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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.

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