergent ideological renderings of Montaigne oppose P. Manent and D.L. Schaefer: the first provided a pervasively conservative interpretation of Montaigne in line with his overall public service, while the latter endorsed the dominant liberal views characteristic to Montaigne's writings (see P. Manent, *Montaigne: La Vie Sans Loi* (Paris: Flammarion, 2014) and D.L. Schaefer, "Of Cannibals and Kings: Montaigne's Egalitarianism," *Review of Politics* 43, no. 1 (1981): 43–74).

⁴⁶ See, for instance, M. Oakeshott's, *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996); N.O. Keohane, "Montaigne's Individualism," *Political Theory* 5, no. 3 (1977): 377–381.