

“THE ESSAYS” BY MONTAIGNE: POSTMODERNIST INTERPRETATION

Abstract

The article is devoted to the analysis of Montaigne’s book “The Essays” from the point of view of postmodernist criticism. The work is conceived as an experimental eclectic and mosaic formation, full of paradoxes, which creates the multiplicity of its interpretations in terms of different practices, including postmodernist practices. The features of the author’s self-identification are analysed through the postmodernist paradigm. The originality of the essayistic method of understanding reality through the philosopher’s own beliefs is investigated. The intertextual nature of his essays, based on individual authorial commentary on citation material, reinterpretation, and reevaluation of the past experiences, through which the author creates his image, are analysed. The ironic nature of Montaigne’s works, his methods of playing with the reader are analyzed separately. It is generalized that the author’s ironic position in the book “The Essays” is an indicator of the freedom of his personal thinking and a catalyst for readers to develop their own attitude to everything he contemplates.

The comprehension of the compositional organization of the book “The Essays” from the point of view of rhizomatism is suggested. It is concluded that by combining tradition and experiment, Montaigne demonstrates the limitations of both classical tradition and postmodern aesthetics.

Keywords: Montaigne, essay, essay compilation, postmodernism, intertextuality, irony, rhizome, game, experiment.

Introduction

Montaigne’s book “The Essays”, first published in 1580, has not ceased to be the subject of interpretations of philosophers, literary scholars, historians, culturologists till this today. The interest in this publication with the unusual format, the essayistic delivery of information, the genre, which was formulated based on the method proposed by Montaigne, has been decreasing and increasing during different cultural periods. The complexity and, at the same time, the simplicity of the method of self-presentation chosen by M. Montaigne (“I am myself the matter of my book”) still attracts the attention of researchers who seek to reveal the mechanisms of essayist

practices and find factors in the composition of “The Essays” as a special form of integrity, as implied by the author. For example, according to N. Mavlevich, “the undiminished interest in M. Montaigne is explained by the fact that “The Essays” is among those universal, inexhaustible works of world classics, which are certainly addressed by each era, and each one of them interprets those work in its way, just as each new generation redefines the circle of eternal questions of existence” (Mavlevich, 1998, p. 253).

The uniqueness of Montaigne’s book “The Essays” has been the object of interdisciplinary understanding for many centuries. Montaigne’s philosophical views were the subject of study by O. Alexandrov, I. Bychko, V. Buslinovskiy,

J. Giton, L. Gruenberg, V. Decombe, V. Diniov, M. Dreano, F. Duviar, Z. Zalyuk, M. Zinka, E. Callo, L. Kessel, M. Konsh, S. Krymsky, P. Kurtz, P. Magnardt, O. Montzhen, I. Ogorodnik, P. Riley, T. Liutiy, O. Panich, B. Russell, D. Reale, J. F. Revel, V. Tabachkovskiy, C. Taylor, R. Flatman, R. Fridental, A. Yaruchik, and many others. Montaigne’s literary talent became the subject of comprehension by S. Alekseev, S. Artamonov, F. Kogan-Bernstein, S. Mokulskiy, M. Lazard, N. Paskharian, and many others. The philosophical and journalistic discourse of comprehension of the book “The Essays” covers the works of S. Balaklitskiy, S. Kvit, V. Makarenko and others. A separate group of studies consists of works devoted to the translation of essays and their cultural contexts: G. Yermolenko, S. Stavitsky, I. Shargai, M. Slepneva, V. Komarova, and many others.

Joining the work in various fields, we offer a new look at Montaigne’s book from the viewpoint of postmodern criticism. Given the opinion of U. Eco (1983) that “postmodernism is not a chronologically fixed phenomenon, but a kind of spiritual state, if you will, *Kunstwollen*, an approach to work. In this sense, it is legitimate to say that any era has its own postmodernism” (p. 635). We believe that the study of classics, taking into account the latest historical and literary experience, is quite probable and opens new possibilities for their interpretation, allowing finding mechanisms of creativity, which had not previously been disclosed or were difficult to fit into existing traditions. Postmodern critique seeks to “equalize differences, oppositions and pluralism” (Kozlyk, 2020, p. 73). It opens new perspectives for understanding not only creativity, which is directly related to the literature of the postmodern era (the mid-1980s – early XXI century) but also allows us to understand the origins of its artistic techniques, the specifics of their origin and development, to analyze the specifics of their manifestation in works that were created in other periods of development of literature and philosophy. Thus, T. Hundorova (2013) writes:

“Postmodernism can be called the first universally accepted literary code and can be interpreted in terms that are understood in all cultures, regardless of whether they have passed through the previous stage of modernism” (p. 76). Therefore, we believe that the postmodern experience of literary analysis will provide an opportunity to analyze the works of the past from new positions and thus find answers to certain questions of the poetics of works that have remained unresolved for many centuries.

In this sense, the book “The Essays” by Montaigne, which was written for many years and was rewritten, changed, and supplemented by the author himself, is a fruitful material for analysis in terms of postmodern practices because the publication is a large-scale layering of different interpretations, comments, citations, reflections based on the opinions of famous intellectuals of the past, collected and personally compiled by the author in 3 volumes. Much of what was written did not change, it was only supplemented, so the researcher can trace the evolution of the thinking of the French philosopher because often, a new interpretation of what he said did not mean crossing out the previous one. Thus, the purpose of this article is to analyze postmodern practices in Montaigne’s book “The Essays” to comprehend their role and intentions in the book created in the late sixteenth century. This will enable researchers, in particular, to clarify certain mechanisms of the French thinker’s work, which previously did not fit well into the existing philosophical and literary interpretations. The primary objective of the present article is to analyse postmodernist practices of game, intertextuality, and irony. The structure of the book “The Essays” and the essayistic method of self-presentation of the individual are also analysed as a subject through the lens of postmodernist poetics.

Research Methods

In order to fulfil the tasks set before us, the main methods were: historically-literary, which

allowed us to combine the methodological priorities of scientific thought about essays from antiquity to the present in different research coordinates, in particular, from the standpoint of postmodernist criticism; receptive method, focused on the study of communicative features of a fictional essay as a work of art; hermeneutic, aimed at the interpretation of essays in the context of ensemble associations and other works of the writer. We also partially applied the principles of the biographical method and structuralism.

Discussion

Thus, the understanding of Montaigne's works in postmodernist discourse is not new. Theorists of postmodernism, in particular J. F. Lyotard (1994) saw certain signs of postmodernism in Montaigne's essays: "A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the creation he creates, in principle, are not governed by any prescriptive rules... It seems to me that the essay (Montaigne) belongs to postmodernism" (p. 8). P. Anderson (2011) also speaks about the influence of Montaigne on the formation of pre-modern culture, which in its own way prepared postmodernism. I. Fizer (1998) doubts whether Montaigne was the first postmodernist but he does not consider the very idea of this as paradoxical and artificial. Art critic O. Sydir-Hibelynda (2005) called Montaigne a forerunner of postmodernism "with a human face". In short, drawing parallels between Montaigne's "The Essays" and postmodern aesthetics does not seem absurd to us.

Thus, Montaigne's book "The Essays" is interesting both for the unconventional method of presenting reality at those times and for the organization of the book itself, which consists of individual works devoted, at first glance, to simple things, such as idleness, sorrow, fear, lies, dreams, smells, prayers. Montaigne's own way of presenting these concepts is experimental: the French thinker, based on what he has read from famous philosophers and thinkers of the past,

offers his own view of the phenomena he comprehends, interesting for its non-standard and often paradoxical nature. In other words, the author appears as an experimenter: he flirts with the reader and with his own "I" at the same time, plays with the word, presents the flow of thoughts "in real time", being in love with the very process of thinking, embodied in the word. In some cases, it may seem that the author is not so interested in the result of his reasoning, as the process of text generation, the course of colouring the thought into a verbal shell, the very act of creativity without embellishments and editorial work. Thus, V. Yaruchik (2015), speaking about the method of Montaigne, notes that "the author [Montaigne] analyzes himself and in parallel quotes the statements of many thinkers and philosophers, thus getting to know better the human nature. In particular, Montaigne admits this creative work has become the main thing in his life: the book created him to the same extent as he created it" (p. 189).

The author's chosen method of self-presentation and the genre form of the essay, which cannot be attributed to any of the current genres either in the Renaissance or today, are in complete agreement with such postmodern practices as hybridization, mutant change of genres, generating new forms, and abandonment of traditional "I", emphasizing its multiplicity. Undoubtedly, the narrator, on the one hand, is too focused on himself, on his own position, on his exclusive vision of the world, which is consciously emphasized in the text. However, on the other hand, he does not shy away from changing his own views. He can enter into a discussion with himself, abandon what had been said before, deny what was said at the beginning, which reveals the ambiguity of the author's "I": frank, but not always consistent. For example, in the essay "Of pedantry" his initial view of the importance of true science, which is a lever for continuous self-development and human improvement, correlates little with the view of science as a burden, as a dependence on one's own capabilities, expressed

at the end of this essay. If at the beginning of the work, the author writes that “knowledge is an excellent drug, but no drug has virtue enough to preserve itself from corruption and decay, if the vessel is tainted and impure wherein it is put to keep” (Montaigne, 2006, p. 178), then, in the end, he contradicts himself, claiming that “the study of sciences more softens and untemper the courage of men than it in any way fortifies and excites them” (Montaigne, 2006, p. 180). The thinker seems to leave to the reader’s discretion the position that seems closer to him, repeatedly emphasizing that he has the right to both his own view of things and the right to change them, even within a single work, because this is the nature of his proposed method of understanding reality—essayistic self-presentation through self-reflection: “I do not take upon me to direct what other men should do in the government of their families, there are plenty that meddles enough with that, but only give an account of my method in my own” (Montaigne, 2006, p. 217).

Among other postmodernist writing techniques, which, paradoxically, to some extent can be found in the book “The Essays”, it is worth noting the following: openness, the ambiguity of the sign code, variety, giving a feeling of “flickering” meanings; “scattering” of original texts by deconstruction, recoding of borrowed elements, newly combined with each other, fundamental non-consistency, incompleteness, the openness of construction, demonstration of the pleasant attitude to the text, game element, the process of creation of a model of being, the embodiment of semantic multiplicity achieved by previous operations with signifiers belonging to sign systems with connotative system and can be considered as connotations in connotations, orientation on the multiplicity of interpretations of the text, revealing of pluralistic type of thinking liberated in nature, orienting on acceptance of real-life wealth and diversity (Afanaseva, 2008). Based on the components of the postmodernist paradigm presented by I. Skoropanova (2001), it should also be noted that some of them, of

course, can also be found in Montaigne’s book “The Essays”. In addition to the above, it is important to note the ironic reassessment of values, intertextuality, reliance on the then-current history of human culture and its rethinking, pluralism of cultural languages, models, styles used as equals, a combination of entertainment and excessive intellectuality, the principle of reader’s participation, the emergence of a new type of reader, the variety of meanings and points of view, fundamental non-consistence, incompleteness, the openness of construction (Skoropanova, 2001). In our opinion, the primary practices used by Montaigne in the sixteenth century, which are still influential in the postmodernist discourse of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, paradoxically, are intertextuality, the fundamental systemic nature of unity, irony, the principle of reader’s participation, which gives rise to a new type of reader *a priori*. Of course, we are talking about the active usage of these practices by Montaigne, and not the basis for the poetics of his work as a whole, as is the case in specific postmodern discourse, but this does not diminish their importance and the possibility of fresh assessment in view of postmodern criticism. We shall look at these features in more detail.

Of course, quotations and intentional intertextuality are the artistic practices that lie on the surface of Montaigne’s “The Essays” because the work of the French thinker arose as a commentary on the works of prominent figures of the past. They were the ones who encouraged the thinker to base on what he read. We are talking about different variations of such penetration of the text into the text: in the form of quotations, cento, reminiscences, allusions, stylization, etc. The paramount place here is given to quotations with or without authorship: in the latter case, Montaigne did not consider it necessary because of relying on a well-rounded reader who can immediately recognize the author and source. Quotes in “The Essays” appear as an “emblematic form of intertextuality” (Piege-Gro, 2008, p. 34), rather than a fundamental basis of poetics,

allowing the reader to enjoy the process of flowing other people's thoughts in the meditations of Montaigne or to observe how the ideas of prominent figures of the past become part of Montaigne's discourse literally in real time, becoming, according to P. Rudnev (1999), "the key to self-growth of the meaning of the text" (p. 113). In some cases, the author uses someone else's text as a continuation of his own thought, "For the impression of passions does not remain superficially in him, but penetrates farther, even to the very seat of reason, infecting and corrupting it, so that he judges according to his fear, and conforms his behaviour to it. In this verse, you may see the true state of the wise Stoic learnedly and plainly expressed:

*"Mens immota manet; lachrymae
voluntur inanes"*.

("Though tears flow, the mind remains unmoved").

The Peripatetic sage does not exempt himself totally from perturbations of mind, but he moderates them" (Montaigne, 2006, p. 112).

Other fragments of the texts of the figures from the past encourage him to think: the quote forms the course of thought and constructs the essay's structure based on the associative principle. For example, this is precisely how the essay "That our affections carry themselves beyond us" begins, which immediately opens with three quotations from Seneca, Cicero and Epicurus. The whole essay is devoted to understanding the mechanisms of self-knowledge given the views of ancient figures. The third version of quoting is to expand and supplement Montaigne's own statement with the help of external thoughts, such as: "I fancied I could not more oblige my mind than to suffer it at full leisure to entertain and divert itself, which I now hoped it might henceforth do, as being by time become more settled and mature; but I find – "Leisure ever creates varied thought" that, quite contrary, it is like a horse that has broken from his rider, who voluntarily runs into a much more violent career than any horseman would put him to" (Mon-

taigne, 2006, p. 94).

Another trick is to comment on the quote in the quote: Montaigne comments on how one or another figure of the past interprets other people's ideas, so there is a double explanation of what is said, and, consequently, a new understanding of it emerges: "Socrates, in Plato, laughs at Laches, who had defined fortitude to be a standing firm in the ranks against the enemy. "What!" says he, "would it, then, be a reputed cowardice to overcome them by giving ground?" urging, at the same time, the authority of Homer, who commends in Aeneas, the science of flight. Moreover, whereas Laches, considering better of it, admits the practice as to the Scythians, and, in general, all cavalry whatever, he again attacks him with the example of the Lacedaemonian foot – a nation of all other the most obstinate in maintaining their ground – who, in the battle of Plataea, not being able to break into the Persian phalanx, bethought themselves to disperse and retire, that by the enemy supposing they fled, they might break and disunite that vast body of men in the pursuit, and by that stratagem obtained the victory" (Montaigne, 2006, p. 111).

By actively interweaving implicit intertexts and intermediates in the thinking process, Montaigne creates the effect of the incompleteness of the work and an almost limitless number of options for its reception, which is very characteristic of postmodernist discourse. His favourite thinkers of the past are ancient poets and philosophers, who are so organically intertwined with Montaigne's reflections that, in some places, it is difficult to separate them from the author's thoughts. Personal attachment to Sophocles, Aristophanes, Euripides, Demosthenes, Cicero, Virgil, Horace, Lucian, according to biographers of Montaigne, began in the days of the thinker's studies at the university and grew into a stable body of knowledge that can be supplemented and commented by the scholar-philosopher with the course of time and taking into account the systematic thinking of those who dare to do it.

In this regard, it should be noted that the role

of notes and comments in “The Essays” is no less important than the main text. According to C. Blum (1981), they did not play an illustrative role in order to confirm a certain philosophical idea, as was the case with moralist predecessors, whose works pursued a didactic purpose, but in order to show that the authority of the past is relative, they should be perceived regardless of the truth/falsity of what they said. N. Mavlevich (1998), having collected and systematized different positions on the poetics of Montaigne’s “The Essays” in the article “Ideological and artistic unity of Montaigne” on the peculiarities of citation, notes that: “One cannot but agree that one of the functions of quotations in Montaigne’s work, is to create polyphony (in opposition to traditions), which gives the right to an ambiguous interpretation of any issue” (Mavlevich, 1998, p. 256). Thus, the saturation of Montaigne essays with numerous quotations and allusions performs a cognitive-suggestive function, actualizing the literary and cultural-historical memory of the author-thinker and reader at the same time, giving impetus to independent comprehension of information, drawing parallels and logical connections between Montaigne’s opinions of others and the very thoughts of prominent thinkers and writers of the past. Thus, the recipient acts as the third participant in the process of contemplation by joining the thoughts of Montaigne and those whom he interprets in his own way, forming his own attitude to what is said. It should be noted that we consider the nature of utterance in the essay, first clearly presented as a separate practice in the book “The Essays” by Montaigne in 1580, interactive, i.e. one that determines the approach to utterance not as a ready interpretation, but as an event of communication, which “allows you to capture meanings depending on the situation of reception, experience, cognitive attitude and emotional-reflexive nature of the recipient’s perception. The reflexive, meditative and intellectual-dialogical nature of an essay can be filled with performative aesthetics” (Shevchenko, 2017, p. 70). Such an understanding of Mon-

taigne’s approach to the dialogue of the author of “The Essays” with the reader became possible based on the theoretical understanding of performative practices as part of postmodernist aesthetics.

Thus, quoting in Montaigne’s text is a productive method of organizing primarily his own opinion. However, in contrast to the actual postmodernist texts, in Montaigne’s “The Essays”, citation practices are directly related to the meditative as a way of expressing opinions, rather than to the systematic construction of an essay text as an author’s modelling of reality and attitude to it. First of all, quotations help the author as an intelligent and educated thinker and writer to present himself in the best way, through the thoughts of other famous artists with the help of possibilities provided in essay writing.

The obvious feature of Montaigne’s “The Essays” is an ironic presentation of both himself and everything he talks about. The fact that the author constantly doubts what is said avoids categorical statements, flirts with the reader confirms this. If in the text of traditional postmodernist work, irony becomes the main technique and way of uniting the past and the present, depicting characters, expressing the author’s position, in Montaigne’s book, the irony is a method of co-creating the author’s “I” – narrative instance – in essay discourse. According to O. Maltseva (2010), “in the philosophical essays of Michel Montaigne, irony became a way of understanding the experience of the Renaissance as a failure, and at the same time as a means to see the greatness of man in his loneliness, contradictions, mortality” (Maltseva, 2010, p. 173). She also believes that the thinker is ironic for being “alone while being surrounded with everyone”, that is, no matter how the French thinker expresses his own thoughts, they will always be inadequate to his own intuition. The researcher believes that Montaigne’s irony is a kind of revival of the half-forgotten ancient tradition of conscious non-negotiation and openness of philosophy for subsequent interpretative acts. That

is why the author of “The Essays” does not often use quotation marks in order to show a special – ironic – attitude to what is said. Usually, quotes that specify the multi-layered depth of reading the text refer the reader to the cultural and symbolic secondary meaning. The absence of quotation marks blurs the boundaries of ironic utterances, becoming an unarticulated part of the author's mentality, so sometimes realizing where the author is serious and where he is ironic about what he has read or understood does not always seem possible: “When I lately retired to my own house, with a resolution, as much as possibly I could, to avoid all manner of concern in affairs, and to spend in privacy and repose the little remainder of the time I have to live, I fancied I could not more oblige my mind than to suffer it at full leisure to entertain and divert itself, which I now hoped it might henceforth do, as being by time become more settled and mature; but I find –

“Variam semper dant otia mentem”,
 (“Leisure ever creates varied thought”)

that, quite contrary, it is like a horse that has broken from his rider, who voluntarily runs into a much more violent career than any horseman would put him to, and creates me so many chimaeras and fantastic monsters, one upon another, without order or design, that, the better at leisure to contemplate their strangeness and absurdity, I have begun to commit to writing, hoping in time to make it ashamed of itself” (Montaigne, 2006, p. 95).

The ironic discourse of “The Essays” reveals the alternation of high and low themes as the object of the author's understanding. It is illustrated in the headlines (“Of the Roman grandeur” / “Tomorrow's a new day!”, “Of liberty of conscience” / “Against idleness”). Also striking is the author's instant ability to speak absolutely mundanely, pathos-free, sometimes even casually about elevated topics (“The ceremony of the interview of princes”, “Of the Roman grandeur”, “Of judging of the death of another”), and his

quite sublime manner of thinking about everyday things (“Of smells”, “Of drunkenness”, “Of cripples”). In some places, the irony is a method of absurdizing some objects and phenomena and emphasizing different thoughts of the past. Montaigne's ironic position appears as a kind of indicator of the freedom of his own thinking and a catalyst for readers to develop their own attitude to everything, about which he says: “I should not speak so boldly if it were my due to be believed; and so I told a great man, who complained of the tartness and contentiousness of my exhortations” (Montaigne, 2006, p. 868); “I find that almost throughout we should say, “there is no such thing” and should myself often make use of this answer, but I dare not: for they cry that it is an evasion produced from ignorance and weakness of understanding; and I am fain, for the most part, to juggle for company, and prate of frivolous subjects and tales that I believe not a word of” (Montaigne, 2006, p. 863).

Thus, on a verbal-reflexive level, the artist evaluates the thoughts of prominent philosophers and artists of the past, intersperses episodes from his own life, draws parallels between his own actions, the actions of acquaintances, people close to him and the position of prominent figures of the past, actively using the comic techniques, such as the Socratic formula “I know that I know nothing”. The use of puns, unexpected comparisons, drawing parallels between high and low allows the author to quickly find contact with the reader to whom the author constantly appeals. Irony in Montaigne's text, as in the postmodern text, appears as an intellectual game with the recipient, provokes sympathy. In some places, this is manifested in the comparison of the logical and the illogical, the normal and the absurd, the high and the mundane, but it is not radical and exclusively sceptical, except that it is endowed with provocative properties: to force the reader to try out what he says.

However, in our opinion, the most important question that allows us to talk about Montaigne's “The Essays” in a postmodernist way is the ques-

tion of the compositional organization of this book. With the appearance of the text, which has been repeatedly rewritten by the author himself, as he himself has repeatedly stated, discussions about the common factors on which the book is built have not stopped. Most researchers consider “The Essays” to be complete, though each time with some clarifications. For example, F. Rigolot (1982) tried to isolate the composition of the work based on quotations in it, as the relationship between a particular literary series and the archetype stored in the memory of humankind. A. Tournon (1983) also tries to find “order in disorder”. He looks for compositional factors in the logic of commenting, which is a reflection on the above and is not a step forward. According to L. Kritzman (1980), the principle of denying everything that the author writes on the basis of the opinions of others generates scepticism, which becomes the principle of compositional unity. N. Mavlevich (1998) writes about this: “It is denial that becomes the desired basis of ideological and artistic unity” (p. 257). Many researchers consider asystemic and fragmentary formative factors of the composition (A. Yarchuk (2015), L. Kajda (2008), O. Zubecz (2019), S. Savicki (2019)) as the ones invented by the author himself or formed by him in the very process of composition and rewriting of the text. This is precisely what S. Artamonov (1997) means, who rejects the very need to look for factors of unity, emphasizing that “it is impossible to speak of any pre-thought-out and accepted composition of one or another part, and even more so of all work as a whole. Those who are trying to do so now are making a mistake. It is a free pairing of the mind, it is not even just a thought, it is a stream of thinking” (p. 90). And M. Alekseev calls the only unity of this work “unity of worldview” (Alekseev, Zhirmunskij, & Mokulskij, 1978, p. 6).

Meanwhile, some researchers are trying to find the factors of unity not at the ideological and compositional levels but on the basis of the application of exclusively artistic practices and

techniques, including those in postmodern discourse. For example, A. Perepadya (2012), the translator of Montaigne into Ukrainian and someone who, in a special way, feels the author’s style, views scaffolding as the main factor of unity in “The Essays”. “We must refuse to read the whole book by Montaigne “at once”, that is, we must realize that this is a text which is built based on scaffolding. However, remaking the plan of “The Essays” would be a hopeless task” (Perepadya, 2012, p. 382). V. Skurativskiy (2012) also draws attention to “The Essays”, which form a unity under the sign of freedom, to their “anarchic composition”, “compositional chaos” – definition based on oxymoron.

Meanwhile, the postmodern principle of the rhizome, which we see in the basis of the composition of “The Essays” by Montaigne, and indeed largely removes the question of the factors combining unity and chaos in this multi-layered text. The concept introduced by G. Deleuze and F. Guattari (2005) became part of postmodern consciousness and postmodern discourse as such. As it is known, the main features of the rhizome are adhesion and heterogeneity (any point of the rhizome can and should be associated with another one, unlike tree or root, which fix the point and the order as a whole), decentralization and anti-hierarchy (all points, which are part of it, deprived of each other’s advantages and priorities); plurality, the insignificance of the gap and its insignificance (rhizome after interruption does not cease to exist, but increases its own growth potential); cartography and decalcomania (fundamental disobedience to any structure-generating model, etc. (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005; Shevchenko, 2017). Thus, a rhizome is a system without beginning and end, without centre and periphery, it is the convergence of a single, and the plural is unity in the plural and plurality in unity” (Shevchenko, 2019, p. 113). Rhizomaticity, paradoxically, is the basis of Montaigne’s collection “The Essays”. Here, individual essays lose their uniqueness and acquire new features by appearing under one cover together.

This is not about the development of motives, the sequence of described plots, the cause-and-effect relationships of the thoughts expressed in the mental narrative, often repeated in different parts of the book. It is a question of rhizomatism as a nonlinear way of organising the integrity endowed with the intention of mobility and change of self-configuration. This way of seeing the text (as one of the possible ways) raises the question of other ways of presenting Montaigne's own work in an essayistic way. This removes the question of the very necessity of the system in the unity composed by Montaigne, because it simply does not exist there and cannot be, according to the author's own definition: "I hate to examine myself, and never review, but very unwillingly, what has once escaped my pen. I here set down nothing new. These are common thoughts, and having, peradventure, conceived them a hundred times, I am afraid I have set them down somewhere else already" (Montaigne, 2006, p. 819).

The author writes a book about himself, so all the time, the author's "I" manifests itself with varying degrees of openness, irony, interactivity, interrupted in some moments and restored in others. From these fragments of the manifestation of one's own, "I" emerges a portrait of an exogynarrator (narrator and thinker) in "The Essays": a scholar, an expert in classics, an encyclopedist, a philosopher, a critic, a writer, a sceptic, an ironizer and at the same time an ordinary person, to whom the earthly things are not alien: delicious food, good wine, human goods. It is impossible to single out the primary and the secondary in this. The author "plays" with the very attempt of the reader to get closer to the essence of the author's "I". Quotes, reflections, revelations, stories about his life events – all this has no system and integrity. The unifying substance of all this is the narrator-thinker, presenting himself as a person in a mosaic key. This personality is constantly changing, stays in doubt, avoids definite statements, does not give direct answers, preferring only shades and nuances of meanings

and comments. This can explain such a wide range of topics for discussion – from the nuances of food consumption to the peculiarities of hostilities in antiquity, and this can explain such frequent revelations by the author about the essence of his own writing and arbitrary nature of thought: "My book is always the same, saving that upon every new edition (that the buyer may not go away quite empty) I take the liberty to add (as 'tis but an ill jointed marqueterie) some supernumerary emblem; it is but overweight, that does not disfigure the primitive form of the essays, but, by a little artful subtlety, gives a kind of particular value to every one of those that follow. Thence, however, will easily happen some transposition of chronology, my stories taking place according to their opportuneness, not always according to their age)" (Montaigne, 2006, p. 820). Montaigne, as a true postmodernist, seeks to show the multiplicity of truth, the multiplicity of its meanings, which cannot be reduced to a single denominator, so many things the philosopher understands from the standpoint of the late Renaissance and from the standpoint of antiquity, which is clearly preferred in work.

It is known that the rhizome consists of multiplicities that coexist with other multiplicities. G. Deleuze and F. Guattari (2005) call them plateaus, these peculiar clumps of thought that are scattered throughout the text. They can be found anywhere, and the work can be read from anywhere. Because of this, it ceases to be a static and linear structure. At the same time, the permutation does not interfere with the meaning of what is being understood. This is because each element of the rhizome, when getting mixed, is combined with the others, and they, in turn, are closely intertwined but are not fixed in a clear sequence. This was confirmed by J. Brody (1982), who drew attention to the semantic cores of "The Essays", calling them the organizing beginning of the book as a combination of various thematic works. He declared impermanence, nature, and death to be the main cores of the work as a whole, considering them to be the basis of

Montaigne’s mentality. Commenting on the approach of J. Brody, N. Mavlevich (1998) considers it rational because in this way, it is possible to explain how “externally unrelated fragments of the text get a new meaning and form an associative framework of the chapter” (p. 254). At the same time, however, the question of associativity as a natural property of Montaigne’s thinking or associativity as a sign of his artistic writing a priori remains open. Presumably, both of these positions have the right to exist and do not contradict each other, but this may be the subject of further research.

Conclusion

Thus, the book “The Essays” by Montaigne – a work representing the literature of the late Renaissance, is not devoid of postmodern practices, which, of course, are not paramount in the poetic characteristics of the French author, i.e. do not constitute *ultima ratio*. Montaigne’s artistic thinking focuses on experimental cognition and presentation of one’s own consciousness through a non-traditional rethinking of the experience consumed as individual-authorial commentary, reinterpretation and pre-definition. The philosopher opposes any absolute and questions the inalienable truths, endowing his reader, to whom he constantly appeals, with a great degree of freedom. Thus, we can speak of the French philosopher’s use of several postmodern practices and in no way call him a postmodernist. The leading practices are: game strategies, intertextuality, focus on multiple interpretations, including his own, easy change of position, focus on the reassessment of values, creation of a new type of reader as a co-creator of philosophizing, ironic understanding of reality, mosaicism and eclecticism in creating a picture of the world. Montaigne completed his works arbitrarily, non-linearly and systematically; the author often repeats himself, which reveals the rhizome nature of the composition of his book “The Essays”. The paradox is that, by combining tradition and

experiment, Montaigne demonstrates the limitations of both classical tradition and postmodern aesthetics, leaving considerable space for the academic understanding of his extraordinary work, full of mysteries and hidden meanings.

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