

George Steiner Quotes

*Men, Art, Book, World, Writing, Age, Believe, Reading, Cities, Teacher, Hands,
Heart, Poetry, Dream, Language, Silence, Past, Life, Night, Criticism*

To many men... the miasma of peace seems more suffocating than the bracing air of war.

~George Steiner

When a language dies, a way of understanding the world dies with it, a way of looking at the world.

~George Steiner

We know that a man can read Goethe or Rilke in the evening, that he can play Bach and Schubert, and go to his day's work at Auschwitz in the morning.

~George Steiner

Every language is a world. Without translation, we would inhabit parishes bordering on silence.

~George Steiner

The intellectual is, quite simply, a human being who has a pencil in his or her hand when reading a book.

~George Steiner

Books - the best antidote against the marsh-gas of boredom and vacuity

~George Steiner

The most important tribute any human being can pay to a poem or a piece of prose he or she really loves is to learn it by heart. Not by brain, by heart; the expression is vital.

~George Steiner

Language can only deal meaningfully with a special, restricted segment of reality. The rest, and it is presumably the much larger part, is silence.

~George Steiner

The Jew has his anchorage not in place but in time, in his highly developed sense of history as personal context. Six thousand years of self-awareness are a homeland.

~George Steiner

The ordinary man casts a shadow in a way we do not quite understand. The man of genius casts light.

~George Steiner

Men are accomplices to that which leaves them indifferent.

~George Steiner

Words that are saturated with lies or atrocity, do not easily resume life.

~George Steiner

Tragedy speaks not of secular dilemmas which may be resolved by rational innovation, but of the unalterable bias toward inhumanity and destruction in the drift of the world.

~George Steiner

Language is the main instrument of man's refusal to accept the world as it is.

~George Steiner

For many human beings, religion has been the music which they believe in.

~George Steiner

The letter kills the spirit. The written text is mute in the face of responding challenge. It does not admit of inward growth and correction. Text subverts the absolutely vital role of memory.

~George Steiner

There is something terribly wrong with a culture inebriated by noise and

gregariousness.

~George Steiner

I have every reason to believe that an individual man or woman fluent in several tongues seduces, possesses, remembers differently according to his or her use of the relevant language.

~George Steiner

Books are in no hurry. An act of creation is in no hurry; it reads us, it privileges us infinitely.

~George Steiner

If there is a chronic infirmity by which every teacher ought to be afflicted, it is, indeed, hope.

~George Steiner

The whispers of shared ecstasy are choral.

~George Steiner

To shoot a man because one disagrees with his interpretation of Darwin or Hegel is a sinister tribute to the supremacy of ideas in human affairs -- but a tribute nevertheless.

~George Steiner

More and more lower-middle-income families either live their lives in debt or leave the city altogether. The boom is strictly at the penthouse level.

~George Steiner

The journalistic vision sharpens to the point of maximum impact every event, every individual and social configuration; but the honing is uniform.

~George Steiner

To be a European is to try to negotiate morally, intellectually and existentially the opposing statements and praxis of the city of Socrates and the city of Isaiah.

~George Steiner

Pornographers subvert this last, vital privacy; they do our imagining for us. They take away the words that were of the night and shout them over the roof-tops, making them hollow.

~George Steiner

The immense majority of human biographies are a gray transit between domestic spasm and oblivion.

~George Steiner

The very opposite of freedom is cliché, and nothing is less free, more inert with convention and hollow brutality, than a row of four-letter words.

~George Steiner

My father loved poetry and music. But deep in himself he thought teaching the finest thing a person could do.

~George Steiner

A good deal of classical music is, today, the opium of the good citizen.

~George Steiner

When it turned on the Jew, Christianity and European civilization turned on the incarnation - albeit an incarnation often wayward and unaware - of its own best hopes.

~George Steiner

I owe everything to a system that made me learn by heart till I wept. As a result I have thousands of lines of poetry by heart. I owe everything to this.

~George Steiner

To understand is to decipher. To hear significance is to translate.

~George Steiner

Bookishness, highest literacy, every technique of cultural propaganda and training not only can accompany bestiality and oppression and despotism but at certain points foster it.

~George Steiner

He who has read Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and can look into his mirror unflinching may technically be able to read print, but is illiterate in the only sense that matters.

~George Steiner

Anything can be said and, in consequence, written about anything.

~George Steiner

What worthwhile book after the Pentateuch has been written by a committee?

~George Steiner

Nothing in a language is less translatable than its modes of understatement.

~George Steiner

I have students who are now in chairs in five continents. They invite me to their inaugurals. A tremendous reward.

~George Steiner

I find so much writing colourless, small in its means, unwilling to take stylistic risks. Often it goes wrong; I am not the one to judge. Sometimes, I hope, it goes right.

~George Steiner

Self-projection is, more often than not, the move of the minor craftsman, of the tactics of the hour whose inherent weakness is, precisely, that of originality.

~George Steiner

The Socratic demonstration of the ultimate unity of tragic and comic drama is forever lost. But the proof is in the art of Chekhov.

~George Steiner

There are three intellectual pursuits, and, so far as I am aware, only three, in which human beings have performed major feats before the age of puberty. They are music, mathematics, and chess.

~George Steiner

Functions of technical information, historic record, analytic argument, which are integral and obvious to Dante's use of verse are now almost completely a part of the 'prosaic'.

~George Steiner

My writing of fiction comes under a very general heading of those teachers, critics, scholars who like to try their own hand once or twice in their lives.

~George Steiner

When the modern scholar cites from a classic text, the quotation seems to burn a hole in his own drab page.

~George Steiner

I'm sorry, I'm absolutely convinced that there is at the moment no realistic prospect for very much hope in human affairs.

~George Steiner

Literary criticism has about it neither rigour nor proof. Where it is honest, it is passionate, private experience seeking to persuade.

~George Steiner

Literature and the arts are also criticism in a more particular and practical sense. They embody an expository reflection on, a value judgement of, the inheritance and context to which they pertain.

~George Steiner

The critic lives at second hand. He writes about. The poem, the novel, or the play must be given to him; criticism exists by the grace of other men's genius.

~George Steiner

Increasingly unable to create for itself a relevant body of myth, the modern imagination will ransack the treasure house of the classic.

~George Steiner

To ask larger questions is to risk getting things wrong. Not to ask them at all is to constrain the life of understanding

~George Steiner

Given my age, I am pretty near the end, probably, of my career as a writer, a scholar, a teacher. And I wanted to speak of things I will not be able to do.

~George Steiner

The age of the book is almost gone.

~George Steiner

To starve a child of the spell of the story, of the canter of the poem, oral or written, is a kind of living burial. It is to immure him in emptiness.

~George Steiner

If, in the Judaic perception, the language of the Adamic was that of love, the grammars of fallen man are those of the legal code.

~George Steiner

It is not the literal past that rules us, save, possibly, in a biological sense. It is images of the past.

~George Steiner

Fischer does not merely outplay opponents; he leaves them bodily and mentally glutted. Fisher himself speaks of the exultant instant in which he feels the 'ego of the other player crumbling.'

~George Steiner

Life proceeds amid an incessant network of signals.

~George Steiner

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