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Quotes by White, Elwyn Brooks

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Advertisers are the interpreters of our dreams -- Joseph interpreting for Pharaoh. Like the movies, they infect the routine futility of our days with purposeful adventure. Their weapons are our weaknesses: fear, ambition, illness, pride, selfishness, desire, ignorance. And these weapons must be kept as bright as a sword.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

Democracy is the recurrent suspicion that more than half of the people are right more than half of the time.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

The complaint about modern steel furniture, modern glass houses, modern red bars and modern streamlined trains and cars is that all these objects modernize, while adequate and amusing in themselves, tend to make the people who use them look dated. It is an honest criticism. The human race has done nothing much about changing its own appearance to conform to the form and texture of its appurtenances.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

A good farmer is nothing more nor less than a handy man with a sense of humor.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

It is at a fair that man can be drunk forever on liquor, love, or fights; at a fair that your front pocket can be picked by a trotting horse looking for sugar, and your hind pocket by a thief looking for his fortune.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

You have been my friends, replied Charlotte, that in itself is a tremendous thing...

- White, Elwyn Brooks

A man's liberal and conservative phases seem to follow each other in a succession of waves from the time he is born. Children are radicals. Youths are conservatives, with a dash of criminal negligence. Men in their prime are liberals (as long as their digestion keeps pace with their intellect). The middle aged run to shelter: they insure their life, draft a will, accumulate mementos and occasional tables, and hope for security. And then comes old age, which repeats childhood -- a time full of humors and sadness, but often full of courage and even prophecy.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

In middle life, the human back is spoiling for a technical knockout and will use the flimsiest excuse, even a sneeze, to fall apart.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

There is nothing more likely to start disagreement among people or countries than an agreement.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

A man is not expected to love his country, lest he make an ass of himself. Yet our country, seen through the mists of smog, is curiously lovable, in somewhat the way an individual who has got himself into an unconscionable scrape seems lovable -- or at least deserving of support.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

Commas in The New Yorker fall with the precision of knives in a circus act, outlining the victim.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

Deathlessness should be arrived at in a... haphazard fashion. Loving fame as much as any man, we shall carve our initials in the shell of a tortoise and turn him loose in a peat bog.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

The living language is like a cowpath: it is the creation of the cows themselves, who, having created it, follow it or depart from it according to their whims or their needs. From daily use, the path undergoes change. A cow is under no obligation to stay

- White, Elwyn Brooks

A man who publishes his letters becomes a nudist -- nothing shields him from the world's gaze except his bare skin. A writer, writing away, can always fix himself up to make

himself more presentable, but a man who has written a letter is stuck with it for all time.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

The liberal holds that he is true to the republic when he is true to himself. (It may not be as cozy an attitude as it sounds.) He greets with enthusiasm the fact of the journey, as a dog greets a man's invitation to take a walk. And he acts in the dog's way too, swinging wide, racing ahead, doubling back, covering many miles of territory that the man never traverses, all in the spirit of inquiry and the zest for truth. He leaves a crazy trail, but he ranges far beyond the genteel old party he walks with and he is usually in a better position to discover a skunk.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

I am often mad, but I would hate to be nothing but mad: and I think I would lose what little value I may have as a writer if I were to refuse, as a matter of principle, to accept the warming rays of the sun, and to report them, whenever, and if ever, they

- White, Elwyn Brooks

Heredity is a strong factor, even in architecture. Necessity first mothered invention. Now invention has little ones of her own, and they look just like grandma.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

The terror of the atom age is not the violence of the new power but the speed of man's adjustment to it -- the speed of his acceptance.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

Shocking writing is like murder: the questions the jury must decide are the questions of motive and intent.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

A poet's pleasure is to withhold a little of his meaning, to intensify by mystification. He unzips the veil from beauty, but does not remove it.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

Everything in life is somewhere else, and you get there in a car.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

A candidate could easily commit political suicide if he were to come up with an unconventional thought during a presidential tour.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

The total collapse of the public opinion polls shows that this country is in good health. A country that developed an airtight system of finding out in advance what was in people's minds would be uninhabitable.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

The so-called science of poll-taking is not a science at all but mere necromancy. People are unpredictable by nature, and although you can take a nation's pulse, you can't be sure

that the nation hasn't just run up a flight of stairs.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

Americans are willing to go to enormous trouble and expense defending their principles with arms, very little trouble and expense advocating them with words. Temperamentally we are ready to die for certain principles (or, in the case of overripe adults, send youngsters to die), but we show little inclination to advertise the reasons for dying.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

The most puzzling thing about TV is the steady advance of the sponsor across the line that has always separated news from promotion, entertainment from merchandising. The advertiser has assumed the role of originator, and the performer has gradually been eased into the role of peddler.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

Television hangs on the questionable theory that whatever happens anywhere should be sensed everywhere. If everyone is going to be able to see everything, in the long run all sights may lose whatever rarity value they once possessed, and it may well turn out that people, being able to see and hear practically everything, will be specially interested in almost nothing.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

All we need is a meteorologist who has once been soaked to the skin without ill effect. No one can write knowingly of the weather who walks bent over on wet days.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

Writing is an act of faith, not a trick of grammar.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

In a sense the world dies every time a writer dies, because, if he is any good, he has been a wet nurse to humanity during his entire existence and has held earth close around him, like the little obstetrical toad that goes about with a cluster of eggs attached to his legs.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

There is a period near the beginning of every man's life when he has little to cling to except his unmanageable dream, little to support him except good health, and nowhere to go but all over the place.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

The whole problem is to establish communication with ones self.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

Commuter -- one who spends his life in riding to and from his wife; And man who shaves and takes a train, and then rides back to shave again.

- White, Elwyn Brooks

Commuters give the city its tidal restlessness; natives give it solidity and continuity; but

the settlers give it passion.

- White, Elwyn Brooks



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