



Montaigne

Stefan Zweig

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Montaigne es un libro biográfico del escritor austríaco Stefan Zweig.

Es la historia de Michel Eyquem de Montaigne [mi??l ek?m d? m??t??] (Castillo de Montaigne, Saint-Michel-de-Montaigne, cerca de Burdeos, 28 de febrero de 1533 - ibíd., 13 de septiembre de 1592) fue un filósofo, escritor, humanista y moralista del Renacimiento, autor de los Ensayos y creador del género literario conocido en la Edad Moderna como ensayo. Ha sido calificado como el más clásico de los modernos y el más moderno de los clásicos. Su obra fue escrita en la torre de su propio castillo entre 1580 y 1588 bajo la pregunta "¿Qué sé yo?". Montaigne es el hermano de Juana de Montaigne, casada con Richard de Lestonnac y por lo tanto el tío de Santa Juana Lestonnac.

Montaigne Details

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Σωτ?ρης Αδαμαρ?τσος says

Αυτ? δεν ε?ναι ?να βιβλ?ο για να γνωρ?σεις την συλλογιστικ? και το ?ργο του Μονταινιου, εν?ς τελευτα?ου των Ουμανιστων του 16ου αι?να. Ε?ναι μια υποκειμενικ? ματι? του Τσβαιχ π?νω στην στ?ση ζω?ς του Μ. Ο συγγραφ?ας κ?τω απ? την ψυχολογικ? κατ?ρρευση των τελευτα?ων μην?ν πριν την αυτοκτον?α του το 1942 βρ?σκει στην αν?γνωση των δοκιμ?ων του Μονταινιου μια δικα?ωση της στ?σης ζω?ς του και μια ανακο?φιση απ? την Πνευματικ? αναστ?τωση που ο π?λεμος προκ?λεσε στην ζω? του. Στο επ?μετρο, στις επιστολ?ς του προς τρ?τους, περιγρ?φει την καταθλιπτικ? παραδοχ? του και την Απελπισ?ας του για την Απ?λεια του κ?σμου που ?ζησε και γν?ρισε και θεωρο?σε κατ?ρθωμα της εποχ?ς του — το ?ργο του της ?διας περι?δου "ο κ?σμος του Χτες" απεικονιζεται αυτ? η πνευματικ? αν?ταση ?πως αυτ?ς την β?ωσε τα χρ?νια πριν τον π?λεμο!

Με αυτ? την συλλογιστικ? και με μ?νο σκοπ? να φωτ?σει την α?σθηση της εσωτερικ?ς ελευθερ?ας που ο Μονταίνιος —αν?μεσα στα υπ?λοιπα θ?ματα — διαπραγματευεται στο κ?ριο ?ργο του, τα Δοκ?μια, ο Τσβαιχ γρ?φει αυτ? την μικρ? ημιτελ? σε κ?ποια σημει?α βιογραφ?α ως το τελευτα?ο επεισ?διο μιας πλο?σιας σε ελευθερ?α ζω?ς! Και για το λ?γο αυτ? το βιβλ?ο ξεν?ζει, αν ψ?χνεις μια γν?ση για τον Μ.

Μ?σα απ? την βιογραφ?α αυτ? διαβ?ζουμε λοιπ?ν περσοτερο μια πνευματικ? διαθ?κη του Τσβαιχ, μια υπενθ?μιση (προς την Ευρ?πη που γκρεμ?ζεται πνευματικ? στον φανατισμ? και την μισαλλοδοξια και στην καταστροφ? της γερμανικ?ς κουλτο?ρας) ?τι π?ρα και π?νω απ ?λα, η μ?γιστη κατ?κτηση του Ανθρ?που παραμ?νει η εσωτερικ? ελευθερ?α του και η Αποξ?νωση απ? ?λα τα περιττ?.

Αυτ? καθιστ? το ?ργο ολ?γον ανιαρ? και εμμονικο, εντο?τοις ε?ναι η ?δια η φιλοσοφ?α ζω?ς του Τσβαιχ που ΚΑΘΡΕΦΤΙΖΕΤΑΙ στο ?ργο μ?σα απ? τον Μονταίνιο, για την οπο?α και επιτιμηθηκε και μετ? θ?νατον με την κατηγορ?α της δραπετευσης μ?σω της αυτοκτον?ας!

Vassiliki Dass says

2,5

Ακατ?ργαστο, μεροληπτικο. Δεν μου ?ρεσε εν? τον Τσβαιχ τον λατρε?ω. ?ταν οι τελευτα?οι μ?νες της ζω?ς του, σε προφαν?ς περ?εργη ψυχολογικ? κατ?σταση, ?γραψε ?μως ?να αριστο?ργημα, την Σκακιστικ? νουβ?λα. Μπορ? να πω ?τι αντιπ?θησα τον βιογραφομενο τελειως

BlackOxford says

Thinking the Unthinkable

Emotionally and politically, if not yet militarily, the presidency of Donald Trump has had the same impact on the world as the election of Adolf Hitler in 1933 or the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand in 1914. It is a shocking, incomprehensible fact which becomes more shocking and incomprehensible every day. Trump establishes a demarcation between one world and another. I don't feel it an exaggeration to echo

Zweig's feeling for Montaigne's situation of "*precisely a generation like ours, cast by fate into the cataract of the world's turmoil.*"

Before Trump, the United States, while often causing great harm in the world, had some claim to moral standing. It erred, when it did, with some shame and recognition that it wasn't as honourable as it should be. After Trump it is clear that the great democratic experiment has failed. The United States is merely a banana republic with nuclear weapons. Its factions are mutually criminalising and irreconcilable through either intellect or emotional appeal. Its politics is as brutal and corrupt as that of a recently liberated colony. Its ineptness in governing its own people and communicating with the rest of the world is breath-taking.

This is relevant to Zweig's *Montaigne* because it was written in similar circumstances. Exiled from his native Austria, he watched as the civilisation of Europe destroyed itself ideal by ideal. He had already experienced the political and economic disaster of the First World War and the shame that ensued. As he wrote *Montaigne*, he was overcome by the cultural disaster of European fascism that he perceived would have even more terrible consequences. Shortly after finishing the book, he and his wife despairingly took their own lives.

Montaigne, Zweig felt accurately or not, was a man who encountered a similar mass deterioration of society. A model therefore, possibly even an inspiration as great as Marcus Aurelius, for how to cope with the spiritual and aesthetic chaos of a pervasive and dominant vulgarity. Like Montaigne, Zweig felt "*We too need to stand the test, to endure one of the most horrifying collapses of humanity, which follows directly one of its most magnificent periods of advancement.*" The book is an exploration of how one might do that.

One also might suspect, given the tragic outcome, that Zweig's exploration was not all that successful. But then again perhaps it was exactly what was needed to provide the courage to act decisively. In any case it is not necessary to make a judgment using Zweig's criterion, whatever that was. The reader can use his own aesthetic template to judge both *Montaigne* and the Zweig one can detect in his version of Montaigne - a man trying with all his resources to comprehend and accept a reality that is in many ways incomprehensible and unacceptable.

"*Strong diseases require strong remedies*", wrote Montaigne. Most of us feel the same "*fundamental feeling*" of impotence which Zweig ascribes to Montaigne and which he claims for himself. Withdrawal until some semblance of rationality rather than cant, of beauty rather than insistent vulgarity returns. "*One must seek another certitude beyond the world, beyond the homeland; one must refuse to join the chorus of the demoniacal and create one's own homeland, one's own world, outside the present time.*" In the age of Trump, what alternative is there? And what if such a return proves impossible? I suppose Zweig's ultimate choice if one has sufficient courage.

Melissa says

I received an ARC from Pushkin Press through Edelweiss.

Stefan Zweig was forced to flee his home in Austria as the Nazis were taking control of his motherland. For years he wandered around Europe as a nomad with no real place to call home. As Europe is ravaged by war, he finds his way to the German community of Petropolis in Brazil and in 1941 he decides to write this brief biography of Michel de Montaigne with whose life he identifies on many levels.

Montaigne comes from a long line of hardworking ancestors. His father's family were fishermen and made their fortune by eventually owning their own fleet of ships. His mother's family were Jewish bankers from Spain who fled that country to avoid the Inquisition. Montaigne's grandfather buys a chateau and a vast estate in Bordeaux and intends to further the family's aristocratic status through his purchase of land and a title.

Montaigne is brought up in the lap of luxury and it was very important to his father that his eldest son receive the best education possible. As a result it was mandatory that Montaigne be fluent in Latin, for which purpose his father hired a German tutor when Montaigne was only four years old. Montaigne was only allowed to speak in Latin and even the rest of the family and the household servants were required to learn some basic Latin phrases in order to communicate with the young boy. As a result of this immersion in the language Montaigne is said to have been more comfortable speaking and writing in Latin than in his native French. As a classicist I couldn't help but smile at and appreciate this part of Montaigne's story. If only it were possible to educate all of my students in this way!

When Montaigne's father dies he takes over as the head of household.. This foists a large responsibility on a man who sees his familial and civic responsibilities as mundane and tiresome occupations. Zweig highlights Montaigne's detachment from his family whom he even seems to view at times as a burden. He never has fond words for his wife or the institution of marriage and at one point Zweig says that Montaigne is not even really sure how many children he has that are still alive. Montaigne's isolation from his family is further deepened when, at the age of thirty-eight, he decides that he wants to retire from his life, lock himself in the study in his tower, and read the precious books with which he has surrounded himself.

Montaigne's view of books and reading is also noteworthy in Zweig's account of his life. Montaigne wants to absorb as much information and knowledge as possible and he scribbles notes in his books as various thoughts occur to him. Montaigne states about his collection: "Books are my kingdom. And here I seek to reign as absolute lord." It is during this time of self-imposed retreat and isolation that Montaigne tries to attain individual freedom and seeks to know himself as a man and as a human being on a deeper level. His intentions, like other philosophers, is not to give his readers a specific ideology to follow. Instead his thoughts and writings are introspective and intensely personal.

Ten years later, at the age of forty-eight, Zweig decides that he has had enough of his retirement and so decides to travel across Europe. This journey becomes very painful for him since he suffers debilitating pain from kidney stones. While he is away on his journey, the citizens of Bordeaux elect him in absentia as their mayor so at this point he decides to go back and serve his people. Zweig reminds us, though, that Montaigne is no hero and his selfish habits come to the forefront once again when the plague breaks out in Bordeaux and he abandons his people to find for themselves.

Whether or not one is familiar with Montaigne, Zweig's account of him is definitely worth a read. Zweig was at a critical point in his life where he saw the world erupt in violence because of fascism and communism. He commiserated with Montaigne who also saw his world torn apart by religious wars and fanaticism. Zweig commits suicide in 1942 and this was one of the last things that he wrote. Many believe that Zweig took Montaigne's advice as far as death is concerned and decided to die on his own terms instead of living through a miserable exile imposed on him by outside forces.

Laila says

Uzun yıllar önce Montaigne'nin "Denemeler"ini okumuştum. Zweig'in kitabı sonrasında bir kere daha okumam gerektiğini düşünüyorum ama düşünceleri ve yaşam tarzının bana göre olmadığını bilerek okumaya başlamak bana ne kazandıracak bilmiyorum. Önyargı mı? Belki evet!

Alıntı: Kendi anlattığına göre, genç bir insanken, "böbürlenmek" ve bildikleriyle kendini göstermek için okumuştur; daha sonra biraz daha bilge olabilsin diye okumuştur; şimdi ise yalnızca canı istediği için okumakta, asla herhangi bir yarar düşüncesi beklememektedir. Bir kitap sıkıcı geldiğinde eline bir başkasını almaktadır. Bir kitap fazla sıkıcı geldiğinde şunları söyler: "Karşıma kaçan güç pasajlar yüzünden kendimi yiyip bitiremem. Bir-iki giriştikten sonra vazgeçerim; çünkü aklımda, yalnızca bir atılım yapabilecek güçtedir. Bir noktaya bir bakışta anlayamadım olursa, yeni çabalarla artık bana hiçbir yarar yoktur; böyle çabalar, olayı aydınlatamaz yerde daha da karartırlar."-Bu tembel okur-, okuma çaba gerektirdiği anda kitabı elinden bırakır: "Kitaplar yüzünden ter dökmek gibi bir zorunluluğum yok, canım isterse onları bir yana atabilirim." diyen Montaigne'in, kitapların kendisi için en yararlı yanı da "düşünme yeteneğini körüklemesi" olduğunu söylemesi tezat geldi. bu bölümleri okuduktan sonra kitaba bakış açısı bu şekilde olan birini okumak benim için pozitif bir getiri olur mu? Bilemiyorum.

Montaigne'in çocukluğunda ana sütünden kesilmezden önce, başka aristokrat evlerinde olduğu gibi atoya bir süt anne getirtilecek yerde, Montaigne atası'ndan uzaklaştırmaması ilginç buldum. Derebeylik sırasında kalan ufak bir köyde yaşayan yoksul bir oduncu ailenin yanına verilmesi gelişmesini nasıl etkiledi merak ediyorum.

Montaigne'in ilşkiler konusundaki fikirleri de ilginç... "kisinin kendisini ödünç verebileceğini ama ruhunun özgürlüğünü kendisi için ayırmaması gerektiğini" savunması farklı bir bakış açısıydı. Fakat kadının çok eğlencesiz aldatması üzerine olan sözlerini kabul edilemez buldum!

Bir dönem bir yerlere gelebilmek için çabalayan Montaigne'in eserlerinin basılması sonrasında belediye başkanlığı olması, ardından Navarrelî Henri ile III. Henri arasındaki diyalogda sergilediği tavır en beğendiğim bölümler oldu.

Ölmeden önce ya da en küçük kızının ya da kadar olan Matmazel Marie de Gournay ile nişanlanmaması o dönem şartlarına göre normal sayılsa da bu satırları okurken irkildim. Evet Matmazel, Montaigne'in yazdıkları tutulmuş olabilir ama bir insanın yazdıklarıyla başlanmakla onun karakterine aşık olmak farklı şeyler diye düşünüyorum.

Zweig, Montaigne'yi her zamanki gibi kendine has tarzıyla erişilebilir, doğrusuyla anlatmış... **Deneme yazarlığındaki son büyük ürünü bu eser.** Son günlerinde, Brezilya'da eyle intihar etmeden önce, Avrupalı bir arkadaşına, "artık sadece en büyükleri okuyabiliyorum." demiş...

Diğer Alıntılar:

#1 Bir şeyi ezbere bilmek, insanın bir şey bildiğini değil, bir şeyi belleğinde tutabildiğini gösterir.

#2 Yalnızca kendi göbeğine bakan dünyayı göremez.

Jorge says

Un texto inconcluso en que la emotiva y magistral pluma de Stefan Zweig (1881-1942) dedica una biografía al gran pensador renacentista francés Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) y más que una biografía este texto es una suerte de apología de este gran humanista, creador de una obra fundamental de la literatura y el pensamiento occidental llamada simplemente “Ensayos” que se constituye en una especie de biblia pagana.

Otra pequeña obra por su extensión pero grande en belleza y en luz que el maestro Zweig nos regala y en donde además de proveernos de datos sobre la vida de Montaigne, también nos proporciona píldoras del gran pensamiento del autor francés, interpretando esa sabiduría renacentista.

“El escritor que hay en él es sólo una sombra del hombre, mientras que de ordinario nos maravillamos mil veces al ver en otros lo grande que es su arte de escribir y lo pequeño que es su arte de vivir”.

Ignacio Irulegui says

En los últimos días de su vida, retirado en un exilio forzoso, Stefan Zweig escribe -como puede- un ensayo apologético sobre la figura de Michel de Montaigne. Zweig conoció la barbarie del siglo XX y descubrió que su época estaba signada por un mal cada vez más invasivo: la pérdida de la libertad. En ese contexto, redescubre al ensayista francés con la significación que le provee la quizás más notoria actitud *montaigneana*: una resistencia casi absoluta a la cesión de la libertad individual hacia agentes externos. Zweig rescata, entonces, a Montaigne como símbolo de la fortaleza del sujeto ante aquellos factores que quieren hacer de él un instrumento para su conveniencia. Lo repite una y otra vez, con pasión convencida, y todo el ensayo se articula sobre ese núcleo de significado. Al tiempo que pretende componer una biografía, Zweig extrae de Montaigne un ejemplo moral que, extrapolado a la actualidad, permitiría generar un fármaco contra las nuevas formas de esclavitud auspiciadas por las sociedades modernas. Este es un libro urgente, escrito bajo la presión del tiempo que se acaba, en muchos sentidos inacabado. Pero esa emergencia precaria (Zweig contaba apenas con bibliografía para consulta) se compensa con la energía emocional con la que el autor pergeña cada frase. Es el último esfuerzo antes del disparo suicida. Finalmente, dos planos de lectura se superponen: como biografía, *Montaigne* se percibe acaso demasiado escueta, breve, insuficiente. Da cuenta apenas de los episodios fundamentales de la vida del hombre retratado; lo cual posiblemente haga de ella un texto idóneo como introducción a Montaigne. Pero una capa subyacente, que es a la que Zweig le interesa, imprime en verdad la potencia motivadora del texto: demostrar que la voluntad del hombre puede oponerse en cualquier época a fuerzas las tiránicas que intentan subyugarlo.

david says

Can you imagine a better biographer than Stefan Zweig?

And is there a more interesting subject, in this genre, than Michel de Montaigne?

The best biography I have read on one of literature's most interesting yet obscure figures.

Montaigne, from a philosophical viewpoint, is one of the most relatable and organic thinkers I have been introduced to through the medium of words.

He, Montaigne, lived during the 1500's.

Great. Worthy of seven point five stars.

Steve says

Autumn Rhythm, by Jackson Pollak

Denn es gehört zu den geheimnisvollen Gesetzen des Lebens, daß wir seiner wahren und wesentlichen Werte immer erst zu spät gewahr werden: der Jugend, wenn sie entschwindet, der Gesundheit, sobald sie uns verläßt, und der Freiheit, dieser kostbarsten Essenz unserer Seele, erst im Augenblick, da sie uns genommen werden soll oder schon genommen worden ist.()

Though Stefan Zweig (1881-1942) and his first wife, Friderike, escaped the Nazis by fleeing to England in 1934, in 1940 the overwhelming triumphs of the Blitzkrieg sent Zweig and his second wife, Lotte, to the USA and then Brazil. One of the most commercially successful German language authors of the first half of the 20th century, Zweig had to witness the Nazis banning and burning his books because he was Jewish and anti-Nazi, and then sweeping across Europe in a wave that seemingly could not be stopped.

In the midst of this stress and despair Zweig, who had written many memorable biographies of historical figures, started composing *Montaigne*. He felt close to Montaigne because he had lived through the violence and intolerance of the religious wars that convulsed Europe in the 16th century and had advocated for civilized values that were in danger of disappearing. Indeed, Zweig felt that he was now able to fully appreciate Montaigne's force of character.

Nur wer in der eigenen erschütterten Seele eine Zeit durchleben muß, die mit Krieg, Gewalt und tyrannischen Ideologien dem Einzelnen das Leben und innerhalb seines Lebens wieder die kostbarste Substanz, die individuelle Freiheit, bedroht, nur der weiß, wieviel Mut, wieviel Ehrlichkeit und Entschlossenheit vonnöten sind, in solchen Zeiten der Herdentollheit seinem innersten Ich treu zu bleiben. Nur er weiß, daß keine Sache auf Erden schwerer und problematischer wird als innerhalb einer Massenkatastrophe sich seine geistige und moralische Unabhängigkeit unbefleckt zu bewahren. ()*

But precisely this identification with his subject assures that *Montaigne* is not a biography, even in the idiosyncratic sense of Zweig's other biographies. Zweig admits this freely:

*Mich aber berührt und beschäftigt an Montaigne heute nur dies: wie er in einer Zeit ähnlich der unsrigen sich innerlich freigemacht hat, und wie wir, indem wir ihn lesen, uns an seinem Beispiel bestärken können.(**)*

Though one certainly does learn something of Montaigne's life from this text - drawn primarily from Montaigne's own discursive essays - it is more than anything a *cri de coeur* and Zweig's attempt to remind himself that mankind had survived earlier crises, an attempt at self-therapy. The therapy failed - I have the sense that *Montaigne* remained unfinished at the double suicide of Zweig and his wife on February 22, 1942. They left their lives, holding each other's hands, through an overdose of barbiturates.

() For it belongs to the secret laws of life that we always become aware of its true and essential values too late: of youth when it vanishes, of health as soon as it leaves us, and of freedom, this most valuable essence of our soul, only in the moment when it would be or already is taken from us.

(*) Only he who in his own stricken soul must live through a time that with war, violence and tyrannical ideologies threatens his life, and within that life his most valuable substance, his individual liberty, only he knows how much courage, how much honesty and resolve are necessary to remain true to his innermost Self in such times of herd madness. Only he knows that nothing on earth is more difficult and problematic than to maintain his spiritual and moral independence within a mass catastrophe.

(**) What touches and occupies me today with Montaigne is only this: how he in a time similar to ours managed to free himself internally, and how we, by reading him, can fortify ourselves with his example.

Sara says

No hay nadie mejor que Stefan Zweig, ese vienés omnisapiente al que todo el mundo debería leer, para escribir una biografía sobre una figura tan inmensa como lo fue Montaigne. Sin pretensiones y tiñéndola de grandes reflexiones sobre sus propias circunstancias —exiliado en Brasil durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial—, es probablemente uno de los estudios biográficos más amenos que he leído nunca.

Adem Yüce says

Stefan Zweig, Nazi Almanyas'nda kitaplar'nı yak?lmas'nı ard'ndan, Erasmus'la ba?lad??? içsel yolculu?una yine bir hümanistle, Montaigne'le noktayı koyar. Montaigne, yazar'n 1942'de hayat'na son vermeyi seçmesiyle yar'm kalan son eserlerinden biridir. Avrupa'y? Avrupa yapan filozof ve yazarlar? konu alan biyografiler üzerinden kendini anlama ve anlatma yolculu?unun Zweig için son u?ra?d'r Montaigne. . "Stefan Zweig, "En gönüllü ölüm, ölümlerin en güzelidir," diyen Montaigne'de kendini bulmu?tur. Büyük Avrupa'y? geri dönü?ü olmayacak ?ekilde sonland'ran ?kinci Dünya Sava?? y?llar'nda, ya'am'n ve ya?aman'n insan'n kendi iradesine ba?l? olmaktan ç?kt???n? fark eden son büyük Avrupalı'd'r Zweig. . / **Havadaki a??r kasvet sözcüklere kilit vurdu?u için yaz'nı ikinci bölümü kitaptan al'ntı'd'r.

/ . "nsana her ya??nda ve hayat'n her döneminde seslenebilen yazarlar'n say?s? azd'r –Homeros, Shakespeare, Goethe, Balzac, Tolstoy gibi– ve baz? yazarlar da vard'r ki, ancak belli bir zaman geldi?inde kendilerini bütün anlamlar?yla açarlar. Montaigne, onlardan biridir. Onu do?ru de?erlendirebilmek için insan'n çok genç, deneyimlerden ve hayal k'r?kl'klar'ndan yoksun olmamas? gerekir; Montaigne'in özgür ve yan'lt'lımas? imkân'sz dü?üncelerinin en yard'mc? olabilece?i ku?ak ise, örne?in bizimkisi gibi, kaderin bir dünya karga'as'nı ortas'na fırlatıp att??? bir ku?akt'r. Ancak sava?lar'n, zorbal???n, tiranca

ideolojilerin bireyin hayat?n? –ve yine bu hayat içinde olmak üzere– en de?erli özü, bireysel özgürlü?ü tehdit etti?i bir zaman dilimini
kendi sars?lm?? ruhunda ya?amak zorunda kalm?? olan ki?i, sürü kudurmu?lu?unun egemenli?indeki böyle zamanlarda insan?n iç dünyas?n?n en derin noktas?nda yatan “ego”suna sad?k kalabilmesinin ne büyük bir cesaret, dürüstlük ve kararlılık gerektirdi?ini bilebilir. Yaln?zca böyle bir insan, dünyada bir kitlesel y?k?m?n ortas?nda kendi manevi ve ahlaki ba??ms?zl??n? lekesiz koruyabilmekten daha güç bir ?ey olamayaca??n? bilir. ?nsan, ancak kendisi ak?ldan, insanlık onurundan yana ku?kuya dü?üp çaresiz kalm??sa e?er, dünya çap?nda bir kaosun ortas?nda tek bir ki?inin örnek biçimde dimdik ayakta kalabilmesini övgüyle kar??layabilir."

Catherine says

I've read around Montaigne and now have tackled a bit of his writing with the delicate and sensitive help of Zweig. This book is a fine meditation on a freethinker's life— especially for our chaotic days.
“He who thinks freely for himself, honors all freedom on earth.”
and conversely, “Que sais-je?”

Sue says

Thank you to Pushkin Collection for re-publishing Stefan Zweig's biography of Montaigne. Zweig's personal, somewhat casual, yet highly informed style of writing for biography totally engaged me in Montaigne's life and also led me to a renewed wish to read the Essays sooner rather than later. In this current age of vile and petty discourse, I enjoyed the call to searching for "knowing the self." Very little of this is in evidence in the public forum today leaving Montaigne's wish for solitude so understandable. Also his wish for travel in order to know as many people and customs different from himself and those he already knew as possible.

Those who have read other of Sweig's biographies will not be surprised at the lack of citations for quotes in the text. I noted the lack of footnotes in Marie Antoinette: The Portrait of an Average Woman. While at first this may have irked me in this latter book, I grew not to mind it at all. And in Montaigne it really did not bother me as I knew that the source was Montaigne unless another source was mentioned, such as a letter from the king. I am only mentioning this as it is a Zweig quirk, not a publishing error.

I highly recommend this as a brief and engaging introduction to the life of Montaigne and a glimpse into the Essays. What better service can a biography provide than to whet the appetite for the works of its subject.

A copy of this book was provided by the publisher through NetGalley in return for an honest review.

Lee says

Zweig is the best. Secular humanism uber alles! Great to return to him after a year or so away and think the same general thought: I need to read everything he's written, particularly these short biographies. This is a step in that direction. It's really a pretty slight but insightful/enjoyable rundown of Montaigne's life, paralleled by Zweig's own. Zweig wrote this in Brazil shortly before he killed himself with his second wife,

exiled from the irretrievably ruined European culture he thrived in and treated like his true religion (if you haven't read *The World of Yesterday*, I can't recommend it more highly if you're interested in Euro culture in the first half of the 20th century). I haven't read Montaigne, though I've tried and will surely try again soon. Interesting bits: he flees the plague that kills half of Bordeaux's 34K population, he essentially self-publishes his essays, he travels for nearly two years at age 48 to get away from all the demands of family and land ownership and while away is named mayor without running for office, he essentially locks himself in a tower with a view of his inherited estate and writes, trying to get as close as possible to the core of his life (I've used that phrase before writing about Knausgaard) yet he doesn't consider himself a writer. His mother comes from a Spanish Jewish family, yet he doesn't talk about her at all. As a child his father immersed him in Latin to such a degree (all caregivers and teachers only spoke it) that it was his true first language. But the real power of this, what sustains it through its 115 pages (first 35 pages is an introduction) is the parallel Zweig draws right away between his time (the unimaginable brutalities of the Nazi rise and WWII) and Montaigne's time, which offered sufficient horrific slaughter, with a sort of civil war descending into what Zweig calls (deploying a typically perfect Zweig-type phrase) "a vortex of pandemonium," totally lawless criminality run rampant etc. During such a time, how do you protect yourself from contracting some terrible infection of the soul? Montaigne and Zweig inculcate themselves, fighting the battle the only way they really can: internally, waging a sort of soul battle against the incursions of immorality run amok. But the really interesting thing was to read the opening as Zweig parallels his own time with Montaigne's time, thinking all the time of course about our own time, its particular nastiness -- really bad, so bad, bad! Thankfully little books like this, beautifully published by Pushkin Press (French flaps, textured covers, thick bright pages), disperse readers across centuries of struggles, most of which seem far worse than anything we face now, which is good to keep in mind since, despite the general gist of protecting oneself from the forces of idiocy and evil all around, these guys aren't exactly role models -- it's probably not a good idea for everyone to hide away in a tower writing essays about what they know or to light out for South America and ultimately end themselves before seeing the resolution of an era's nasty issues. But still totally worth the few hours reading and a reminder that things have always been simultaneously good and bad, undulating for the most part between either extreme for all time.

Sunny says

I have to admit being a little biased with this book as Montaigne is my all time third favourite philosopher behind Socrates and Neechy. I liked this little book by Zweig and decided to read it having finished *Chess Story* not that long ago. The book is a very short book about the life of Michel De Montaigne. If you don't know who Montaigne is then kindly defriend me (just kidding). He was basically a rich aristocratic dude born around the 1500s in France. I didn't realise this but he was half Jewish and Montaigne wasn't his surname; it was actually Eyquem which is even harder to pronounce. From a really young age he was given to live with a very poor family even though he himself was aristocracy. His father wanted to make sure that from the nascent stage Michel was bought up to understand what poverty meant so that he could appreciate his riches. He then returned to live with his own family after a few years and immediately he was taught to speak in Latin. Everyone in his household even all the poor servants had to learn Latin. The book then chronicles his life through the key phases. He went on to live in a boarding school but like the education system in most of the world today he rebelled against the sheep producing education system. His thoughts were miles away and from a very young age he discovered books into which he would escape. At 38 he decided to basically lock himself up like a self-proclaimed Rapunzel but used words to engage with the reality around him spewing them out in a series of essays like long golden locks of mellifluous wisdom. To cut a long story short a lot of people began to read his essays (he wrote 3 series of them I think) to the extent that the future king of France and other dignitaries would contact him to gain his guidance on important

matters (religious wars of France being one of them). I read his essays when I was in my 20s and still remember being moved by the simplicity and yet the sharpness of the words. Like Neechy but just a little bit more easy on the mind. Here are some of my favourite bits from the book:

- Michel was for many years woken to the sounds of musicians playing music for him. No, not on his iPad or his iPhone or the radio, but real musicians. One of his tutors had informed his dad that suddenly waking children from their sleep damages their young sponge-bob minds.
 - Michel hated learning things by rote. At one point he writes “what use is it to have a bellyful of meat, if one cannot digest it, If it cannot transform us, if it cannot improve us and fortify us.” I agree with this both on a mental and a physical level. Especially on the latter – if you eat a hearty meal like a steak you best get down the gym and turn it into something solid or what else is the point of eating it? Same with facts and information. What can you turn those facts into? What actions do the things you learn drive in you?
 - Michel had a huge library in his tower and I must have close to 1000 books at home by now also. One of the things that I like the most about having physical books at home is that it gives you the opportunity at any point to pick any one of them. I may not touch some of them for years but the fact that they are there means a lot to me. Michel was the same. His soul was satisfied merely with the possession of them.
 - Michel was also very honest in the fact that he never spent too much time over procrastinating on particularly difficult parts of a book. He would leapfrog and skim read and sometimes altogether abandon books. I can’t do the latter but I also skim read and just skip sections if I can’t understand them (eg the whole of making of Americans by friggin Gertrude Stein! – do not read that book).
 - Michel would also use books as a means of discourse. He would annotate and mark books with his thoughts and put a date next to all of his thoughts. I do this myself and also encourage my 2 little boys to do that already. This is how I feel you can get the most out of books. Mortimer j Adler must have learnt that technique from Michel.
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