This book is about passing on Michel de Montaigne’s ideas to others. For her 21\textsuperscript{st} birthday, in 1903, Thoby gave Montaigne’s essays to her sister, Virginia. She had ‘hunted him 3 years’, ‘quite desperate’ for a good translation (8). Woolf’s lifelong intimacy with Montaigne is manifest throughout her work, especially in her own essays. Judith Allen has a long familiarity with both writers; she began her exploration of the relationship between Woolf and the writings of Montaigne as a mature graduate student in 1984. This text is ‘a distillation of the many years of investigation that have followed’ (23). Allen has condensed this work from a very deep well of scholarship. Excluding notes and bibliography the text is only 14 pages so, fittingly, we might consider this to be an essay.

The title Walking in the Footsteps of Montaigne suggests that this will be a book about pursuit, perhaps a biographical study seeking to elucidate some elusive aspect of this major Renaissance figure. This kind of tracking may imply that the writer is embarking on a dogged search, shadowing the target subject, with detective intentions. Another way of interpreting the idea of ‘walking in someone’s footsteps’ is as an act of intellectual or spiritual homage. Allen’s use of the words ‘veneration’ (8) to describe Woolf’s attitude to Montaigne and ‘pilgrimage’ (20) to describe her own trip supports the idea that this monograph has a devotional dimension.

Allen frames her discussion with a personal expedition to Montaigne’s tower in Bordeaux in June 2011. This quest unites Allen with Woolf; both have pursued Montaigne, physically (through France) and mentally (through their work). Both express ‘sheer joy in finally being in his Tower’ (7). A letter to Vita Sackville-West communicates Woolf’s excitement and elation, her ‘grammar gone’ (8) at visiting his Tower.

Richard Holmes introduced the term ‘footstepping’ to describe a biographer following the traces of his subject to imagine how they might have lived and felt. Holmes loves the word sentier, (French for a track) because it ‘hints at the notion of a line of smell or perfume, as “on the scent”’. Allen’s book has a 4 page glossy colour insert of 8 beautiful pictures helping us to sense Montaigne’s place. One photograph shows ‘the steps, worn in deep waves, up to the tower’ as Woolf writes (7). Just looking at the photograph creates an empathetic frisson, the kind we seek when visiting places of literary importance. The sensual and cerebral aspects of following Montaigne are both honoured here. We are literally ‘footstepping’ Montaigne, as Leonard and Virginia Woolf did in 1931, 1937 and 1938. This essay is a personal homage by a writer with a deep affinity with Montaigne and with Woolf.

The middle part of this essay demonstrates the aesthetic, philosophical and political empathy that Montaigne, Woolf (and Allen) share. This is not a comparative study but the connection between the two writers is made throughout. Allen shows how Woolf appropriates ideas and ‘tips her hat to Montaigne’s writings’ (7). Both Woolf and Montaigne acknowledge numerous literary influences, both made reading notes, were avid book collectors and ‘voracious readers’ (9). Allen shows their use of ‘multiple perspectives, varied voices, repetition, contradiction and, of course much equivocation’ (10). She demonstrates Montaigne’s interest in language, in analysing creativity and his prescience, shared by Woolf, in anticipating reader-response theory, using the analogy of a tennis match, ‘Speech belongs half to the speaker, half to the listener. The latter must prepare to receive it according to the motion it takes’ (12).

Leonard Woolf recognised Montaigne as ‘the first completely modern man in his intense awareness of and passionate interest in the individuality of himself and of other human beings’ (8). Here Allen shows why Montaigne can be seen as a truly modern thinker by demonstrating the place of the provisional, uncertain and unstable in his work. She uses his famous statement embracing opposition, ‘when someone opposes me, he arouses my attention, not my anger. I go to meet a man who contradicts me, who instructs me’ (12). Allen perceives the ‘essayistic’ mode as ‘always hybrid, “outside” and “marginal”’ (20), combining ‘resistance and freedom’ (7). It is a form of dialogue rather than monologue; it refuses the unitary but, rather, relishes the ‘clash of oppositional voices’ (11). Allen shows how Montaigne and Woolf seek to ‘resist doctrines, hierarchies, abstractions, stasis, and all totalising systems’ (10). This essay is a very personal testimony to their influence.

Allen’s approach, like Montaine’s, is fluent and intimate, often engagingly conversational but, concurrently, scholarly and dense with citation. Both Montaigne and Woolf are susceptible to free association and get sidetracked by digressions. Like Montaigne, Allen’s style and mind ‘alike go roaming’ (9). Although this is a tightly written, controlled essay, the links between sections are not always well signposted. This lack of ‘a firm footing’ (16) is self-reflexive and entirely appropriate. Allen gets waylaid. There is a randomness in its progress which suggests her mind is roving over possibilities; she does not always finish or fix an idea. Towards the end of the essay, in square parenthesis, she adds an ‘incomplete list’ of things to be resisted. These are the ideas that have occupied Allen throughout her work: [ Singular meanings. Hierarchies. Labels. Rigid

\footnote{Richard Holmes, Sidetracks: Explorations of a Romantic Biographer (London: Vintage, 2001), ix.}

\footnote{Allen adds italics for emphasis when she notes Woolf’s ‘playful’ writing of the date of this letter to Ethel Smyth: “April 24, perhaps. 1931 certainly”, 7.}

Cecil Woolf’s ‘Bloombury Heritage’ series publishes work that can be enjoyed by both specialist and ‘common reader’. Number 63 is enjoyable, absorbing and richly resonant. It will certainly send readers back to Montaigne, Woolf and, possibly, Bordeaux too.

Gill Lowe
Virginia Woolf was an English writer and essayist. We have most of her works at this site and they consistently rank as some of the most popular ebooks accessed. At the bottom of this page you will find a few snippets of her writing. The article on Woolf at Wikipedia states that she "is considered one of the greatest innovators in the English language. In her works she experimented with stream-of-consciousness, the underlying psychological as well as emotional motives of characters, and the various possibilities of fractured narrative and chronology. In the words of E. M. Forster, she pushed t The Complete Common Reader book. Read 2 reviews from the world's largest community for readers. This carefully crafted ebook: â€œThe Complete Common Reader...Â Woolf outlines her literary philosophy in the introductory essay to the first series, "The Common Reader," and in the concluding essay to the second series, "How Should One Read a Book?" The first series includes essays on Geoffrey Chaucer, Michel de Montaigne, Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Joseph Conrad, as well as discussions of the Greek language and the modern essay. The second series features essays on John Donne, Daniel Defoe, Dorothy Osborne, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Thomas Hardy, among others. Woolf Studies Annual is a refereed journal publishing substantial new scholarship on the work of this major writer and her milieu. Each volume includes several...Â Review by: Beth Rigel Daugherty. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24907007. Cite this Item. Woolf & the City: Selected Papers of the Nineteenth Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf by Elizabeth F. Evans, Sarah Cornish.Â Bloomsbury Heritage Series 55 by Drew Patrick Shannon; Virginia Woolf: Walking in the Footsteps of Michel de Montaigne (with 8 illustrations). Bloomsbury Heritage Series 63 by Judith Allen; The Best of Blogging Woolf, Five Years On. Bloomsbury Heritage Series 64 by Paula Maggio; Virginia Woolf's Likes and Dislikes. Virginia Woolf and the Politics of Language - July 2010.Â Harold Brodkey, â€œReading is the Most Dangerous Gameâ€™, The New York Times Book Review. Risk. Danger.Â But the writings of the late sixteenth-century Michel de Montaigne and the early twentieth-century Virginia Woolf express and enact the significance of the intimacy between reader and writer â€“ between reader and text. Both were intensely interested in what ensues when one brings one's self, in all its mystery and mutability, to meet another self, as it is embodied in their carefully chosen words and punctuation, deftly arranged on the page. What is the risk of following a mind moving along varying trajectories, venturing to places unknown? It suggests a voyage for both writer and reader, takin PDF | Virginia Woolf's literary essays emerge out of an eagerness to communicate a self at odds with its own time, rejecting ideological assumptions | Find, read and cite all the research you need on ResearchGate.Â Michel de Montaigne is her literary mentor. The aim of this paper is to explore the ethics of subversion which underpin. Woolf's critical practice through her concept of the literary essay, as well as the.Â 2 The reviews of Woolf's critical pamphlet Mr. Bennett and Mrs Brown (1924) which would also be included in The Common. Reader had not been totally favourable; for the Nation and the Athenaeum, Woolf's criticism was obviously of little use (Majumdar and McLaurin 1975, 134). Moreover, in a review in Bookman Frank Swinnerton described Woolf's essay.