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When Montaigne developed the essay in the sixteenth century, he could not have imagined the power and longevity of his creation. "He did not set up for a philosopher, wit, orator, or moralist," wrote Hazlitt, "but he became all these by merely daring to tell us whatever passed through his mind." Ever since, writers have seized upon his example, and for over four hundred years we have encountered astonishing insights and breathtaking language by following what has passed through their minds, as recounted in the essay. And now some of the finest essays of all time have been gathered together by John Gross, former editor of *The New York Times Book Review*, in an outstanding new anthology.
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The authors Gross has gathered form a gallery of genius, all indispensable masters of rhetoric, from Samuel Butler to Samuel Johnson, from John Dryden to Ben Franklin, from Geoge Eliot to George Bernard Shaw, from E.B. White to Joan Didion. Including book reviews and travel sketches, history lessons and meditations, reflections on art and on potato chips, these essays sample four centuries of eloquence and insight in a collection that is at once immensely enlightening, edifying, and entertaining.

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About the Author

*About the Editor:*
**John Gross** is the author of *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters* and editor of *The Oxford Book of Aphorisms*. He has been editor of *The New York Times Book Review* and *The Times Literary Supplement* and is theater critic for *The Sunday Telegraph*.

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