

# Robert Penn Warren Quotes

*Men, Writing, History, Past, Thinking, Self, Poetry, Real, World, People, May,  
Doe, Heart, Trying, Life, Stories, Country, Understanding, Want, Distance*

The lack of a sense of history is the damnation of the modern world.

~Robert Penn Warren

Everything seems an echo of something else.

~Robert Penn Warren

I think the greatest curse of American society has been the idea of an easy millennialism -- that some new drug, or the next election or the latest in social engineering will solve everything.

~Robert Penn Warren

Maybe a man has to sell his soul to get the power to do good.

~Robert Penn Warren

The image that fiction presents is purged of the distractions, confusions and accidents of ordinary life.

~Robert Penn Warren

Historical sense and poetic sense should not, in the end, be contradictory, for if poetry is the little myth we make, history is the big myth we live, and in our living, constantly remake.

~Robert Penn Warren

Goodness . . . You got to make it out of badness . . . Because there isn't anything else to make it out of.

~Robert Penn Warren

The poem . . . is a little myth of man's capacity of making life meaningful. And in the end, the poem is not a thing we see-it is, rather, a light by which we may see-and what we see is life.

~Robert Penn Warren

It is human defect "to try to know oneself by the self of another.

~Robert Penn Warren

You have to make the good out of the bad because that is all you have got to make it out of.

~Robert Penn Warren

If you look at a thing, the very fact of your looking changes it...if you think about yourself, that very fact changes you.

~Robert Penn Warren

I longed to know the world's name.

~Robert Penn Warren

Real writers are those who want to write, need to write, have to write.

~Robert Penn Warren

Storytelling and copulation are the two chief forms of amusement in the South. They're inexpensive and easy to procure.

~Robert Penn Warren

Tell me a story of deep delight.

~Robert Penn Warren

...a man does not die for words. He dies for his relation to them.

~Robert Penn Warren

There was nothing particularly wrong with them; they were just the ordinary garden variety of human garbage.

~Robert Penn Warren

If you could not accept the past and its burden there was no future, for without one there cannot be the other.

~Robert Penn Warren

History is all explained by geography.

~Robert Penn Warren

The poem is not a thing we see; it is, rather, a light by which we may see.

~Robert Penn Warren

Man is conceived in sin and born in corruption and he passeth from the stink of the didie to the stench of the shroud. There is always something  
(All The King's Men)

~Robert Penn Warren

A young man's ambition - to get along in the world and make a place for himself - half your life goes that way, till you're 45 or 50. Then, if you're lucky, you make terms with life, you get released.

~Robert Penn Warren

The past is always a rebuke to the present.

~Robert Penn Warren

Most writers are trying to find what they think or feel. . . not simply working from the given, but toward the given, saying the unsayable and steadily asking, "What do I really feel about this?"

~Robert Penn Warren

In one deep sense, novels are concealed autobiography. I don't mean that you are telling facts about yourself, but you are trying to find out what you really think or who you are.

~Robert Penn Warren

The poem is a little myth of man's capacity of making life meaningful.

~Robert Penn Warren

The urge to write poetry is like having an itch. When the itch becomes annoying enough, you scratch it.

~Robert Penn Warren

For what is a poem but a hazardous attempt at self-understanding: it is the deepest part of autobiography.

~Robert Penn Warren

What is man but his passion?

~Robert Penn Warren

More and more Emerson recedes grandly into history, as the future he predicted becomes a past.

~Robert Penn Warren

I don't expect you'll hear me writing any poems to the greater glory of Ronald and Nancy Reagan.

~Robert Penn Warren

For the truth is a terrible thing.

~Robert Penn Warren

If a man knew how to live he would never die.

~Robert Penn Warren

How do poems grow? They grow out of your life.

~Robert Penn Warren

So little time we live in Time, And we learn all so painfully, That we may spare this hour's term To practice for Eternity.

~Robert Penn Warren

To be an American is not...a matter of blood; it is a matter of an idea--and history is the image of that idea.

~Robert Penn Warren

For whatever you live is life.

~Robert Penn Warren

There is no country but the heart.

~Robert Penn Warren

That summer we had been absolutely alone, together, even when people were around, the only inhabitants of the kind of floating island or magic carpet which being in love is.

~Robert Penn Warren

Reality is not a function of the event as event, but of the relationship of that event to past, and future, events.

~Robert Penn Warren

We are the prisoners of history. Or are we?

~Robert Penn Warren

A symbol serves to combine heart and intellect.

~Robert Penn Warren

If you are an idealist, it does not matter what you do or what goes on around you because it isn't real anyway.

~Robert Penn Warren

Dying--shucks! If you kin handle the living, what's to be afraid of the dying?

~Robert Penn Warren

You don't choose a story, it chooses you.

~Robert Penn Warren

Poets, we know, are terribly sensitive people, and in my observation one of the things they are most sensitive about is money.

~Robert Penn Warren

What if angry vectors veer Round your sleeping head, and form.

There's never need to fear Violence of the poor world's abstract storm.

~Robert Penn Warren

My only crime was being a man and living in the world of men, and you don't have to do special penance for that. The crime and the penance, in that case, coincide perfectly. They are identical.

~Robert Penn Warren

[A]nd soon now we shall go out of the house and go into the convulsion of the world, out of history into history and the awful responsibility of Time.

~Robert Penn Warren

I reckon I am a smart aleck, but it is just a way to pass the time.

~Robert Penn Warren

I've been to a lot of places and done a lot of things, but writing was always first. It's a kind of pain I can't do without.

~Robert Penn Warren

All I've tried to do (with my writing) is capture the essence of my time.

~Robert Penn Warren

History is not melodrama, even if it usually reads like that.

~Robert Penn Warren

The best luck always happens to people who don't need it.

~Robert Penn Warren

Nobody had ever told me that anything could be like this.

~Robert Penn Warren

There is nothing more alone than being in a car at night in the rain.

~Robert Penn Warren

In separateness only does love learn definition.

~Robert Penn Warren

Your business as a writer is not to illustrate virtue but to show how a fellow may move toward it or away from it.

~Robert Penn Warren



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