

10 QUOTATIONS



Max Eastman

(1883-1969)

Max Eastman made it into literary history by a nose. A poet, critic and influential political activist, like many writers in the early 20th century he was a Socialist who eventually turned hard right, becoming a conservative adversary of the Left. He was a Greenwich Village radical and Editor of the leading Socialist periodical *The Masses* until it was shut down in 1918 under the Espionage Act. When an artist resigned from the magazine over a dispute, Eastman wrote him: “Dear Sloan: I shall regret the loss of your wit and artistic genius as much as I shall enjoy the absence of your cooperation.” Eastman raised money to send the Communist writer John Reed to Russia in 1917 and he published Reed’s articles on the Bolshevik Revolution. Then he visited Russia himself, saw the truth behind the propaganda and reversed himself. After he published a book that contained insults to Ernest Hemingway, he ran into Hemingway in the office of editor Max Perkins at Scribner’s. Hemingway pushed the book into Eastman’s face, leaving a spot on page 95 caused by contact “with Mr. Eastman’s nose when Mr. Hemingway struck him with it in a gesture of disapproval of the critical essay ‘Bull in the Afternoon’.” Then they wrestled to a draw. Perkins signed as a witness to the incident, increasing the value of the book to collectors:

A liberal mind is a mind that is able to imagine itself believing anything.

The worst enemy of human hope is not brute facts, but men of brains who will not face them.

I don’t know why it is we are in such a hurry to get up when we fall down. You might think we would lie there and rest for awhile.

Humor is the instinct for taking pain playfully.

Laughter is, after speech, the chief thing that holds society together.

A poet in history is divine, but a poet in the next room is a joke.

It is the ability to take a joke, not to make one, that proves you have a sense of humor.

Dogs laugh, but they laugh with their tails.

The defining function of the artist to cherish consciousness.

Classic art was the art of necessity; modern romantic art bears the stamp of caprice and chance.

