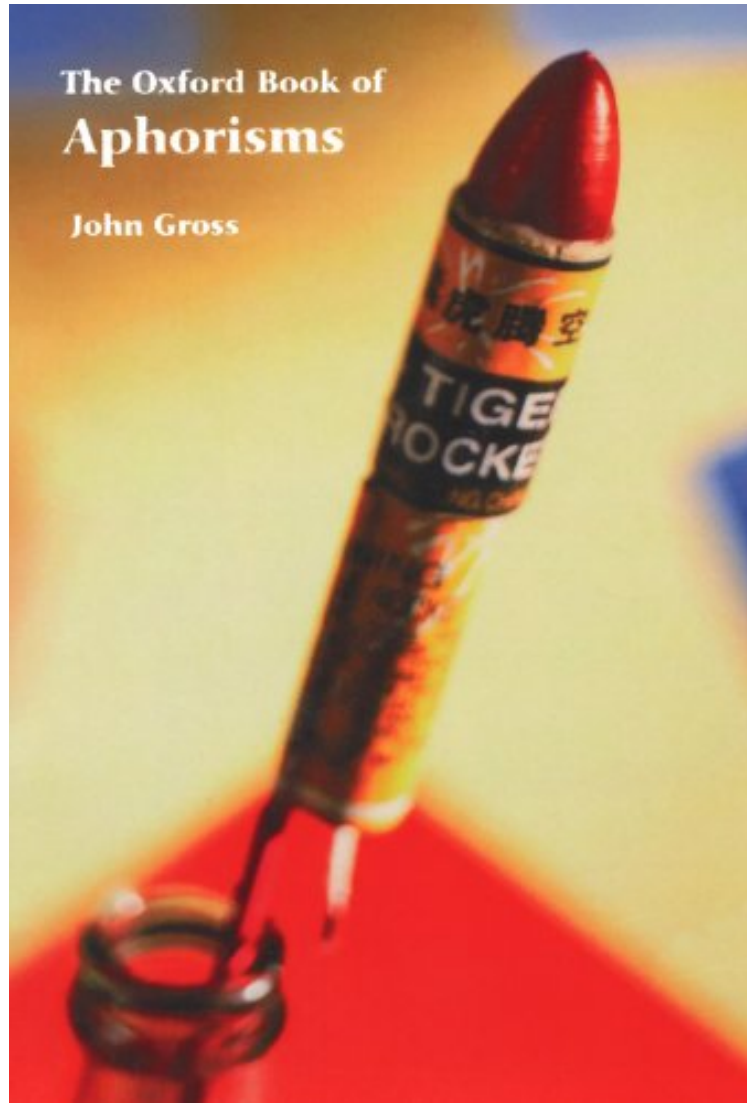


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sardonic, reflecting the dark, sardonic nature of the best epigrams of our age. I was inspired to respond in the margins to a number of them, and I can't think of a better response to epigrams in general, than for them to get under your prickly skin to the extent that you might write your own ironic counterstatements. Bloodshed begets bloodshed, and so we might say (ironically) that this sort of bitterness begets bitterness. But it may very well be the most brilliant bitterness you've known. Some of my favorite quotes with my responses--representative in the extreme: "Where they burn books they will also in the end burn human bodies"--Heine, , 1823 "Where they burn human beings, they will also, in the end, burn the wrong book"--Eucaleh Terrapin "A secret may sometimes be best kept by keeping the secret of its being a secret"--Sir Henry Taylor, , 1823 "Thus the wisest proverb is common sense"--Eucaleh Terrapin "Freedom produces jokes, and jokes produce freedom"--Jean Paul Richter, Introduction to Aesthetics, 1823 "But to be witty is to be serious about other comedians"--Eucaleh Terrapin

An aphorism is "a short pithy statement or maxim," but beneath this definition lies a wealth of wit and insight to which neither the word nor a brief description can do justice. This anthology demonstrates just how rewarding an art form the aphorism can be, and just how brilliantly the aphorist can illuminate the hidden truth, or lay bare the ironies of existence. Specific sections on desires and longings, self-doubt, fame and reputations, happiness and sorrow, cover the whole range of aphoristic literature. This book brings together the most diverse figures--the classic aphorists, like La Rochefoucauld; the philosophers, from the Greeks to Samuel Johnson to Virginia Woolf--as well as statesmen, scientists, boulevardiers, Olympians, and gadflies. John Gross draws on their wisdom and wit to produce an anthology that will be referred to time and time again.