

# Quotable Williams



As editor of the *Yale Book of Quotations*, I am often asked, “What makes something quotable, such that you want to include it in your compilation?” The process of selection involves both science and art.

The science consists in comprehensively identifying the most famous quotations by using sophisticated research techniques; for the state-of-the-art editor, this means employing a panoply of online collections of books, periodicals and newspapers along with traditional research and networking with experts in many fields.

The art requires the compiler to be sufficiently attuned to the intensity and impact of words so that he or she “knows” a great quotation “when he sees it,” to paraphrase



Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart on obscenity. Like Emily Dickinson recognizing poetry, the quotation anthologist responds to the verbal quarry with the sense that “it makes my body so cold no fire can ever warm me. ... I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off.”

In my work, I have tried to encompass both the most eloquent and the best-known quotes, blending the art and the science of selection.

On the following pages I’ve provided a snapshot of Williams’ quotational legacy. But rather than simply run off a list of famous alumni and/or their famous quotes, I thought I’d present them in the form of a quiz. Can you match the following words with their Williams-educated authors? (The answers are on p. 15.)

**BY FRED R. SHAPIRO**

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROBBI BEHR '97



1 To **him who in the love** of Nature holds  
Communion with **her visible forms**, she speaks  
A **various language**.

2 **Wynken, Blynken, and Nod** one night  
Sailed off in a **wooden shoe**—  
Sailed on a **river of crystal light**,  
Into a **sea of dew**.

3 The ordered, **regular life of maturity involves** necessarily more  
or less **degeneration for simple tendencies**. Indeed, **the best  
definition of genius is intensified and prolonged adolescence**,  
to which excessive or premature systematization is fatal.

## HOPKINS, GARFIELD & THE ROOTS OF THE LOG

Any discussion of famous Williams-related quotations has to start with Mark Hopkins and the log, which nicely illustrates the complexities of quotations scholarship. The well-known story is that future U.S. President James A. Garfield, Class of 1856, delivered an address to Williams alumni at Delmonico's restaurant in New York City on Dec. 28, 1871. In this speech Garfield is supposed to have said—referring to longtime Williams president and legendary teacher Mark Hopkins (a member of the Class of 1824)—“A pine log with the student at one end and Dr. Hopkins at the other would be a liberal education.” (This version is taken from a speech in the late 1880s by John James Ingalls, Class of 1855, who would become president pro tempore of the U.S. Senate.)

In his 1938 article “Familiar ‘Small College’ Quotations: Mark Hopkins and the Log,” Carroll A. Wilson, Class of 1907, points out that the newspapers covering the Delmonico's dinner did not include Garfield's quotation in their articles and that all variants of the quote are taken from later accounts. The earliest record appears in an undergraduate publication, the *Williams Vidette*, which reported in its Jan. 27, 1872, issue: “Offer him [Garfield] the finest College buildings, the largest library and the most complete physical appliances, and he would rather have Dr. Hopkins in a brick shanty than them all.” Wilson did not find the “brick shanty” changed to a “log cabin” until a September 1881 article in *Harpers Magazine*: “Give me a log cabin in the center of the state of Ohio, with one room in it and a bench with Mark Hopkins on one end of it and me on the other, and that would be a college good enough for me.”

Using searches in databases of historical newspaper articles, I was able to

improve upon Wilson's research. The first example I found of the “log cabin” variant was in the *New York Evangelist*, July 17, 1879: “General Garfield thinks there is a whole college in Dr. Hopkins. He once said: ‘Take a log cabin in the West, put a wooden bench in it, with Mark Hopkins on one end and a student on the other, and you have a college.’” The Ingalls speech mentioned earlier appears to have introduced the log itself as the locus of the teacher-student interaction and crystallized the familiar form of the saying.

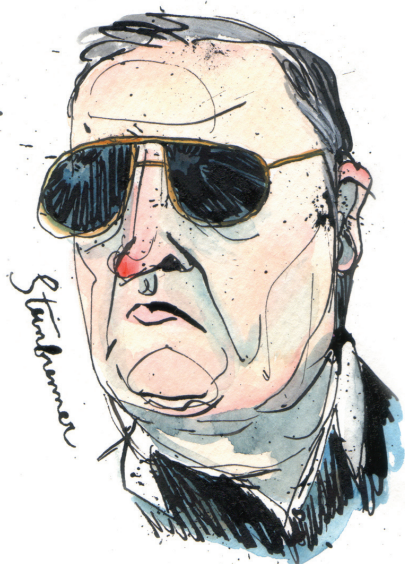
Garfield's other famous sound bite poses even more of a challenge for quotation research. After Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, Garfield allegedly calmed a crowd in New York on April 17, 1865, by proclaiming: “God reigns and the Government at Washington still lives.” The earliest evidence I find for this via historical text searching is in the *Bangor Daily Whig & Courier*, June 29, 1880, when Garfield was running for president. Suzy Platt, in her book *Respectfully Quoted*, cites Garfield biographer Theodore Clarke Smith: “Smith notes that while the tradition of this speech was so well established during Garfield's own lifetime as to become a ‘familiar commonplace,’ no clipping of it exists among Garfield's papers, nor did Garfield himself, so far as known, refer to it in later times.” *They Never Said It*, by Paul F. Boller Jr. and John George, goes further: “It's a splendid story, but unfortunately it's not true. Garfield, an Ohio Congressman at the time, wasn't even in New York in April 1865.”

*Fred Shapiro is the editor of the Yale Book of Quotations, published in 2006 by Yale University Press. He is associate librarian for collections and access services at Yale Law School Library.*

**4** One manifest truth ... is this: **the sincere, sensitive artist, willing to go beneath the clichés of popular belief to get at an underlying reality,** will be wary of confining a race's entire characters to a half-dozen narrow grooves. He will hardly have the temerity to say that **his necessarily limited observation of a few Negroes in a restricted environment can be taken as the last word about some mythical the Negro.**



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



**7** "Mrs. Robinson," he said, turning around, **"you are trying to seduce me. ... Aren't you?"**

**8** *Transactional* leaders approach followers with an eye to exchanging one thing for another: **jobs for votes, or subsidies for campaign contributions.** ... The *transforming* leader looks for **potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person** of the follower. The result of transforming leadership is **a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation** that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents.

**6** Everything's **Coming Up Roses**



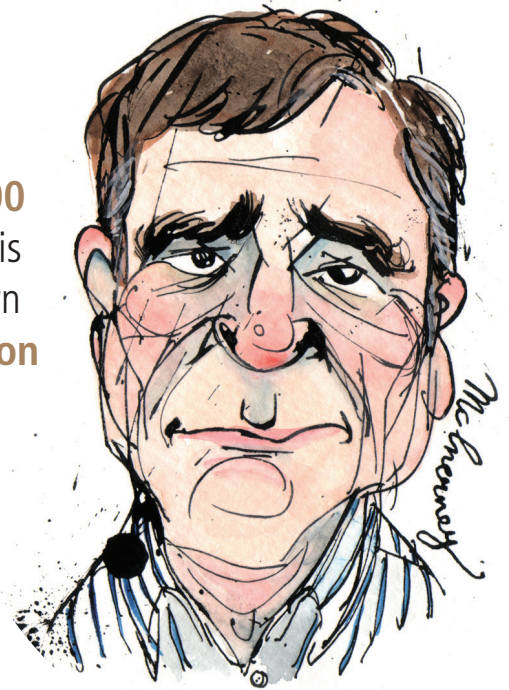


9

**You are not the kind of guy** who would be at a place like this at this time of the morning. But here you are, and **you cannot say that the terrain is entirely unfamiliar**, although the details are fuzzy.

10

To turn **\$100 into \$110** is work. To turn **\$100 million into \$110 million** is inevitable.



11 **"Supply-side economics" ... could be interpreted to mean economics supplied to meet the demand of politicians to rationalize what they intend to do.**

**T**hese days, one is as likely to find quotations in films and popular music as in literature and other writings or political and humorous utterances. Thus Stephen Sondheim '50, who began as the 27-year-old lyricist for *West Side Story* and went on to usher in a new maturity for the Broadway musical, looms as large in a Williams quotation roundup as any literary author. Charles Webb '61 is remembered because dialogue from his book was repeated in the movie version of *The Graduate*. And the most famous modern quote associated with a Williams alumnus may be one from the motion picture *On the Waterfront* (1954). Although not the screenwriter, Elia Kazan '31, as its director, could be regarded as the "auteur" of the lines ranked as number three on the American Film Institute's list of top 100 movie quotations in all of American cinema: "You don't understand! I coulda had class. I coulda been a contender. I could've been somebody, instead of a bum, which is what I am."

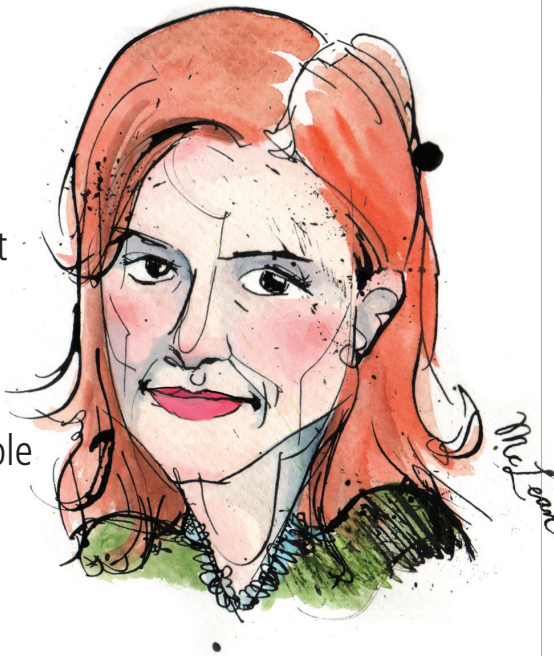
In the future, famous quotations may emanate from blogs or YouTube clips or new media not yet even envisioned. Whatever the medium, Williams people will probably be quotable in it.

— Fred Shapiro

**12** Winning is the most important thing in my life, after breathing. Breathing first, winning next.

**13** We must develop a fair appreciation for the real strengths and limitations of government effort on behalf of children. **Government, obviously, cannot fill a child's emotional needs.** Nor can it fill his spiritual and moral needs. Government is not a father or mother. **Government has never raised a child, and it never will.**

**14** To do the job without angering an owner is impossible. **I can't make all 28 of my bosses happy.** People have told me I'm the last commissioner.



**15** The **Smartest Guys** in the Room

## EPH ANSWERS

- 1 William Cullen Bryant, Class of 1814, poet and editor of the *New York Evening Post*, in his poem *Thanatopsis* (1817-21)
- 2 Eugene Field, who attended Williams from 1868 to 1869, poet and journalist, in his 1889 poem "Wynken, Blynken, and Nod"
- 3 G. Stanley Hall, Class of 1867, founder of American child psychology, educational psychology and scientific psychology generally, and president of Clark University, in his 1904 book *Adolescence*
- 4 Sterling A. Brown '22, literary critic, poet and folklorist, in his 1933 article "Negro Character as Seen by White Authors"
- 5 Max Eastman, Class of 1905, editor and writer, founder of *The Masses* magazine, in his 1935 book *The Enjoyment of Laughter*
- 6 Title of the 1959 song written for *Gypsy: A Musical Fable*, by Stephen Sondheim '50, composer and lyricist, winner of the Pulitzer Prize and seven Tony Awards
- 7 Charles Webb '61, in his 1963 novel *The Graduate*
- 8 James Macgregor Burns '39, political scientist, Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer and the father of leadership studies, in his 1978 book *Leadership*
- 9 Jay McInerney '76, writer, in his 1984 novel *Bright Lights, Big City*
- 10 Edgar Bronfman '50, businessman and philanthropist, president of Seagram's, chairman of MGM, president of the World Jewish Congress, quoted in *Newsweek*, Dec. 2, 1985
- 11 Herbert Stein '35, economist, chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers, in his 1989 book *The Triumph of the Adaptive Society*
- 12 George M. Steinbrenner III '52, shipping executive and principal owner of the New York Yankees, quoted in the *Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel*, June 7, 1998
- 13 William J. Bennett '65, U.S. Secretary of Education and national "drug czar," conservative commentator and author, in a speech given at the University of Notre Dame, Oct. 1, 1990
- 14 Fay Vincent '60, lawyer and former commissioner of Major League Baseball, in a statement after resigning his commissioner post, Sept. 7, 1992
- 15 Title of the 2004 best-selling book about Enron (written with Peter Elkind), attributed to its author and business journalist Bethany McClean '92