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Quotes by Benjamin, Walter

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Counsel woven into the fabric of real life is wisdom.

- Benjamin, Walter

Books and harlots have their quarrels in public.

- Benjamin, Walter

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

- Benjamin, Walter

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

- Benjamin, Walter

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. For what one has lived is at best comparable to a beautiful statue which has had all its limbs knocked off in transit, and now yields nothing but the precious block out of which the image of one's future must be hewn.

- Benjamin, Walter

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

- Benjamin, Walter

Taking food alone tends to make one hard and coarse. Those accustomed to it must lead a Spartan life if they are not to go downhill. Hermits have observed, if for only this reason, a frugal diet. For it is only in company that eating is done justice; food must be divided and distributed if it is to be well received.

- Benjamin, Walter

Gifts must affect the receiver to the point of shock.

- Benjamin, Walter

We have long forgotten the ritual by which the house of our life was erected. But when it is under assault and enemy bombs are already taking their toll, what enervated, perverse antiquities do they not lay bare in the foundations.

- Benjamin, Walter

The greater the decrease in the social significance of an art form, the sharper the distinction between criticism and enjoyment by the public. The conventional is uncritically enjoyed, and the truly new is criticized with aversion.

- Benjamin, Walter

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

- Benjamin, Walter

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.

- Benjamin, Walter

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.

- Benjamin, Walter

Memory is not an instrument for exploring the past but its theatre. It is the medium of past experience, as the ground is the medium in which dead cities lie interred.

- Benjamin, Walter

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

- Benjamin, Walter

Opinions are to the vast apparatus of social existence what oil is to machines: one does not go up to a turbine and pour machine oil over it; one applies a little to hidden spindles and joints that one has to know.

- Benjamin, Walter

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.

- Benjamin, Walter

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

- Benjamin, Walter

Reminiscences, even extensive ones, do not always amount to an autobiography. For autobiography has to do with time, with sequence and what makes up the continuous flow of life. Here, I am talking of a space, of moments and discontinuities. For even if months and years appear here, it is in the form they have in the moment of recollection. This strange form -- it may be called fleeting or eternal -- is in neither case the stuff that life is made of.

- Benjamin, Walter

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

- Benjamin, Walter

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. He is impelled by inertia, rather than curiosity, and nothing is more unlike the submissive apathy with which

he hears his fate revealed than the alert dexterity with which the man of courage lays hands on the future.

- Benjamin, Walter

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

- Benjamin, Walter

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

- Benjamin, Walter

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

- Benjamin, Walter

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

- Benjamin, Walter

He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging. He must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter; to scatter it as one scatters earth, to turn it over as one turns over soil. For the matter itself is only a deposit, a stratum, which yields only to the most meticulous examination what constitutes the real treasure hidden within the earth: the images, severed from all earlier associations, that stand --like precious fragments or torsos in a collector's gallery --in the prosaic rooms of our later understanding.

- Benjamin, Walter

Death is the sanction of everything the story-teller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death.

- Benjamin, Walter

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

- Benjamin, Walter

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

- Benjamin, Walter

All religions have honored the beggar. For he proves that in a matter at the same time as prosaic and holy, banal and regenerative as the giving of alms, intellect and morality, consistency and principles are miserably inadequate.

- Benjamin, Walter

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

- Benjamin, Walter

The power of a text is different when it is read from when it is copied out. Only the copied text thus commands the soul of him who is occupied with it, whereas the mere reader never discovers the new aspects of his inner self that are opened by the text, that road cut through the interior jungle forever closing behind it: because the reader follows the movement of his mind in the free flight of day-dreaming, whereas the copier submits it to command.

- Benjamin, Walter

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

- Benjamin, Walter

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

- Benjamin, Walter

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

- Benjamin, Walter

Nothing is poorer than a truth expressed as it was thought. Committed to writing in such cases, it is not even a bad photograph. Truth wants to be startled abruptly, at one stroke, from her self-immersion, whether by uproar, music or cries for help.

- Benjamin, Walter

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.

- Benjamin, Walter

Separation penetrates the disappearing person like a pigment and steepens him in gentle radiance.

- Benjamin, Walter

Not to find one's way in a city may well be uninteresting and banal. It requires ignorance -- nothing more. But to lose oneself in a city -- as one loses oneself in a forest -- that calls for a quite different schooling. Then, signboard and street names, passers-by, roofs, kiosks, or bars must speak to the wanderer like a cracking twig under his feet in the forest.

- Benjamin, Walter

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

- Benjamin, Walter

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

- Benjamin, Walter

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

- Benjamin, Walter



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