

A DICTIONARY OF  
LITERARY  
*Quotations*



MEIC STEPHENS

# PREFACE

This dictionary was begun more than twenty years ago when I fell into the habit of jotting down, in a desk-diary, extracts from whatever I happened to be reading from day to day. Thereafter it grew, casually but steadily, until I had so many quotations that to publish them in book form seemed the most sensible way of putting my compendium to some practical use.

It is inevitable that such a work must reflect the compiler's own reading, which in my case I readily admit to have been unsystematic and, it might even be thought, quite idiosyncratic. Nevertheless, I have been able to draw on several literatures, both ancient and modern, and on books famous and obscure, so that although readers may not find here all the quotations they might have expected, if they discover something entertaining or informative with which they were previously unfamiliar, then my purpose will have been served.

The quotations gathered in this book, some 3250 in all, are 'literary' in the sense that they refer to literature, writers, writing, books and reading, defined in a fairly broad way and taking in a number of contiguous areas such as journalism and the book-trade. This is an enormous field and I have had to restrict my choice in several ways. For example, I have not included quotations about specific authors, however memorable, for the reason that they are easily found elsewhere. Many others were discarded because, in the time available for the book's compilation, I could no longer put my hand on the exact sources.

A list of the headings under which the material has been arranged appears on page v. They are presented in a single, alphabetical sequence, with cross-references to other headings where related quotations may be found. Sometimes the principle of allocation may appear to be somewhat arbitrary, and especially so when the quotation refers to more than one subject, but the reader in search of a particular item will be helped by the Author and Subject Indexes which form the latter part of the dictionary. As for the arrangement of the quotations under each heading, it has been done with the browser in mind: the juxtaposition of contrasting opinions, or in some instances the cumulative effect of similar ones, has an elegant simplicity that makes for stimulating reading.

In this last detail, as in the distribution of the quotations under the various

headings, I have relied on the expertise of Betty Palmer.

For their response to my appeal for suitable material I should like to thank the following: Brian Aldiss, John Barnie, Freddie Baveystock, Duncan Bush, Tony Curtis, Walford Davies, Dorothy Eagle, Raymond Garlick, David Gunston, David Hughes, Glyn Tegai Hughes, Bobi Jones, Richard Joseph, Suzanne Kalweit, H.R.F. Keating, Alan Llwyd, Gerda Mayer, the late D. Parry Michael, Derek Parker, Margaret Payne, Alun Rees, Trevor Royle, Morris Venables and Irving Wallace.

I am also grateful to Mark Barragry of Routledge for his genial interest in the work's progress, to my secretary Angela Howells, and as always to my wife Ruth for her encouragement and practical assistance.

The book is inscribed with my son's name, in the hope that he will grow up to share his father's love of books and reading.

Meic Stephens  
Cardiff

Cyflwynir y llyfr hwn i  
**HUW MEREDYDD STEPHENS**  
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## 1 ACADEME

- 1 And seek for truth in the groves of  
Academe.  
Horace, *Epistles*
- 2 The whole business [academic criticism] is a  
subsidiary undertaking, like extracting  
useful chemicals from smoke.  
John Cheever, in interview in *Writers at  
Work* (5th series, 1981)
- 3 The colleges, whilst they provide us with  
libraries, furnish no professor of books; and,  
I think, no chair is so much wanted.  
Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Books'
- 4 A mere scholar, who knows nothing but  
books, must be ignorant even of them.  
William Hazlitt, *The Ignorance of the  
Learned* (1821)
- 5 There is more ado to interpret  
interpretations than to interpret things, and  
more books upon books than upon any  
other subject; we do nothing but comment  
upon one another.  
Michel de Montaigne, 'Of Experience',  
*Essays* (1580-88)
- 6 Every place swarms with commentaries; of  
authors there is great scarcity.  
Michel de Montaigne, 'Of Experience',  
*Essays* (1580-88)
- 7 Gentlemen who use MSS as drunkards use  
lamp-posts — not to light them on their way  
but to dissimulate their instability.  
A.E. Housman, in introduction to his  
edition of the poems of Manilius (1903)
- 8 Follow'd then  
A classic lecture, rich in sentiment,  
With scraps of thunderous Epic lifted out  
By violet-hooded Doctors, elegies  
And quoted odes, and jewels five-words  
long,  
That on the stretch'd forefinger of all Time  
Sparkle for ever.  
Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *The Princess* (1847)
- 9 Bald heads forgetful of their sins,  
Old, learned, respectable bald heads  
Edit and annotate the lines  
That young men, tossing on their beds,  
Rhymed out in love's despair  
To flatter beauty's ignorant ear.  
W.B. Yeats, 'The Scholars'
- 10 I cannot see that lectures can do so much  
good as reading the books from which the  
lectures are taken.  
Samuel Johnson, quoted in James Boswell,  
*Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791)
- 11 It depends on what we read, after all manner  
of Professors have done their best for us.  
Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship  
and the Heroic in History* (1840)
- 12 I think that one possible definition of our  
modern culture is that it is one in which  
nine-tenths of our intellectuals can't read  
any poetry.  
Randall Jarrell, remark to friends
- 13 It is bad that English is taught in  
universities. It's bad over here, where it's  
sometimes not badly taught, but over there  
(in the United States), where it's horribly  
badly taught, it simply stops the thing in its  
traces . . . It's an absurd error to put modern  
English literature in the curriculum. You  
should read contemporary literature for  
pleasure or not read it at all. You shouldn't  
be taught to monkey with it.  
Rebecca West, in interview in *Writers at  
Work* (8th series, 1984)
- 14 Our American professors like their literature  
clear and cold and pure and very dead.  
Sinclair Lewis, in speech on receiving the  
Nobel Prize for Literature (12 Dec. 1930)
- 15 You cannot lecture on really pure poetry any  
more than you can talk about the  
ingredients of pure water — it is  
adulterated, methylated, sanded poetry that  
makes the best lectures.  
Virginia Woolf, *The Second Common  
Reader* (1932)
- 16 I think that journalism is a healthier  
occupation for a writer than teaching,  
especially if he teaches literature. By  
teaching literature the writer gets  
accustomed to analyzing literature all the  
time.  
Isaac Bashevis Singer, in interview in  
*Writers at Work* (5th series, 1981)
- 17 The primary object of a student of literature  
is to be delighted. His duty is to enjoy  
himself, his efforts should be directed to  
developing his faculty of appreciation.  
David Cecil, *The Fine Art of Reading* (1957)
- 18 Gentlemen of the universities, you should  
most of you, on poetry, be silent, outside

- your tutorials or your lecture-rooms, remembering that in the last four hundred years few persons — and those poets — have written helpfully about poems.  
Geoffrey Grigson, *The Private Art* (1982)
- 19 Poetic diction. What a forbidding, dry biscuit of a term that sounds! And what hungry generations of scholastic weevils have battered upon it!  
C. Day-Lewis, 'The Colloquial Element in English Poetry'
- 20 There is a type of student . . . who has a curious subconscious itch in the presence of poetry; an itch for explaining it, in the hope of explaining it away.  
G.K. Chesterton, *Chaucer* (1932)
- 21 A blonde girl is bent over a poem. With a pencil sharp as a lancet she transfers the words to a blank page and changes them into strokes, accents, caesuras. The lament of a fallen poet now looks like a salamander eaten away by ants.  
Zbigniew Herbert, 'Episode in a Library'
- 22 To underline a poem word by word is the work of a misguided schoolmaster.  
Peter Warlock, in *The New Age* (1917)
- 23 Find me one good poet who thinks that the academic concern for literature isn't toxic and depressant.  
Geoffrey Grigson, *The Private Art* (1982)
- 24 One performs autopsies only on corpses. The idea of lecturing on a living poet is all wrong.  
Robert Graves, in *Esquire* (1970)
- 25 The world is full of young men coming down from the universities with the world's greatest novel that no one wants to read.  
Desmond Bagley, in *The Guardian* (1972)
- 26 Any man who becomes a novelist forfeits all the rights to scholarship.  
Anthony Powell, remark on BBC Radio 3 (6 Oct. 1980)
- 27 I never went to college. But I have lectured on campuses for a quarter-century, and it is my impression that after taking a course in The Novel, it is an unusual student who would ever want to read a novel again.  
Gore Vidal, in interview in *Writers at Work* (5th series, 1981)
- 28 Eventually the novel will simply be an academic exercise, written by academics to be used in classrooms in order to test the ingenuity of students.  
Gore Vidal, in interview in *Writers at Work* (5th series, 1981)
- 29 A writer who lives long enough becomes an academic subject and almost qualified to teach it himself.  
Harold Rosenberg, *Discovering the Present* (1973)
- 30 Vladimir Nabokov is surely the most preposterous Transylvanian monster ever to be created by American Academe. He is not a writer at all but a looming beast that stalks the Old Dark House of Campus Literature.  
John Osborne, 'Grievous Bodily Harm', in *The Anti-Booklist* (ed. Brian Redhead and Kenneth McLeish, 1981)
- 31 My method of teaching precluded genuine contact with my students. At best they regurgitated a few bits of my brain during examination.  
Vladimir Nabokov, in interview in *Writers at Work* (4th series, 1977)
- 32 Fourteen years in the professor dodge has taught me that one can argue ingeniously on behalf of any theory, applied to any piece of literature.  
Robert B. Parker, in *Murder Ink* (ed. Dilys Winn, 1977)
- 33 And why does Gratt teach English? Why, because  
A law school felt he could not learn the laws.  
Donald Hall, 'Professor Gratt'
- 34 Mosher came out into the reception room, looking like a professor of English literature who has not approved of the writings of anybody since Sir Thomas Browne.  
James Thurber, *The Years with Ross* (1959)
- 35 College professors in one-building universities on the prairie, still hoping, at the age of sixty, to get their whimsical essays into the *Atlantic Monthly*.  
H.L. Mencken, in *Smart Set* (Nov. 1921)
- 36 Now that I am Oxford Professor of Poetry,  
Stephen Spender,  
I would just like to say Tough Luck, Baby  
But that's the way the cookie crumbles;  
Someone has to lose.  
Clive James, parody of poem by John Wain, 'Unsolicited Letters to Five Artists'

- 37 Finally I was given the Chair of comparative Ambiguity  
At Armpit University, Java.  
It didn't keep me busy,  
But it kept me quiet.  
It seemed like poetry had been safely tucked  
up for the night.  
Adrian Mitchell, 'The Oxford Hysteria of English Poetry'
- 38 Words never let you conquer them by force,  
But certain possibilities remain.  
I'll make a new anthology. And of course  
I'll have to take up lecturing again.  
Colin Falck, 'Keeping up with Kingsley', in  
*Taking Off* (ed. Tim Dooley, 1984)
- 39 Once I went to the University of Tennessee  
in Knoxville with a prepared lecture. When I  
got there I discovered I'd left the lecture at  
home. So I had to get up on stage and  
improvise, which infuriated the professors.  
They were outraged.  
Tennessee Williams, in interview in *Writers at Work* (6th series, 1984)
- 40 I find people call it research nowadays if  
they ever have to look anything up in a  
book.  
Margaret Lane, *A Night at Sea* (1964)
- 41 Commit no thesis.  
John Knoppswood, 'Inscription for a poet's tomb'
- 42 The average PhD thesis is nothing but the  
transference of bones from one graveyard to  
another.  
J. Frank Dobie, *A Texan in England* (1945)
- 43 It is not for nothing that the scholar  
invented the PhD thesis as his principal  
contribution to literary form. The PhD  
thesis is the perfect image of his world. It is  
work done for the sake of doing work —  
perfectly conscientious, perfectly laborious,  
perfectly irresponsible.  
Archibald MacLeish, *The Irresponsibles*  
(1940)
- 44 The avocation of assessing the failures of  
better men can be turned into a comfortable  
livelihood, providing you back it up with  
PhD.  
Nelson Algren, in interview in *Writers at Work* (1st series, 1958)
- 45 'Pushing up theses', that is the euphemism  
which men of letters use for being dead; a  
long littleness of dons lies ahead of us,  
unless we have been afflicted with the curse  
of lucidity.  
Cyril Connolly, *Previous Convictions*  
(1963)
- 46 Who Killed James Joyce?  
I, said the commentator,  
I killed James Joyce  
For my graduation.  
What weapon was used  
To slay mighty Ulysses?  
The weapon that was used  
Was a Harvard thesis . . .  
Patrick Kavanagh, 'Who killed James Joyce?'
- 47 Dankwerts, scholarship boy from the slums,  
One of many, studied three years for the  
Tripos,  
Honours, English; grew a beard, imitated  
the gesture  
And the insistent deliberate (but not  
dogmatic)  
'There!' of his supervisor For a time  
The mimesis was startling. Dankwerts knew  
Uncannily what was good, what bad.  
Life and earning a living, extra muros, for a  
time afterwards,  
Left him hard up: people in their ambiguity  
Nuisances.  
David Holbrook, 'Living? Our Supervisors  
Will Do That For Us!'

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## 2 AGENTS

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- 1 The world is a peculiar place, but it has  
nothing on the world of books. This is  
largely a fantasy world in which the pecking  
order goes as follows: if you can't cope with  
life, write about it; if you can't write,  
publish; if you can't get a job in publishing,  
become a literary agent; if you are a failed  
literary agent — God help you!  
Colin Haycraft, in *The Sunday Telegraph*  
(20 July 1986)
- 2 The relation of the agent to the publisher is  
the same as that of the knife to the throat.  
Anonymous
- 3 Pimps who . . . don't do anything, don't  
make anything — they just stand there and  
take their cut.  
Jean Giraudoux, *The Madwoman of  
Chaillot* (1945)

## AGENTS

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- 4 When asked whether I believe in literary agents, I always feel inclined to reply as I should were I asked if I 'believed' in spectacles: 'Yes, if you need them and can be quite sure of getting the right kind.' Stanley Unwin, *The Truth about Publishing* (1926)
  - 5 If you're a writer there will come at least one morning in your life when you wake up and want to kill your agent. Bernice Rubens, quoted in Anthony Blond, *The Book Book* (1985)
  - 6 Economically, the agent is the only figure behind whom the apparently fierce but actually timid and incompetent individualism of authors can really unite without having to admit it. V.S. Pritchett, in *The Author* (1940)
  - 7 As far as I'm concerned, Giles takes 10% of my income; as far as he's concerned, I take 90% of his. Fay Weldon, of her agent Giles Gordon, quoted by Giles Gordon, 'I can't get an agent!' in *The Author* (Spring 1987)
  - 8 Let every eye negotiate for itself, and trust no agent. William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*
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## ALLEGORY

See FIGURES OF SPEECH

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### 3 ALPHABET

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- 1 The invention of the alphabet will produce forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn it through the neglect of memory, for through trusting to writing, they will remember outwardly by means of foreign marks, and not inwardly by means of their own faculties. Socrates
- 2 I struggled through the alphabet as if it had been a bramble-bush; getting considerably worried and scratched by every letter. Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (1860)

- 3 God have mercy on the sinner  
Who must write with no dinner,  
  
No gravy and no grub,  
No pewter and no pub,  
  
No belly and no bowels,  
Only consonants and vowels.  
John Crowe Ransom, 'Survey of Literature'
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### 4 AMBITION

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- 1 To commence author is to claim praise, and no man can justly aspire to honour, but at the hazard of disgrace. Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler* (1750-2)
  - 2 Oh, to be a *writer*, a real writer given up to it and to it alone! Katherine Mansfield, *Diary* (29 Feb. 1920)
  - 3 I am earnest, terribly earnest. Carlyle bending over the history of Frederick called the Great was a mere trifle, a volatile butterfly, in comparison. Joseph Conrad, in letter to Edward Garnett
  - 4 A poet's hope: to be,  
like some valley cheese,  
local, but prized elsewhere.  
W.H. Auden, 'Shorts'
  - 5 I'd like to be the poet my father reads! Tony Harrison, 'The Rhubarbarians'
- 

### 5 AMERICA

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- 1 An interviewer asked me what book I thought best represented the modern American Woman. All I could think of to answer was: Madame Bovary. Mary McCarthy, 'Characters in Fiction'
- 2 Our fundamental want today in the United States is of a class, and the clear idea of a class, of native authors, literatures, far different, far higher in grade, than any yet known, sacerdotal, modern, fit to cope with our occasions, lands, permeating the whole mass of American mentality, taste, belief, breathing into it a new breath of life, giving it decision. Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas* (1870)

- 3 Let us await the great American novel!  
Archibald MacLeish, 'Critical Observations'
- 4 Alas! for the South, her books have grown  
fewer —  
She never was much given to literature.  
J. Gordon Coogler, 'Alas! for the South!'
- 5 Only one out of five in America, it is said,  
are readers of 'books'. But even this small  
number read far too much.  
Henry Miller, *The Books in my Life* (1952)
- 6 All modern American literature comes from  
one book by Mark Twain called  
*Huckleberry Finn*.  
Ernest Hemingway, *The Green Hills of  
Africa* (1935)
- 7 God bless the U.S.A., so large,  
So friendly, and so rich.  
W.H. Auden, 'On the Circuit'
- 8 All right, if I go to America, I'll settle down  
to a book; and if I don't go to America I  
will, too.  
Malcolm Muggeridge, *The Diaries of  
Malcolm Muggeridge* (ed. John  
Bright-Holmes, 1981)
- 9 In America, the majority raises formidable  
barriers around the liberty of opinion:  
within these barriers, an author may write  
what he pleases; but woe to him if he goes  
beyond them.  
Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in  
America* (1835–9)
- 10 In America the race goes to the loud, the  
solemn, the hustler. If you think you're a  
great writer, you must say that you are.  
Gore Vidal, in interview in *Writers at Work*  
(5th series, 1981)
- 11 In America they make too much fuss of  
poets; in London they make too little.  
Caitlin Thomas, widow of Dylan Thomas,  
*Caitlin: a Warring Absence* (1986)
- 12 In the Soviet Union a writer who is critical,  
as we know, is taken to a lunatic asylum. In  
the United States, he's taken to a talk show.  
Carlos Fuentes, in interview in *Writers at  
Work* (6th series, 1984)
- 13 In other countries, art and literature are left  
to a lot of shabby bums living in attics and  
feeding on booze and spaghetti, but in  
America the successful writer or  
picture-painter is indistinguishable from any  
other decent business man.  
Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt* (1922)

- 14 You talk like an American novel.  
Henry James, *The Tragic Muse* (1890)

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## 6 ANTHOLOGY

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- 1 All these things heer collected, are not mine,  
But diverse grapes make but one sort of  
wine;  
So I, from many learned authors took  
The various matters printed in this book.  
What's not mine own by me shall not be  
father'd,  
The most part I in fifty years have gather'd,  
Some things are very good, pick out the  
best,  
Good wits compiled them, and I wrote the  
rest.  
If thou dost buy it, it will quit thy cost,  
Read it, and all thy labour is not lost.  
John Taylor, 'An Arrant Thief' (1652)
- 2 I have gathered a posie of other men's  
flowers and nothing but the thread that  
binds them is my own.  
Michel de Montaigne, *Essays* (1580–88)
- 3 Miscellanists are the most popular writers  
among every people; for it is they who form  
a communication between the learned and  
the unlearned, and, as it were, throw a  
bridge between those two great divisions of  
the public.  
Isaac D'Israeli, 'Miscellanists', *Literary  
Character of Men of Genius* (1795)
- 4 I am not against anthologies, as long as they  
are not attempts to enforce a poor idea of  
poetry, as long as they discover, and as long  
as they are born of excitement and  
generosity.  
Geoffrey Grigson, *The Private Art* (1982)
- 5 A well-chosen anthology is a complete  
dispensary of medicine for the more  
common mental disorders, and may be used  
as much for prevention as cure.  
Robert Graves, *On English Poetry* (1962)
- 6 The anthology . . . tears the soul out and  
labels its squirming parts.  
Frank Jennings, *This is Reading* (1965)
- 7 The more honest the private anthology,  
particularly when the author is a  
well-known poet, the more dangerous is it  
when put on the market: its publication

makes it appear an act of criticism instead of a mere expression of taste.

Robert Graves, 'True Anthologies and Popular Anthologies', *Anthologies* (1927)

- 8 To my dear sons Michael and Nicholas without whose school bills this anthology would not have been made.  
Dwight Macdonald, dedication in *Parodies* (1960)

## 7 ANTI-BOOK

- 1 Books do not teach the use of books.  
Anonymous
- 2 Another damned thick, square book!  
Always scribble, scribble! Eh! Mr Gibbon?  
Duke of Gloucester, upon accepting the second volume of *A History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* from its author (1781)
- 3 Big book, big bore.  
Callimachus, *The Deipnosophists*
- 4 Get thee gone then, thou cursed book,  
which hath seduced so many precious soules; get thee gone, thou corrupt, rotten book, earth to earth, and dust to dust; get thee gone into the place of rottenness, that thou mayest rot with thy author, and see corruption.  
Francis Cheynell, *The Sickness, Heresy, Death and Burial of William Chillingworth . . . and a Short Oration at the Burial of His Heretical Book* (1644)
- 5 A book displeases you? Who forces you to read it?  
Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, *Satires* (1666)
- 6 Weak men are the worse for the good sense they read in books because it furnisheth them only with more matter to mistake.  
Marquess of Halifax, *Moral Thoughts and Reflections* (late 17th cent.)
- 7 Books, books. One reads so many, and one sees so few people and so little of the world. Great thick books about the universe and the mind and ethics. You've no idea how many there are. I must have read twenty or thirty tons of them in the last five years. Twenty tons of ratiocination, weighted with that, one's pushed out into the world.  
Aldous Huxley, *Crome Yellow* (1921)
- 8 I hate books, for they only teach people to talk about what they do not understand.  
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile* (1762)
- 9 There can hardly be a stranger commodity in the world than books. Printed by people who don't understand them; sold by people who don't understand them; bound, criticized and read by people who don't understand them; and now even written by people who don't understand them.  
Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, *Aphorisms* (1764-99)
- 10 And to feed on books, for a philosopher or a poet, is still to starve. Books can help him to acquire form, or to avoid pitfalls; they cannot supply him with substance, if he is to have any.  
George Santayana, 'The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy', *The Genteel Tradition: Nine Essays* (1967)
- 11 Books tell me so much that they inform me of nothing.  
St John de Crevecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782)
- 12 People in general do not willingly read, if they can have anything else to amuse them.  
Samuel Johnson, quoted in James Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791)
- 13 Most of today's books have an air of having been written in one day from books read the night before.  
Nicolas-Sebastien Chamfort, *Maximes et pensées* (1805)
- 14 Some books seem to have been written, not to teach us anything, but to let us know that the author has known something.  
J.W. Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections* (early 19th cent.)
- 15 Beware you be not swallowed up in books! An ounce of love is worth a pound of knowledge.  
John Wesley, quoted in R. Southey, *Life of Wesley* (1820)
- 16 Books are less often made use of as spectacles to look at nature with than as blinds to keep out its strong light and shifting scenery from weak eyes and indolent dispositions.  
William Hazlitt, *The Ignorance of the Learned* (1821)
- 17 Have you any right to read, especially novels, until you have exhausted the best

- part of the day in some employment that is called practical?  
**Charles Dudley Warner**, 'First Study', *Backlog Studies* (1873)
- 18 Books are a world in themselves, it is true; but they are not the only world. The world itself is a volume larger than all the libraries in it.  
**William Hazlitt**, 'The Plain Speaker', *On the Conversation of Authors* (1846)
- 19 The enormous multiplication of books in every branch of knowledge is one of the greatest evils of this age; since it presents one of the most serious obstacles to the acquisition of correct information, by throwing in the reader's way piles of lumber in which he must painfully grope for the scraps of useful matter, peradventure interspersed.  
**Edgar Allan Poe**, *Marginalia* (1844-9)
- 20 We are too civil to books. For a few golden sentences we will turn over and actually read a volume of four or five hundred pages.  
**Ralph Waldo Emerson**, *Journals* (1841)
- 21 Books are made not like children but like pyramids . . . and they're just as useless! and they stay in the desert! . . . Jackals piss at their foot and the bourgeois climb up on them.  
**Gustave Flaubert**, in letter to Ernest Feydeau (November 1857)
- 22 Burn the libraries, for all their value is in the Koran.  
**Caliph Omar**, on the fall of Alexandria (641)
- 23 If books do not assist to make us better and more substantial men, they are only providing fuel for a fire larger, and more utterly destructive, than that which consumed the Library of the Ptolemies.  
**Revd F.D. Maurice**, 'On Books', *The Friendship of Books* (1893)
- 24 In old days books were written by men of letters and read by the public. Nowadays books are written by the public and read by nobody.  
**Oscar Wilde**, in *The Saturday Review* (1894)
- 25 Thank God, Achilles and Don Quixote are well enough known so that we can dispense with reading Homer and Cervantes.  
**Jules Renard**, *Journal* (1895)
- 26 Books, I don't know what you see in them . . . I can understand a person reading them, but I can't for the life of me see why people have to write them.  
**Peter Ustinov**, *Photo-Finish* (1962)
- 27 How our life has been warped by books! We are not contented with realities: we crave conclusions.  
**David Grayson**, *Adventures in Contentment* (1907)
- 28 In the main there are two sorts of books; those that no one reads, and those that no one ought to read.  
**H.L. Mencken**, *Prejudices* (1919)
- 29 I never was much on this book reading, for it takes 'em too long to describe the color of the eyes of all the characters.  
**Will Rogers**, *Autobiography* (1949)
- 30 A book is not harmless merely because no one is consciously offended by it.  
**T.S. Eliot**, *Religion and Literature* (1935)
- 31 I have only read one book in my life, and that is *White Fang*. It's so frightfully good I've never bothered to read another.  
**Nancy Mitford**, *The Pursuit of Love* (1945)
- 32 Very few books of any nationality are worth reading. People read to kill time; consequently it is no more objection to a book that it is not worth reading than it is to a pack of cards that it does not pile up treasures in heaven.  
**George Bernard Shaw**, remark
- 33 It was a book to kill time for those who like it better dead.  
**Rose Macaulay**, attr.
- 34 Tom came to Dick to get advice: 'What present should I give my son?' Dick thought a book might be quite nice, 'A book? Oh no — you know, he's got one!'  
**Erich Kästner**, 'Woche des Buches', in *Die kleine Freiheit* (1976)
- 35 Gee, dat day ah read a book — some day ah'm gonna do it again!  
**Jimmy Durante**, remark, c. 1956
- 36 Few books today are forgivable.  
**R.D. Laing**, in introduction to *The Politics of Experience* (1967)
- 37 Don't read much now: the dude  
 Who lets the girl down before  
 The hero arrives, the chap  
 Who's yellow and keeps the store,

Seem far too familiar. Get stewed:  
Books are a load of crap.  
Philip Larkin, 'A Study of Reading Habits'

- 38 The most delightful books are the ones  
which aren't really books.  
Kurt Tucholsky, *Gesammelte Werke*  
(1960-62)
- 39 I hate all Boets and Bainters.  
George I, quoted in Lord Campbell, *Lives of  
the Chief Justices* (1857)

## 8 APHORISM

- 1 What is an Epigram? a dwarfish whole,  
Its body brevity, and wit its soul.  
Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Epigram'
- 2 'Tis easy to write epigrams nicely, but to  
write a book is hard.  
Martial, *Epigrams*
- 3 Our live experiences, fixed in aphorisms,  
stiffen into cold epigram,  
Our heart's blood, as we write with it, turns  
to mere dull ink.  
F.H. Bradley, *Aphorisms* (1930)
- 4 I don't see how an epigram, being a bolt  
from the blue, with no introduction or cue,  
ever gets itself writ.  
William James, *Letters* (1920)
- 5 An aphorism is never exactly truthful. It is  
either a half-truth or a truth and a half.  
Karl Kraus, *Aphorisms and More Aphorisms*  
(1909)
- 6 There are no sentences, no maxims, no  
aphorisms, of which the opposite cannot be  
written.  
Paul Léautaud, *Propos d'un jour* (1969)
- 7 Aphorisms are salted, not sugared, almonds  
at Reason's feast.  
Logan Pearsall Smith, *Afterthoughts* (1931)
- 8 Epigram: a platitude with vine-leaves in its  
hair.  
H.L. Mencken, *A Book of Burlesques*  
(1916)
- 9 It's the danger of the aphorism that it states  
too much in trying to be small.  
George Douglas, *The House with the Green  
Shutters* (1901)

- 10 In lapidary inscriptions a man is not upon  
oath.  
Samuel Johnson, quoted in James Boswell,  
*Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791)
- 11 He liked those literary cooks  
Who skim the cream of others' books;  
And ruin half an author's graces  
By plucking bon-mots from their places.  
Hannah More, 'Florio'
- 12 The great writers of aphorisms read as if  
they had all known each other well.  
Elias Canetti, *The Human Province* (1978)
- 13 If, with the literate, I am  
Impelled to try an epigram,  
I never seek to take the credit;  
We all assume that Oscar said it.  
Dorothy Parker, 'Oscar Wilde', in *Sunset  
Gun* (1928)

## 9 AUDIENCE

- 1 He who does not expect a million readers  
should not write a line.  
J.W. Goethe, quoted in Johann Peter  
Eckermann, *Conversations with Goethe* (12  
May 1825)
- 2 I never wrote one single Line of Poetry with  
the least Shadow of public thought.  
John Keats, in a letter to John Hamilton  
Reynolds (9 April 1818)
- 3 The truly great book does not find its  
readers, it creates them.  
Dagobert D. Runes, *Treasury of Thought*  
(1966)
- 4 To have great poets, there must be great  
audiences, too.  
Walt Whitman, 'Ventures, on an Old  
Theme', *Notes Left Over* (1899)
- 5 A book, like a landscape, is a state of  
consciousness varying with readers.  
Ernest Dimnet, *The Art of Thinking* (1928)
- 6 The spirit of the poet craves spectators --  
even if only buffaloes.  
Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On Poets', *Thus Spake  
Zarathustra* (1883-92)
- 7 What is responsible for the success of many  
works is the rapport between the mediocrity



of the author's ideas and the mediocrity of the public's.

Nicolas-Sebastien-Chamfort, *Maximes et pensées* (1805)

Of all artificial relations formed between mankind, the most capricious and variable is that of author and reader.

Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinion and Times* (c. 1713)

The ideal audience the poet imagines

consists of the beautiful who go to bed with him, the powerful who invite him to dinner and tell him secrets of state, and his fellow-poets. The actual audience he gets consists of myopic schoolteachers, pimply young men who eat in cafeterias, and his fellow-poets. This means, in fact, he writes for his fellow-poets.

W.H. Auden, 'Squares and Oblongs', *Poets at Work* (1948)

We are all poets when we read a poem well. Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1840)

- 1 We do not know more than a handful of our readers.

Geoffrey Grigson, *The Private Art* (1982)

- 2 A book is a bottle thrown into the sea on which this motto must be stuck: catch me who can.

Alfred de Vigny, *Journal d'un poète* (1867)

- 3 A writer doesn't write for his readers, does he? Yet he has to take elementary precautions all the same to keep them comfortable.

Graham Greene, *A Burnt-out Case* (1961)

- 4 He that writes to himself writes to an eternal public.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Spiritual Laws', *Essays* (1841)

- 5 Writing is one of the few professions left where you take all the responsibility for what you do. It's really dangerous and ultimately destroys you as a writer if you start thinking about responses to your work or what your audience needs.

Erica Jong, *The Craft of Poetry* (ed. William Packard)

- 6 I don't have an audience in mind when I write. I'm writing mainly for myself. After a long devotion to playwriting I have a good inner ear. I know pretty well how a thing is going to sound on the stage, and how it will

play. I write to satisfy this inner ear and its perception. That's the audience I write for. Tennessee Williams, in interview in *Writers at Work* (6th series, 1988)

- 7 The play was a great success, but the audience was a failure

Oscar Wilde, remark on the reception of one of his least successful plays

- 8 Fit audience find, though rare, John Milton, *Paradise Lost* bk. VII, 706-7

- 9 Leaving great verse unto a little clan. John Keats, 'Ode to Maia'

- 20 After all, it's rather a privilege amid the affluent traffic to serve this unpopular art which cannot be turned into background noise for study or hung as a status trophy by rising executives, cannot be 'done' like Venice or abridged like Tolstoy, but stubbornly still insists upon being read or ignored: our handful of clients at least can rue.

W.H. Auden, 'Thanksgiving for a Habitat'

- 21 A man really writes for an audience of about ten persons. Of course if others like it, that is clear gain. But if those ten are satisfied, he is content.

Alfred North Whitehead, *Dialogues* (1956)

- 22 Ideally, the writer needs no audience other than the few who understand. It is immodest and greedy to want more.

Gore Vidal, 'French Letters: Theories of the New Novel', in *Encounter* (Dec. 1967)

- 23 It is not the novel that is declining, but the audience for it.

Gore Vidal, in interview in *Writers at Work* (5th series, 1981)

- 24 Readers may be divided into four classes:  
1. Sponges, who absorb all they read and return it nearly in the same state, only a little dirtied.  
2. Sand-glasses, who retain nothing and are content to get through a book for the sake of getting through the time.  
3. Strain-bags, who retain merely the dregs of what they read.  
4. Mogul diamonds, equally rare and valuable, who profit by what they read, and enable others to profit by it also.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Notebooks* (1794-1819)