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Quotes by Trilling, Lionel

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Lionel Trilling (July 4, 1905 – November 5, 1975) was an American literary critic, author, and teacher. Trilling was one of the group known as "The New York Intellectuals" and was viewed as one of the great literary critics of his time. He is probably most famous to the general public for his introduction to a 1952 reissue of George Orwell's book, *Homage to Catalonia*. He was also a regular contributor to the *Partisan Review*.

Educating a son I should allow him no fairy tales and only a very few novels. This is to prevent him from having 1. the sense of romantic solitude (if he is worth anything he will develop a proper and useful solitude) which identification with the hero gives. 2. cant ideas of right and wrong, absurd systems of honor and morality which never will he be able completely to get rid of, 3. the attainment of ideals, of a priori desires, of a priori emotions. He should amuse himself with fact only: he will then not learn that if the weaker younger son do or do not the magical honorable thing he will win the princess with hair like flax.

- Trilling, Lionel

Probably it is impossible for humor to be ever a revolutionary weapon. *Candide* can do little more than generate irony.

- Trilling, Lionel

Being a Jew is like walking in the wind or swimming: you are touched at all points and conscious everywhere.

- Trilling, Lionel

We who are liberal and progressive know that the poor are our equals in every sense except that of being equal to us.

- Trilling, Lionel

Any historian of the literature of the modern age will take virtually for granted the adversary intention, the actually subversive intention, that characterizes modern writing -- he will perceive its clear purpose of detaching the reader from the habits of thought and feeling that the larger culture imposes, of giving him a ground and a vantage point from which to judge and condemn, and perhaps revise, the culture that produces him.

- Trilling, Lionel

The function of literature, through all its mutations, has been to make us aware of the particularity of selves, and the high authority of the self in its quarrel with its society and its culture. Literature is in that sense subversive.

- Trilling, Lionel

Literature is the human activity that make the fullest and most precise account of variousness, possibility, complexity, and difficulty.

- Trilling, Lionel

A theory of the middle class: that it is not to be determined by its financial situation but rather by its relation to government. That is, one could shade down from an actual ruling or governing class to a class hopelessly out of relation to government, thinking of government as beyond its control, of itself as wholly controlled by government.

Somewhere in between and In gradations is the group that has the sense that gov't exists for it, and shapes its consciousness accordingly.

- Trilling, Lionel

Every neurosis is a primitive form of legal proceeding in which the accused carries on the prosecution, imposes judgment and executes the sentence: all to the end that someone else should not perform the same process.

- Trilling, Lionel

Where misunderstanding serves others as an advantage, one is helpless to make oneself understood.

- Trilling, Lionel

The immature artist imitates. The mature artist steals.

- Trilling, Lionel

Immature artists imitate. Mature artists steal.

- Trilling, Lionel

A primary function of art and thought is to liberate the individual from the tyranny of his

culture in the environmental sense and to permit him to stand beyond it in an autonomy of perception and judgment.

- Trilling, Lionel

In the American metaphysic, reality is always material reality, hard, resistant, unformed, impenetrable, and unpleasant.

- Trilling, Lionel

We are at heart so profoundly anarchistic that the only form of state we can imagine living in is Utopian; and so cynical that the only Utopia we can believe in is authoritarian.

- Trilling, Lionel



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