

# Donald Barthelme

## Quotes

*Art, Thinking, Men, Writing, World, Doe, People, Knowing, Self, Book, Despair,  
Angel, White, Reading, Fur, Heart, Progress, Girl, Tasks, Firsts*

I don't think you can talk about progress in art - movement, but not progress. You can speak of a point on a line for the purpose of locating things, but it's a horizontal line, not a vertical one.

~Donald Barthelme

The writer is one who, embarking upon a task, does not know what to do... Writing is a process of dealing with not-knowing, a forcing of what and how.

~Donald Barthelme

The aim of literature ... is the creation of a strange object covered with fur which breaks your heart.

~Donald Barthelme

Endings are elusive, middles are nowhere to be found, but worst of all is to begin, to begin, to begin.

~Donald Barthelme

Any genuine work of art generates new work.

~Donald Barthelme

I believe that because I had obtained a wife who was made up of wife-signs (beauty, charm, softness, perfume, cookery) I had found love.

~Donald Barthelme

Some people', Miss R. said,'run to conceits or wisdom but I hold to the hard, brown, nutlike word. I might point out that there is enough aesthetic excitement here to satisfy anyone but a damned fool.

~Donald Barthelme

Yes, success is everything. Failure is more common. Most achieve a sort of middling thing, but fortunately one's situation is always blurred, you never know absolutely quite where you are.

~Donald Barthelme

The death of God left the angels in a strange position.

~Donald Barthelme

We are what we have been told about ourselves. We are the sum of the messages we have received. The true messages. The false messages.

~Donald Barthelme

The privileged classes can afford psychoanalysis and whiskey. Whereas all we get is sermons and sour wine. This is manifestly unfair. I protest, silently.

~Donald Barthelme

Art is not difficult because it wishes to be difficult, but because it wishes to be art.

~Donald Barthelme

Write about what you're afraid of.

~Donald Barthelme

How can you be alienated without first having been connected?

~Donald Barthelme

Can the life of the time be caught in an advertisement? Is that how it is, really, in the meadows of the world?

~Donald Barthelme

Maybe writing can't be taught, but editing can be taught—prayer, fasting and self-mutilation.

~Donald Barthelme

The world is sagging, snagging, scaling, spalling, pilling, pinging,

pitting, warping, checking, fading, chipping, cracking, yellowing, leaking, stalling, shrinking, and in dynamic unbalance.

~Donald Barthelme

Goals incapable of attainment have driven many a man to despair, but despair is easier to get to than that -- one need merely look out of the window, for example.

~Donald Barthelme

The much heaves and palpitates. It is multidirectional and has a mayor.

~Donald Barthelme

I don't think you can talk about progress in artâ€™movement, but not progress.

~Donald Barthelme

The writer is one who, embarking upon a task, does not know what to do.

~Donald Barthelme

The best way to live is by not knowing what will happen to you at the end of the day.

~Donald Barthelme

Take me home," Snow White said. "Take me home instantly. If there is anything worse than being home, it is being out.

~Donald Barthelme

Let me point out, if it has escaped your notice, that what an artist does, is fail.

~Donald Barthelme

Well chaps first I'd like to say a few vile things more or less at random,

not only because it is expected of me but also because I enjoy it.

~Donald Barthelme

The task is not so much to solve problems as to propose questions.

~Donald Barthelme

Is death that which gives meaning to life? And I said, no, life is that which gives meaning to life.

~Donald Barthelme

People always like to hear that they're under stress, makes them feel better. You can imagine what they'd feel if they were told they weren't under stress.

~Donald Barthelme

Is death that which gives meaning to life?

~Donald Barthelme

Succeed! It has been done, and with a stupidity that can astound the most experienced.

~Donald Barthelme

See the moon? It hates us.

~Donald Barthelme

Doubt is a necessary precondition to meaningful action. Fear is the great mover in the end.

~Donald Barthelme

MTV has severely compromised surrealism, perhaps ruined it forever.

~Donald Barthelme

I think writers like old cities and are made very nervous by new cities.

~Donald Barthelme

As Jules Renard said, no matter how much care an author takes to write as few books as possible, there will be people who haven't heard of some of them.

~Donald Barthelme

The self cannot be escaped, but it can be, with ingenuity and hard work, distracted.

~Donald Barthelme

And I sat there getting drunker and drunker and more in love and more in love.

~Donald Barthelme

Instant gratification is not as good as that gratification which comes dripping slow, over the sere seasons.

~Donald Barthelme

Food ... is the topmost taper on the golden candelabrum of existence.

~Donald Barthelme

Who among us is not thinking about divorce, except for a few tiny-minded stick-in-the-muds who don't count?

~Donald Barthelme

Is it permitted to differ with Kierkegaard? Not only permitted but necessary. If you love him.

~Donald Barthelme

I am never needlessly obscure - I am needfully obscure, when I am obscure.

~Donald Barthelme

Painters, especially American painters since the Second World War, have been much more troubled, beset by formal perplexity, than

American writers. They've been a laboratory for everybody.

~Donald Barthelme

My mother studied English and drama at the University of Pennsylvania, where my father studied architecture. She was a great influence in all sorts of ways, a wicked wit.

~Donald Barthelme

The important thing is the educational experience itself â€” how to survive it.

~Donald Barthelme

No man's plenum, Mr. Quistgaard, is impervious to the awl of God's will.

~Donald Barthelme

Anathematization of the world is not an adequate response to the world.

~Donald Barthelme

The center will not hold if it has been spot-welded by an operator whose deepest concern is not with the weld but with his lottery ticket.

~Donald Barthelme

Self-criticism sessions were held, but these produced more criticism than could usefully be absorbed or accomodated.

~Donald Barthelme

There's not a strong autobiographical strain in my fiction. A few bits of fact here and there.

~Donald Barthelme

Best not to anticipate too much ... it jiggles the possibilities.

~Donald Barthelme

There was no particular point at which I stopped being promising.

~Donald Barthelme

One of the pleasures of art is that it enables the mind to move in unanticipated directions, to make connections that may be in some sense errors but are fruitful nonetheless.

~Donald Barthelme



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