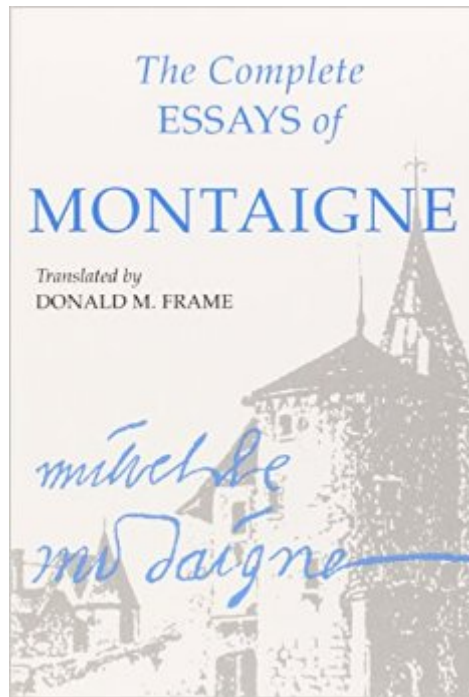


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The Complete Essays Of Montaigne



Synopsis

This new translation of Montaigne's immortal Essays received great acclaim when it was first published in The Complete Works of Montaigne in the 1957 edition. The New York Times said, "It is a matter for rejoicing that we now have available a new translation that offers definite advantages over even the best of its predecessors," and The New Republic stated that this edition gives "a more adequate idea of Montaigne's manner, his straight and unpretentious style, than any of the half-dozen previous English translations." In his Essays Montaigne warns us from the outset that he has set himself "no goal but a domestic and private one"; yet he is one author whose modernity and universality have been acclaimed by each age since he wrote. Probing into his emotions, attitudes, and behavior, Montaigne reveals to us much about ourselves. As new editions of the Essays were published during his lifetime, Montaigne interpolated many new passages; often of considerable length. This volume indicates the strata of composition, so that the reader may follow the development of Montaigne's thought over the years. The detailed index provides a convenient means of locating the many famous passages that occur throughout the work.

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Customer Reviews

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.

Should I ever be forced to run away from war and disaster with nothing else but one book in a torn briefcase, or find myself at the business-end of a feeding tube in a hospital waiting for my last breather, then Montaigne would be a strong candidate to keep me company in this last and loneliest hour. Not that I have a hard time to choose, there is really only one other book I would consider, and it is most definitely not the bible, but Montaigne always conveyed to me the warmth and comfort of a good friend. Even when he sometimes loses me and prattles away on some obsession of his, it is like listening to your best friend without really listening, you are just glad he is there. What is it about this Frenchman I wonder, that has endured for such a long period of time? Shakespeare too still speaks to us, but often in a somewhat muffled voice, time and distance are beginning to tell. But Montaigne, who predated Shakespeare and even provided Hamlet with a few clues and phrases, strikes us still as fresh and modern as ever. He is one of those writers of which I have read every line ever printed; and apart from his essays, the itinerary of his travel to Italy has always been of particular interest to me, because it describes places I used to know intimately. How could times have changed so much, and certainly not always to the better. But in Montaigne this remote period becomes alive again, its comforts (or the lack of it), its smells, its behaviors, and of course the food (Montaigne was French after all) maintain their tangible presence and a glow like the memories of a distant childhood.

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