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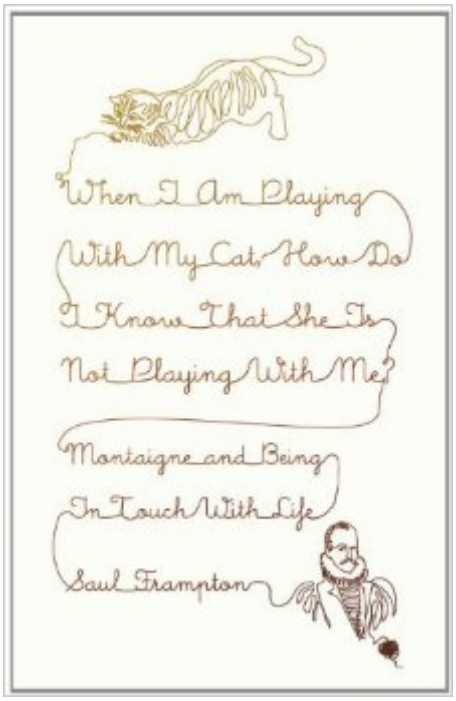
# When I Am Playing With My Cat, How Do I Know That She Is Not Playing With Me?: Montaigne And Being In Touch With Life

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## Synopsis

â œWhen I dance, I dance; when I sleep, I sleep. And when Iam walking alone in a beautiful orchard, if my thoughtsare sometimes preoccupied elsewhere, the rest of the time Ibring them back to the walk, to the orchard, to the sweetnessof this solitude, and to me.â •â ”MontaigneÂ In the year 1570, at the age of thirty-seven, Michel de Montaigne gave up his job as a magistrate and retired to his chÃ¢teau to brood on his own private griefâ ”the deaths of his best friend, his father, his brother, and his firstborn child. On the ceiling of his library he inscribed a phrase from the Roman poet and philosopher Lucretius: â œThere is no new pleasure to be gained by living longer.â • Â But finding his mind agitated rather than settled by this idleness, Montaigne began to write, giving birth to the Essaysâ ”short prose explorations of an amazingly wide range of subjects. And gradually, over the course of his writing, Montaigne rejected his stoical pessimism and turned from a philosophy of death to a philosophy of life. He erased Lucretiusâ ™s melancholy fatalism and began to embrace the exuberant vitality of living, finding an antidote to death in the most unlikely placesâ ”the touch of a hand, the smell of his doublet, the playfulness of his cat, and the flavor of his wine. Â Saul Frampton offers a celebration of perhaps the most enjoyable and yet profound of all Renaissance writers, whose essays went on to have a huge impact on figures as diverse as Shakespeare, Emerson, and Orson Welles, and whose thoughts, even today, offer a guide and unprecedented insight into the simple matter of being alive.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 320 pages

Publisher: Pantheon; 1st edition (March 15, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0375424717

ISBN-13: 978-0375424717

Product Dimensions: 5.8 x 1.2 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.1 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (4 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,114,365 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #89 inÂ Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Modern Renaissance #506 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Movements & Periods > Renaissance

## Customer Reviews

I was a bit disappointed in this book, which is a shame, because it is a fine book that I believe

interested readers will enjoy very much if they come with the right expectations.A book’s title should give the reader a sense of what the book is going to be about. From the title "When I Am Playing with My Cat, How Do I Know She Is Not Playing with Me? Montaigne and Being in Touch with Life", I anticipated a book focusing on Montaigne’s insights into everyday life. Words on the flyleaf talking of Montaigne "finding an antidote to death in the most unlikely places---the touch of a hand, the smell of his doublet, the playfulness of his cat, and the flavor of his wine" and calling him a writer "whose thoughts, even today, offer a guide and unprecedented insight into the simple matter of being alive," strengthened my feeling. In addition, every one of several articles I read about the book mentioned that Montaigne wrote about the human thumb, as a striking example of his interest in the simple things; I rather naturally thought the thumb essay would be discussed at some length. In truth, "Of Thumbs" is cited only once."When I Am Playing with my Cat" is a series of essays, most of which could be read by themselves, and each of which is about a subject of interest to Montaigne. However, rather than focusing narrowly on Montaigne’s writings, they provide an intellectual history about Montaigne’s influences and the events and thinkers that he, in turn, influenced. We learn Montaigne’s thoughts through numerous quotes and citations from the essays, but we also learn about the thinking of people like Epictetus, Cicero, Descartes, and even on to Emerson and Orson Welles. This is not entirely inappropriate, since Montaigne himself cited other thinkers extensively, and Frampton is merely continuing the practice. Frampton does a good job of describing Montaigne’s life and the era in which he lived and how these experiences and events shaped his beliefs. The late 16th century was an exciting time as medieval Christianity gradually lost its pervasive influence and the age of science began to flower, and Montaigne’s thoughts show his progressive spirit.The subjects of Frampton’s essays/chapters are very diverse, including war, friendship, death, sex, and other themes big and small. The title essay is one of the best, and it is typical of the way Frampton puts Montaigne in a broader context. He traces attitudes towards humans and animals from the caves of Lascaux to the medieval belief in Man’s divinely ordained pre-eminence in nature’s hierarchy to the humanist perspective as shown by Pico della Mirandola and Erasmus to Montaigne’s unconventional , for his time, inquisitiveness about the capabilities of other animals. Montaigne believed that perhaps animals seem inferior to us in part because we just don’t understand them and, further, that animals can give us insights into ourselves. Much of what he says on this subject seems very modern, and one feels a sense of intellectual kinship across the centuries.One of the great pleasures of "When I Am Playing with my Cat" is Frampton’s style. Sentences like "Springing from the flanks of the Puy de Sancy in the mountains of Auvergne, the Drodogne curls intestinally through the broad belly of France" make the poetry of the writing as

enjoyable as the content.I was somewhat reluctant to write a review of this book because of my unfulfilled expectations, but when I noticed that no one else has reviewed it I decided to weigh in to encourage others to give it a try. I do not think you will be disappointed.

Excellent. I picked up this book while visiting London,and it became one of the little joys of that trip. Intrigued by the title and the words "being in touch with life" in the title, I enjoyed this introduction to Montaigne. His approach to life and living were welcome thoughts I embraced and soaked up when I read the book in 2011. "Living happily...is the source of human contentment." Also, I found reading about Montaigne's influence on Shakespeare to be enlightening.

I have many books on Montaigne, including his original essays, and so I was delighted to find Saul Frampton's When I Am Playing With My Cat ...Frampton's books is well written and he connects with readers, inviting us to engage with him in reading the book. I had a sense of actually sitting down with Frampton as he talks to me about Montaigne, sharing stories, insights, and the findings of his scholarship.I often pick the book up and read a few pages and continue the imaginary conversation that I have been having with Frampton . . . and with Montaigne, who has been one of my literary companions for many years.

A great book by a solid writer and thinker about a beautiful soul: Michel de Montaigne. I highly recommend it for anyone interested in history, philosophy or writing.Also, it has one of the best titles of any book I have ever read!

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