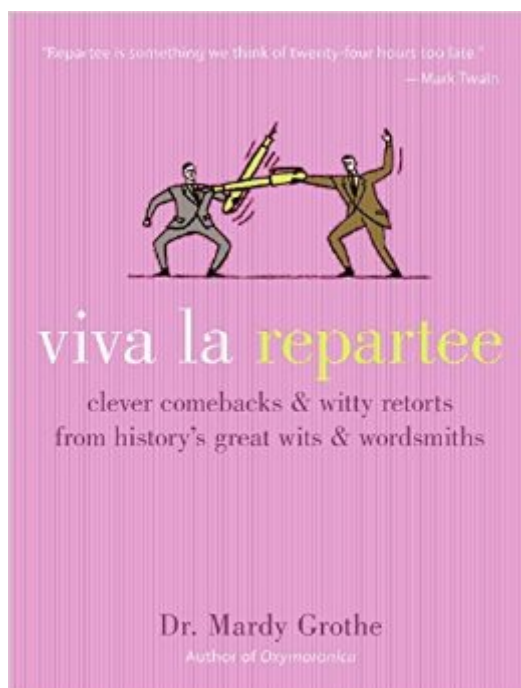


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# Viva La Repartee: Clever Comebacks And Witty Retorts From History's Great Wits And Wordsmiths



## Synopsis

For most of us, that perfect retort or witty reply often escapes us when we need it most, only to come to mind with perfect clarity when it's too late to be useful. The twentieth-century writer Heywood Broun described this all-too-common phenomenon when he wrote "Repartee is what we wish we'd said." In *Viva la Repartee*, Dr. Mardy Grothe, author of *Oxymoronica*, has lovingly assembled a collection of masterfully composed -- and perfectly timed -- replies that have turned the tables on opponents and adversaries. This delightful volume is a celebration of the most impressive retorts, ripostes, rejoinders, comebacks, quips, ad-libs, bon mots, off-the-cuff comments, wisecracks, and other clever remarks ever to come out of the mouths -- and from the pens -- of people throughout history. Touching on all areas of human endeavor, including politics, the arts, literature, sports, relationships, and even the risqué, the book features contributions from Oscar Wilde, Mark Twain, Dorothy Parker, Mae West, Groucho Marx, Winston Churchill, Dolly Parton, and scores more. As entertaining as it is intellectually enriching, *Viva la Repartee* is sure to capture the attention of language lovers and is the perfect antidote for anyone who's ever thought I wish I'd said that!

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Those who have already read Grothe's *Oxymoronica* will thoroughly enjoy this volume in which he shifts his attention from "paradoxical wit and wisdom from history's greatest wordsmiths" to "clever comebacks & witty retorts from history's great wits & wordsmiths." Not surprisingly and in fact inevitably, many of the same wordsmiths are represented in both volumes, notably Robert C. Benchley, Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain), Winston Churchill, W.C. Fields, Dorothy Parker, and

Oscar Wilde. In his introduction, Grothe defines two terms which certainly apply to the selections which follow: citing the OED, a retort is "a sharp or incisive reply, especially one by which the first speaker's statement or argument is in some way turned against himself" and repartee is "1. A ready, witty, or smart reply; a quick and clever retort" and "2. Sharpness or wit in sudden reply; such replies collectively; the practice or faculty of uttering them." With great skill, Grothe creates a context within which each selection is the response. Here are four examples: During a noted opera singer's "perfectly dreadful performance," one of the guests leaned over and whispered in President Calvin Coolidge's ear, "What do you think of the singer's execution?" to which Coolidge replied, "I'm all for it." Shortly before his death, W.C. Fields (a lifelong agnostic) was visited by a friend who was astonished when he entered the hospital room. "What are you doing reading a Bible?" to which Fields responded "I'm looking for loopholes." After losing the Republican presidential nomination to George H.W. Bush, Robert Dole was asked by a reporter how he felt. "Contrary to reports that I took the loss badly, I slept like a baby -- every two hours I woke up and cried.

Viva la Repartee: Clever Comebacks and Witty Retorts from History's Great Wits and Wordsmiths by Dr. Mardy Grothe celebrates the art of the ingenious reply. Grothe distinguishes between various kinds of witty comments -- for example, the retort, which is a response to an insult, and a quip, which is a clever remark prompted by a situation. In Viva la Repartee Grothe follows the format that served him well in his previous books, Never Let a Fool Kiss You or a Kiss Fool You and Oxymoronica. He begins each chapter with a discussion of that chapter's theme illustrated by a few examples. Then he provides additional examples without discussion. Themes include repartee in the following areas: stage and screen, literature (one chapter being devoted to the Algonquin Round Table), politics, relationships, senior citizens, and sports. Other chapters feature chiasmus and oxymoron, the literary devices celebrated in Grothe's earlier books. The ultimate example of laconic repartee, in the chapter with that theme, is an exchange of telegrams, each consisting solely of one punctuation mark. The gems in Grothe's earlier books could stand alone as brief quotations -- often no more than a sentence. However, in order to appreciate a reply, one must know the words and the situation that prompted it. Viva la Repartee, then, is a collection of anecdotes. Grothe masterfully crafts the set-ups for his rejoinders. In taut prose that could well serve as models for aspiring writers, he provides the details of time, place, and circumstance. Most of the remarks featured in Viva la Repartee were uttered by celebrities. Grothe's collection, which includes a helpful index of names, gives us personal glimpses that bring these people to life for us.

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