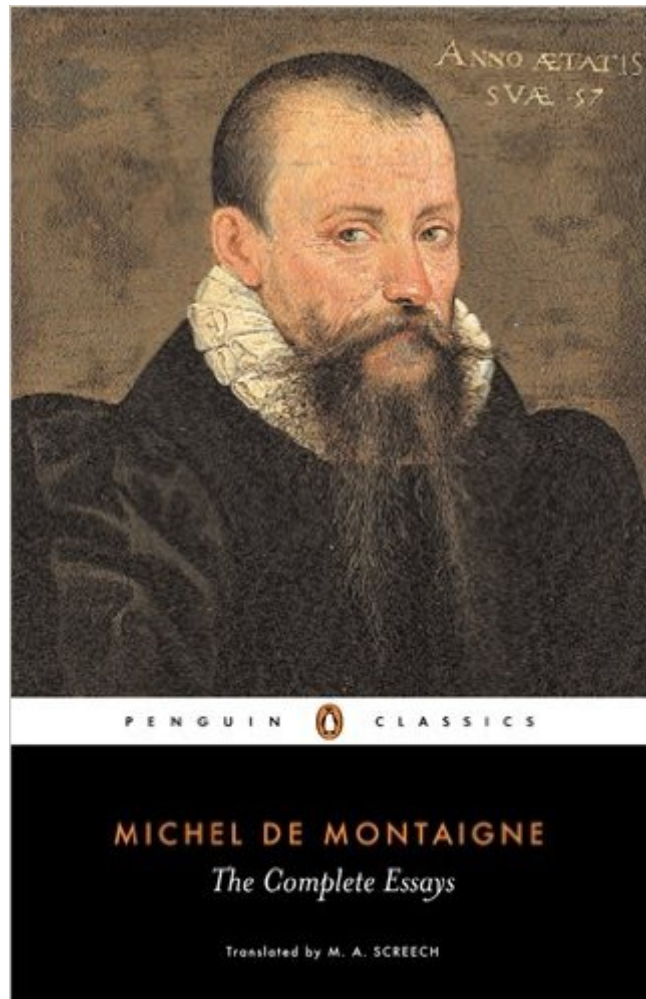


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# Michel De Montaigne - The Complete Essays (Penguin Classics)



## Synopsis

Michel de Montaigne was one of the most influential figures of the Renaissance, singlehandedly responsible for popularising the essay as a literary form. This Penguin Classics edition of *The Complete Essays* is translated from the French and edited with an introduction and notes by M.A. Screech. In 1572 Montaigne retired to his estates in order to devote himself to leisure, reading and reflection. There he wrote his constantly expanding 'assays', inspired by the ideas he found in books contained in his library and from his own experience. He discusses subjects as diverse as war-horses and cannibals, poetry and politics, sex and religion, love and friendship, ecstasy and experience. But, above all, Montaigne studied himself as a way of drawing out his own inner nature and that of men and women in general. The *Essays* are among the most idiosyncratic and personal works in all literature and provide an engaging insight into a wise Renaissance mind, continuing to give pleasure and enlightenment to modern readers. With its extensive introduction and notes, M.A. Screech's edition of Montaigne is widely regarded as the most distinguished of recent times. Michel de Montaigne (1533-1586) studied law and spent a number of years working as a counsellor before devoting his life to reading, writing and reflection. If you enjoyed *The Complete Essays*, you might like Francois Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, also available in Penguin Classics. 'Screech's fine version ... must surely serve as the definitive English Montaigne' A.C. Grayling, *Financial Times*  
'A superb edition' Nicholas Wollaston, *Observer*

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## Customer Reviews

Over the years I have kept a copy of the Essays by my favorite reading chair to be enjoyed at random, particularly in the middle of the night when Entropy seems to hold the upper hand. They exercise a remarkable calming effect. Seduced by the idea of having a complete set of all the Essays, I initially opted for the Screech translation, but found it wooden and pedantic. I moved to the Cohen translation, which does not include all of the Essays, but has all of the major ones and is far more enjoyable.

Montaigne's Essays are one of the more enjoyable massive tomes of renaissance writing available, and if reading in English, one has two major modern choices of translation, Screech and Frame. To start with Translation: Both major translations are excellent in their own way, but some differences are of note. When a translation is done, usually the translator will translate the major language of the text, French in this case, and leave quotes by the author from other languages, mostly Latin in this case, untranslated. The translator will provide a note with the translation of the quote, and preferably the source of the quote. This is where Screech and Frame differ considerably. Screech does what should be done, and Frame just translates everything into English with no significant notations other than the person quoted. This means, however, that one may prefer one translation over the other based on this alone. For example, one that wishes to take a more scholarly look will likely use Screech (or the original), and one that simply wants to read for pleasure may have no problem using the translation by Frame. Also, Screech is British and Frame is American, so one may have other preferences for style. As for the Physical Copy: The physical copies of Frame's translation (Stanford and Everyman's) are vastly superior to the Penguin Classics Screech version. The Penguin paperback is thick, but in keeping with the generally small form factor, the print is terribly small, and the paper is of a horrible quality, which is the reason I also purchased the Kindle version. As for the Kindle version: The Penguin Classics Kindle file is much more pleasant to read and deal with than the paperback alternative. However, there are many errors in the Kindle version that are not present in the paperback version. It appears some items get corrected occasionally, but still, it is not nice to charge so much for the Kindle version, and not have it completely proofread and ready for primetime. This actually led me to have a conversation with a Penguin representative about the quality of the Kindle version, and in that conversation, I learned something I had not realized before. Penguin does not produce the Kindle version. Amazon does. So, all of the quality issues I have noticed in the past about Kindle versions essentially are the fault of Amazon rather than the publisher listed. I suppose the publisher only sells a license to produce the Kindle file and sets price limitations,

and does the rest. This needs to change, because there needs to be more quality control.\*\*\*EDIT 02/01/2016: SEE COMMENT BELOW BY RAFA. APPARENTLY, IT IS THE PUBLISHER'S FAULT, NOT 'S.\*\*\*However, because of the limitations of the Penguin paperback, I would still recommend the Kindle version if one is to read Screech. Five stars for Montaigne's Complete Essays, regardless of which version one chooses to read.

Montaigne wrote what he called "essays", in the sense of "attempts" - he was trying to find out what he thought about stuff. It helped that he'd read a great deal, led a pretty full life and had known some interesting people, although one of his great virtues is that he seems to have found them more interesting than they themselves probably thought they were. Pascal struggled all his life with the example of Montaigne. The problem for Pascal was that he was only really concerned with one thing - God's grace - and he was scandalised that Montaigne didn't seem to find it that big a deal. MM will write as readily about theological disputes and poetry as he will about sex, forgetfulness and his own stupidity. Apart from anything else, he was perhaps the first person to observe that nobody can pretend that his s\*\*\* doesn't stink (I can't remember the exact page, but then there \_are\_ over a thousand.) There's a lifetime's reading in here. For such a big fat classic of a book it reads like it was written yesterday, although if it \_had\_ been written yesterday, he'd've been all over Hello! magazine by now. Wisdom is maybe underrated these days, but Montaigne isn't just spouting off. This is not a 16th century evening with Morrie. You can see him thinking. He \_encourages\_ you. (What a great word "encourage" is.) It's not that bad for about fourteen quid.

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