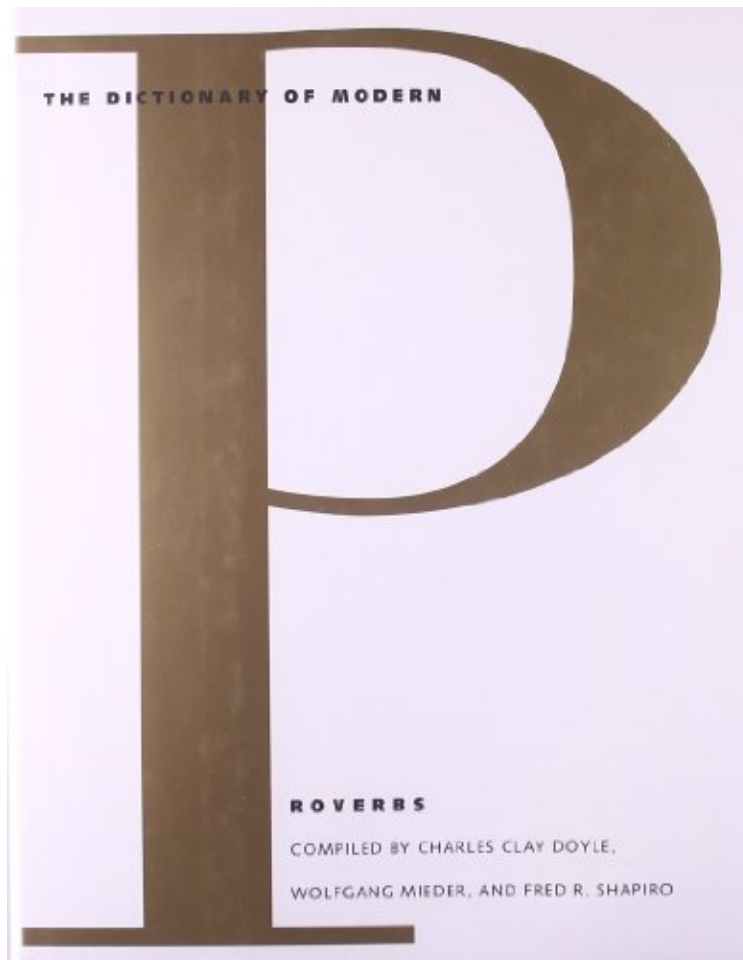


The Dictionary of Modern Proverbs

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From Brand: Yale University Press : The Dictionary of Modern Proverbs before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Dictionary of Modern Proverbs:

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sayings that, as far as they were able to tell, did not appear in print earlier than 1900. So if you wish to have a collection that includes all proverbs in common use, such as old, classical, popular wisdom--for example, "a stitch in time saves nine"--this isn't it. On the other hand, this could serve as a very good supplement to an older proverb book. Or it could be seen as a collection of the relatively new popular wisdom sayings (prompting the interesting questions, why these did arise and catch on and why others faded). As such, there is no absolute hierarchical authority to decide which sayings to include--though Prof. Mieder may come as close to such authority as anyone. And the editors acknowledge that the, what, corpus or canon, of modern proverbs keeps changing. The book announces a website for accepting suggestions for additional proverbs or for finding some of those included attested in print before 1900 (for that page, search "Submit to The Dictionary of Modern Proverbs"). Of course some readers may wonder why some are included and others not, or want more information about precursors. Some probably can be antedated. Some possibly can be reattributed. The saying (with variations) attributed to Stalin in 1947 and later--one's man's death is a tragedy, a million deaths is a statistic--may draw on a writing of Kurt Tucholsky from 1925 (and in at least three later printings), Französischer Witz. A French diplomat is represented as saying, "Der Krieg? Ich kann das nicht so schrecklich finden! Der Tod eines Menschen: das ist eine Katastrophe. Hunderttausend Tote: das ist eine Statistik!" (Tucholsky, Gesamtausgabe, Band 7, Text 136, page 375). Some can be discussed further. For example, the rather flat and silly imperative 1991 formulation "Don't rearrange deck chairs on the Titanic" may well have been influenced by perhaps more elegant and imaginative wording in January 17, 1969 reports in both the Washington Post and NY Times quoting Liz Carpenter of the Johnson administration: "There are already a lot of new faces in the White House. All the new people want an office close to the President's. You should see them scramble; it's like fighting for a deck chair on the Titanic." Page 101 includes "If anything can go wrong, it will" (and variants). Then follows a discussion of Murphy's Law. Considerably more could be said about that "law"; the current Wikipedia entry for Murphy's Law includes some additional information--at least in today's version.

"You can't unring a bell." "It takes a village to raise a child." "Life is just a bowl of cherries." We sometimes think of proverbs as expressions of ancient wisdom, but in fact new proverbs are constantly arising. This unique volume is devoted exclusively to English-language proverbs that originated in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The most complete and accurate such collection ever compiled, The Dictionary of Modern Proverbs presents more than 1,400 individual proverbs gathered and researched with the help of electronic full-text databases not previously used for such a project. Entries are organized alphabetically by key words, with information about the earliest datable appearance, origin, history, and meaning of each proverb. Mundane or sublime, serious or jocular, these memorable sayings represent virtually every aspect of the modern experience. Readers will find the book almost impossible to put down once opened; every page offers further proof of the immense vitality of proverbs and their colorful contributions to the oral traditions of today.

From Booklist Success is always preceded by preparation is a proverb that aptly describes The Dictionary of Modern Proverbs. The handy volume includes this and 1,400 additional popular English-language proverbs from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Entries are organized alphabetically by keyword and include the first datable appearance, history, origin, and meaning. Researchers used full-text databases to compile the volume, a first time for this type of project. Users will find it both educational and entertaining. --Jennifer Adams Its a fabulous book, certainly the most enjoyable one Ive read this year. Ben Yagoda, The Chronicle of Higher Education, Lingua Franca blog