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Cultivating the Soul

Luigi Zoja



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In Cultivating the Soul Luigi Zoja argues that the soul's 'cultivation' underpins all cultural phenomena. The author examines the mythopoetic function in human beings by locating Psychoanalysis within the history of the Western world and firmly rooting it in the classical tradition. When, for example, Zoja links psychoanalytic narration with the epic-tragic narration in Greek civilization, he is establishing a remarkable kind of continuity, one which transcends centuries of economic, political and social change to insist on the timeless human need to tell a life story with passion in order to make sense of it. Zoja's masterful knowledge of the classical world is here used dialectically, to understand and explicate our modern-day predicaments. Whether employing classical notions, like hubris, (to analyze the modern phenomenon of arrogant acquisitiveness), or deploying a contemporary perspective on antiquity (to examine, for instance Homer's own technique of "mass communication"), Zoja's words fall like a sword cutting through to the core of what he sees as the inertia of much contemporary thinking. The author explores what he sees as the failure in the formation of a contemporary European identity. Lacking formative myths, with psyches mutilated by the failure of the mythopoetic function, today's citizens are left with little other than an economic reality called "Europe" to orient them. It is in such a context that Zoja claims a crucial role for Psychoanalysis in elucidating cultural, social and political phenomena. Eighteen essays grapple with thinkers from Plato to Hillman, Bloch to Ortega, Michelangelo to Rilke, and Nietzsche to Freud and Jung.

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