



Euphemania: Our Love Affair with Euphemisms

Ralph Keyes

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How did die become kick the bucket, underwear become unmentionables, and having an affair become hiking the Appalachian trail? Originally used to avoid blasphemy, honor taboos, and make nice, euphemisms have become embedded in the fabric of our language. EUPHEMANIA traces the origins of euphemisms from a tool of the church to a form of gentility to today's instrument of commercial, political, and postmodern doublespeak.

As much social commentary as a book for word lovers, EUPHEMANIA is a lively and thought-provoking look at the power of words and our power over them.

Euphemania: Our Love Affair with Euphemisms Details

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From Reader Review Euphemania: Our Love Affair with Euphemisms for online ebook

Yaaresse says

Euphemisms: a sign of fertile imaginative language or a cop-out way to evade uncomfortable topics? Both!

Keyes provides a brief history of euphemisms by topic, providing examples and light etymology of the more famous (read: crude) terms. Of course the chapters on sex and body parts are at the beginning, probably because he knows most of us are 12 years old when it comes to tittering with juvenile glee over those subjects, but it's the sections on money, war, and class that provide more to think about. Sure, it's fun to learn the origin of the term "fizzle out" and snicker, but what's really fascinating is to tease out how we use euphemism to tease out people's social standing without admitting to anyone - including ourselves -- that this is what we're doing with these veiled terms.

The probably with material like this is that you quickly reach a saturation point. No matter how interested one might be, it's hard to read chapter after chapter of it. It can't help but become dull. About halfway through, I started putting it down for a day or two so I could come back to it with renewed interest. With that in mind, I'd give it three and a half stars if that were an option.

Nathan says

More a list of euphemisms than the sociological exploration of the reasons we use euphemisms I was expecting. Luckily, Keyes' basic concept is simple enough to warrant such a scanty analysis of it. We use euphemisms simply in order to soften the blow of words that are culturally loaded: words for death, sex, bodily functions, etc.

But that premise is too simple to support this book. It feels stretched, lacking a substantive perspective of culture as a whole. Language is culture, and the implications of one have necessary implications for the other. Keyes alludes to this, but just barely, and certainly not as thoroughly as it warranted. In this age of "enhanced interrogation techniques", language is begging to be studied from a sociopolitical perspective, and Keyes misses it. If you don't know anything about euphemisms (unlikely, given their pervasiveness in culture) this is a decent place to start, but it often feels like a job half done.

Edward Sullivan says

Always fascinating, frequently amusing, occasionally hilarious.

Gmr says

Egad this was a hard one! It's not that it wasn't interesting, because it was...it's more that this is one of those books that is much better when taken in small draughts then read straight through. Euphemisms are the the

bread to our butter, the sugar to our tea, the easy way of putting things that are less than easy (or sometimes polite) to speak of...and with that being said, this book covers in a glancing fashion a range of topics that at best can be somewhat touchy to the truly controversial.

Anyone that has ever wondered why we sugar coat some of the words we say will certainly have an eye opening experience with this informative and unique book. Recommended for late teens (at the earliest) through adult readers.

Carmen says

A non-fiction book about euphemisms. Very interesting, but I wish he would go into more detail.

Eva says

So good! Some kindle quotes:

During a dinner party in Virginia before World War II, Winston Churchill asked the butler for some breast of chicken. According to Churchill family lore, a woman sitting next to him reprimanded the British guest for using this vulgar term. And what should he have asked for? "White meat," Churchill was told. The next day, Churchill sent the woman a corsage with the message, "Pin this on your white meat." - location 28

Using euphemisms is the verbal equivalent of draping nude statues. - location 32

Impoverished countries once considered undeveloped became underdeveloped, then less developed, then developing. Today, they are optimistically called emerging. - location 98

When they executed a prisoner, Romans said he was led away to punishment or simply led away. - location 102

"Execution" itself is a onetime euphemism, evolving from the execution of a death warrant. - location 103

In the midwestern town where I live, brown paper grocery containers are called "sacks," not "bags." This always puzzled me until, in the course of researching this book, I discovered that bag is a euphemism for "scrotum" in some parts of the United States. - location 105

A BBC correspondent just back from covering the conflict in Congo told a radio interviewer that soldiers there were "self-provisioning." When asked what this meant, the correspondent conceded that it was a euphemism for "loot and steal." - location 113

During the late-eighteenth century, born on the wrong side of the blanket was a slangy euphemism for those presumably conceived somewhere other than a married couple's bed. - location 123

The terms we use and those we avoid reflect deeper concerns, which change over time. Several centuries ago, when religion reigned, we converted "damn" to darn and "hell" to heck. Then prudery kicked in, and the gonads became family jewels, and the vagina, down there. Today, it's death, disability, and discrimination that provide fodder for euphemisms, as we grope for inoffensive terms to designate loved ones who have died, those with physical or intellectual limitations, and members of minority groups. - location 127

Euphemisms must step lively to keep pace with changing attitudes. Another era's tacky comment is today's hip remark. Yesterday's polite euphemism is tomorrow's prissy evasion. "Cherry" was once considered more respectable than "hymen." Now, just the opposite is true. The former is thought to be vulgar, the latter decent. - location 148

Sleep with has been a euphemism for sex for centuries; pass away for dying since the Middle Ages. Cemetery—from the Greek word for "sleeping place"—was initially a euphemism for the more ominous "graveyard" but proved so functional that it became our standard term for this setting. - location 154

Like "cemetery," a notable number of today's everyday words began as euphemisms. Penis, Latin for "tail," in Cicero's time was put to work as a euphemism for the male sex organ. Once this term lost its euphemistic cover, others stepped up to take its place, then shape-shifted. "Dork" was originally a synonym for "penis." Similarly, "jerk" once referred to a man who masturbates (echoes of which can still be heard in today's phrase "jerk off"). - location 156

Similarly, retarded was originally a polite way to describe those more rudely called "idiots," "imbeciles," or "morons." Today, the word "retarded" is considered so insulting that there is a movement to ban its use. - location 175

Crazy derived from the more benign term "crazed," which meant "flawed" or "cracked." - location 192

In a gruesome illustration of euphemism degradation, concentration camp—a term initially used by the British as an innocuous name for internment centers they created during the Boer War—became sinister due to the hideous reality of what took place in Nazi death camps that also used this name. - location 194

Sometimes these substitute words are invented ones that sound similar to the verboten term. (Shucks! Fooey!) In - location 200

Soixante-neuf is a double-duty euphemism, one relying on both French and numbers - location 205

In an account popular in England some decades ago, a British soldier who had been shot in the buttocks during World War I was asked by a woman visiting his hospital ward where he was wounded. The soldier responded, “I’m sorry, ma’am. I can’t say. I never studied Latin.” - location 209

“Jock” developed dubious connotations, another common form of euphemizing was employed: substituting a single letter in an offending word to convert it into one that’s inoffensive. Thus, the football fans’ cry “Knock their jocks off!” gave way to “Knock their socks off!” - location 228

Bernard Madoff said he “didn’t give a blank” about his sons (who had turned him in to the authorities for running a Ponzi scheme). - location 243

Clipping words fore and aft is another euphemistic strategy. “Whipped” is one such word, clipped from the vulgar “pussywhipped,” which is a more vivid way to say “henpecked.” “Bull” is a reasonably respectable clip of “bullshit,” and “mother” used in a proper tone of voice can pass muster in a way that its root—“motherfucker”—could not. During the brief period when George Wallace’s wife, Lurleen, stood in for him as governor of Alabama, bumper stickers appeared that read GOVERNOR WALLACE IS A MOTHER. - location 244

THE SCUNTHORPE PROBLEM Victorian euphemizing strategies are alive and well on the Internet. There, content filters do the work that used to be left to human censors, only with no sense of nuance. “Hello” gets changed to hecko online, “class” to cl***, “wish it” to wi** **. A filter that replaces “nigga” with nubian revised “niggardly” to read nubiandly. This is known as the Scunthorpe problem, so called because an early content filter used by AOL prevented residents of Scunthorpe, England, from registering accounts due to the second, third, fourth, and fifth letters of their town’s name. Those living in Penistone, Sussex, and Lightwater faced similar problems (in the latter, “twat” being a no-no). For that very reason “saltwater taffy” showed up in one online forum euphemized as “salfemale genitaliaer taffy.” Auto-replace has been problematic when put to work on behalf of particular agendas. In the most celebrated example, a Christian website whose filter automatically converted the word “gay” to “homosexual” ran an Associated Press article about sprinter Tyson Gay. The article began, “Tyson Homosexual was a blur in blue, sprinting 100 meters faster than anyone ever has.” - location 260

To work around ham-handed cyber prudery, when discussing a manuscript, members of one chat room began writing m****cript. Other site hosts make a game out of foiling filters, reprogramming their own to translate “bitch” into “gluestick,” say, or “shit” into “cheese.” The reprogrammed filter of one online forum automatically changes “fuck” to “gently caress” (“Gently caress you!”). Another alters any mention of “hell” to read “New Jersey.” A third changes all questionable words to “Melanie Griffith.” What have they got against Melanie Griffith? - location 281

When interviewing lexicographer Jesse Sheidlower on National Public Radio about his book The F-Word, Robert Siegel substituted the word “floss” for “fuck” (sparking protest from listeners who asked him to consider the implications of this euphemism for dentists, to say nothing of fastidious flossers). In a similar gambit, the New Yorker’s Tad Friend replaced every word referring to intimate body parts in an obscenity-filled routine by a Canadian comedian with “Wayne Gretzky” (e.g., pointing to his mother and wife in the

audience, saying, “There’s the Wayne Gretzky I come from, and there’s the Wayne Gretzky I go home to”). - location 286

Tushie music is what a family in Los Angeles called flatulence. - location 300

In one family, defecating was called big business; urinating, wets (as in “Dad, Dad, pull over! I’ve gotta go.” / “Wets or big business?”). - location 303

Senator Larry Craig (R-ID) pled guilty to soliciting sex from an undercover police officer in the adjacent stall of an airport men’s room by tapping his toe beneath the stall divider. Toe tapping then became a euphemism for gay solicitation. When Craig explained that his foot appeared beneath the next stall’s divider because he had a “wide stance” while seated on a toilet, wide stance became a euphemism for closeted gay behavior. Two years later, after North Carolina governor Mark Sanford said he was hiking the Appalachian Trail when he was actually canoodling with his mistress in Argentina, hiking the Appalachian Trail enjoyed a vogue as a euphemism for “having an affair.” (“I think Jason and Amy are hiking the Appalachian Trail.”) - location 341

To keep track of such euphemisms, one must be au courant newswise. It also helps to be up on contemporary pop-culture references, ones in which Steely Dan can refer to either the rock band by that name or an erect penis. An even more esoteric modern euphemism in this area is sunglasses, referencing an often-erect sunglass-wearing rock guitarist. (“OMG! Sunglass alert!”) - location 346

BEARS ARE SCARY ANIMALS. They are so scary that early northern Europeans referred to them by substitute names for fear that uttering their real name might beckon these ferocious beasts. Instead, they talked of the honey eater, the licker, or the grandfather. The word “bear” itself evolved from a euphemistic term that meant “the brown one.” It is the oldest known euphemism, first recorded a thousand years ago. Because the word that “bear” replaced was never recorded, it remains a mystery. - location 355

Words originally were not considered distinct from what they named. Those who believed this thought that referring to something by name risked summoning that entity. - location 366

When embarking on a long sea voyage, members of the Alfoor tribe near Papua New Guinea thought it wise to fool eavesdropping spirits about their intentions by using substitute words. In place of “straight ahead,” they’d say bird’s beak. Instead of “starboard” (to the right), sword. Rather than “larboard” (to the left), shield. - location 372

Early on, “God” was euphemized to gog, gosse, gom, and gad, to name just a few. “Lord” could be law, lawks, lawzy, lawdy, land, or losh. More obvious euphemisms such as gosh darn and heck and Jimminy Christmas were supplemented by others, such as zounds (for “God’s wounds”) and gadzooks (for “God’s hooks”). - location 424

“Christ” alone inspired cripes and crikey. - location 431

Pioneering dictionary compilers such as Samuel Johnson left out words they considered inappropriate. Although Johnson included “piss,” “turd,” “arse,” and “fart” in his 1755 opus, he omitted other terms such as “shit,” “penis,” “vagina,” “cunt,” and “fuck.” When a proper London lady congratulated him for keeping such words out of his dictionary, the lexicographer responded, “Then you have been looking for them?” - location 484

One reason for the heavy use of euphemism in literary works at this time was that books were so commonly read aloud within families. This was what motivated a retired English physician named Thomas Bowdler to edit a collection of Shakespeare’s plays for tender ears. In *The Family Shakespeare*, “Out damn’d spot” was revised to “Out crimson spot”; Romeo and Juliet were a chaste young couple; and Ophelia’s suicide became an accidental drowning. Bowdler was sure that the Bard himself would have approved. In recognition of his efforts, we still call censorship of all kinds “bowdlerization.” Dr. Bowdler later had a go at the Bible. - location 508

Ames was also put off by the growing use of euphemistic foreign expressions. “Our mother tongue is fast assuming a dress like that of a state’s prison convict,” he wrote, “one leg of its inexpressibles being made of Greek, and the other of French, while the waistbands are made of Latin.” “Inexpressibles”? Surely Ames would not use this mealy-mouthed euphemism for “trousers” that was common in his time. Yet he did. Even plain-speaking Nathaniel Ames wasn’t willing to flout the nineteenth-century taboo against using this word or “breeches,” for fear that doing so might make ladies swoon. - location 524

Alexis de Tocqueville thought the guarded discourse he heard so often when touring the United States might be due to the fact that men and women mingled freely there, forcing both sexes to choose their words carefully. In other words, the very social freedom and egalitarianism that Americans prized made them feel a need to self-censor when in mixed company. - location 545

In his 1849 novella *Kavanaugh*, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow excerpted this rule from the prospectus of a fashionable girls’ boarding school: “Young ladies are not allowed to cross their benders in school.” - location 556

As Winston Churchill later discovered, polite guests at American tables knew that asking a poultry-serving hostess for white meat instead of “breast meat,” dark meat instead of “a thigh,” and a drumstick in place of “a leg,” saved embarrassment all around. - location 562

“Cock” in particular posed serious problems. This word was short for “cockerel,” a male chicken. But “cock” was also short for “watercock,” the spigot of a barrel, leading it to become slang for “penis.” Unfortunately, that tainted term was embedded in many others. In the United States especially, previously innocent terms such as “cockeyed” and “cocksure” could no longer be used when both sexes were present. Under this regimen, “weathercocks” became weathervanes; “haycocks,” haystacks; and “apricocks,” apricots. Those burdened with last names such as “Hitchcock” and “Leacock” began to feel under siege. In response, an

American family named “Alcocke” changed their name to Alcox. Fearing that this might not be adequate, before siring a daughter named Louisa May in 1832, Bronson Alcox became Bronson Alcott. - location 569

Many of those reciting Longfellow’s 1841 poem “Wreck of the Hesperus” sacrificed rhyme for refinement when they revised the last three words of one line—“like the horns of an angry bull”—in this fashion: She struck where the white and fleecy waves Looked as soft as carded wool; But the cruel rocks they gored her side, Like the horns of a gentleman cow. - location 586

During English legal proceedings, rape was referred to as “taking improper liberties” or “feloniously ravishing.” - location 626

“Certain” was an important multipurpose word in divorce-related testimony and might refer to a certain organ, a certain unnatural vice, a certain posture, or a certain condition (i.e., pregnancy). - location 627

During World War II, pregnant Women’s Army Corps members discharged from service were said to have back trouble. - location 654

Pennsylvania’s censors demanded that a “loose woman” in D. W. Griffith’s 1920 film *Way Down East* be called an “adventuress.” A year later, the same censors concluded that having a character exclaim “It’s a boy!” in a film suggested too boldly that a baby had just been born. They proposed instead, “The boy is better” (leading one film critic to call this “the first case of pre-natal screen colic” on record). - location 663

But no problem proved more vexing than Rhett Butler’s exit line in the movie’s closing scene, “Frankly, my dear, I don’t give a damn.” Hays’s censors objected, of course. In response, MGM suggested some alternatives: “I don’t give a hoot,” “I just don’t care,” “It’s all the same to me,” “It is of no consequence,” and “My indifference is boundless.” To placate Hays, the studio actually filmed an alternate take in which Rhett Butler tells Scarlett O’Hara, “My dear, I don’t care.” It was as if Lady Macbeth had said “Out darned spot!” Fortunately, MGM stood its ground and won. - location 691

Discussing what the Hays Office would or wouldn’t allow on the silver screen became a popular American pastime. According to a widespread but unfounded rumor, the Hays Office would not permit any couple to be in bed on screen unless the man had one foot on the floor. That inspired an enduring euphemism for heavy petting without consummation: one foot on the floor. - location 696

Then, as now, men who made passes were thought to be horny, a concept that dates back to biblical times when animal horns represented virility and, metaphorically, an erect penis. - location 775

Women who were captured and raped by Indians used elliptical words to describe this experience once they were rescued. One Coloradoan who survived such an ordeal in 1878 told a military hearing that she was “insulted” several times by her Ute captors. Under questioning, the young woman elaborated a bit by saying

that she'd been subjected to "outrageous treatment." When the presiding officer asked, "Am I to understand that they outraged you several times at night?" she responded "Yes, sir." - location 819

This resulted in a criminal conversation charge being filed against the younger man, a common euphemism for adultery in England between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. - location 841

"Did you sleep with this woman?" "Not a wink, your honor." - location 870

When academy was a euphemism for "brothel," those who worked there were called academicians. - location 885

Such movies were called "adult entertainment." As a result, the word adult became a euphemism for pornography or for sex itself. ("We engaged in some adult activity.") - location 937

Because porne is Greek for "prostitute," and pornographos for "depictions of prostitutes," "pornography" originally referred to writing about whores. - location 939

by the mid-twentieth century sex researcher Alfred Kinsey had defined a nymphomaniac as "someone who has more sex than you do." - location 982

(When he first heard of masturbation in the early 1950s, my brother Gene looked it up in an old dictionary. There the practice was defined as "self-pollution," a definition Gene creatively misread as "self-pollination.") - location 1000

Charms became a rather cheery euphemism for breasts in early-nineteenth-century England, far more appealing than its predecessors dairies and milky ways. - location 1106

According to an old jest, one James Joyce incorporated into Ulysses, when women of a certain age bathed standing erect, they first washed up as far as possible, then down as far as possible, then washed "old possible." - location 1268

Gloria Steinem once referred to herself as a member of the "down there generation." - location 1270

Due to modern depilation methods, we're now able to talk comfortably about the wax line, bikini line, or bikini zone. - location 1283

Her sister invited some English friends to tea. "We were talking about family resemblances (and the fact that

I didn't resemble anyone in my family at all)," reported Louise, "and I remarked that my family had been so desperate to find a resemblance that they would say that I 'had Aunt Harriet's fanny.' A dozen china teacups hit their saucers simultaneously as jaws dropped. Finally one woman asked, 'How on earth would they know?' " What Louise didn't realize was that, while fanny refers to the buttocks among Americans, in the United Kingdom it's slang for "vagina." - location 1291

[Truncated here because I'm out of space. Boo.]

Shayne says

Delves well into the roots of euphemisms, along with a delightful catalog of examples.

Jennifer says

Euphemisms are an exercise of evasion. (Aside from that sentence summarizing what I learned, it's also alliterative. Score!)

As a whole, this book was really interesting because it wasn't a simple list of euphemisms-- it delved into the etymology and history of how such phrases came to be, how euphemisms themselves were euphemized, and how some of them have become so ingrained in culture that they're the go-to word or phrase we now use. There are your obvious euphemisms (those for bodily functions and sexual intercourse), but the chapters that most interested me were the euphemisms that revolve around the issue of money and war-- mainly because they aren't obvious.

This book was very methodical in its journey to that point; you could count on the last paragraph of each chapter to somehow segue into the topic for the next one. Sometimes the transitions were a bit forced, but if you're really interested in the subject matter, the structure of how its presented shouldn't matter too much.

Steven says

I'd never really thought much about how much I use and hear euphemisms on a day to day basis, but to read this book, it would seem that a big part of our language use is dedicated to creating, using and interpreting other ways of saying things. Euphemism is used to talk about gender, class, race, bodily functions, money, and all manner of things that make us squirm.

Some of the more interesting things I learned from this book is that most of the perfectly fine and descriptive words (think four letters and vulgar) that we euphemize are of Anglo-Saxon origin, usually replaced with neo-Latin substitutions for more delicate ears. Some words in our language, considered vulgar now, were once euphemisms for still earlier terms. And, most interestingly of all, some of our euphemisms are so old, the original words are lost -- prime example, *bear* -- the oldest known English language euphemisms. Etymologically, it means "the brown one," used by people who were probably worried about conjuring one up by using its real name. But that real name is now lost to us.

Although some of Keyes' examples might be considered slang rather than euphemisms (he addresses this point), I still found this a good overview of the concept. I'm going to really be looking and listening for euphemisms for some time to come.

Joe Kapraszewski says

This book had high expectations for me and failed to live up to them. It took long enough to get to WHY we use euphemisms, being the last chapter. Granted, there were reasons put throughout, but I would have thought this would be the FIRST topic and go from there.

I was also frustrated by the seemingly haphazard reasons as to which euphemisms are explained further and which are not. The author mentions his consternation with his first name being used as a euphemism for what is called "a reversal of fortune" at the hot dog eating contest, but no mention as to WHY. Why does fanny mean tush in America but the female part in England? Where and when did this get lost in translation? Why is my name used for "the common man" when John Doe is the ultimate everyman? How did Jack become a respectable nickname for John when Jack was unmentionable for so long? (The Jack in a poker deck was known as a knave for a long time) These are just some of my most memorable haphazard parts, but there are plenty for everyone.

It also seemed like at times that the author was just trying to cram in every single way to say a naughty word without saying it straight out. At times I was wondering if I was reading a new kind of thesaurus of words Roget failed to put in.

Maybe this is a part of my frustration with what I thought this would be a much better book than it turned out to be. At least I learned a few new things, which gives the book a 2nd * of 5.

Cheryl says

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At the request of The Hachette Book Group, a TPB was sent, at no cost to me, for my honest opinion.

Synopsis (from back of book): An entertaining look at euphemisms-where they come from, why we need them, and what they tell us about who we are.

How did "die" become kick the bucket, "underwear" become unmentionables, and "having an affair" become hiking the Appalachian Trail? Originally used to avoid blasphemy and taboos and to make nice, euphemisms have become embedded in the fabric of our language. Euphemania traces the evolution of euphemisms from tools of the church to expressions of gentility to today's instrument of commercial, political, and postmodern doublespeak. As much social commentary as a book for word lovers, Euphemania is a lively and thought-provoking look at the power of words and our power over them.

My Thoughts and Opinion: Just in time for the holidays. This book is informative, filled with trivia and a fun read. I found it to be quite interesting as to where and how certain terms came in to being such as "a loose cannon" (pg 193), "bookworm"(pg 228) "under the weather"(pg 124) and so many more. This book is perfect for those that enjoy trivia, history of the English language and the origin of certain phrases. I will never look at a chocolate chip cookie the same way again (page 111). Just in time for the holidays, this book should be

on one's Christmas list, for yourself or someone you know.

My Rating: 4

K.M. Weiland says

I was eager to read this book from the moment I saw its title. Slang and its role in the evolution of language is of great interest to me, so I enjoyed Keyes's romp through the history of the “unsayable” and especially his insights into why certain societies at certain points in history employ certain euphemisms.

John Thorndike says

There's something fascinating on every page of this book. What a revelation to consider all the words and phrases I use daily, barely aware of them, as I avoid more direct speech about embarrassing or awkward topics. From *gosh* and *bust* and *shoot* on the first page of *Euphemia*, to *private parts* and *oyster fries*, to a soldier, near the end of the book, saying he *offed* or *dispatched* or *neutralized* an enemy, Keyes wakes me up to how common our euphemisms are. His research is prodigious, with hundreds of books cited in the bibliography—and I enjoyed as well the many reports gathered from families about the particular euphemisms they've invented or adopted. Indeed, they reminded me of how my teenage son, instead of saying *I have to take a crap* (kind of a euphemism itself), would announce, *I'm going to drop some friends off at the pool*. Altogether more elegant, don't you think?

How wonderfully rich our language is, and this book, with its tour of evasions both proper and colloquial, is a great addition to the brew.

John says

I heard the author on NPR read a few excerpts and the book sounded like a fun read. As expected, the chapters on sex, anatomy and bodily functions were all entertaining. But I was struck by the chapters on death, economics and war. I was very aware of how society talks around sex, but I had not thought much about how we talk around death and war and finances.

The book is worth the read. It is pretty quick and will make you smile with its anecdotes. I think it will challenge you to think too.

Julianna says

Reviewed for THC Reviews

Lately, I've realized that I'm something of a language geek particularly in the area of etymology, so the instant I saw *Euphemania*, I was thoroughly intrigued and knew I wanted to read it. What I got was a fascinating study in euphemisms which intermingled the words and phrases themselves with their origins and social commentary on their use. I learned a lot of new euphemisms with which I was not familiar, as well as where many I already knew came from. The author draws on a wide variety of sources including quotes from

famous people, songs and literature. Oddly enough, I've never studied Shakespeare (not even in school), so until reading this book, I never realized how incredibly "naughty" the Bard actually was. I was also amazed to discover that the original King James Bible contained many words and phrases which over the years have been sanitized, because they came to be considered vulgar. Since censorship is an area ripe for the use of euphemistic talk, there is some interesting discussion on what words and phrases can and can't be used in movies, television and other media both now and down through history. Could anyone possibly imagine Rhett Butler's famous last words in *Gone with the Wind* being, "I don't give a hoot" or "My dear, I don't care?" I know I sure couldn't. I also found myself nearly ROTFL at a sidebar discussion on automatic censoring in Internet forums.

In addition to the great history of words, I also got a wonderful study on the sociology and psychology behind word usages (two of my favorite scientific areas of interest). The sociology angle explores which words and phrases were acceptable in polite company in various eras and cultures and why that is. It is absolutely fascinating how something can be perfectly acceptable in one country/culture and considered insulting in another or how a particular saying could go from being acceptable to vulgar, and perhaps back to acceptable, depending on the time frame in which it was used. In this vein, there was another hilarious sidebar on the conflicting meanings of various euphemisms between America and Britain. The psychology angle discusses how "prettying-up" certain words can fool the brain into thinking they are more appealing, such as how adding French words to the name of a food that would normally be considered icky on a restaurant menu will make it sell better. The author also makes some fabulous points on the use of euphemisms, one being that, when done well, euphemisms can show a marked talent for creativity and they can be a really fun way to communicate, the other being that euphemisms can sometimes be overused to the point that they sap power from the words that they replace.

Euphemania covers a large selection of potentially taboo or at the very least uncomfortable subjects with major chapter topics including sex, anatomy, bodily functions, illness and death, food, money and commerce, and war. This book is chock full of "bad" words and "naughty" phrases which could be offensive to some readers, but when one critically analyzes the subject matter, I'm not sure how a book like this could have been written without them. I personally found the author's directness to be refreshing. There is also an index and extensive bibliography that looks like it might make for some interesting extended reading on the subject. For me, *Euphemania* was a fast-paced, humorous, and entertaining look at why we use euphemisms that is definitely going on my keeper shelf for future reference. Ralph Keyes certainly has a way with making a topic that could have been dry into something fun and easy for the average lay-person to understand. I only wish all non-fiction books were so engaging and well-written.

Note: I received an ARC of *Euphemania* from the publisher in exchange for my review.
