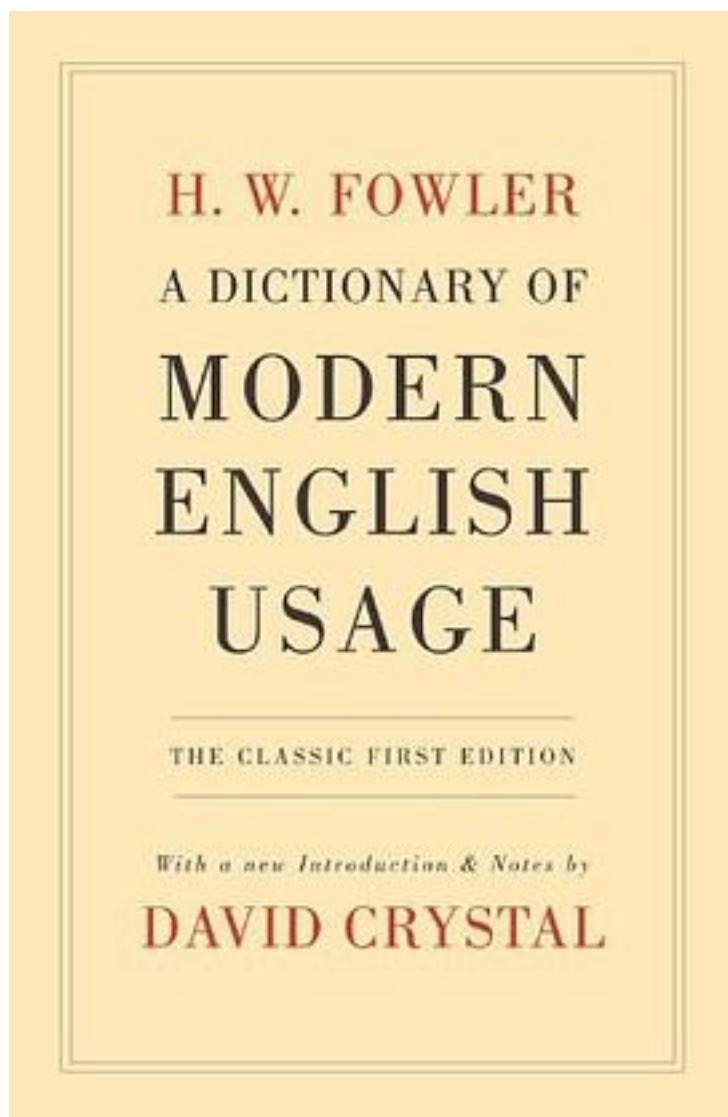


A Dictionary of Modern English Usage



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著者:H. W. Fowler

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A guide to precise phrases, grammar, and pronunciation can be key; it can even be admired. But beloved? Yet from its first appearance in 1926, Fowler's was just that. Henry Watson Fowler initially aimed his Dictionary of Modern English Usage, as he wrote to his publishers in 1911, at "the half-educated Englishman of literary proclivities who wants to know Can I say so-&-so?" He was of course obsessed with, in Swift's phrase, "proper words in their proper places." But having been a schoolmaster, Fowler knew that liberal doses of style, wit, and caprice would keep his manual off the shelf and in writers' hands. He also felt that description must accompany prescription, and that advocating pedantic "superstitions" and "fetishes" would be to no one's advantage. Adepts will have their favorite inconsequential entries--from burgle to brood, truffle to turgid. Would that we could quote them all, but we can't resist a couple. Here Fowler lays into dedicated: He is that rara avis a dedicated boxer. The sporting correspondent who wrote this evidently does not see why the literary critics should have a monopoly of this favourite word of theirs, though he does not seem to think that it will be greatly needed in his branch of the business. Needless to say, later on rara avis is also smacked upside the head! And practically fares no better: "It is unfortunate that practically should have escaped from its true meaning into something like its opposite," Fowler begins. But our linguistic hero also knew full well when to put a crimp on comedy. Some phrases and proper uses, it's clear, would always be worth fighting for, and the guide thus ranges from brief definitions to involved articles. Archaisms, for instance, he considered safe only in the hands of the experienced, and meaningless words, especially those used by the young, "are perhaps more suitable for the psychologist than for the philologist." Well, youth might respond, "Whatever!"--though only after examining the keen differences between that phrase and what ever. (One can only imagine what Fowler would have made of our late-20th-century abuses of like.) This is where Robert Burchfield's 1996 third edition comes in. Yes, Fowler lost the fight for one r in guerrilla and didn't fare too well when it came to quashing such vogue words as smear and seminal. But he knew--and makes us ever aware--that language is a living, breathing (and occasionally suffocating) thing, and we hope that he would have welcomed any and all revisions. Fowlerphiles will want to keep their first (if they're very lucky) or second editions at hand, but should look to Burchfield for new entries on such phrases as gay, iron curtain, and inchoate--not to mention girl. --Kerry Fried

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