



The Art of the Personal Essay: An Anthology from the Classical Era to the Present

Phillip Lopate (Editor)

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For more than four hundred years, the personal essay has been one of the richest and most vibrant of all literary forms. Distinguished from the detached formal essay by its friendly, conversational tone, its loose structure, and its drive toward candor and self-disclosure, the personal essay seizes on the minutiae of daily life-vanities, fashions, foibles, oddballs, seasonal rituals, love and disappointment, the pleasures of solitude, reading, taking a walk -- to offer insight into the human condition and the great social and political issues of the day. *The Art of the Personal Essay* is the first anthology to celebrate this fertile genre. By presenting more than seventy-five personal essays, including influential forerunners from ancient Greece, Rome, and the Far East, masterpieces from the dawn of the personal essay in the sixteenth century, and a wealth of the finest personal essays from the last four centuries, editor Phillip Lopate, himself an acclaimed essayist, displays the tradition of the personal essay in all its historical grandeur, depth, and diversity.

The Art of the Personal Essay: An Anthology from the Classical Era to the Present Details

Date : Published January 15th 1997 by Anchor (first published 1994)

ISBN : 9780385423397

Author : Phillip Lopate (Editor)

Format : Paperback 777 pages

Genre : Writing, Essays, Nonfiction, Language, Anthologies



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Jessica says

My favorite essay in this thick, heavy, door-stopping book is a humble writing of G.K. Chesterton entitled "A Piece of Chalk". I absolutely adore drawing with chalk and so of course I felt connected to him right off the bat. It was actually the first time I'd ever read Chesterton before, and I instantly fell in love. There is something in his writing that resonates with something inside me... in other words, it feels good. This anthology also includes other masters, both classic and modern such as Didion, Seneca, among many, many others. Despite the size, it's very easy to read through and find your own favorites thanks to the table that sorts the essays by theme.

Gideon Burton says

As anthologies go, Phillip Lopate's collection of personal essays is more than apt. He introduces this important genre of contemporary creative nonfiction, and gives to us the ancestry of the form by reaching back into history to find the beginnings and antecedents to modern essay writing. While I have not read every essay in this volume, I don't think is intended to be read cover to cover. It is just right: a large enough set to have true variety in the selection, but not daunting. It is slightly dated now, I think, because it predates the onslaught of personal writing now happening with blogs and online writing. But this is a more than solid collection to which I've referred many others.

Karen says

I always come back to this anthology for Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Lantern Bearers," probably one of my favorite pieces of all time, by one of my favorite authors. The quote below isn't inspirational or aphoristic, but when I think of my favorite quotes, this paragraph rings out. Read aloud, its words and rhythm (say "top-coat buttoned") are beautiful on their own, but as far as the sentiment underpinning it, I could almost take it as a manifesto:

"But the talk, at any rate, was but a condiment; and these gatherings themselves only accidents in the career of the lantern-bearer. The essence of this bliss was to walk by yourself in the black night; the slide shut, the top-coat buttoned; not a ray escaping, whether to conduct your footsteps or to make your glory public: a mere pillar of darkness in the dark; and all the while, deep down in the privacy of your fool's heart, to know you had a bull's-eye at your belt, and to exult and sing over the knowledge."

Also, two other standouts: I recently read The Pillow Book, because the Sei Shonagon excerpt included in this collection, Hateful Things, is so viciously funny. The Crack Up is a masterpiece, but I can never re-create that first reading, where I really understood for the first time how a good author can lead you so nonconsensually down a path you didn't expect to walk. I recommend it to others so they can experience that artful violation for the first time.

Emily says

I read four essays from this book every week, and picked one to write about. The final list, with links to individual essay reviews:

Seneca
Shonagon
Montaigne
Steele
Edgeworth
Lamb
Stevenson
Chesterton
Woolf
Tanizaki
Borges
Cioran
Suleri
Thoreau
McCarthy
Baldwin
Didion
Lopate

Mel says

The Art of the Personal Essay is an amazing collection of nonfiction essays that spans hundreds of years. It offers the cityscape that is the development of Creative Nonfiction. Whilst I was engrossed in each essay, I confess the power of the text becomes lost if one tries to read it as a whole (or assignment). I find myself returning to the essays contained there often; opening the book and simply being drawn into a world in miniature, perhaps Virginia Woolf, or Richard Rodriguez, or some ancient Chinese writer. A text that should be on the shelf of every nonfiction writer, and one that should not collect dust as it offers insight to the narrative of the human condition that all writers wish to add.

Snickers says

This collection of essays warrants several readings. Phillip Lopate, a distinguished essayist and brother of Leonard Lopate, NPR commentator on New York City's WNYC, presents a sizable and articulate Introduction of what makes an essay 'personal'. He examines the process of crafting the personal essay by dedicating digestible segments under headings such as "The Conversational Element", "Honesty, Confession, and Privacy", and "Questions of Form and Style." This book is as much of a resource as it is a compendium

of powerful yet honest writing.

I chose this book out of want to be better writer in craft but also as a learning tool on how to come closer to my questions and understandings of the human condition. I wanted to hone my ability to drop deeper into areas of myself and write skillfully of my thought process. Lopate brings together a wonderful survey of the long tradition in the genre of the personal essay starting from writers like Seneca and Sei Shinagon under the chapter heading "Forerunners", onto "Fountainhead" with Montaigne, "The Rise of the English Essay" with works by Beerbohm, Chesterton, Woolf, and Orwell, "Other Cultures, Other Continents" by Tanizaki, Hsun, Borges, Fuentes, and finally with "The American Scene" by Thoreau, Vidal, Pemberton, Rodriguez, and Lopate himself. This is naming just a few of the many writers in this volume with several essays included for each writer. The table of contents also offers a way of finding essays according to themes like "Analytic Meditation", "Letters (Epistolary Essay)", and "Portrait and Double Portrait". The book comes with an extensive bibliography broken up into "Works About the Essay", "Pertinent Books by Authors Featured in this Anthology", and "Suggested Further Reading". This is a treasured tome where Lopate's dedication to continuing this genre's tradition comes through.

Each essayist's collection also begins with a short description written by Lopate giving historical and societal context further elucidating the writer's style and nuances.

I will be reading this collection again and again.

Nancy says

Lopate's introduction alone is worth the price of admission to this house of wonders. Anyone at all interested in writing essays must read it. As for the essays themselves, some are more riveting/amusing/touching than others. My favorites: Seneca on Asthma; Virginia Woolf on "Street Haunting" and "Death of a Moth"; George Orwell's hair-raising account of prep school English-style, "Such, Such Were the Days; Richard Selzer's "The Knife" (don't read this if you have surgery scheduled); Didion's "Goodbye to All That"...Okay, I see I have a lot of favorites, most of them in the 20th century. The culmination is Lopate's own hilarious "Against Joie de Vivre." The man is some kind of quirky genius at a genre that can't get no respect.

Rachel Rueckert says

As I have been working on some of my own personal essays from my travels in India, this was like my Bible. I'm just going to attach some of my responses on the form and content of selected essays. It can be daunting to try and sift through the entire anthology, so I hope this can help someone:

Consolation to His Wife by Plutarch

Content:

It is kind of refreshing to find a guy who "atypically for his age, saw marriage as the closet of human bonds" (16). It is clear as we read this that he admires his "dear wife." This is a letter written to her to give advice and encouragement to her as she mourns for their recently deceased little girl, who died while he was away (and somehow missed the message). It is interesting to see this kind of marriage dynamic and to get a

glimpse at some of the cultural values of his society. This was written before 120 AD, and there are some practices that are definitely different from what we would be accustomed to. For one, mourning is not really appropriate, and actually against the law (22). The advice given to his wife was clear on that, and he commended her for handling it so well.

Yet, some things are similar, and some of the advice might be as applicable today as it was over a thousand years ago. I thought it was interesting that he realized that his daughter only knew of “little things, and in little things she took her please” (21). Since she had no way of knowing what she was deprived of, they should therefore not mourn the loss of potential. I don’t think I would necessarily love that advice if I had a kid pass away, but he has a point, and it seems applicable to now.

One of the other things notable about this letter was that, beautiful as it was, Plutarch seemed to betray no emotion. That would probably be a societal value as well.

Form:

The most notable thing about this form is that it is written as a letter to his wife. She is the audience, and he writes directly to her. Yet, the messages and the formal way he writes make it universal.

The form of the letter really does kind of wrap up the comments on form. It has an intended audience and flows organically wherever the topic comes to. He does not change voice, use flashback, or anything like that. There are a lot of rhetorical questions though, which is probably a notable device, and the letter is somewhat of an argument meant to persuade not just his wife, but others, the appropriate way to behave after a death.

Love-Letters by Addison & Steele

Content:

This was hilarious! It is essentially a commentary on two different love letters to Romana to prove a point about the complexity of what women want in a guy. Tale as old as time! We tend to want the guy who is fun, dangerous, and frankly not the best choice, though, as this lady says, “she knew she out to have taken Constant; but believed, she should have chosen Careless” (135).

Form:

This is a really interesting form—we get a very “show but not tell” thing going on, which does not seem to be very common for the time period it was written. It begins and ends with an overarching commentary but includes two letters from outside voices. The two letters are almost exactly the same as far as style and length, but the first (Careless) is vain and silly, while the second (Constant) is formal and boring. Yet, the last paragraph that sums up the point does not come out with a didactic moral of the story kind of line. Instead, the last line is left to Romana, who sums it up for us.

This was also very impersonal. We got minimal details about the actual narrator.

On Marriage by Robert Louis Stevenson

Content:

It was not necessarily easy to figure out right away what Stevenson was talking about. He first comes out

saying that while “there is something in marriage so natural and inviting” that “there is probably no other act in a man’s life so hot-headed and foolhardy” (230). He explains that people who want to get married to fix their problems should not be married, because you’ll only bring the other person problems.

At this point he goes on to unveil the ideal of marriage and reminds us all that when we marry, we are taking on “a creature of equal, if of unlike, frailties; whose weak human heart beats no more tunefully” than our own (233). Understanding this, Stevenson then argues that if we get over this and truly understand the institution of marriage, then we should proceed with hope, faith, and find “glimpses of kind virtues” amidst the hardship (235).

I like this argument. Marriage is a lot of work and I think a lot of kids in my ward could benefit from this. My parents taught me well how much work marriage is, but I think many of my friends see it as the answer to their problems. I think marriage is something wonderful and something I now look forward to (though that was not always the case), but it needs to stop being idealized as a fix-all solution. I’ve always felt that no relationship will work well if one or both of the parties are not whole on their own first.

Form:

This was meant to be a persuasive essay. Stevenson obviously has a lot of feeling on the subject because of personal experience (as the biography states), but he leaves it pretty impersonal. In fact, before I read the biography and casually skimmed this essay I misunderstood it completely, thinking that Stevenson was arguing that marriage anything but a positive experience. It is not very concrete and does not give many concrete examples, which might be one reason why it is kind of difficult to wade through.

Along with that the organization is like most of the essays from this time, go with the flow till you reach the conclusion. We don’t really see how the beginning fits with the topic until we get to the end. What I can gather is that the essay starts on one large sentence on hope, goes through a few abstractions, and then argues them. It takes a few paragraphs to get to the point, which is very unlike a more modern essay form.

Stevenson starts a lot of his sentences with “And.” I remember learning that that was a horrible idea in high school, but now it seems to be encouraged. I’ve been trying to figure out how to use it more myself.

A Piece of Chalk by G.K. Chesterton

Content:

I love pretty much everything written by Chesterton. What I liked most about the content of this piece was the whole “what is white” as a color debate. Even though he meant it more as a moral thing, virtue needing to be tested, the color debate it is one I have had with myself many times. As a painter, white is not a color. Black is. Don’t believe me? Smear the paint on your easel together and see what color you end up with. But, to the scientist, white is the “all color.” According to Chesterton too I guess. I do like this argument much better than all the other “waves” and garbage they use to explain it though. I like this as an artist. I like that he doesn’t draw on very conventional things, and his argument about not needing to be a Wordsworth to appreciate nature simply because you don’t describe it is fantastic. Maybe it is how we can balance feeling romantic while being post modern. I can tell, based on what limited info I have, that this is the nonconforming artist. He is also funny, with parts that made me laugh out loud. Chesterton seems a little bizarre, and I like that.

Form:

The essay begins with “I remember.” This is a pure reminiscing moment, and the entire essay is written in past tense. It is told chronologically, but like Woolf, meandering from concrete image into an interesting significance and overarching theme. He plays with humor. His sentences breaking up his insights are blunt, pulling you back to the moment. He outright trumps the romantic’s argument by doing the whole, “don’t for heaven’s sake, imagine I was going to sketch nature.” He is addressing us as listeners, and he is telling the story, guiding us along with cues.

We see this again with the single paragraph, “Meanwhile I could not find my chalk.” It is a subtle humor. I feel like he is definitely a realist. This style and the images he invokes give a great sense of his character, even within such a short amount of space.

The essay is divided by ellipses between his experience buying chalk and then when he goes out to use the chalk. Because the experience buying the chalk does not tell us why he is doing it, it keeps us reading trying to figure out what he is up to. For breaks between what he is doing in that moment and a thought he is having, the essay does a double space and does not indent the paragraph, like other essays I have come across in this anthology and Best American Travel Writing 2010.

The ending is not spelled out, but there is a clear conclusion. I love that.

On Running After One’s Hat b G.K. Chesterton

Content:

This was quite a bit different from A Piece of Chalk. It still had the humor and the “this is how it is people” tone, but the message in this essay was one I needed to hear in the field. So much of our experience is based on our outlook, and Chesterton makes it seem like a real choice we have. “An adventure is only an inconvenience rightly considered.” That is a great line.

Form:

The first thing I noticed was that Chesterton says “I feel” and not “I felt.” Where A Piece of Chalk was told in the past tense, here he is telling the story of London’s flooding as a present affair. It holds all the romance of the home country, and yet it is so strange and shocking that the reader wants to keep reading to figure out if this guy is insane or has a point to make. It is bold! Either way, it is a great way to grab the reader’s attention.

The flood was the frame for the essay. It starts and ends making sense of that image, but the whole middle encourages us to reevaluate the way we look at misfortune. He does it with humor too, which makes it not feel preachy and gets us to laugh at ourselves instead. He also uses a lot of specific, concrete examples to make his point. This essay is meant to be a persuasive argument.

Another device I noticed that Chesterton uses in this essay is a lot of “as I said” phrases to keep the reader on track. It sounds more casual and conversation-esk without feeling repetitive. This matter-of-fact tone and the repetition also helps establish the ethos of the narrator as someone who is confident in what he is talking about, and someone not afraid to make a point and argue it, even if it is in left field. He seems to thoroughly enjoy it too! By the end of the essay he lets on that we might recognize his claims as a little absurd, but he lightly encourages us to see the extreme as a way to demonstrate a general point. In this sense, I don’t feel like Chesterton is very vulnerable in his essays. It seems that he is more interested in getting us to re-think the way we think and see the world.

Street Haunting: A London Adventure by Virginia Woolf

Content:

This is potentially my favorite personal essay of all of the ones I've ever read. I have probably read through it fifteen times, but each experience teaches me something new—some image I did not immediately discover. It is genius. It is real. What happens when we travel? I love the image transforming from “the self our friends know us by” and becoming “part of that vast republican army of anonymous trampers.” How we can do anything with a pretext, even something like going out for a pencil. It makes me wonder why I travel.

I love how Woolf is able to show how we can be in our minds and outside—how we can be sitting at dinner and somehow be off thinking about something entirely different. It is so in line with how we really live. I don't know how to adequately express how this piece resonates with me. I want to read all of her work.

Form:

Woolf's stream of conscious style is the most notable of the features she uses in her essays. We have a lot of concrete images and metaphors to keep the piece moving and interesting. She has no problem using “too many” commas and adverbs, and it flows like the content, a journey in the mind.

This style leads us along with her. It is not a past reflection, but yet her observations are written in the past tense, while her thoughts are in the present, drawing attention to that. It is not a traditional essay. You read it as if it is happening right now, like you are right there, and she is right beside you, except that it seems more like it is coming from your own head. Either way, it is your eyes that see it. The transitions seem to be a lot of “ands” and “perhaps” and “buts.” There is no arguable pattern of flow of an event or subject. It just flows to one topic to the next, and it works.

The narrator does not outright state her own feelings, or insights, or reactions. It is a description of “out there,” and so we understand her personality from a distance. This is an interesting way of being personal and vulnerable in an essay. This style tells us something about her. She is withdrawn, an observer, and reflecting the way it would naturally come to the mind.

The Death of the Moth by Virginia Woolf

Content:

Okay, this is slightly disturbing. It is well done, but it is clear that the dying moth, the one that had our sympathies “on the side of life,” (267), is probably a metaphor for Woolf herself. Death and life were both left as strange and there was no kind of wrap up conclusion to make sense of it all. It is left ambiguous, which I found powerful.

Form:

Woolf paints some awesome images! If they were not as concrete and beautiful, it would probably be really hard to pull off the stream of conscious writing style. The first line is a great example: “dark autumn nights and ivy-blossom” or “yellow-underwing.” It is just enjoyable to read, even if we don't understand it all on a first, second, or even third read through.

The moth is a metaphor. That is a device worth noting. Not only is it an interesting metaphor to Woolf

knowing that she killed herself later, but to all of us, trying to make sense of the whole “to be or not to be” feelings we have as humans sometimes.

This essay is not very personal. The entire thing is written in the past tense, and it feels withdrawn if anything. It seems to be more of a string of vivid observations than a kind of argument set out to prove something. It is a chronological and unbroken narrative, short and to the point. The objective nature of the essay seems to match the content of the coldness of death.

He and I by Natalia Ginzburg

Content:

This was really sad, but really well done commenting on the difficulties of a husband wife relationship in the eyes of the wife. It highlights many of my own concerns with marriage—how you can be in such an intimate relationship as marriage and yet be so completely different and distant from each other. This sums up everything I do not want to think and feel in my future marriage.

Form:

The form was very distinct and powerful—the sentences were short and plain. Most of the paragraphs are just a line or two, and it goes through different aspects of their marriage by identifying their opposites. “He is this and I am that,” etc., and always in a way to put the narrator down. The narrator never includes names. She is “I” and her husband is always “he.” I think that helps make this essay universal, even if she goes through many specifics.

There is no specific organization to this essay. It just goes through a list of opposites and then once in awhile gives us a snap shot of a moment where this was the case.

To help with the intimacy of this essay, it is told in the present tense. The power of this essay is that it is honest and real, giving a lot of concrete examples. It is so simple, but it works so well! This is a style that I want to try to play with at some point, though I’m not sure if fits so well with my India essays.

The Courage of Turtles by Edward Hoagland

Content:

This was a very vulnerable and sad essay. I think the title is kind of ironic, because it seems to be more about the courage of the narrator. I like this narrator—I like that he collects and tries to save turtles in New York City. That is such a strange, random thing to do. I think it said a lot about him.

You certainly do not leave this feeling warm and happy. It was sad almost the entire way through it, and the fact that the guy just walked away at the end was really tragic somehow. We came to feel about the turtle the same way that he did. He tried to do the right thing, but in the end he was the turtle killer. Sad sad sad. But good.

Form:

This essay was divided into two parts. The first part starts with a really bizarre sentence, which hooks us, and then gives us a little bit of background about him and where his fascination with turtles began as a kid.

The second part of the essay, divided by asterisks, takes us into his adulthood and where his turtle obsession seems to have taken him—why turtles? Most of the second essay is observation. It also includes a lot of background history and information about turtles, giving the narrator credibility as a turtle expert and not some guy who just likes pets. This shows depth to the characters fascination with turtles and that through the years he has put a lot of thought and energy into them. As he talks about it though, the reader is not left bored since he includes a lot of vivid images and great descriptions. The final description of putting the turtle in the Hudson was especially vivid.

This whole essay was told in the past tense. I'm not sure that the author intended any real message, but rather wanted to tell a story and express a part of himself. It seems to be a bit confessional as well. There is not a lot of humor in this. The narrator puts himself down and paints himself just as vulnerable as the writing. He feels bad about his lack of real aid to the turtles, and in turn we feel bad for him for feeling that way.

This would certainly be a form I could imitate for some of my India essays. It is one I will come back to when I am drafting.

Michael says

So many great essays in this anthology that it would be worthy for that reason alone, but Lopate's organizational principles make this especially useful for the essayist in search of models, or for the reader who is chasing the many forms of a specific type of essay, or for anyone who enjoys reading personal nonfiction. I never fail to feel a buzz of anticipatory joy when I pick this volume up, and writing out this Goodreads note makes me realize that I really should dip back into this soon.

Keertana says

I need to make a separate shelf for this book titled, "kill-me-now," because really, the best way to offer someone a slow and painful death is to make them read this. I was forced to read this for class and write up summaries and analysis' for practically all the essays, in addition to taking a test and writing an essay *on these essays* for my classes, so I did not have fun reading this. It's boring, it's long, and 99.9% of the essays in this are boring. I guess if you like reading personal essays this might be your thing, but they're clearly not for me.

Seneca, thank you for writing essays that were only two pages long.

James Baldwin, thank you for writing an essay that, although was long, actually kept my attention!

Joan Didion, thank you too for writing a short essay that was only three pages long.

Michael Montaigne, you are hailed as the best personal essay writer *ever*, but I still have *no idea* what the purpose of your ramblings were. Seriously, that looong thing I read couldn't have been a coherent essay. No. Way.

Richard Rodriguez, I'm sorry I never even bothered to read your essay because it was the last one. I'm also sorry I had to make up a really bad analysis for it because the internet didn't have much information on it. Curse you, Google! I bet Hermione would have had the answers I needed! >.<

Phillip Lopate, the guy who had WAY too much time on his hands to compile all these BORING AS HELL essays and RUIN MY LIFE, you SUCK! If I ever meet you...well, let's just say your face won't be so pretty anymore and your family members will fail to recognize you. You might need a wheelchair afterwards too.

I read this...anthology...and wished I could have seen insta-love between the pages. I dreamt about crappy love triangles, Mary Sues, lack of world-building, and terribly developed characters while reading this book because all that stuff is *so much better* than this anthology. If I could give this book 0.00000001 Stars, I would. In short, give this to your worst enemy or hand it out to criminals in the prison if you want them to die of insanity. Otherwise, RUN AWAY! I don't even think going to Antarctica can get me far enough away from this book. *starts running*

Joy H. says

Added 8/21/13.

Nina of my GR group had recommended this book: *The Art of the Personal Essay: An Anthology from the Classical Era to the Present*. So I borrowed it from our local library. It's quite a tome! Some of the essays are excellent and others don't appeal to me, but it has a wonderfully varied list of selections written during the "last four centuries". The reader is bound to find at least some of the essays quite interesting.

The multiple tables of contents are arranged in different ways, one being "by theme" (e.g., ambition, city life, marriage, nature, etc.) another "by form" (e.g., meditation, humor, etc.), the others being either chronological or geographical (e.g., "The American Scene"). This arrangement is very helpful in finding the right essay to fit the reader's mood.

The essay on "Noise" by Seneca (of Roman times) is engaging and easy to understand.

The essay by Robert Benchley entitled "My Face" is precious... very amusing and fun to read.

So there seems to be something for everyone in this book of essays. I wish I could afford to buy it* and then underline the parts that impress me. It would be good for random reading when all the reader wants is a short burst of interesting reading and reflection.

*** PS-I BOUGHT IT! :)**

Trying to take it all in at once might be overwhelming! :)

Debra says

Although I've been a fan of the personal essay for many years, I put off reading this collection for a long time because of its 771-page length. Still, the time to dive in finally arrived in late April and two months

later (reading shorter novels in between) all I can say is wow! I'm so glad I took the time to read every page.

Editor Phillip Lopate has put together an amazing collection for fans of the personal essay. His forward is lengthy, but insightful, and he provides a good definition of the personal essay, noting that it's "hallmark is it's intimacy". He also provides a comparison between personal and formal essays, indicating that, among other things, personal essays employ the familiar and use casual, everyday, language.

The book's divided into five sections to demonstrate both similarities and differences through time and geography. Starting with what Lopate calls "Forerunners", the first section focuses on the work of five authors from as early as 2,000 years ago. One of my favorites in this section was a piece by Japanese author, Sei Shonagon (a court lady from tenth century Japan), who wrote a short, caustic yet delightful essay called "Hateful Things".

The second section is devoted solely to Michel De Montaigne, who Lopate considers the grandmaster of the form, yet I didn't enjoy his work as much. I did find great pieces in the next three sections, which were named "The Rise of the English Essay", "Other Cultures, Other Continents" and "The American Scene". The essays provide poignant looks at the regrets, loves, personal demons, and families of writers like James Baldwin, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and E.B. White. I also discovered wonderful essayists I'd never heard of such as Gayle Pemberton and Richard Rodriguez.

If you love the written word, if you love connecting with people from previous generations and other cultures, if you want to learn some pretty intriguing stuff about famous authors, than this is a must-read book.

Titus Hjelm says

It's a BIG book that took me quite while to finish, but worth all the effort. The contemporary American essays were my favourites, mostly because I'm very much into the social criticism/observation genre represented by people like McCarthy, Baldwin, Vidal, Lopate and Rodriguez. Also, some of the essays, especially Montaigne's pieces, suffered in translation. I'm not a native speaker, but still I could tell that the flow of the text wasn't as good as it could have been. Can't wait to compare this with some other broad essay collections--I have the Oxford Book of Essays on the nighttable waiting already. One of the best things about this particular collection was that it inspired me to buy some of the original collections by the authors featured in the text. Also, it has a useful 'further reading' section which includes a couple of important essays on the essay as a literary genre. Highly recommended!

Adrianna says

Finished reading "Art of the Personal Essay" complied by Phillip Lopate for school and I enjoyed learning about the development of the personal essay from Ancient Rome to present day. While at times, the language can get tough and the metaphors a bit complicated to understand, any true bibliophile and writer should pick up this book at least once. The essays contained within are gems of literature and its writers are brilliant minds that still have much to teach us, even from beyond the grave.

Daniel Taylor says

For countless years, I salivated at the sight of this book. I'm glad the experience of reading it has been every bit as good as my anticipation.

If you want to write personal essays -- a long-time aspiration of mine -- then this book is a must-read.

But anyone who loves reading some of the best writing in the world on a crossing a range of disciplines and topics, then this book is worth the effort.
