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Quotes by Thurber, James

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James Grover Thurber (December 8, 1894November 2, 1961) was a U.S. humorist and cartoonist. Thurber was best known for his contributions (both cartoons and short stories) to The New Yorker.

But what is all this fear of and opposition to Oblivion? What is the matter with the soft Darkness, the Dreamless Sleep?

- Thurber, James

Early to rise and early to bed makes a male healthy and wealthy and dead.

- Thurber, James

Human Dignity has gleamed only now and then and here and there, in lonely splendor, throughout the ages, a hope of the better men, never an achievement of the majority.

- Thurber, James

Discussion in America means dissent.

- Thurber, James

My drawings have been described as pre-internationalist, meaning that they were finished before the ideas for them had occurred to me. I shall not argue the point.

- Thurber, James

A drawing is always dragged down to the level of its caption.

- Thurber, James

The animals that depend on instinct have an inherent knowledge of the laws of economics and of how to apply them; Man, with his powers of reason, has reduced economics to the level of a farce which is at once funnier and more tragic than Tobacco Road.

- Thurber, James

Editing should be, especially in the case of old writers, a counseling rather than a collaborating task. The tendency of the writer-editor to collaborate is natural, but he should say to himself, How can I help this writer to say it better in his own style? and avoid How can I show him how I would write it, if it were my piece?

- Thurber, James

With sixty staring me in the face, I have developed inflammation of the sentence structure and definite hardening of the paragraphs.

- Thurber, James

I'm 65 and I guess that puts me in with the geriatrics. But if there were fifteen months in every year, I'd only be 48. That's the trouble with us. We number everything. Take women, for example. I think they deserve to have more than twelve years between the ages of 28 and 40.

- Thurber, James

It takes that je ne sais quoi which we call sophistication for a woman to be magnificent in a drawing-room when her faculties have departed but she herself has not yet gone home.

- Thurber, James

From one casual of mine he picked this sentence. 'After dinner, the men moved into the living room'. I explained to the professor that this was Ross's way of giving the men time to push back their chairs and stand up. There must, as we know, be a comma after every move, made by men, on this earth.

- Thurber, James

One has but to observe a community of beavers at work in a stream to understand the loss in his sagacity, balance, co-operation, competence, and purpose which Man has suffered since he rose up on his hind legs. He began to chatter and he developed Reason, Thought, and Imagination, qualities which would get the smartest group of rabbits or orioles in the world into inextricable trouble overnight.

- Thurber, James

Humor is emotional chaos remembered in tranquility.

- Thurber, James

The wit makes fun of other persons; the satirist makes fun of the world; the humorist makes fun of himself, but in so doing, he identifies himself with people --that is, people

everywhere, not for the purpose of taking them apart, but simply revealing their true nature.

- Thurber, James

It is better to have loafed and lost than never to have loafed at all.

- Thurber, James

He who hesitates is sometimes saved.

- Thurber, James

My opposition to Interviews lies in the fact that offhand answers have little value or grace of expression, and that such oral give and take helps to perpetuate the decline of the English language.

- Thurber, James

We are a nation that has always gone in for the loud laugh, the wow, the yak, the belly laugh, and the dozen other labels for the roll-em-in-the-aisles gagerissimo. This is the kind of laugh that delights actors, directors, and producers, but dismays writers of comedy because it is the laugh that often dies in the lobby. The appreciative smile, the chuckle, the soundless mirth, so important to the success of comedy, cannot be understood unless one sits among the audience and feels the warmth created by the quality of laughter that the audience takes home with it.

- Thurber, James

The laughter of man is more terrible than his tears, and takes more forms -- hollow, heartless, mirthless, maniacal.

- Thurber, James

You can fool too many of the people too much of the time.

- Thurber, James

Let us not look back in anger or forward in fear, but around in awareness.

- Thurber, James

The difference between our decadence and the Russians is that while theirs is brutal, ours is apathetic.

- Thurber, James

There are two kinds of light -- the glow that illumines, and the glare that obscures.

- Thurber, James

Love is the strange bewilderment that overtakes one person on account of another person.

- Thurber, James

Love is what you've been through with somebody.

- Thurber, James

I love the idea of there being two sexes, don't you?

- Thurber, James

You might as well fall flat on your face as lean over too far backward.

- Thurber, James

Art -- the one achievement of Man which has made the long trip up from all fours seem well advised.

- Thurber, James

He was always leaning forward, pushing something invisible ahead of him.

- Thurber, James

From now on, I think it is safe to predict, neither the Democratic nor the Republican Party will ever nominate for President a candidate without good looks, stage presence, theatrical delivery, and a sense of timing.

- Thurber, James

In an extensive reading of recent books by psychologists, psychoanalysts, psychiatrists, and inspirationalists, I have discovered that they all suffer from one or more of these expression-complexes: italicizing, capitalizing, exclamation-pointing, multiple-interrogating, and itemizing. These are all forms of what the psychos themselves

would call, if they faced their condition frankly, Rhetorical-Over-Compensation.

- Thurber, James

All men should strive to learn before they die, what they are running from, and to, and why.

- Thurber, James

Every man is occasionally visited by the suspicion that the planet on which he is riding is not really going anywhere; that the Force which controls its measured eccentricities hasn't got anything special in mind. If he broods on this somber theme long enough he gets the doleful idea that the laughing children on a merry-go-round or the thin, fine hands of a lady's watch are revolving more purposely than he is.

- Thurber, James

It's better to know some of the questions than all of the answers.

- Thurber, James

Sophistication might be described as the ability to cope gracefully with a situation involving the presence of a formidable menace to one's poise and prestige (such as the butler, or the man under the bed -- but never the husband).

- Thurber, James

Speed is scarcely the noblest virtue of graphic composition, but it has its curious rewards. There is a sense of getting somewhere fast, which satisfies a native American urge.

- Thurber, James

But those rare souls whose spirit gets magically into the hearts of men, leave behind them something more real and warmly personal than bodily presence, an ineffable and eternal thing. It is everlasting life touching us as something more than a vague, recondite concept. The sound of a great name dies like an echo; the splendor of fame fades into nothing; but the grace of a fine spirit pervades the places through which it has passed, like the haunting loveliness of mignonette.

- Thurber, James

I always begin at the left with the opening word of the sentence and read toward the right and I recommend this method.

- Thurber, James

We all know that the theater and every play that comes to Broadway have within themselves, like the human being, the seed of self-destruction and the certainty of death. The thing is to see how long the theater, the play, and the human being can last in spite of themselves.

- Thurber, James

While he was not as dumb as an ox, he was not any smarter either.

- Thurber, James

If a playwright tried to see eye to eye with everybody, he would get the worst case of

strabismus since Hannibal lost an eye trying to count his nineteen elephants during a snowstorm while crossing the Alps.

- Thurber, James

Man is flying too fast for a world that is round. Soon he will catch up with himself in a great rear end collision.

- Thurber, James

It's a naive domestic Burgundy without any breeding, but I think you'll be amused by its presumption.

- Thurber, James

A word to the wise is not sufficient if it doesn't make sense.

- Thurber, James

Humor does not include sarcasm, invalid irony, sardonicism, innuendo, or any other form of cruelty. When these things are raised to a high point they can become wit, but unlike the French and the English, we have not been much good at wit since the days of Benjamin Franklin.

- Thurber, James

Next to reasoning, the greatest handicap to the optimum development of Man lies in the fact that this planet is just barely habitable. Its minimum temperatures are too low, and its maximum temperatures too high. Its day is not long enough, and its night is too long. The

disposition of its water and earth is distinctly unfortunate (the existence of the Mediterranean Sea in the place where we find it is perhaps the unhappiest accident in the whole firmament). These factors encourage depression, fear, war, and lack of vitality. They describe a planet, which is by no means perfectly devised for the nurturing or for the perpetuation of a higher intelligence.

- Thurber, James

Some American writers who have known each other for years have never met in the daytime or when both were sober.

- Thurber, James

When all things are equal, translucence in writing is more effective than transparency, just as glow is more revealing than glare.

- Thurber, James

The only rules comedy can tolerate are those of taste, and the only limitations those of libel.

- Thurber, James

Comedy has to be done en clair. You can't blunt the edge of wit or the point of satire with obscurity. Try to imagine a famous witty saying that is not immediately clear.

- Thurber, James

Well, if I called the wrong number, why did you answer the phone?

- Thurber, James

Why do you have to a nonconformist like everybody else?

- Thurber, James

Philosophy offers the rather cold consolation that perhaps we and our planet do not actually exist; religion presents the contradictory and scarcely more comforting thought that we exist but that we cannot hope to get anywhere until we cease to exist. Alcohol, in attempting to resolve the contradiction, produces vivid patterns of Truth which vanish like snow in the morning sun and cannot be recalled; the revelations of poetry are as wonderful as a comet in the skies -- and as mysterious. Love, which was once believed to contain the Answer, we now know to be nothing more than an inherited behavior pattern.

- Thurber, James



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