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Quotes by Miller, Henry

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Henry Valentine Miller (December 26, 1891 – June 7, 1980) was an American writer and, to a lesser extent, painter of German Catholic heritage. He is particularly known for breaking with existing literary forms and developing a new sort of "novel" that is a mixture of novel, autobiography, social criticism, philosophical reflection, surrealist free association, and mysticism, one that is distinctly always about and expressive of the real-life Henry Miller and yet is also an imaginative construct. His most characteristic works of this kind are *Tropic of Cancer*, *Tropic of Capricorn*, and *Black Spring*. He also wrote travel memoirs and essays of literary criticism and analysis.

Life has no other discipline to impose, if we would but realize it, than to accept life unquestioningly. Everything we shut our eyes to, everything we run away from, everything we deny, denigrate or despise, serves to defeat us in the end. What seems nasty, painful, evil, can become a source of beauty, joy and strength, if faced with an open mind. Every moment is a golden one for him who has the vision to recognize it as such.

- Miller, Henry

I have always looked upon decay as being just as wonderful and rich an expression of life as growth.

- Miller, Henry

It is the American vice, the democratic disease which expresses its tyranny by reducing everything unique to the level of the herd.

- Miller, Henry

No man is great enough or wise enough for any of us to surrender our destiny to. The only way in which anyone can lead us is to restore to us the belief in our own guidance.

- Miller, Henry

The stabbing horror of life is not contained in calamities and disasters, because these things wake one up and one gets very familiar and intimate with them and finally they become tame again. No, it is more like being in a hotel room in Hoboken let us say, and just enough money in one's pocket for another meal.

- Miller, Henry

The dreamer whose dreams are non-utilitarian has no place in this world. In this world the poet is anathema, the thinker a fool, the artist an escapist, the man of vision a criminal.

- Miller, Henry

The real enemy can always be met and conquered, or won over. Real antagonism is based on love, a love which has not recognized itself.

- Miller, Henry

What have we achieved in mowing down mountain ranges, harnessing the energy of mighty rivers, or moving whole populations about like chess pieces, if we ourselves

remain the same restless, miserable, frustrated creatures we were before? To call such activity progress is utter delusion. We may succeed in altering the face of the earth until it is unrecognizable even to the Creator, but if we are unaffected wherein lies the meaning?

- Miller, Henry

Example moves the world more than doctrine. The great exemplars are the poets of action, and it makes little difference whether they be forces for good or forces for evil.

- Miller, Henry

The world itself is pregnant with failure, is the perfect manifestation of imperfection, of the consciousness of failure.

- Miller, Henry

Back of every creation, supporting it like an arch, is faith. Enthusiasm is nothing: it comes and goes. But if one believes, then miracles occur.

- Miller, Henry

Fame is an illusive thing -- here today, gone tomorrow. The fickle, shallow mob raises its heroes to the pinnacle of approval today and hurls them into oblivion tomorrow at the slightest whim; cheers today, hisses tomorrow; utter forgetfulness in a few months.

- Miller, Henry

There is nothing strange about fear: no matter in what guise it presents itself it is something with which we are all so familiar that when a man appears who is without it we

are at once enslaved by him.

- Miller, Henry

You can travel fifty thousand miles in America without once tasting a piece of good bread.

- Miller, Henry

Whatever needs to be maintained through force is doomed.

- Miller, Henry

The loss of sex polarity is part and parcel of the larger disintegration, the reflex of the soul's death, and coincident with the disappearance of great men, great deeds, great causes, great wars, etc.

- Miller, Henry

If men cease to believe that they will one day become gods then they will surely become worms.

- Miller, Henry

Actually we are a vulgar, pushing mob whose passions are easily mobilized by demagogues, newspaper men, religious quacks, agitators and such like. To call this a society of free peoples is blasphemous. What have we to offer the world besides the superabundant loot which we recklessly plunder from the earth under the maniacal delusion that this insane activity represents progress and enlightenment?

- Miller, Henry

Perhaps I am still very much of an American. That is to say, naive, optimistic, gullible. In the eyes of a European, what am I but an American to the core, an American who exposes his Americanism like a sore. Like it or not, I am a product of this land of plenty, a believer in superabundance, a believer in miracles.

- Miller, Henry

I see America spreading disaster. I see America as a black curse upon the world. I see a long night settling in and that mushroom which has poisoned the world withering at the roots.

- Miller, Henry

I have never been able to look upon America as young and vital but rather as prematurely old, as a fruit which rotted before it had a chance to ripen.

- Miller, Henry

The world isn't kept running because it's a paying proposition. (God doesn't make a cent on the deal.) The world goes on because a few men in every generation believe in it utterly, accept it unquestioningly; they underwrite it with their lives.

- Miller, Henry

All growth is a leap in the dark, a spontaneous, unpremeditated act without benefit of experience.

- Miller, Henry

The ordinary man is involved in action, the hero acts. An immense difference.

- Miller, Henry

Hope is a bad thing. It means that you are not what you want to be. It means that part of you is dead, if not all of you. It means that you entertain illusions. It's a sort of spiritual clap, I should say.

- Miller, Henry

Man has demonstrated that he is master of everything -- except his own nature.

- Miller, Henry

The man who is forever disturbed about the condition of humanity either has no problems of his own or has refused to face them.

- Miller, Henry

Imagination is the voice of daring. If there is anything Godlike about God it is that. He dared to imagine everything.

- Miller, Henry

No one asks you to throw Mozart out of the window. Keep Mozart. Cherish him. Keep Moses too, and Buddha and Lao Tzu and Christ. Keep them in your heart. But make room for the others, the coming ones, the ones who are already scratching on the

window-panes.

- Miller, Henry

The man who looks for security, even in the mind, is like a man who would chop off his limbs in order to have artificial ones which will give him no pain or trouble.

- Miller, Henry

I didn't have to think up so much as a comma or a semicolon; it was all given, straight from the celestial recording room. Weary, I would beg for a break, an intermission, time enough, let's say, to go to the toilet or take a breath of fresh air on the balcony. Nothing doing!

- Miller, Henry

I will never again go to people under false pretenses even if it is to give them the Holy Bible. I will never again sell anything, even if I have to starve. I am going home now and I will sit down and really write about people.

- Miller, Henry

It isn't the oceans which cut us off from the world -- it's the American way of looking at things.

- Miller, Henry

Who hates the Jews more than the Jew?

- Miller, Henry

Sin, guilt, neurosis --they are one and the same, the fruit of the tree of knowledge.

- Miller, Henry

Topographically the country is magnificent -- and terrifying. Why terrifying? Because nowhere else in the world is the divorce between man and nature so complete. Nowhere have I encountered such a dull, monotonous fabric of life as here in America. Here boredom reaches its peak.

- Miller, Henry

The real leader has no need to lead -- he is content to point the way.

- Miller, Henry

It does me good to write a letter which is not a response to a demand, a gratuitous letter, so to speak, which has accumulated in me like the waters of a reservoir.

- Miller, Henry

One can be absolutely truthful and sincere even though admittedly the most outrageous liar. Fiction and invention are of the very fabric of life.

- Miller, Henry

Life is constantly providing us with new funds, new resources, even when we are reduced to immobility. In life's ledger there is no such thing as frozen assets.

- Miller, Henry

Life moves on, whether we act as cowards or heroes. Life has no other discipline to impose, if we would but realize it, than to accept life unquestioningly. Everything we shut our eyes to, everything we run away from, everything we deny, denigrate or despise, serves to defeat us in the end. What seems nasty, painful, evil, can become a source of beauty, joy, and strength, if faced with an open mind. Every moment is a golden one for him who has the vision to recognize it as such.

- Miller, Henry

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

- Miller, Henry

Madness is tonic and invigorating. It makes the sane more sane. The only ones who are unable to profit by it are the insane.

- Miller, Henry

The world is not to be put in order; the world is order, incarnate. It is for us to harmonize with this order.

- Miller, Henry

Life has to be given a meaning because of the obvious fact that it has no meaning.

- Miller, Henry

We live in the mind, in ideas, in fragments. We no longer drink in the wild outer music of the streets -- we remember only.

- Miller, Henry

The waking mind is the least serviceable in the arts.

- Miller, Henry

Moralities, ethics, laws, customs, beliefs, doctrines --these are of trifling import. All that matters is that the miraculous become the norm.

- Miller, Henry

Music is a beautiful opiate, if you don't take it too seriously.

- Miller, Henry

A new world is not made simply by trying to forget the old. A new world is made with a new spirit, with new values. Our world may have begun that way, but today it is caricature. Our world is a world of things. What we dread most, in the face of the impending debacle, is that we shall be obliged to give up our gewgaws, our gadgets, all the little comforts that have made us so uncomfortable. We are not peaceful souls; we are smug, timid, queasy and quaky.

- Miller, Henry

The new always carries with it the sense of violation, of sacrilege. What is dead is sacred; what is new, that is different, is evil, dangerous, or subversive.

- Miller, Henry

Obscenity is a cleansing process, whereas pornography only adds to the murk.

- Miller, Henry

The great work must inevitably be obscure, except to the very few, to those who like the author himself are initiated into the mysteries. Communication then is secondary: it is perpetuation which is important. For this only one good reader is necessary.

- Miller, Henry

Develop interest in life as you see it; in people, things, literature, music -- the world is so rich, simply throbbing with rich treasures, beautiful souls and interesting people. Forget yourself.

- Miller, Henry

Any genuine philosophy leads to action and from action back again to wonder, to the enduring fact of mystery.

- Miller, Henry

Actors die so loud.

- Miller, Henry

The artist is the opposite of the politically minded individual, the opposite of the reformer, the opposite of the idealist. The artist does not tinker with the universe; he recreates it out of his own experience and understanding of life.

- Miller, Henry

Art teaches nothing, except the significance of life.

- Miller, Henry

Art is only a means to life, to the life more abundant. It is not in itself the life more abundant. It merely points the way, something which is overlooked not only by the public, but very often by the artist himself. In becoming an end it defeats itself.

- Miller, Henry

One's destination is never a place, but rather a new way of looking at things.

- Miller, Henry

The aim of life is to live, and to live means to be aware, joyously, drunkenly, serenely, divinely aware.

- Miller, Henry

One has to be a lowbrow, a bit of a murderer, to be a politician, ready and willing to see people sacrificed, slaughtered, for the sake of an idea, whether a good one or a bad one.

- Miller, Henry

And what is the potential man, after all? Is he not the sum of all that is human? Divine, in other words?

- Miller, Henry

When you know what men are capable of you marvel neither at their sublimity nor their baseness. There are no limits in either direction apparently.

- Miller, Henry

The prisoner is not the one who has committed a crime, but the one who clings to his crime and lives it over and over.

- Miller, Henry

Life, as it is called, is for most of us one long postponement.

- Miller, Henry

Whatever there be of progress in life comes not through adaptation but through daring, through obeying the blind urge.

- Miller, Henry

If you are well off and can afford to spend ten or twenty-five dollars a day to hire some patient soul to listen to your troubles you can be readjusted to the crazy scheme of things

and spare yourself the humiliation of becoming a Christian Scientist. You can have your ego trimmed or removed, as you wish, just like a wart or bunion.

- Miller, Henry

Analysis brings no curative powers in its train; it merely makes us conscious of the existence of an evil, which, oddly enough, is consciousness.

- Miller, Henry

Reality is not protected or defended by laws, proclamations, ukases, cannons and armadas. Reality is that which is sprouting all the time out of death and disintegration.

- Miller, Henry

Remorse is impotence, it will sin again. Only repentance is strong, it can end everything.

- Miller, Henry

Why are we so full of restraint? Why do we not give in all directions? Is it fear of losing ourselves? Until we do lose ourselves there is no hope of finding ourselves.

- Miller, Henry

What holds the world together, as I have learned from bitter experience, is sexual intercourse.

- Miller, Henry

Sex is one of the nine reasons for reincarnation. The other eight are unimportant.

- Miller, Henry

We have two American flags always: one for the rich and one for the poor. When the rich fly it means that things are under control; when the poor fly it means danger, revolution, anarchy.

- Miller, Henry

An artist is always alone -- if he is an artist. No, what the artist needs is loneliness.

- Miller, Henry

In this age, which believes that there is a short cut to everything, the greatest lesson to be learned is that the most difficult way is, in the long run, the easiest.

- Miller, Henry

No matter how vast, how total, the failure of man here on earth, the work of man will be resumed elsewhere. War leaders talk of resuming operations on this front and that, but man's front embraces the whole universe.

- Miller, Henry

What distinguishes the majority of men from the few is their inability to act according to their beliefs.

- Miller, Henry

Our own physical body possesses a wisdom which we who inhabit the body lack. We give it orders which make no sense.

- Miller, Henry

Every man with a bellyful of the classics is an enemy to the human race.

- Miller, Henry

This is not a book. This is libel, slander, defamation of character. This is not a book, in the ordinary sense of the word. No, this is a prolonged insult, a gob of spit in the face of Art, a kick in the pants to God, Man, Destiny, Time, Love, Beauty... what you will. I am going to sing for you, a little off key perhaps, but I will sing.

- Miller, Henry

Until it is kindled by a spirit as flamingly alive as the one which gave it birth a book is dead to us. Words divested of their magic are but dead hieroglyphs.

- Miller, Henry

A book is a part of life, a manifestation of life, just as much as a tree or a horse or a star. It obeys its own rhythms, its own laws, whether it be a novel, a play, or a diary. The deep, hidden rhythm of life is always there -- that of the pulse, the heart beat.

- Miller, Henry

All my good reading, you might say, was done in the toilet. There are passages in Ulysses which can be read only in the toilet -- if one wants to extract the full flavor of their content.

- Miller, Henry

The life of a creator is not the only life nor perhaps the most interesting which a man leads. There is a time for play and a time for work, a time for creation and a time for lying fallow. And there is a time, glorious too in its own way, when one scarcely exists, when one is a complete void. I mean -- when boredom seems the very stuff of life.

- Miller, Henry

Every genuine boy is a rebel and an anarchist. If he were allowed to develop according to his own instincts, his own inclinations, society would undergo such a radical transformation as to make the adult revolutionary cower and cringe.

- Miller, Henry

Broadway, such as I see it now and have seen it for twenty-five years, is a ramp that was conceived by St. Thomas Aquinas while he was yet in the womb. It was meant originally to be used only by snakes and lizards, by the horned toad and the red heron, but when the great Spanish Armada was sunk the human kind wriggled out of the ketch and slopped over, creating by a sort of foul, ignominious squirm and wiggle the cunt-like cleft that runs from the Battery south to the golf links north through the dead and wormy center of Manhattan Island.

- Miller, Henry

Instead of asking -- How much damage will the work in question bring about? why not ask

-- How much good? How much joy?

- Miller, Henry

Chaos is the score upon which reality is written.

- Miller, Henry

Whenever a taboo is broken, something good happens, something vitalizing. Taboos after all are only hangovers, the product of diseased minds, you might say, of fearsome people who hadn't the courage to live and who under the guise of morality and religion have imposed these things upon us.

- Miller, Henry

The American white man (not to speak of the Indian, the Negro, the Mexican) hasn't a ghost of a chance. If he has any talent he's doomed to have it crushed one way or another. The American way is to seduce a man by bribery and make a prostitute of him. Or else to ignore him, starve him into submission and make a hack of him.

- Miller, Henry

Man torturing man is a fiend beyond description. You turn a corner in the dark and there he is. You congeal into a bundle of inanimate fear. You become the very soul of anesthesia. But there is no escaping him. It is your turn now...

- Miller, Henry

If we are always arriving and departing, it is also true that we are eternally anchored.

One's destination is never a place but rather a new way of looking at things.

- Miller, Henry

When one is trying to do something beyond his known powers it is useless to seek the approval of friends. Friends are at their best in moments of defeat.

- Miller, Henry

Nine-tenths of our sickness can be prevented by right thinking plus right hygiene --
nine-tenths of it!

- Miller, Henry

There are lone figures armed only with ideas, sometimes with just one idea, who blast away whole epochs in which we are enwrapped like mummies. Some are powerful enough to resurrect the dead. Some steal on us unawares and put a spell over us which it takes centuries to throw off. Some put a curse on us, for our stupidity and inertia, and then it seems as if God himself were unable to lift it.

- Miller, Henry

The word which gives the key to the national vice is waste. And people who are wasteful are not wise, neither can they remain young and vigorous. In order to transmute energy to higher and more subtle levels one must first conserve it.

- Miller, Henry

After all, most writing is done away from the typewriter, away from the desk. I'd say it occurs in the quiet, silent moments, while you're walking or shaving or playing a game, or whatever, or even talking to someone you're not vitally interested in.

- Miller, Henry

A man writes to throw off the poison which he has accumulated because of his false way of life. He is trying to recapture his innocence, yet all he succeeds in doing (by writing) is to inoculate the world with a virus of his disillusionment. No man would set a word down on paper if he had the courage to live out what he believed in.

- Miller, Henry

The American ideal is youth --handsome, empty youth.

- Miller, Henry

The city is loveliest when the sweet death racket begins. Her own life lived in defiance of nature, her electricity, her frigidaires, her soundproof walls, the glint of lacquered nails, the plumes that wave across the corrugated sky. Here in the coffin depths grow the everlasting flowers sent by telegraph.

- Miller, Henry

The word civilization to my mind is coupled with death. When I use the word, I see civilization as a crippling, thwarting thing, a stultifying thing. For me it was always so. I don't believe in the golden ages, you see... civilization is the arteriosclerosis of culture.

- Miller, Henry

Civilization is drugs, alcohol, engines of war, prostitution, machines and machine slaves, low wages, bad food, bad taste, prisons, reformatories, lunatic asylums, divorce, perversion, brutal sports, suicides, infanticide, cinema, quackery, demagoguery, strikes, lockouts, revolutions, putsches, colonization, electric chairs, guillotines, sabotage, floods, famine, disease, gangsters, money barons, horse racing, fashion shows, poodle dogs, chow dogs, Siamese cats, condoms, peccaries, syphilis, gonorrhoea, insanity, neuroses, etc., etc.

- Miller, Henry

Confusion is a word we have invented for an order which is not yet understood.

- Miller, Henry

We do not talk -- we bludgeon one another with facts and theories gleaned from cursory readings of newspapers, magazines and digests.

- Miller, Henry

In the beginning was the Word. Man acts it out. He is the act, not the actor.

- Miller, Henry

All the lies and evasions by which man has nourished himself -- civilization, in a word is the fruits of the creative artist. It is the creative nature of man which has refused to let him lapse back into that unconscious unity with life which characterizes the animal world from which he made his escape.

- Miller, Henry

There is the happiness which comes from creative effort. The joy of dreaming, creating, building, whether in painting a picture, writing an epic, singing a song, composing a symphony, devising new invention, creating a vast industry.

- Miller, Henry

The study of crime begins with the knowledge of oneself. All that you despise, all that you loathe, all that you reject, all that you condemn and seek to convert by punishment springs from you.

- Miller, Henry

We have been educated to such a fine -- or dull -- point that we are incapable of enjoying something new, something different, until we are first told what it's all about. We don't trust our five senses; we rely on our critics and educators, all of whom are failures in the realm of creation. In short, the blind lead the blind. It's the democratic way.

- Miller, Henry

Honest criticism means nothing: what one wants is unrestrained passion, fire for fire.

- Miller, Henry

Men are not suffering from the lack of good literature, good art, good theatre, good music, but from that which has made it impossible for these to become manifest. In short, they are suffering from the silent shameful conspiracy (the more shameful since it is

unacknowledged) which has bound them together as enemies of art and artists.

- Miller, Henry

The world is the mirror of myself dying.

- Miller, Henry

In the attempt to defeat death man has been inevitably obliged to defeat life, for the two are inextricably related. Life moves on to death, and to deny one is to deny the other.

- Miller, Henry

All history is the record of man's signal failure to thwart his destiny-the record, in other words, of the few men of destiny who, through the recognition of their symbolic rôle, made history.

- Miller, Henry

History is the myth, the true myth, of man's fall made manifest in time.

- Miller, Henry



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