

Walter Benjamin

Quotes

*Book, Writing, Past, Men, Art, Memories, Ideas, Dream, Giving, Doe, Lying,
Cities, Life, World, Long, Mean, People, Order, Running, Attitude*

Like ultraviolet rays memory shows to each man in the book of life a script that invisibly and prophetically glosses the text.

~Walter Benjamin

Of all the ways of acquiring books, writing them oneself is regarded as the most praiseworthy method.

~Walter Benjamin

The more circumspectly you delay writing down an idea, the more maturely developed it will be on surrendering itself.

~Walter Benjamin

To be happy is to be able to become aware of oneself without fright.

~Walter Benjamin

Work on good prose has three steps: a musical stage when it is composed, an architectonic one when it is built, and a textile one when it is woven.

~Walter Benjamin

The only way of knowing a person is to love them without hope.

~Walter Benjamin

Quotations in my work are like wayside robbers who leap out armed and relieve the stroller of his conviction.

~Walter Benjamin

There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.

~Walter Benjamin

The concept of progress must be grounded in the idea of catastrophe. That things are 'status quo' is the catastrophe

~Walter Benjamin

All human knowledge takes the form of interpretation.

~Walter Benjamin

Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.

~Walter Benjamin

You could tell a lot about a man by the books he keeps - his tastes, his interest, his habits.

~Walter Benjamin

The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses.

~Walter Benjamin

Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars [translated from *Trauerspiel*, 1928].

~Walter Benjamin

Genuine polemics approach a book as lovingly as a cannibal spices a baby.

~Walter Benjamin

Capitalism is a purely cultic religion, perhaps the most extreme that ever existed.

~Walter Benjamin

Mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual.

~Walter Benjamin

Every monument of civilization is a monument of barbarism

~Walter Benjamin

It is precisely the purpose of the public opinion generated by the press to make the public incapable of judging, to insinuate into it the attitude of someone irresponsible, uninformed.

~Walter Benjamin

He who observes etiquette but objects to lying is like someone who dresses fashionably but wears no vest.

~Walter Benjamin

We collect books in the belief that we are preserving them when in fact it is the books that preserve their collector.

~Walter Benjamin

Counsel woven into the fabric of real life is wisdom.

~Walter Benjamin

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the "state of emergency" in which we live is not the exception but the rule.

~Walter Benjamin

The illiterate of the future will not be the man who cannot read the alphabet, but the one who cannot take a photograph.

~Walter Benjamin

Work on a good piece of writing proceeds on three levels: a musical one, where it is composed, an architectural one, where it is constructed, and finally a textile one, where it is woven.

~Walter Benjamin

The film is the first art form capable of demonstrating how matter plays tricks on man.

~Walter Benjamin

Writers are really people who write books not because they are poor,

but because they are dissatisfied with the books which they could buy but do not like.

~Walter Benjamin

The art of the critic in a nutshell: to coin slogans without betraying ideas. The slogans of an inadequate criticism peddle ideas to fashion.

~Walter Benjamin

Not to find one's way around a city does not mean much. But to lose one's way in a city, as one loses one's way in a forest, requires some schooling.

~Walter Benjamin

Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death.

~Walter Benjamin

Gifts must affect the receiver to the point of shock.

~Walter Benjamin

Books and harlots have their quarrels in public.

~Walter Benjamin

The experience of our generation: that capitalism will not die a natural death.

~Walter Benjamin

Allegories are, in the realm of thought, what ruins are in the realm of things.

~Walter Benjamin

In every case the storyteller is a man who has counsel for his readers.

~Walter Benjamin

Art teaches us to see into things. Folk art and kitsch allow us to see outward from within things.

~Walter Benjamin

Every passion borders on the chaotic, but the collector's passion borders on the chaos of memories.

~Walter Benjamin

The nourishing fruit of the historically understood contains time as a precious but tasteless seed.

~Walter Benjamin

These are days when no one should rely unduly on his competence. Strength lies in improvisation. All the decisive blows are struck left-handed.

~Walter Benjamin

Any translation which intends to perform a transmitting function cannot transmit anything but information-hence, something inessential. This is the hallmark of bad translations.

~Walter Benjamin

Any order is a balancing act of extreme precariousness.

~Walter Benjamin

Those who do not learn how to decipher photographs will be the illiterate of the future.

~Walter Benjamin

All great works of literature either dissolve a genre or invent one.

~Walter Benjamin

To a book collector, you see, the true freedom of all books is somewhere on his shelves.

~Walter Benjamin

Ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects. Not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them.

~Walter Benjamin

The adjustment of reality to the masses and of the masses to reality is a process of unlimited scope, as much for thinking as for perception.

~Walter Benjamin

All efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war.

~Walter Benjamin

The idea that happiness could have a share in beauty would be too much of a good thing.

~Walter Benjamin

Experience has taught me that the shallowest of communist platitudes contains more of a hierarchy of meaning than contemporary bourgeois profundity.

~Walter Benjamin

The art of storytelling is reaching its end because the epic side of truth, wisdom, is dying out.

~Walter Benjamin

In the fields with which we are concerned, knowledge comes only in flashes. The text is the thunder rolling long afterward.

~Walter Benjamin

The destructive character lives from the feeling, not that life is worth living, but that suicide is not worth the trouble.

~Walter Benjamin

You follow the same paths of thought as before. Only, they appear strewn with roses.

~Walter Benjamin

Boredom is the dream bird that hatches the egg of experience. A rustling in the leaves drives him away.

~Walter Benjamin

In the end, we get older, we kill everyone who loves us through the worries we give them, through the troubled tenderness we inspire in them, and the fears we ceaselessly cause.

~Walter Benjamin

All the decisive blows are struck left-handed.

~Walter Benjamin

History breaks down into images, not into stories.

~Walter Benjamin

Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well.

~Walter Benjamin

Never stop writing because you have run out of ideas. Fill the lacunae of inspiration by tidily copying out what is already written.

~Walter Benjamin

Living substance conquers the frenzy of destruction only in the ecstasy of procreation.

~Walter Benjamin

It is the task of the translator to release in his own language that pure language that is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work.

~Walter Benjamin

All disgust is originally disgust at touching.

~Walter Benjamin

The crowd is the veil through which the familiar city beckons to the flâneur as phantasmagoria-now a landscape, now a room.

~Walter Benjamin

To do justice to the figure of Kafka in its purity and its peculiar beauty one must never lose sight of one thing: it is the purity and beauty of a failure.

~Walter Benjamin

Only for the sake of the hopeless ones have we been given hope.

~Walter Benjamin

The construction of life is at present in the power of facts far more than convictions.

~Walter Benjamin

The killing of a criminal can be moral-but never its legitimation.

~Walter Benjamin

Never stop writing because you have run out of ideas.

~Walter Benjamin

Opinions are a private matter. The public has an interest only in judgments.

~Walter Benjamin

I came into the world under the sign of Saturn -- the star of the slowest revolution, the planet of detours and delays.

~Walter Benjamin

Every image of the past that is not recognised by the present as one of

its own threatens to disappear irretrievably.

~Walter Benjamin

The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again.

~Walter Benjamin

Things are only mannequins and even the great world-historical events are only costumes beneath which they exchange glances with nothingness.

~Walter Benjamin

The book borrower...proves himself to be an inveterate collector of books not so much by the fervor with which he guards his borrowed treasures...as by his failure to read these books.

~Walter Benjamin

As Hegel put it, only when it is dark does the owl of Minerva begin its flight. Only in extinction is the collector comprehend.

~Walter Benjamin

He who asks fortune-tellers the future unwittingly forfeits an inner intimation of coming events that is a thousand times more exact than anything they may say.

~Walter Benjamin

No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the listener.

~Walter Benjamin

The work of memory collapses time.

~Walter Benjamin

It is only for those without hope that hope is given.

~Walter Benjamin

Our image of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the image of the past.

~Walter Benjamin

As long as there is still one beggar around, there will still be myth.

~Walter Benjamin

I am unpacking my library. Yes I am. The books are not yet on the shelves, not yet touched by the mild boredom of order.

~Walter Benjamin

For only that which we knew and practiced at age 15 will one day constitute our attraction. And one thing, therefore, can never be made good: having neglected to run away from home.

~Walter Benjamin

What we must demand from the photographer is the ability to put such a caption beneath his picture as will rescue it from the ravages of modishness and confer upon it a revolutionary use value.

~Walter Benjamin

To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return.

~Walter Benjamin

Only he who can view his own past as an abortion sprung from compulsion and need can use it to full advantage in the present.

~Walter Benjamin

How many cities have revealed themselves to me in the marches I undertook in the pursuit of books!

~Walter Benjamin

Literature tells very little to those who understand it.

~Walter Benjamin

A bearer of news of death appears to himself as very important. His feeling - even against all reason - makes him a messenger from the realm of the dead.

~Walter Benjamin

Melancholy betrays the world for the sake of knowledge. But in its tenacious self-absorption it embraces dead objects in its contemplation, in order to redeem them

~Walter Benjamin

The distracted person, too, can form habits.

~Walter Benjamin

In the world's structure dream loosens individuality like a bad tooth.

~Walter Benjamin

Books, too, begin like the week - with a day of rest in memory of their creation. The preface is their Sunday.

~Walter Benjamin

Kitsch offers instantaneous emotional gratification without intellectual effort, without the requirement of distance, without sublimation.

~Walter Benjamin

The good tidings which the historian of the past brings with throbbing heart may be lost in a void the very moment he opens his mouth.

~Walter Benjamin

To the lover the loved one always appears as solitary.

~Walter Benjamin

Rather than ask, What is the attitude of a work to the relations of production of its time? I should like to ask, What is its position in them.

~Walter Benjamin

It is in a small village in the Pyrenees where no one knows me 7that my life will come to a close.... There is not enough time remaining for me to write all the letters I would like to write.

~Walter Benjamin

I would like to metamorphose into a mouse-mountain.

~Walter Benjamin

For what is the program of the bourgeois parties? A bad poem on springtime, filled to bursting with metaphors.

~Walter Benjamin

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