

Book Notice

Words on Words: Quotations About Language and Languages. By David Crystal and Hilary Crystal. Chicago, IL. University of Chicago Press. 2000. Pp. 580. \$29.00.

With *Words on Words* you can throw away those files of quotations on language that struck you as so pointed and so apt that you knew you were going to use them sometime if you could only remember which quotations were in which files. The Crystals, David and Hilary, have compiled all of those sparking quotations into a single source of nearly 5,000 quotations about language and its use; this is a remarkably complete compendium and I highly recommend it for anyone who reads or writes (or even thinks) about language, languages, or related topics.

The quotations are grouped into six main headings: Language; Languages; Analysing (sic) Language; Good and Bad Language; Words; Style, Genre and Variety, with 65 subheads total. Most of our favorites are here: "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world" (Wittgenstein); "A language is a dialect that has an army and a navy" (here credited to Max Weinreich); "Slang is a language that rolls up its sleeves, spits on its hands and goes to work" (Carl Sandburg), along with some lesser knowns, but equally deserving: "Some guy hit my fender the other day, and I said unto him, 'Be fruitful and multiply.' But not in those words" (Woody Allen); and "Women like silent men. They think they're listening" (Marcel Achard).

There is one short of a hundred entries under "Names and Nicknames." Again some are standards, such as S.V. Benét's "I have fallen in love with American names, / The sharp, gaunt names that never get fat. . . ." and W. H. Auden's "In a brothel, both / the ladies and gentlemen / have nicknames only," as well as some which might become standards, such as Jorge Amado's "No one on the docks has just one name. Everybody has a nickname too, or the name is shortened, or lengthened, or something is added that recalls a tale, a fight, a woman."

A book such as this not only invites but requires a reviewer to carp and to nitpick, to question why the compilers included this quotation and excluded that one. I hasten to join the nitpickers. The Crystals have omitted Elbert Hubbard's "If you can't answer a man's arguments, all is not lost; you can still call him vile names" and H.L. Mencken's "The first Rotarian was the first man to call John the Baptist Jack."

But the real wisdom is here and never better expressed than by Nelson Algren: "Never play cards with any man named 'Doc'."

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