



Fair of Speech: The Uses of Euphemism

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Can a bomb ever be "clean"? Are we relieved to be warned that there will be an "odor" when once we were told that something would "stink"? Or, to put it another way, when is a euphemism a mark of good taste and when is it a sign of verbal obfuscation?

To answer such questions, D.J. Enright invited sixteen distinguished writers to ponder and explore the ubiquitous phenomenon of euphemism. The result is a delightful and provocative collection that not only includes general reflections on euphemism and its history but also treats such specific categories as sex, death, and other natural functions; politics; the language of the great Christian texts; euphemisms spoken to and by children; the law; medicine; office life; and the jargon of official spokesmen, military communiques, and tyrants. Such writers as Diane Johnson, Robert Nisbet, John Gross, Robert Burchfield, and Joseph Epstein bring a variety of perspectives and sensibilities to bear on these topics.

Because euphemisms are so intimate and integral to our thinking, any study of them is bound to throw light on the human condition, both past and present. In these essays, humor jostles horror and the homely alternates with the farfetched. Taken together they form an eloquent and often amusing testament to the richness of the subject.

About the Author:

D.J. Enright is a noted English poet and critic. He recently compiled and edited *The Oxford Book of Death*.

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