



# The anatomy of swearing

*Ashley Montagu*

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Although the act of swearing, or cursing, has today been reduced to the four-letter interjection and unimaginative put-down, this has not always been the case. Elegant, sublime oaths and vicious imprecations mark the history of human conduct and language. Shedding light on the forbidden, misunderstood, and clandestinely pursued forms of interpersonal communication, *The Anatomy of Swearing* uniquely documents the history of taboo words and phrases. It presents the curious inquirer with a summary of what the best minds and most accomplished practitioners of the art have said and done inventively in the form of indiscrete, insulting, spiteful, or otherwise objectionable speech.

Swearing is one of the most cathartic and common modes of language. Montagu examines the genre in all its aspects--its origins, philosophy, and psychology--as well as its evolution and differing manifestations in various ages and cultures. Montagu demonstrates that the human race, regardless of time and culture, has always used invective to lighten its burden. *The Anatomy of Swearing* traces this phenomenon from the ancient Egyptians, Hebrews, and Babylonians through Elizabethan England to the middle class of contemporary America.

A list of the most common and offensive expletives in the English language is bound to make you laugh, but there is much to learn about human interaction and behavior by examining the significance of swear words throughout human history. And what better reason to read a book littered with the world's unacceptable speech.

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