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Quotes by Kundera, Milan

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Milan Kundera (born April 1, 1929 in Brno, Czechoslovakia) is a Franco-Czech writer.

Eroticism is like a dance: one always leads the other.

- Kundera, Milan

The serial number of a human specimen is the face, that accidental and unrepeatable combination of features. It reflects neither character nor soul, nor what we call the self.

The face is only the serial number of a specimen.

- Kundera, Milan

A novel that does not uncover a hitherto unknown segment of existence is immoral.

Knowledge is the novel's only morality.

- Kundera, Milan

All great novels, all true novels, are bisexual.

- Kundera, Milan

People are always shouting they want to create a better future. It's not true. The future is an apathetic void of no interest to anyone. The past is full of life, eager to irritate us,

provoke and insult us, tempt us to destroy or repaint it. The only reason people want to be masters of the future is to change the past.

- Kundera, Milan

True human goodness, in all its purity and freedom, can come to the fore only when its recipient has no power.

- Kundera, Milan

Happiness is the longing for repetition.

- Kundera, Milan

Nothing is more repugnant to me than brotherly feelings grounded in the common baseness people see in one another.

- Kundera, Milan

The reign of imagagology begins where history ends.

- Kundera, Milan

A gesture cannot be regarded as the expression of an individual, as his creation (because no individual is capable of creating a fully original gesture, belonging to nobody else), nor can it even be regarded as that person's instrument; on the contrary, it is gestures that use us as their instruments, as their bearers and incarnations.

- Kundera, Milan

I think, therefore I am is the statement of an intellectual who underrates toothaches.

- Kundera, Milan

The sound of laughter is like the vaulted dome of a temple of happiness.

- Kundera, Milan

We live everything as it comes, without warning, like an actor going on cold. And what can life be worth if the first rehearsal for life is life itself? That is why life is always a sketch. No sketch is not quite the right word, because a sketch is an outline of something, the groundwork for a picture, whereas the sketch that is our life is a sketch of nothing, an outline with no picture.

- Kundera, Milan

A wave of anger washed over me, anger against myself, at my age at the time, that stupid lyrically age, when a man is too great a riddle to himself to be interested in the riddles outside himself and when other people are mere walking mirrors in which he is amazed to find his own emotions, his own worth.

- Kundera, Milan

Mankind's true moral test, its fundamental test (which lies deeply buried from view), consists of its attitude towards those who are at its mercy: animals. And in this respect mankind has suffered a fundamental debacle, a debacle so fundamental that all others stem from it.

- Kundera, Milan

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

The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.

- Kundera, Milan

Mysticism and exaggeration go together. A mystic must not fear ridicule if he is to push all the way to the limits of humility or the limits of delight.

- Kundera, Milan

We don't know when our name came into being or how some distant ancestor acquired it. We don't understand our name at all, we don't know its history and yet we bear it with exalted fidelity, we merge with it, we like it, we are ridiculously proud of it as if we had

thought it up ourselves in a moment of brilliant inspiration.

- Kundera, Milan

Listening to a news broadcast is like smoking a cigarette and crushing the butt in the ashtray.

- Kundera, Milan

Nudity is the uniform of the other side... nudity is a shroud.

- Kundera, Milan

Optimism is the opium of the people.

- Kundera, Milan

We can never establish with certainty what part of our relations with others is the result of our emotions -- love, antipathy, charity, or malice -- and what part is predetermined by the constant power play among individuals.

- Kundera, Milan

No great movement designed to change the world can bear to be laughed at or belittled.

Mockery is a rust that corrodes all it touches.

- Kundera, Milan

The basis of shame is not some personal mistake of ours, but the ignominy, the

humiliation we feel that we must be what we are without any choice in the matter, and that this humiliation is seen by everyone.

- Kundera, Milan

Solitude: a sweet absence of looks.

- Kundera, Milan

The light that radiates from the great novels time can never dim, for human existence is perpetually being forgotten by man and thus the novelists discoveries, however old they may be, will never cease to astonish.

- Kundera, Milan

The word change, so dear to our Europe, has been given a new meaning: it no longer means a new stage of coherent development (as it was understood by Vico, Hegel or Marx), but a shift from one side to another, from front to back, from the back to the left, from the left to the front (as understood by designers dreaming up the fashion for the next season).

- Kundera, Milan

A worker may be the hammer's master, but the hammer still prevails. A tool knows exactly how it is meant to be handled, while the user of the tool can only have an approximate idea.

- Kundera, Milan

A route differs from a road not only because it is solely intended for vehicles, but also because it is merely a line that connects one point with another. A route has no meaning in itself; its meaning derives entirely from the two points that it connects. A road is a tribute to space. Every stretch of road has meaning in itself and invites us to stop. A route is the triumphant devaluation of space, which thanks to it has been reduced to a mere obstacle to human movement and a waste of time.

- Kundera, Milan

Woman is the future of man. That means that the world which was once formed in man's image will now be transformed to the image of woman. The more technical and mechanical, cold and metallic it becomes, the more it will need the kind of warmth that only the woman can give it. If we want to save the world, we must adapt to the woman, let ourselves be led by the woman, let ourselves be penetrated by the Ewigweiblich, the eternally feminine!

- Kundera, Milan

There is nothing heavier than compassion. Not even one's own pain weighs so heavy as the pain one feels with someone, for someone, a pain intensified by the imagination and prolonged by a hundred echoes.

- Kundera, Milan

Without the meditative background that is criticism, works become isolated gestures, historical accidents, soon forgotten.

- Kundera, Milan

Let us consider the critic, therefore, as a discoverer of discoveries.

- Kundera, Milan

High culture is nothing but a child of that European perversion called history, the obsession we have with going forward, with considering the sequence of generations a relay race in which everyone surpasses his predecessor, only to be surpassed by his successor. Without this relay race called history there would be no European art and what characterizes it: a longing for originality, a longing for change. Robespierre, Napoleon, Beethoven, Stalin, Picasso, they're all runners in the relay race, they all belong to the same stadium.

- Kundera, Milan



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