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The permanent transient

by [Joseph Epstein](#)

Santayana in his letters.

If you infer the man from the books, you may go seriously wrong, because only a part of my nature has gone into my writings, and not all my writings have been published.

—George Santayana to Baker Brownell, December 26, 1939

One sometimes speaks of the proper time in life to read certain writers: no Hemingway after twenty, no Proust before forty, that sort of thing. Less attention is given to the best time of day to read a writer. The literarily omnivorous Edmund Wilson said he was unable to read the Marquis de Sade at breakfast. (I shouldn't think he would go down too smoothly at bedtime, either.) Off and on in recent years, I have found myself reading George Santayana—the eight volumes of his letters, his three volumes of autobiography, his essays, and his one novel, *The Last Puritan*—directly upon ar ...

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