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5 essays to rethink reality

Montaigne on solitude, Nabokov on vulgarity and three more essays on art, the experience of reality and the perception of modern life.

Essays are one of the most difficult to define genres. Some classical examples of essays are both documentary prose, philosophical reasoning, and scientific article. The author of the essay refers directly to the reader, the subtlety and accuracy of associations involving him in the mental game.

We have collected five texts both classical and modern that make you look at the world in a new way, provoke and help to think.

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MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE. ABOUT PRIVACY

The French thinker of the Renaissance Michel de Montaigne was the founder of the genre free razmyshlenia about everything: the word "essay" was coined with the feed (from the French. essais "experiments, attempts"). Three volumes of his "Experiments" a bizarre interweaving of scholarship and everyday observations, philosophical digressions and ordinary wisdom. After the first publication of Montaigne waited for success. "Experiments" have become the point where attention to the individual and the particular vicissitudes of his mental world begins.

The text "On solitude" raises the most important questions how to live and how to die. Should we follow the majority or seek our own path away from everyone? Is it worth striving for glory? Following the Stoics, Montaigne recognizes the benevolence of private, secluded life: social needs and mores force to abandon himself. In his opinion, it is necessary to indulge in ordinary pleasures, but not to get attached to anything excessively (even to scientific occupations). After all, the main good, according to Montaigne is peace of mind. Michel De Montaigne The greatest thing in the world is self-control. It is necessary to take advantage of the random and independent comforts that life gives us, since they give us pleasure, but we should not look at them as the main thing in our existence; it is not so, and neither reason nor nature does not want it. What, contrary to her laws, made conditional on the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of our souls from the things that do not depend on us?

NABOKOV. VULGAR AND VULGARITY (source: pinterest.com)

Nabokov was the author of not only wonderful novels and stories, but also essays, much less known. The text about vulgarity as a lifestyle appeared in 1957 as a speech to American students, and then was published in the collection "Lectures on Russian literature". The word "vulgar" here has nothing to do with sexuality, and refers to the fact that Nabokov only refers to vulgarity and philistinism.

Gross seeks to portray itself as something respectable and considerable, he was always busy restoring gloss.

Although the lecture is intended for Americans, Nabokov uses the Russian word (poshlost). It is in Russian culture that this phenomenon is grasped well in his opinion, thanks to the cult of simplicity and good taste that existed in literature. Vulgarity is always associated with Convention and is subject to public judgments about decency. The question of where does vulgarity and how to get rid of it, the text does not answer, although it offers its guesses. Vladimir Nabokov The vulgarity is not

only obvious, blatant lack of talent, but mostly false, fake significance, fake beauty, fake mind fake appeal. By putting the word "vulgarity" on something, we not only make an aesthetic judgment, but also create a moral court. Everything genuine, honest, beautiful cannot be vulgar.

SUSAN SONTAG. AGAINST INTERPRETATION

Perhaps the most famous essay by an American writer, critic and Director. Sontag became one of the symbols of the XX century; she was a public intellectual who formed the tastes of several generations. In her youth, she decided that the writer is the one who is interested in everything, and adhered to this principle until the end of life. The result was hundreds of articles about art, literature and cinema, four novels and several experimental films. Her legacy began to reach the Russian-speaking reader only in recent years.

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"Against interpretation" an essay on the perception of works of art, which seeks for them an additional, hidden meaning.

This is what we are taught in school we get used to perceive reality by interpreting it. Songa constructing this manner of perception to Plato and the idea of imitation (mimesis). The interpreter is never satisfied with what he sees. He seeks to replace the work of art with something else, to make it an object placed in a grid of categories understandable to him. The tank rumbling down the street in Bergman's film becomes a phallic symbol, Kafka's "Process" God's judgment, etc. Sontag proves that interpretation does not enrich reality, but impoverishes it. Her call to "learn to see more, hear more, feel more", uttered in the 60s, looks relevant now. Susan Sontag ...interpretation is the revenge of the intellect on art. Moreover. It's the revenge of the intellect to the world. To interpret means to impoverish, to dry up the world in order to establish a ghostly world of "meanings." Turn the world into this world. (This! As if there were others.) The world, our world, is already quite impoverished, drained of blood. Away with all his duplicates, as long as we do not learn to directly perceive what we are given.

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WALTER BENJAMIN. THE WORK OF ART IN THE AGE OF MECHANICAL REPRODUCTION (source: jacobinmag.com)

The essay of the German philosopher and theorist of culture was written in 1936, but leaves a feeling of modernity. Benjamin is one of the most influential figures in the history of twentieth-century philosophy. His influence extends from the theory of the novel to modern developments in the study of new media. This essay is still referred to as an actual text: Benjamin's observations were extremely accurate and profound.