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Quotes by Updike, John

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John Updike

Bankruptcy is a sacred state, a condition beyond conditions, as theologians might say, and attempts to investigate it are necessarily obscene, like spiritualism. One knows only that he has passed into it and lives beyond us, in a condition not ours.

- Updike, John

Dreams come true; without that possibility, nature would not incite us to have them.

- Updike, John

School is where you go between when your parents can't take you, and industry can't take you.

- Updike, John

Existence itself does not feel horrible; it feels like an ecstasy, rather, which we have only to be still to experience.

- Updike, John

Facts are generally overesteemed. For most practical purposes, a thing is what men think it is. When they judged the earth flat, it was flat. As long as men thought slavery tolerable,

tolerable it was. We live down here among shadows, shadows among shadows.

- Updike, John

Celebrity is a mask that eats into the face. As soon as one is aware of being somebody, to be watched and listened to with extra interest, input ceases, and the performer goes blind and deaf in his over-animation. One can either see or be seen.

- Updike, John

Looking foolish does the spirit good. The need not to look foolish is one of youth's many burdens; as we get older we are exempted from more and more, and float upward in our heedlessness, singing Gratia Dei sum quod sum.

- Updike, John

Now that I am sixty, I see why the idea of elder wisdom has passed from currency.

- Updike, John

America is a vast conspiracy to make you happy.

- Updike, John

The guarantee that our self enjoys an intended relation to the outer world is most, if not all, we ask from religion. God is the self projected onto reality by our natural and necessary optimism. He is the not-me personified.

- Updike, John

Government is either organized benevolence or organized madness; its peculiar magnitude permits no shading.

- Updike, John

I love my government not least for the extent to which it leaves me alone.

- Updike, John

The essential self is innocent, and when it tastes its own innocence knows that it lives for ever.

- Updike, John

It rots a writer's brain, it cretinises you. You say the same thing again and again, and when you do that happily you're well on the way to being a cretin. Or a politician.

- Updike, John

A leader is one who, out of madness or goodness, volunteers to take upon himself the woe of the people. There are few men so foolish, hence the erratic quality of leadership in the world.

- Updike, John

An affair wants to spill, to share its glory with the world. No act is so private it does not seek applause.

- Updike, John

Every marriage tends to consist of an aristocrat and a peasant. Of a teacher and a learner.

- Updike, John

That a marriage ends is less than ideal; but all things end under heaven, and if temporality is held to be invalidating, then nothing real succeeds.

- Updike, John

When we try in good faith to believe in materialism, in the exclusive reality of the physical, we are asking our selves to step aside; we are disavowing the very realm where we exist and where all things precious are kept -- the realm of emotion and conscience, of memory and intention and sensation.

- Updike, John

Americans have been conditioned to respect newness, whatever it cost them.

- Updike, John

Being naked approaches being revolutionary; going barefoot is mere populism.

- Updike, John

By the time a partnership dissolves, it has dissolved.

- Updike, John

I would rather have as my patron a host of anonymous citizens digging into their own pockets for the price of a book or a magazine than a small body of enlightened and responsible men administering public funds. I would rather chance my personal vision of truth striking home here and there in the chaos of publication that exists than attempt to filter it through a few sets of official, honorably public-spirited scruples.

- Updike, John

Perfectionism is the enemy of creation, as extreme self-solitude is the enemy of well-being.

- Updike, John

Art imitates Nature in this; not to dare is to dwindle.

- Updike, John

Among the repulsions of atheism for me has been its drastic uninterestingness as an intellectual position. Where was the ingenuity, the ambiguity, the humanity (in the Harvard sense) of saying that the universe just happened to happen and that when we're dead we're dead?

- Updike, John

To be President of the United States, sir, is to act as advocate for a blind, venomous, and ungrateful client; still, one must make the best of the case, for the purposes of

Providence.

- Updike, John

Rain is grace; rain is the sky condescending to the earth; without rain, there would be no life.

- Updike, John

Religion enables us to ignore nothingness and get on with the jobs of life.

- Updike, John

What more fiendish proof of cosmic irresponsibility than a Nature which, having invented sex as a way to mix genes, then permits to arise, amid all its perfumed and hypnotic inducements to mate, a tireless tribe of spirochetes and viruses that torture and kill us for following orders?

- Updike, John

Sex is like money; only too much is enough.

- Updike, John

In asking forgiveness of women for our mythologizing of their bodies, for being unreal about them, we can only appeal to their own sexuality, which is different but not basically different, perhaps, from our own. For women, too, there seems to be that tangle of supplication and possessiveness, that descent toward infantile undifferentiation, that omnipotent helplessness, that merger with the cosmic mother-warmth, that flushed

pulse-quicken leap into overestimation, projection, general mix-up.

- Updike, John

For male and female alike, the bodies of the other sex are messages signaling what we must do -- they are glowing signifiers of our own necessities.

- Updike, John

A healthy male adult bore consumes each year one and a half times his own weight in other people's patience.

- Updike, John

I think taste is a social concept and not an artistic one. I'm willing to show good taste, if I can, in somebody else's living room, but our reading life is too short for a writer to be in any way polite. Since his words enter into another's brain in silence and intimacy, he should be as honest and explicit as we are with ourselves.

- Updike, John

To say that war is madness is like saying that sex is madness: true enough, from the standpoint of a stateless eunuch, but merely a provocative epigram for those who must make their arrangements in the world as given.

- Updike, John

It is not difficult to deceive the first time, for the deceived possesses no antibodies; unvaccinated by suspicion, she overlooks lateness, accepts absurd excuses, permits the

flimsiest patching to repair great rents in the quotidian.

- Updike, John

If men do not keep on speaking terms with children, they cease to be men, and become merely machines for eating and for earning money.

- Updike, John

Our brains are no longer conditioned for reverence and awe. We cannot imagine a Second Coming that would not be cut down to size by the televised evening news, or a Last Judgment not subject to pages of holier-than-thou second-guessing in The New York Review of Books.

- Updike, John

Writing criticism is to writing fiction and poetry as hugging the shore is to sailing in the open sea.

- Updike, John

Customs and convictions change; respectable people are the last to know, or to admit, the change, and the ones most offended by fresh reflections of the facts in the mirror of art.

- Updike, John



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