



The Lost Origins of the Essay (A New History of the Essay)

John D'Agata

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I think the reason we've never pinpointed the real beginning to this genre is because we've never agreed on what the genre even is. Do we read nonfiction in order to receive information, or do we read it to experience art? It's not very clear sometimes. This, then, is a book that tries to offer a clear objective: I am here in search of art. I am here to track the origins of an alternative to commerce.

John D'Agata leaves no tablet unturned in his exploration of the roots of the essay. *The Lost Origins of the Essay* takes the reader from ancient Mesopotamia to classical Greece and Rome, from fifth-century Japan to nineteenth-century France, to modern Brazil, Germany, Barbados, and beyond. With brief and brilliant introductions to seminal works by Heraclitus, Sei Shō-nagon, Michel de Montaigne, Jonathan Swift, Virginia Woolf, Marguerite Duras, Octavio Paz, and more than forty other luminaries, D'Agata reexamines the international forebears of today's American nonfiction. This idiosyncratic collection makes a perfect historical companion to D'Agata's *The Next American Essay*, a touchstone among students and practitioners of the lyric essay.

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