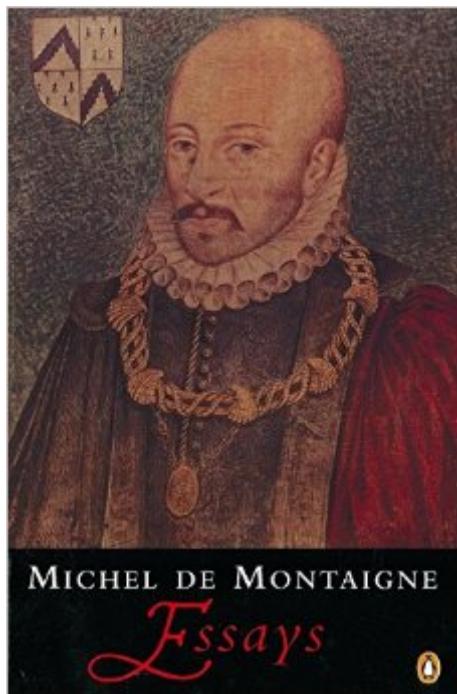


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MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE - THE COMPLETE ESSAYS. Translated and Edited with an Introduction and Notes by M. A. Screech. Iviv + 1284 pp. (Penguin Classics). London : Penguin Books, 1993 and Reissued. ISBN 0-14-044604-4 (pbk.) Those who discover Montaigne should count themselves very lucky. There are so many authors competing for our attention today, so many brilliant and less than brilliant men and women both contemporary and of the past, so many poets, novelists, philosophers, thinkers of every stripe, that Montaigne's voice can easily get lost in the general racket, like the voice of a single cricket on a noisy summer's night. But Montaigne's voice is well worth singling out for special attention, like that one cricket whose song is especially musical, because there has never been anyone quite like him, nor anyone who has produced such a wealth of sensible observations on life and everything that goes to make it up. We love Montaigne for his humanity, his wisdom, his clear insight into human nature, his tolerance of our weaknesses and failings, his love and compassion for all creatures whether man, animal, or plant, his calm, gentle and amiable voice, his stately and dignified progress as he conducts us through the vast repository of his mind. But above all we love him for his plain good sense. Despite his distance in time, we can open these essays almost anywhere and immediately become engrossed. Some of what he says, particularly about our weaknesses and failings, may not be particularly welcome to some, though the open-minded will acknowledge its self-evident truth. Montaigne was not afraid to speak his mind, and as a man who was interested in almost everything, his observations range from the curious through to the truly profound.

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