

Put *That* in Your Pipe

By Dennis Knight

We have been challenged to write on the subject of humor. Now, I am a man who fancies himself a humorist, and I can tell you it's easier to write humorously on any other topic than it is to write intelligently about the singular abstraction, humor.

Love and hate are funny contradictions, as are their frequently changing dance partners, peace and war. Politics, pomposity, pathos, pulchritude and horses in bars are fodder. All these things and more I can write about and make you lose your page laughing.

But what the devil is this thing we call humor? In the manner of modern scholars, I've been Googling at it all week and it seems to defy simple science. What I can relate to you is what some savvier people have had to say.

Aristotle said, "Humor is the only test of gravity, and gravity of humor; for a subject which will not bear raillery is suspicious, and a jest which will not bear serious examination is false wit."

Mark Twain said, "Humor must not professedly teach and it must not professedly preach, but it must do both if it would live forever."

"Humor is the great thing, the saving thing. The minute it crops up, all our irritations and resentments slip away and a sunny spirit takes their place" is another Mark Twain quotation.

"Humor is a spontaneous, wonderful bit of an outburst that just comes. It's unbridled, it's unplanned, it's full of surprises." Erma Bombeck

My single favorite author and humorist, James Thurber, told Edward R. Murrow in a television interview, "The wit makes fun of other persons; the satirist makes fun of the world; the humorist makes fun of himself."

Charlie Chaplin in his 1964 autobiography claimed, "All I need to make a comedy is a park, a policeman and a pretty girl."

"The world is a tragedy to those who feel, but a comedy to those who think." Horace Walpole.

"If there's one thing I know, its God does love a good joke." Hugh Elliott

"One doesn't have a sense of humor. It has you." Larry Gelbart, of M*A*S*H fame

Mel Brooks said, "Tragedy is when I cut my finger. Comedy is when you walk into an open sewer and die". In a more thoughtful moment Brooks said "Humor is just another defense against the universe."

"Comedy is simply a funny way of being serious." Peter Ustinov

“Wit makes its own welcome, and levels all distinctions. No dignity, no learning, no force of character, can make any stand against good wit.” Ralph Waldo Emerson

And on the daunting task at hand, E.B. White tells us, “Humor can be dissected as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the pure scientific mind.”

Robert Benchley cinched it and clinched it by saying, “Defining and analyzing humor is a pastime of humorless people.”

Put *that* in your pipe and smoke it.