

Now the great adversary against whom Pascal set himself, from the time of his first conversations with M. de Saci at Port-Royal, was Montaigne. One cannot destroy Pascal, certainly; but of all authors Montaigne is one of the least destructible. You could as well dissipate a fog by flinging hand-grenades into it. For Montaigne is a fog, a gas, a fluid, insidious element. He does not reason, he insinuates, charms, and influences; or if he reasons, you must be prepared for his having some other design upon you than to convince you by his argument. It is hardly too much to say that Montaigne is the most essential author to know, if we would understand the course of French thought during the last three hundred years. In every way, the influence of Montaigne was repugnant to the men of Port-Royal. Pascal studied him with the intention of demolishing him. Yet, in the Pensées, at the very end of his life, we find passage after passage, and the slighter they are the more significant, almost "lifted" out of Montaigne, down to a figure of speech or a word. The parallels are most often with the long essay of Montaigne called Apologie de Raymond Sébond -- an astonishing piece of writing upon which Shakespeare also probably drew in Hamlet. Indeed, by the time a man knew Montaigne well enough to attack him, he would already be thoroughly infected by him.

T. S. Eliot: THE PENSÉES OF PASCAL
from SELECTED ESSAYS of T. S. Eliot;
Harcourt, Brace; 1932; 1960.

