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# Quotes about Literature

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Only the more rugged mortals should attempt to keep up with current literature.

- Age, George

Literature is made upon any occasion that a challenge is put to the legal apparatus by conscience in touch with humanity.

- Algren, Nelson

The writer in western civilization has become not a voice of his tribe, but of his individuality. This is a very narrow-minded situation.

- Appelfeld, Aharon

If the most significant characteristic of man is the complex of biological needs he shares with all members of his species, then the best lives for the writer to observe are those in which the role of natural necessity is clearest, namely, the lives of the very poor.

- Auden, W. H.

Literary imagination is an aesthetic object offered by a writer to a lover of books.

- Bachelard, Gaston

Literature is without proofs. By which it must be understood that it cannot prove, not only

what it says, but even that it is worth the trouble of saying it.

- Barthes, Roland

In the present age, alas! our pens are ravished by unlettered authors and unmannered critics, that make a havoc rather than a building, a wilderness rather than a garden. But, a lack! what boots it to drop tears upon the preterit?

- Beardsley, Aubrey

Do not worry about the incarnation of ideas. If you are a poet, your works will contain them without your knowledge -- they will be both moral and national if you follow your inspiration freely.

- Belinsky, Vissarion

The great standard of literature as to purity and exactness of style is the Bible.

- Blair, Hugh

Literature is not exhaustible, for the sufficient and simple reason that a single book is not. A book is not an isolated entity: it is a narration, an axis of innumerable narrations. One literature differs from another, either before or after it, not so much because of the text as for the manner in which it is read.

- Borges, Jorge Luis

A losing trade, I assure you, sir: literature is a drug.

- Borrow, George

All literature is political.

- Burton, LeVar

English literature is a kind of training in social ethics. English trains you to handle a body of information in a way that is conducive to action.

- Butler, Marilyn

The struggle of literature is in fact a struggle to escape from the confines of language; it stretches out from the utmost limits of what can be said; what stirs literature is the call and attraction of what is not in the dictionary.

- Calvino, Italo

When politicians and politically minded people pay too much attention to literature, it is a bad sign -- a bad sign mostly for literature. But it is also a bad sign when they don't want to hear the word mentioned.

- Calvino, Italo

All literature is gossip.

- Capote, Truman

There is a great discovery still to be made in literature, that of paying literary men by the quantity they do not write.

- Carlyle, Thomas

When a book, any sort of book, reaches a certain intensity of artistic performance it becomes literature. That intensity may be a matter of style, situation, character, emotional tone, or idea, or half a dozen other things. It may also be a perfection of control over the movement of a story similar to the control a great pitcher has over the ball.

- Chandler, Raymond

Speak of the moderns without contempt, and of the ancients without idolatry.

- Chesterfield, Lord

The greatest masterpiece in literature is only a dictionary out of order.

- Cocteau, Jean

One learns little more about a man from his feats of literary memory than from the feats of his alimentary canal.

- Colby, Frank Moore

Just as it is true that a stream cannot rise above its source, so it is true that a national literature cannot rise above the moral level of the social conditions of the people from whom it derives its inspiration.

- Connolly, James

The test of literature is, I suppose, whether we ourselves live more intensely for the reading of it.

- Drew, Elizabeth

Literature transforms and intensifies ordinary language, deviates systematically from everyday speech. If you approach me at a bus stop and murmur *Thou still unravished bride of quietness*, then I am instantly aware that I am in the presence of the literary.

- Eagleton, Terry

When we read of human beings behaving in certain ways, with the approval of the author, who gives his benediction to this behavior by his attitude towards the result of the behavior arranged by himself, we can be influenced towards behaving in the same way.

- Eliot, T. S.

People do not deserve to have good writings; they are so pleased with the bad.

- Emerson, Ralph Waldo

If you look at history you'll find that no state has been so plagued by its rulers as when power has fallen into the hands of some dabbler in philosophy or literary addict.

- Erasmus, Desiderius

The artist is of no importance. Only what he creates is important, since there is nothing new to be said. Shakespeare, Balzac, Homer have all written about the same things, and if they had lived one thousand or two thousand years longer, the publishers wouldn't have

needed anyone since.

- Faulkner, William

To provoke dreams of terror in the slumber of prosperity has become the moral duty of literature.

- Fischer, Ernst

Only two classes of books are of universal appeal. The very best and the very worst.

- Ford, Ford Madox

In our day the conventional element in literature is elaborately disguised by a law of copyright pretending that every work of art is an invention distinctive enough to be patented.

- Frye, Northrop

Only those things are beautiful which are inspired by madness and written by reason.

- Gide, Andre

Literature, as a field of glory, is an arena where a tomb may be more easily found than laurels; and as a means of support, it is the chance of chances.

- Giles, Henry

The decline in literature indicates a decline in the nation. The two keep pace in their

downward tendency.

- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang Von

One of the proud joys of the man of letters --if that man of letters is an artist is to feel within himself the power to immortalize at will anything he chooses to immortalize.

Insignificant though he may be, he is conscious of possessing a creative divinity. God creates lives; the man of imagination creates fictional lives which may make a profound and as it were more living impression on the world's memory.

- Goncourt, Edmond and Jules De

It is the story-teller's task to elicit sympathy and a measure of understanding for those who lie outside the boundaries of State approval.

- Greene, Graham

A people's literature is the great textbook for real knowledge of them. The writings of the day show the quality of the people as no historical reconstruction can.

- Hamilton, Edith

A great number of the disappointments and mishaps of the troubled world are the direct result of literature and the allied arts. It is our belief that no human being who devotes his life and energy to the manufacture of fantasies can be anything but fundamentally inadequate

- Hampton, Christopher

The attempt to devote oneself to literature alone is a most deceptive thing, and often, paradoxically, it is literature that suffers for it.

- Havel, Vaclav

I really do inhabit a system in which words are capable of shaking the entire structure of government, where words can prove mightier than ten military divisions.

- Havel, Vaclav

The only sensible ends of literature are, first, the pleasurable toil of writing; second, the gratification of one's family and friends; and lastly, the solid cash.

- Hawthorne, Nathaniel

It is a good lesson --though it may often be a hard one --for a man who has dreamed of literary fame, and of making for himself a rank among the world's dignitaries by such means, to step aside out of the narrow circle in which his claims are recognized, and to find how utterly devoid of all significance, beyond that circle, is all that he achieves, and all he aims at.

- Hawthorne, Nathaniel

How simple the writing of literature would be if it were only necessary to write in another way what has been well written. It is because we have had such great writers in the past that a writer is driven far out past where he can go, out to where no one can help him.

- Hemingway, Ernest

All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called Huckleberry Finn. American writing comes from that. There was nothing before. There has been nothing as good since.

- Hemingway, Ernest

All you can be sure about in a political-minded writer is that if his work should last you will have to skip the politics when you read it. Many of the so-called politically enlisted writers change their politics frequently . Perhaps it can be respected as a form of the pursuit of happiness.

- Hemingway, Ernest

Now a writer can make himself a nice career while he is alive by espousing a political cause, working for it, making a profession of believing in it, and if it wins he will be very well placed. All politics is a matter of working hard without reward, or with a living wage for a time, in the hope of booty later. A man can be a Fascist or a Communist and if his outfit gets in he can get to be an ambassador or have a million copies of his books printed by the Government or any of the other rewards the boys dream about.

- Hemingway, Ernest

The hardest thing to do is to write straight honest prose on human beings. First you have to know the subject; then you have to know how to write. Both take a lifetime to learn, and anybody is cheating who takes politics as a way out. All the outs are too easy, and the thing itself is too hard to do.

- Hemingway, Ernest

There are events which are so great that if a writer has participated in them his obligation is to write truly rather than assume the presumption of altering them with invention.

- Hemingway, Ernest

The self-styled intellectual who is impotent with pen and ink hungers to write history with sword and blood.

- Hoffer, Eric

Literature flourishes best when it is half trade and half an art.

- Inge, Dean William R.

It takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature.

- James, Henry

Great literature cannot grow from a neglected or impoverished soil. Only if we actually tend or care will it transpire that every hundred years or so we might get a Middlemarch.

- James, P. D.

The thing that teases the mind over and over for years, and at last gets itself put down rightly on paper -- whether little or great, it belongs to Literature.

- Jewett, Sarah Orne

Literature is my Utopia. Here I am not disfranchised. No barrier of the senses shuts me out from the sweet, gracious discourse of my book-friends. They talk to me without embarrassment or awkwardness.

- Keller, Helen

In the electronic age, books, words and reading are not likely to remain sufficiently authoritative and central to knowledge to justify literature.

- Kernan, Alvin

For a novelist, a given historic situation is an anthropologic laboratory in which he explores his basic question: What is human existence?

- Kundera, Milan

The present era grabs everything that was ever written in order to transform it into films, TV programs; or cartoons. What is essential in a novel is precisely what can only be expressed in a novel, and so every adaptation contains nothing but the non-essential. If a person is still crazy enough to write novels nowadays and wants to protect them, he has to write them in such a way that they cannot be adapted, in other words, in such a way that they cannot be retold.

- Kundera, Milan

Despair, feeding, as it always does, on phantasmagoria, is imperturbably leading literature to the rejection, en masse, of all divine and social laws, towards practical and theoretical evil.

- Lautreamont, Isidore Ducasse, Comte De

Oh literature, oh the glorious Art, how it preys upon the marrow in our bones. It scoops the stuffing out of us, and chucks us aside. Alas!

- Lawrence, D. H.

Literature is a toil and a snare, a curse that bites deep.

- Lawrence, D. H.

Literature must become party literature. Down with unpartisan litterateurs! Down with the superman of literature! Literature must become a part of the general cause of the proletariat.

- Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich

Literature is analysis after the event.

- Lessing, Doris

Our American professors like their literature clear and cold and pure and very dead.

- Lewis, Sinclair

A good metaphor is something even the police should keep an eye on.

- Lichtenberg, Georg C.

With a pen in my hand I have successfully stormed bulwarks from which others armed with sword and excommunication have been repulsed.

- Lichtenberg, Georg C.

There is an incompatibility between literary creation and political activity.

- Llosa, Mario Vargas

The pure work implies the disappearance of the poet as speaker, who hands over to the words.

- Mallarme, Stephane

Literature... is condemned (or privileged) to be forever the most rigorous and, consequently, the most reliable of terms in which man names and transforms himself.

- Man, Paul De

Literature exists at the same time in the modes of error and truth; it both betrays and obeys its own mode of being.

- Man, Paul De

In literature, as in love, we are astonished at the choice made by other people.

- Maurois, Andre

It is not the first duty of the novelist to provide blueprints for insurrection, or uplifting tales

of successful resistance for the benefit of the opposition. The naming of what is there is what is important.

- Mcewan, Ian

For whatever is truly wondrous and fearful in man, never yet was put into words or books.

- Melville, Herman

That is a very good question. I don't know the answer. But can you tell me the name of a classical Greek shoemaker?

- Miller, Arthur

What is not in the open street is false, derived, that is to say, literature.

- Miller, Henry

What makes literature interesting is that it does not survive its translation. The characters in a novel are made out of the sentences. That's what their substance is.

- Miller, Jonathan

A literary movement consists of five or six people who live in the same town and hate each other cordially.

- Moore, George

Literature, the most seductive, the most deceiving, the most dangerous of professions.

- Morley, John

Learning why one great book is just like every other great book is the key to understanding literature

- Moschitta, John

Literature could be said to be a sort of disciplined technique for arousing certain emotions.

- Murdoch, Iris

I am not a literary man. I am a man of science, and I am interested in that branch of Anthropology which deals with the history of human speech.

- Murray, Jim

There was a time when the average reader read a novel simply for the moral he could get out of it, and however naive that may have been, it was a good deal less naive than some of the limited objectives he has now. Today novels are considered to be entirely concerned with the social or economic or psychological forces that they will by necessity exhibit, or with those details of daily life that are for the good novelist only means to some deeper end.

- O'Connor, Flannery

The atmosphere of orthodoxy is always damaging to prose, and above all it is completely ruinous to the novel, the most anarchical of all forms of literature.

- Orwell, George

The existence of good bad literature --the fact that one can be amused or excited or even moved by a book that one's intellect simply refuses to take seriously --is a reminder that art is not the same thing as cerebration.

- Orwell, George

The truth is that literature, particularly fiction, is not the pure medium we sometimes assume it to be. Response to it is affected by things other than its own intrinsic quality; by a curiosity or lack of it about the people it deals with, their outlook, their way of life.

- Palmer, Vance

Literature is a defense against the attacks of life. It says to life: You can't deceive me. I know your habits, foresee and enjoy watching all your reactions, and steal your secret by involving you in cunning obstructions that halt your normal flow.

- Pavese, Cesare

Literature is the expression of a feeling of deprivation, a recourse against a sense of something missing. But the contrary is also true: language is what makes us human. It is a recourse against the meaningless noise and silence of nature and history.

- Paz, Octavio

Whoever has the luck to be born a character can laugh even at death. Because a character will never die! A man will die, a writer, the instrument of creation: but what he has created will never die!

- Pirandello, Luigi

The cultivation of literary pursuits forms the basis of all sciences, and in their perfection consist the reputation and prosperity of kingdoms.

- Pombal, Marques De

Literature is news that stays news.

- Pound, Ezra

If a nation's literature declines, the nation atrophies and decays.

- Pound, Ezra

Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree.

- Pound, Ezra

Literature does not exist in a vacuum. Writers as such have a definite social function exactly proportional to their ability as writers. This is their main use.

- Pound, Ezra

The art of letters will come to an end before A.D. 2000. I shall survive as a curiosity.

- Pound, Ezra

The party of God and the party of Literature have more in common than either will admit;

their texts may conflict, but their bigotries coincide. Both insist on being the sole custodians of the true word and its only interpreters.

- Raphael, Frederic

Writing is the only profession where no one considers you ridiculous if you earn no money.

- Renard, Jules

There can be no literary equivalent to truth.

- Riding, Laura

The liveliness of literature lies in its exceptionality, in being the individual, idiosyncratic vision of one human being, in which, to our delight and great surprise, we may find our own vision reflected.

- Rushdie, Salman

The only privilege literature deserves -- and this privilege it requires in order to exist -- is the privilege of being in the arena of discourse, the place where the struggle of our languages can be acted out.

- Rushdie, Salman

Literature is where I go to explore the highest and lowest places in human society and in the human spirit, where I hope to find not absolute truth but the truth of the tale, of the imagination and of the heart.

- Rushdie, Salman

Just as the office worker dreams of murdering his hated boss and so is saved from really murdering him, so it is with the author; with his great dreams he helps his readers to survive, to avoid their worst intentions. And society, without realizing it respects and even exalts him, albeit with a kind of jealousy, fear and even repulsion, since few people want to discover the horrors that lurk in the depths of their souls. This is the highest mission of great literature, and there is no other.

- Sabato, Ernesto

Of course the illusion of art is to make one believe that great literature is very close to life, but exactly the opposite is true. Life is amorphous, literature is formal.

- Sagan, Françoise

If literature isn't everything, it's not worth a single hour of someone's trouble.

- Sartre, Jean-Paul

Literature is the immortality of speech.

- Schlegel, August Wilhelm Von

Leisure without literature is death and burial alive.

- Seneca

In literature the ambition of the novice is to acquire the literary language: the struggle of the adept is to get rid of it.

- Shaw, George Bernard

Literature that is not the breath of contemporary society, that dares not transmit the pains and fears of that society, that does not warn in time against threatening moral and social dangers -- such literature does not deserve the name of literature; it is only a fa?ade.

Such literature loses the confidence of its own people, and its published works are used as wastepaper instead of being read.

- Solzhenitsyn, Alexander

Perversity is the muse of modern literature.

- Sontag, Susan

Remarks are not literature.

- Stein, Gertrude

How has the human spirit ever survived the terrific literature with which it has had to contend?

- Stevens, Wallace

As life grows more terrible, its literature grows more terrible.

- Stevens, Wallace

Nothing could be more inappropriate to American literature than its English source since the Americans are not British in sensibility.

- Stevens, Wallace

By and large the literature of a democracy will never exhibit the order, regularity, skill, and art characteristic of aristocratic literature; formal qualities will be neglected or actually despised. The style will often be strange, incorrect, overburdened, and loose, and almost always strong and bold. Writers will be more anxious to work quickly than to perfect details. Short works will be commoner than long books, wit than erudition, imagination than depth. There will be a rude and untutored vigor of thought with great variety and singular fecundity. Authors will strive to astonish more than to please, and to stir passions rather than to charm taste.

- Tocqueville, Alexis De

Already the writers are complaining that there is too much freedom. They need some pressure. The worse your daily life, the better your art. If you have to be careful because of oppression and censorship, this pressure produces diamonds.

- Tolstaya, Tatyana

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

The rest, called literature, is a dossier of human imbecility for the guidance of future professors.

- Tzara, Tristan

I have never known a novel that was good enough to be good in spite of its being adapted to the author's political views.

- Wharton, Edith

Anybody can write a three-volume novel. It merely requires a complete ignorance of both life and literature.

- Wilde, Oscar

The difference between literature and journalism is that journalism is unreadable and literature is not read.

- Wilde, Oscar

Literature always anticipates life. It does not copy it, but moulds it to its purpose. The nineteenth century, as we know it, is largely an invention of Balzac.

- Wilde, Oscar

Literature is the orchestration of platitudes.

- Wilder, Thornton

Professors of literature, who for the most part are genteel but mediocre men, can make but a poor defense of their profession, and the professors of science, who are frequently men of great intelligence but of limited interests and education

- Winters, Yvor

A good essay must have this permanent quality about it; it must draw its curtain round us, but it must be a curtain that shuts us in not out.

- Woolf, Virginia

Henry James seems most entirely in his element, doing that is to say what everything favors his doing, when it is a question of recollection. The mellow light which swims over

the past, the beauty which suffuses even the commonest little figures of that

- Woolf, Virginia





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