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Quotes about Fiction

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Although our productions have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary corporation in the world, no species of composition has been so much decried. And what are you reading, Miss -- -? Oh! it is only a novel! replies the young lady; while she lays down her book with affected indifference, or momentary shame. It is only Cecilia, or Camilla, or Belinda ; or, in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humor, are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language.

- Austen, Jane

We live in a world ruled by fictions of every kind -- mass merchandising, advertising, politics conducted as a branch of advertising, the instant translation of science and technology into popular imagery, the increasing blurring and intermingling of identities within the realm of consumer goods, the preempting of any free or original imaginative response to experience by the television screen. We live inside an enormous novel. For the writer in particular it is less and less necessary for him to invent the fictional content of his novel. The fiction is already there. The writer's task is to invent the reality.

- Ballard, J. G.

Novels are longer than life.

- Barney, Natalie Clifford

Fiction is not imagination. It is what anticipates imagination by giving it the form of reality. This is quite opposite to our own natural tendency which is to anticipate reality by imagining it, or to flee from it by idealizing it. That is why we shall never inhabit true fiction; we are condemned to the imaginary and nostalgia for the future.

- Baudrillard, Jean

The traditional novel form continues to enlarge our experience in those very areas where the wide-angle lens and the Cinema screen tend to narrow it.

- Boorstin, Daniel J.

Writing novels preserves you in a state of innocence -- a lot passes you by -- simply because your attention is otherwise diverted.

- Brookner, Anita

Our interest's on the dangerous edge of things. The honest thief, the tender murderer, the superstitious atheist.

- Browning, Robert

If you write fiction you are, in a sense, corrupted. There's a tremendous corruptibility for the fiction writer because you're dealing mainly with sex and violence. These remain the basic themes, they're the basic themes of Shakespeare whether you like it or not.

- Burgess, Anthony

Novelists are perhaps the last people in the world to be entrusted with opinions. The nature of a novel is that it has no opinions, only the dialectic of contrary views, some of which, all of which, may be untenable and even silly. A novelist should not be too intelligent either, although he may be permitted to be an intellectual.

- Burgess, Anthony

But I hate things all fiction... there should always be some foundation of fact for the most airy fabric -- and pure invention is but the talent of a liar.

- Byron, Lord

Romances I never read like those I have seen.

- Byron, Lord

Novels as dull as dishwater, with the grease of random sentiments floating on top.

- Calvino, Italo

What is a novel if not a conviction of our fellow-men's existence strong enough to take upon itself a form of imagined life clearer than reality and whose accumulated verisimilitude of selected episodes puts to shame the pride of documentary history?

- Conrad, Joseph

The narrative impulse is always with us; we couldn't imagine ourselves through a day

without it.

- Coover, Robert

If I were a writer, how I would enjoy being told the novel is dead. How liberating to work in the margins, outside a central perception. You are the ghoul of literature. Lovely.

- DeLillo, Don

There is no longer any such thing as fiction or nonfiction; there's only narrative.

- Doctorow, E. L.

I at least have so much to do in unraveling certain human lots, and seeing how they were woven and interwoven, that all the light I can command must be concentrated on this particular web, and not dispersed over that tempting range of relevancies called the universe.

- Eliot, George

The final test for a novel will be our affection for it, as it is the test of our friends, and of anything else which we cannot define.

- Forster, Edward M.

Writing a novel is not merely going on a shopping expedition across the border to an unreal land: it is hours and years spent in the factories, the streets, the cathedrals of the imagination.

- Frame, Janet

By its very nature, the novel indicates that we are becoming. There is no final solution.
There is no last word.

- Fuentes, Carlos

Novelists do not write as birds sing, by the push of nature. It is part of the job that there should be much routine and some daily stuff on the level of carpentry.

- Golding, William

You know that fiction, prose rather, is possibly the roughest trade of all in writing. You do not have the reference, the old important reference. You have the sheet of blank paper, the pencil, and the obligation to invent truer than things can be true. You have to take what is not palpable and make it completely palpable and also have it seem normal and so that it can become a part of experience of the person who reads it.

- Hemingway, Ernest

When writing a novel a writer should create living people; people not characters. A character is a caricature.

- Hemingway, Ernest

All that non-fiction can do is answer questions. It's fiction's business to ask them.

- Hughes, Richard

It's with bad sentiments that one makes good novels.

- Huxley, Aldous

Writing a novel is actually searching for victims. As I write I keep looking for casualties.

The stories uncover the casualties.

- Irving, John

The only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life.

- James, Henry

The time-honored bread-sauce of the happy ending.

- James, Henry

When I heard the word stream uttered with such a revolting primness, what I think of is urine and not the contemporary novel. And besides, it isn't new, it is far from the dernier cri. Shakespeare used it continually, much too much in my opinion, and there's Tristram Shandy, not to mention the Agamemnon.

- Joyce, James

Fiction is the truth inside the lie.

- King, Stephen

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

No matter how ephemeral it is, a novel is something, while despair is nothing.

- Llosa, Mario Vargas

Would you not like to try all sorts of lives -- one is so very small -- but that is the satisfaction of writing -- one can impersonate so many people.

- Mansfield, Katherine

For if the proper study of mankind is man, it is evidently more sensible to occupy yourself with the coherent, substantial and significant creatures of fiction than with the irrational and shadowy figures of real life.

- Maugham, W. Somerset

The really great novel tends to be the exact negative of its author's life.

- Maurois, Andre

By measuring individual human worth, the novelist reveals the full enormity of the State's crime when it sets out to crush that individuality.

- Mcewan, Ian

A novelist is, like all mortals, more fully at home on the surface of the present than in the ooze of the past.

- Nabokov, Vladimir

For a Jewish Puritan of the middle class, the novel is serious, the novel is work, the novel is conscientious application -- why, the novel is practically the retail business all over again.

- Nemerov, Howard

Jesus of Nazareth could have chosen simply to express Himself in moral precepts; but like a great poet He chose the form of the parable, wonderful short stories that entertained and clothed the moral precept in an eternal form. It is not sufficient to catch man's mind, you must also catch the imaginative faculties of his mind.

- Nichols, Dudley

It seems that the fiction writer has a revolting attachment to the poor, for even when he writes about the rich, he is more concerned with what they lack than with what they have.

- O'Connor, Flannery

The first sentence of every novel should be: Trust me, this will take time but there is order here, very faint, very human. Meander if you want to get to town.

- Ondaatje, Michael

When the characters are really alive before their author, the latter does nothing but follow them in their action, in their words, in the situations which they suggest to him.

- Pirandello, Luigi

Undermining experience, embellishing experience, rearranging and enlarging experience into a species of mythology.

- Roth, Philip

The novel does not seek to establish a privileged language but it insists upon the freedom to portray and analyze the struggle between the different contestants for such privileges.

- Rushdie, Salman

The acceptance that all that is solid has melted into the air, that reality and morality are not givens but imperfect human constructs, is the point from which fiction begins.

- Rushdie, Salman

Democritus plucked his eye out because he could not look at a woman without thinking of her as a woman. If he had read a few of our novels, he would have torn himself to pieces.

- Stevens, Wallace

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 weak younger son do or do not the magical honorable thing he will win the princess with hair like flax.

- Trilling, Lionel

Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.

- Twain, Mark

The purpose of a work of fiction is to appeal to the lingering after-effects in the reader's mind as differing from, say, the purpose of oratory or philosophy which respectively leave people in a fighting or thoughtful mood.

- Unknown, Source

I find in most novels no imagination at all. They seem to think the highest form of the novel is to write about marriage, because that's the most important thing there is for middle-class people.

- Vidal, Gore

Writing fiction has become a priestly business in countries that have lost their faith.

- Vidal, Gore

There is something else which has the power to awaken us to the truth. It is the works of writers of genius. They give us, in the guise of fiction, something equivalent to the actual density of the real, that density which life offers us every day but which we are unable to grasp because we are amusing ourselves with lies.

- Weil, Simone

One should not be too severe on English novels; they are the only relaxation of the intellectually unemployed.

- Wilde, Oscar

The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means.

- Wilde, Oscar

Fiction is like a spider's web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners. Often the attachment is scarcely perceptible.

- Woolf, Virginia

Novels so often provide an anodyne and not an antidote, glide one into torpid slumbers instead of rousing one with a burning brand.

- Woolf, Virginia



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