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Quotes by Rilke, Rainer Maria

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Rainer Maria Rilke (4 December 1875 – 29 December 1926) is generally considered the German language's greatest 20th century poet. Though he never found a consistent verse form, his haunting images tend to focus on the problems of Christianity in an age of disbelief, solitude, and profound anxiety. He is generally placed in the school of modernist poets, though his religious dilemmas may set him apart from some of his peers.

All emotions are pure which gather you and lift you up; that emotion is impure which seizes only one side of your being and so distorts you.

- Rilke, Rainer Maria

The purpose of life is to be defeated by greater and greater things

- Rilke, Rainer Maria

Live your questions now, and perhaps even without knowing it, you will live along some distant day into your answers.

- Rilke, Rainer Maria

Let life happen to you. Believe me: life is in the right, always.

- Rilke, Rainer Maria

Who's not sat tense before his own heart's curtain.

- Rilke, Rainer Maria

For one human being to love another: that is perhaps the most difficult of all our tasks, the ultimate, the last test and proof, the work for which all other work is but preparation.

- Rilke, Rainer Maria

This is the miracle that happens every time to those who really love; the more they give, the more they possess.

- Rilke, Rainer Maria

The great renewal of the world will perhaps consist in this, that man and maid, freed of all false feelings and reluctances, will seek each other not as opposites, but as brother and sister, as neighbors, and will come together as human beings.

- Rilke, Rainer Maria

Physical pleasure is a sensual experience no different from pure seeing or the pure sensation with which a fine fruit fills the tongue; it is a great unending experience, which is given us, a knowing of the world, the fullness and the glory of all knowing. And not our acceptance of it is bad; the bad thing is that most people misuse and squander this experience and apply it as a stimulant at the tired spots of their lives and as distraction instead of a rallying toward exalted moments.

- Rilke, Rainer Maria

Spring has returned. The Earth is like a child that knows poems.

- Rilke, Rainer Maria

Surely all art is the result of one's having been in danger, of having gone through an experience all the way to the end, where no one can go any further.

- Rilke, Rainer Maria

He reproduced himself with so much humble objectivity, with the unquestioning, matter of fact interest of a dog who sees himself in a mirror and thinks: there's another dog.

- Rilke, Rainer Maria

I feel it now: there's a power in me to grasp and give shape to my world I know that nothing has ever been real without my beholding it. All becoming has need me..

- Rilke, Rainer Maria

At the bottom no one in life can help anyone else in life; this one experiences over and over in every conflict and every perplexity: that one is alone. That isn't as bad as it may first appear; and again it is the best thing in life that each should have everything in himself; his fate, his future, his whole expanse and world.

- Rilke, Rainer Maria

The only journey is the one within.

- Rilke, Rainer Maria

There is here no measuring with time, no year matters, and ten years are nothing. Being an artist means, not reckoning and counting, but ripening like the tree which does not force its sap and stands confident in the storms of Spring without the fear that after them may come no Summer. It does come. I learn it daily, learn it with pain to which I am grateful

- Rilke, Rainer Maria

Just as language has no longer anything in common with the thing it names, so the movements of most of the people who live in cities have lost their connection with the earth; they hang, as it were, in the air, hover in all directions, and find no place where they can settle.

- Rilke, Rainer Maria

Painting is something that takes place among the colors, and one has to leave them alone completely, so that they can settle the matter among themselves. Their intercourse: this is the whole of painting. Whoever meddles, arranges, injects his human deliberation, his wit, his advocacy, his intellectual agility in any way, is already disturbing and clouding their activity.

- Rilke, Rainer Maria

Do not assume that she who seeks to comfort you now, lives untroubled among the simple and quiet words that sometimes do you good. Her life may also have much

sadness and difficulty, that remains far beyond yours. Were it otherwise, she would never have been able to find these words.

- Rilke, Rainer Maria

Ideally a painter (and, generally, an artist) should not become conscious of his insights: without taking the detour through his reflective processes, and incomprehensibly to himself, all his progress should enter so swiftly into the work that he is unable to recognize them in the moment of transition. Alas, the artist who waits in ambush there, watching, detaining them, will find them transformed like the beautiful gold in the fairy tale which cannot remain gold because some small detail was not taken care of.

- Rilke, Rainer Maria

From THE SONNETS TO ORPHEUS

(Edited and Translated by Stephen Mitchell)

II,4

Oh this is the animal that never was.

They hadn't seen one; but just the same, they loved
its graceful movements, and the way it stood
looking at them calmly, with clear eyes.

It had not been. But for them, it appeared
in all its purity. They left space enough.

And in the space hollowed out by their love

it stood up all at once and didn't need

existence. They nourished it, not with grain,

but with the mere possibility of being.

And finally this gave it so much power

that from its forehead a horn grew. One horn.

It drew near to a virgin, white, gleaming -

an was, inside the mirror and in her.

- Rilke, Rainer Maria

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