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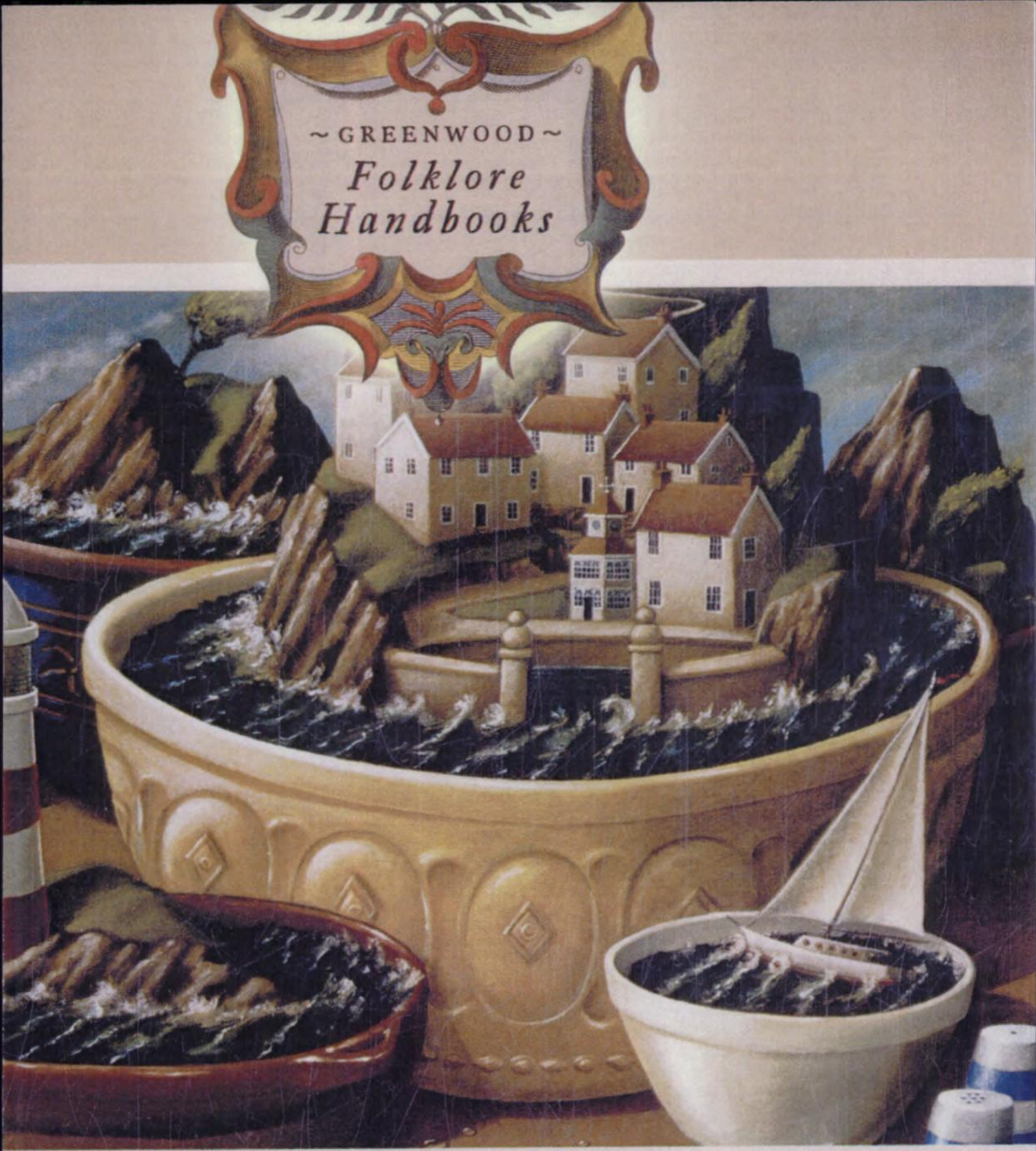

Proverbs

A HANDBOOK

WOLFGANG MIEDER

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A Handbook

Wolfgang Mieder

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Definition and Classification

Of the various verbal folklore genres (i.e., fairy tales, legends, tall tales, jokes, and riddles), proverbs are the most concise but not necessarily the simplest form. The vast scholarship on proverbs is ample proof that they are anything but mundane matters in human communication. Proverbs fulfill the human need to summarize experiences and observations into nuggets of wisdom that provide ready-made comments on personal relationships and social affairs. There are proverbs for every imaginable context, and they are thus as contradictory as life itself. Proverb pairs like "*Absence* makes the heart grow fonder" and "Out of *sight,* out of mind" or "*Look* before you leap" and "He who *hesitates* is lost" make it abundantly clear that proverbs do not represent a logical philosophical system. But when the proper proverb is chosen for a particular situation, it is bound to fit perfectly and it becomes an effective formulaic strategy of communication. And contrary to some isolated opinions, proverbs have not lost their usefulness in modern society. They serve people well in oral speech and the written word, coming to mind almost automatically as prefabricated verbal units. While the frequency of their employment might well vary among people and contexts, proverbs are a significant rhetorical force in various modes of communication, from friendly chats, powerful political speeches, and religious sermons to lyrical poetry, best-seller novels, and the influential mass media. Proverbs are in fact everywhere, and it is exactly their ubiquity that has led scholars from many disciplines to study them from classical times to the modern age. There is no doubt that the playful alteration of the proverb "If the *shoe* fits, wear it" to "If the proverb fits, use it" says it all!

While the first part of this section deals with definition matters, the second part analyzes how proverbs have been classified in a multitude of different ways in thousands of proverb collections of differing quality and scope. This is not the place to review the status of internationally or nationally oriented paremiography (proverb collections) in great detail (see Mieder 1990). Suffice it to say that there exist many major proverb dictionaries that list equivalent proverbs from 2 to 15 different languages. Especially European paremiographers have worked on such synchronic comparative collections that at times include indices, frequency analyses, sources, geographical distribution, and so on. Collections of this type help to advance the structural, semantic, and semiotic studies of scholars like Grigorii L'vovich Permiakov and Matti Kuusi, who tried to develop an international type system of proverbs (see Permiakov 1970 [1979]; Kuusi 1972). By establishing lists of international proverb structures in combination with semantic and semiotic considerations, over 700 "universal" proverb types have now been found.

DEFINITION ATTEMPTS

The definition of a proverb has caused scholars from many disciplines much chagrin over the centuries. Many attempts at definition have been made from Aristotle to the present time (Kindstrand 1978; Russo 1983), ranging from philosophical considerations to cut-and-dry lexicographical definitions. The American paremiologist Bartlett Jere Whiting (1904–1995) reviewed many definitions in an important article on "The Nature of the Proverb" (1932), summarizing his findings in a lengthy conglomerate version of his own:

> A proverb is an expression which, owing its birth to the people, testifies to its origin in form and phrase. It expresses what is apparently a fundamental truth—that is, a truism,—in homely language, often adorned, however, with alliteration and rhyme. It is usually short, but need not be; it is usually true, but need not be. Some proverbs have both a literal and figurative meaning, either of which makes perfect sense; but more often they have but one of the two. A proverb must be venerable; it must bear the sign of antiquity, and, since such signs may be counterfeited by a clever literary man, it should be attested in different places at different times. This last requirement we must often waive in dealing with very early literature, where the material at our disposal is incomplete. (Whiting 1932: 302; also in Whiting 1994: 80)

That certainly is a useful summation, albeit not a very precise statement. It represents a reaction to a tongue-in-cheek statement that Whiting's friend Archer Taylor had made a year earlier at the beginning of his classic study on

The Proverb (1931). Taylor begins his 223-page analysis of proverbs with the claim that a definitive definition of the genre is an impossibility. Of course, he then spends the next 200 pages explaining in much detail what proverbs are all about. His somewhat ironical introductory remark has become an often-quoted paragraph, and his claim that "an incommunicable quality tells us this sentence is proverbial and that is not" has gained "proverbial" status among paremiologists:

> The definition of a proverb is too difficult to repay the undertaking; and should we fortunately combine in a single definition all the essential elements and give each the proper emphasis, we should not even then have a touchstone. An incommunicable quality tells us this sentence is proverbial and that one is not. Hence no definition will enable us to identify positively a sentence as proverbial. Those who do not speak a language can never recognize all its proverbs, and similarly much that is truly proverbial escapes us in Elizabethan and older English. Let us be content with recognizing that a proverb is a saying current among the folk. At least so much of a definition is indisputable. (Taylor 1931 [1962, 1985]: 3)

In 1985 I put Taylor's supposition that people in general know what a proverb is to the test and simply asked a cross section of 55 Vermont citizens how they would define a proverb. After all, the general folk use proverbs all the time, and one would think that they too know intuitively what a proverb represents. A frequency study of the words contained in the over 50 definition attempts made it possible to formulate the following general description:

> A proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorizable form and which is handed down from generation to generation. (Mieder 1985: 119; also in Mieder 1993: 24)

This summary definition mirrors that of Whiting, while the short conglomerate version "A proverb is a short sentence of wisdom" based on the words most often used in the 50-odd definitions resembles Taylor's statement. In any case, people in general, not bothered by academic concerns and intricacies, have a good idea of what a proverb encompasses. This is also born out by a number of proverbs about proverbs, representing folk definitions as it were: "*Proverbs* are the children of experience," "*Proverbs* are the wisdom of the streets," and "*Proverbs* are true words." Proverbs obviously contain a lot of common sense, experience, wisdom, and truth, and as such they represent ready-made traditional strategies in oral speech acts and writings from high literature to the mass media (see Hasan-Rokem 1990).

But proverb scholars have, of course, not been satisfied with the vagaries of this type of definition. Again and again they have tried to approximate *the* definition, but there is no space or necessity to comment on all of them here. Suffice it to cite two more general work-definitions starting with Stuart A. Gallacher's short statement from 1959, which as his student has served me well in my proverbial endeavors: "A proverb is a concise statement of an apparent truth which has [had, or will have] currency among the people" (Gallacher 1959: 47). The parenthetical modifications have been added by me to indicate that while some proverbs have been in use for hundreds of years, some have passed out of circulation and new ones will certainly be coined. In a number of encyclopedia articles I have had to deal with the vexing problem of defining proverbs precisely as well. My attempt in *American Folklore: An Encyclopedia* (1996) shows my indebtedness to my teacher Stuart A. Gallacher:

> Proverbs [are] concise traditional statements of apparent truths with currency among the folk. More elaborately stated, proverbs are short, generally known sentences of the folk that contain wisdom, truths, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed, and memorizable form and that are handed down from generation to generation. (Mieder 1996a: 597)

Certainly these short and general definitions do not pay proper attention to numerous fascinating aspects of proverbs as formulaic and metaphorical texts and as regards their use, function, and meaning in varied contexts. No wonder then that paremiologists have expanded on basic definitions by being more inclusive and descriptive and by exemplifying various proverbial characteristics by means of examples.

PROVERB MARKERS AND MEANINGS

One of the major concerns of paremiologists is to get to the bottom of that "incommunicable quality" of what may be called proverbiality. It is my contention that not even the most complex definition will be able to identify all proverbs. The crux of the matter lies in the concept of traditionality that includes both aspects of age and currency. In other words, a particular sentence might sound like a proverb, as for example "Where there are stars, there are scandals," and yet not be one. The invented sentence is based on the common proverb pattern "Where there are Xs, there are Ys," and it appears to contain some perceived generalizations about the behavior of movie stars. But that does not attest to its alleged proverbiality. This piece of created wisdom would have to be taken over by others and be used over a period of time to be considered a bona fide proverb. As it stands here on this page, it is nothing more than a "proverb-like" statement. Proverb definitions often include the term "traditional," but proving that a given text has gained traditionality is quite another matter. This makes it so very difficult to decide what new statements have in fact gained proverbial status. Such modern American texts as "Been *there,* done that," "The *camera* doesn't lie," "No *guts,* no glory," and "You can't beat (fight) *city hall*" have made it (see Doyle 1996). Why is this so? Simply stated, they have been registered numerous times over time. The last example also shows the formation of variants. And it is exactly the requirement of all folklore, including proverbs, that various references and possibly also variants are found that attest to oral currency.

Stephen D. Winick, in an erudite essay on "Intertextuality and Innovation in a Definition of the Proverb Genre" (2003), has tried valiantly to break with the requirement of traditionality for new proverbs, arguing that a text becomes a proverb upon its creation (see also Honeck and Welge 1997). That would make the sentence "Where there are stars, there are scandals" a proverb! As a folklorist and paremiologist I disagree with this assessment. The fact that the sentence is "proverb-like" does not make it a folk proverb, putting in question Winick's convoluted definition:

> Proverbs are brief (sentence-length) entextualized utterances which derive a sense of wisdom, wit and authority from explicit and intentional intertextual reference to a tradition of previous similar wisdom utterances. This intertextual reference may take many forms, including replication (i.e., repetition of the text from previous contexts), imitation (i.e., modeling a new utterance after a previous utterance), or use of features (rhyme, alliteration, meter, ascription to the elders, etc.) associated with previous wisdom sayings. Finally, proverbs address recurrent social situations in a strategic way. (Winick 2003: 595)

While Winick goes too far in claiming proverbiality for "proverb-like" utterances (i.e., "explicit and intentional intertextual reference to a tradition of previous similar wisdom utterances"), he includes other valid and important criteria of proverbiality that summarize the findings of important theoretical work in paremiology.

Winick speaks of "features" of proverbiality, while other scholars have talked of "markers" that help to identify texts as proverbs in addition to the requirement of traditionality. The anthropologist George Milner observed that many proverbs are characterized by a quadripartite structure. This is the case with such proverbs as "Who pays the *piper,* calls the tune" and "What the *eye* doesn't see, the heart doesn't grieve over." These texts can be divided into four parts with either positive or negative values to each of the four elements. There are thus sixteen possible structural patterns that characterize this type of proverb (see Milner 1971). However, "Who buys the beer, determines the party" also exhibits a quadripartite structure and is most certainly not a proverb. Folklorist Alan Dundes runs into a similar problem with his definition of a proverb being a propositional statement consisting of at least a topic and a comment, as for example in "*Money* talks." This also means that a proverb must at least consist of two words. For longer proverbs Dundes is able to show that they are based on an oppositional or non-oppositional structure, as "*Man* proposes but God disposes" or "Where there's a *will,* there's a way." Yet the statement "Politicians decide but soldiers fight" is certainly not a proverb, even though it follows an oppositional structure. Dundes knew of this problem with his structural approach to proverbs, and he did well in adding the aspect of traditionality to his otherwise useful definition:

> The proverb appears to be a traditional propositional statement consisting of at least one descriptive element, a descriptive element consisting of a topic and a comment. This means that proverbs must have at least two words. Proverbs which contain a single descriptive element are non-oppositional. Proverbs with two or more descriptive elements may be either oppositional or non-oppositional. (Dundes 1975: 970; also in Mieder and Dundes 1981 [1994]: 60)

As can be seen, the structural approach to the conundrum of a proverb definition does not seem to solve the problem either. The necessary ingredient of traditionality keeps rearing its ugly head.

But speaking of structural matters, it is also important to mention that the thousands of proverbs of any language can be reduced to certain structures or patterns (see Peukes 1977). How else could there be so many proverbial texts based on a few words? Some of the more common patterns, and by no means only in the English language, are "Better X than Y," "Like X, like Y," "No X without Y," "One X doesn't make a Y," "If X, then Y," calling to mind such well-known proverbs as "Better *poor* with honor than rich with shame," "Like *father,* like son," "No *work,* no pay," "One *robin* doesn't make a spring," and

"If at first you don't *succeed,* then try, try again." These common structures frequently also serve as the basis of modern proverbs, as "Better *Red* than dead" and its reverse "Better *dead* than Red" from the time of the Cold War with its anticommunism propaganda (see Barrick 1979).

While structural paradigms might at least help in identifying traditional proverbs, there are several other markers available to the scholar. Shortness is certainly one of them, with the average length of a proverb consisting of about seven words. But there are, of course, also much longer proverbs that break the conciseness feature, as for example the paradoxical Bible proverb "It is easier for a *camel* to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:24). Furthermore, proverbs are often shortened to mere allusions owing to their general recognizability. Such truncated proverbs appear in oral speech as well as in literature or the mass media. Why should a journalist cite the entire proverb "A *bird* in the hand is worth two in the bush" in a large-print headline when the remnant "A bird in the hand . . . " will bring the entire proverb to mind automatically, at least in the case of native speakers of English. Earlier scholars have overstated the fixity of proverbs. In actual use, especially in the case of intentional speech play, proverbs are quite often manipulated. Neal Norrick in his valuable study on *How Proverbs Mean* (1985) has concluded that "for well known proverbs, mention of one crucial recognizable phrase [i.e., part] serves to call forth the entire proverb," speaking of "this minimal recognizable unit as the *kernel* of the proverb" (Norrick 1985: 45). Proverbs are definitely fixed only in the proverb collections; otherwise they can be used rather freely, even though the predominant way of citing them is in their unaltered entirety.

Many proverbs also exhibit certain stylistic features that help a statement to gain and maintain proverbial status (see Blehr 1973). Paremiologists have long identified numerous poetic devices, but Shirley Arora summarized them well in her seminal article on "The Perception of Proverbiality" (1984). Such stylistic markers include alliteration: "*Practice* makes perfect," "*Forgive* and forget," and "Every *law* has a loophole"; parallelism: "Ill *got,* ill spent," "Nothing *ventured,* nothing gained," and "Easy *come,* easy go"; rhyme: "A little *pot* is soon hot," "There's many a *slip* between the cup and the lip," and "When the *cat*'s away, the mice will play"; and ellipsis: "More *haste,* less speed," "Once *bitten,* twice shy," and "*Deeds,* not words." Besides these external markers there are also internal features that add to the rhetorical effectiveness of proverbs, among them hyperbole: "All is *fair* in love and war," "Faint *heart* never won fair lady"; paradox: "The longest *way* around is the shortest way home," "The nearer the *church,* the farther from God"; and personification: "*Love* will find a way," "*Hunger* is the best cook." Not all but most proverbs contain a metaphor, among them such common texts as "A watched *pot* never boils," "The squeaky *wheel* gets the grease," and "*Birds* of a feather flock together." But some non-metaphorical proverbs have reached equal popularity, for example "*Knowledge* is power," "*Honesty* is the best policy," and "*Virtue* is its own reward."

The preference for metaphorical proverbs lies in the fact that they can be employed in a figurative or indirect way. Verbal folklore in general is based on indirection, and much can indeed be said or implied by the opportune use of such proverbs as "Don't look a *gift horse* in the mouth," "Don't count your *chickens* before they are hatched," "Every *cloud* has a silver lining," "You cannot teach an old *dog* new tricks," or "All that glitters is not *gold*." By associating an actual situation with a metaphorical proverb, the particular matter is generalized into a common occurrence of life. Instead of scolding someone directly for not behaving according to the cultural customs of a different social or cultural setting, one might indirectly comment that "When in *Rome,* do as the Romans do." If someone must be warned to be more careful with health issues, the proverb "An ounce of *prevention* is worth a pound of cure" might well serve the purpose to add some commonly accepted wisdom to the argument. Or instead of explaining at great length that the time for action has come, the proverb "Strike while the *iron* is hot" expresses the matter in metaphorical but strong language that contains much traditional wisdom. Kenneth Burke has provided the following explanation of this effective use of metaphorical proverbs: "Proverbs are strategies for dealing with situations. In so far as situations are typical and recurrent in a given social structure, people develop names for them and strategies for handling them. Another name for strategies might be attitudes" (Burke 1941: 256). Proverbs in actual use refer to social situations, and it is this social context that in turn gives them meaning (see Seitel 1969). They act as signs for human behavior and social contexts and as such must be studied both from the structural and semiotic point of view (see Grzybek 1987; Zholkovskii 1978).

The meaning of proverbs is thus very much dependent on the contexts in which they appear. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has shown how a number of common proverbs have in fact multiple meanings that come to light only in particular situations. For example, she asked about 80 students in Texas to explain the meaning of the proverb "A *friend* in need is a friend indeed." Here are the different explanations with comments on the different sources of the multiple meanings:

1. Someone who feels close enough to you to be able to ask you for help when he is in need is really your friend.—Syntactic ambiguity (is your friend in need or are you in need).

2. Someone who helps you when you are in need is really your friend.—Lexical ambiguity (indeed or in deed).
3. Someone who helps you by means of his actions (deeds) when you need him is a real friend as opposed to someone who just makes promises.—Key meaning.
4. Someone who is only your friend when he needs you is not a true friend.—Does "a friend indeed" mean "a true friend" or "not a true friend"? (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1973: 822; also in Mieder and Dundes 1981 [1994]: 113–114).

Clearly only a specific context will reveal what the proverb does in fact want to say. The Estonian paremiologist Arvo Krikmann has spoken in this regard of the "semantic indefiniteness" of proverbs that results from their hetero-situativity, poly-functionality, and poly-semanticity (see Krikmann 1974a and 1974b). The meaning of any proverb must therefore be analyzed in its unique context, be it social, literary, rhetorical, journalistic, or whatever.

ORIGIN AND DISSEMINATION OF PROVERBS

Proverbs, like riddles, jokes, or fairy tales, do not fall out of the sky and neither are they products of a mythical soul of the folk. Instead they are always coined by an individual either intentionally or unintentionally, as expressed in Lord John Russell's well-known one-line proverb definition that has taken on a proverbial status of sorts: "A proverb is the wit of one, and the wisdom of many" (ca. 1850). If the statement contains an element of truth or wisdom, and if it exhibits one or more proverbial markers, it might "catch on" and be used first in a small family circle, and subsequently in a village, a city, a region, a country, a continent, and eventually the world. The global spread of proverbs is not a pipe dream, since certain ancient proverbs have in fact spread to many parts of the world. Today, with the incredible power of the mass media, a newly formulated proverb-like statement might become a bona fide proverb relatively quickly by way of the radio, television, and print media. As with verbal folklore in general, the original statement might well be varied a bit as it gets picked up and becomes ever more an anonymous proverb whose wording, structure, style, and metaphor are such that it is memorable. Older literary sources show very clearly that proverbs existed in such variants until one dominant wording eventually became the standard, to wit the following three historical variants of a proverb of prudence: "It is good to be *wise* before the mischief" (1584), "After the business is over, every one is *wise*" (1666), and "It is easy to be *wise* after the event" (1900), with the latter version having become today's standard form (Smith 1935 [1970]: 898).

It is usually quite difficult to trace the origin and history of a proverb in a particular language. Such studies very quickly take on major proportions, and they get very involved if the proverb under investigation proves to go back to medieval times or even further to classical antiquity. Any bilingual speaker or translator will have noticed that there exist two types of proverbs. On the one hand, there are those proverbs that have the same meaning but different structures, vocabulary, and metaphors, and they consequently have different origins in their respective languages. Thus English speakers since Shakespeare say "*Brevity* is the soul of wit," while the Germans utter "In der *Kürze* liegt die Würze" (In brevity there is [lies] spice). Whoever needs to translate one of these texts would have to know the quite different equivalent in the target language or find it in a dictionary. Regional proverbs become especially difficult translation problems, since possible equivalents are often missing from dictionaries that tend to include only the more common proverbs. On the other hand, many proverbs are identical not only in German and English but in most Germanic, Romance, and Slavic languages of Europe, and these do not present any particular translation problem. In other words, there exist general European proverbs, that is proverbs that have been disseminated through precise loan translations throughout Europe. That is why Emanuel Strauss could publish his three-volume *Dictionary of European Proverbs* (1994) and why Gyula Paczolay could follow suit with his invaluable collection of *European Proverbs in 55 Languages* (1997), to name but two of the many polyglot proverb collections. But how can all of this be explained? Since when do these common European proverbs exist, of which many also made it to North America with the waves of immigrants?

Four sources for the distribution of European proverbs can be identified (similar issues have occurred in the dissemination of proverbs in Asian, African, and other linguistic and cultural groups). There is first of all Greek and Roman antiquity, whose proverbial wisdom found a broad geographical dissemination primarily through the Latin language. The scholarly study of proverbs begins with Aristotle, and many Greek proverbs have been found in the works of Plato, Sophocles, Homer, Aristophanes, Aeschylus, Euripides, and so on. Many of them reappeared in Latin translation in Plautus, Terence, Cicero, Horace, and other Roman writers (see Mieder and Bryan 1996). Ancient writers also added new Latin proverbs, and many of these classical texts became part of a rich medieval Latin proverb tradition. More importantly, however, these common Latin texts were then translated into the many developing European languages. Erasmus of Rotterdam played a major role in spreading this classical and medieval wisdom throughout Europe by means of the many editions of his *Adagia* (1500ff.) that contains over four thousand explanatory notes and essays on classical proverbs and proverbial expressions (see Phillips 1964). His works were read and translated, and he himself had also shown interest in early Dutch regional proverbs. The same is true for Martin Luther in Germany, who was a masterful translator of classical proverbs but who also employed indigenous German proverbs in his writings (see Cornette 1942 [1997]). Latin proverbs were used in school translation exercises, and many of them entered the various languages through oral channels, thus spreading classical wisdom through the written and spoken word all over Europe. By way of English they traveled on to Australia, Canada, the United States, and the rest of the world where English is used as a second language. Some of these proverbs have truly taken on an international and global currency, showing once again that they contain universal human experiences and insights.

There is then no doubt that a considerable corpus of common European proverbs can be traced back to classical times. Since they were loan translated from the same sources, they exist in the many languages of Europe in identical forms. Little wonder then that Gyula Paczolay was able to find exact equivalents of the classical proverb "Where there is *smoke,* there is fire" in 54 European languages. A few other very popular proverbs from classical times that are still very much in use today in Europe and elsewhere are: "Barking *dogs* do not bite" (51 European languages), "One *swallow* does not make a summer" (49), "*Walls* have ears" (46), "One *hand* washes the other" (46), "Make *haste* slowly" (43), "*Children* and fools tell the truth" (41), "Still *waters* run deep" (38), "*Love* is blind" (37), and "*Fish* always begin to stink at the head" (33). Their general use in present-day Europe and beyond indicates a strong intellectual, ethical, and human bond among people. All of these texts express general human wisdom without any specific national or ethnic references. And since they are basically identical in all languages, they are and will continue to be effective modes of metaphorical communication among Europeans, North Americans, and other peoples.

A second source of proverbs for the entire European continent and beyond is the Bible, whose proverbs date back to classical antiquity and early wisdom literature. As a widely translated book, the Bible had a major influence on the distribution of common proverbs since the various translators were dealing with the same texts. Several dozen biblical proverbs are thus current in identical wordings in many European languages, even though speakers might not remember that they are employing proverbs from the Bible. A few obvious examples are "As you *sow,* so you reap" (Paczolay lists 52 European references; see Gal. 6:7), "He who digs a *pit* for others, falls in himself" (48; Prov. 26:27), "He that will not *work,* shall not eat" (43; 2 Thess. 3:10), "*Do* as you would be done by" (Matt. 7:12), "A *prophet* is not without honor save in his own country" (39; Matt. 13:57), "An *eye* for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" (38; Exod. 21:24), and "There is nothing new under the *sun*" (29; Eccles. 1:9). It is important to mention, however, that the number of biblical proverbs in various European languages is not identical. Much depended on the linguistic skills of the translators. In the case of Martin Luther, quite a few of his German formulations have actually become proverbial without having been proverbs in the original text.

The third source for common European proverbs is medieval Latin. It must not be forgotten that the Latin language of the Middle Ages had the status of a lingua franca, and as such it developed new proverbs that cannot be traced back to classical times. Hans Walther and Paul Gerhard Schmidt have put together thousands of medieval proverbs in their massive 9-volume collection of *Lateinische Sprichwörter und Sentenzen des Mittelalters* (1963–1986), and the 13-volume *Lexikon der Sprichwörter des romanisch-germanischen Mittelalters* (1995–2002) by Samuel Singer and Ricarda Liver shows the relationship of many of these Latin proverbs to those of the vulgate languages. Many medieval Latin proverbs in their exact translations have spread to European languages, and they certainly belong to some of the most popular proverbs today. A few well-known examples are: "*Crows* will not pick out crows' eyes" (Paczolay lists 48 European references), "Strike while the *iron* is hot" (48), "New *brooms* sweep clean" (47), "All that glitters is not *gold*" (47), "When the *cat* is away, the mice will play" (46), "The *pitcher* goes so long to the well until it breaks at last" (40), "No *rose* without thorns" (39), "At night all *cats* are grey" (38), and "*Clothes* do not make the man" (37). Of special interest is the Middle Latin proverb "Mille *via* ducunt hominem per secula ad Romam" from the twelfth century, for which Gyula Paczolay cites 33 European equivalents. In all these languages the direct loan translation of "All *roads* lead to Rome" exists. However, there are also variants that replace "Rome" with another city. In an Estonian proverb the city is St. Petersburg, a Finnish proverb refers to the old capital Turku, a Russian proverb mentions Moscow, and a Turkish proverb names Mecca. But these are variants that one might well have expected in Europe, and perhaps one day the American version "All roads lead to Washington" will also appear in a proverb collection. It probably exists, but has simply not been recorded yet. As for one speaker, I know that I have used this variant from time to time when discussing national politics.

The fourth source for common European proverbs reverses the historical move of proverbs from Europe to the United States. They are modern texts that have been disseminated since the middle of the twentieth century throughout Europe by means of the mass media. A few American proverbs that are already spreading across the European continent either in the new lingua franca of English or in new loan translations are "A *picture* is worth a thousand words," "It takes two to *tango,*" and "*Garbage* in, garbage out" (from the world of computers). Of special interest is also the "Europeanization" of the well-known American proverb "What's *good* for General Motors is good for America," which the president of General Motors Charles Erwin Wilson coined on January 15, 1953, during a Senate hearing. Willy Brandt, the renowned European politician, changed this proverb in a loan translation to fit the European context. Calling for European solidarity in a speech on November 18, 1971, he exclaimed: "Im übrigen könnte man jedoch in Abwandlung eines alten amerikanischen Sprichwortes sagen: Was gut ist für Europa, ist gut für die Vereinigten Staaten. Die Zeit des Feiertags-Europäertums ist vorbei, Europa ist unser Alltag" (All around one could say by changing an old American proverb: What is good for Europe, is good for the United States. The time of holiday-Europeanness is over, Europe is our normal workday). One is inclined to change the sixteenth-century proverb "*Handsome* is as handsome does" to the new proverbial slogan "Europe is as Europe does" to fit the new European consciousness as the move towards unity continues (Mieder 2000). In any case, the United States and its English language are not only spreading new words throughout Europe and the rest of the world, they are also disseminating new proverbs from popular culture (music, film, etc.) and the mass media (advertisements, cartoons, etc.) as bits of wisdom that fit the twenty-first century.

TRADITIONAL FORMS RELATED TO THE PROVERB

Although this book is concerned primarily with proverbs as such, it is of interest to take at least a cursory glance at some of the other proverbial genres (see Barley 1974). While proverbs are complete thoughts that can stand by themselves, there are such subgenres as proverbial expressions, proverbial comparisons, proverbial exaggerations, and twin (binary) formulas, which are fragmentary and for the most part metaphorical phrases that must be integrated into a sentence. Proverbial expressions are usually verbal phrases, as for example "to throw the *book* at someone," "to cry over spilled *milk,*" "to blow one's own *horn,*" "to be a *tempest* in a teacup," "to look for a *needle* in a haystack," "to be a stumbling *block,*" "to be between a *rock* and a hard place," and "to carry *coals* to Newcastle." Proverbial comparisons can conveniently be divided into two structural groups. The first follows the pattern of "as X as Y," as indicated by such common comparisons as "as *black* as night," "as *busy* as a bee," "as *clear* as daylight," "as *drunk* as a fish," "as *mad* as a hatter," "as *soft* as putty," and "as *swift* as the wind." The second group is based on a verbal comparison with "like": "to *work* like a dog," "to *look* like a million dollars," "to *watch* like a hawk," "to *sleep* like a lamb," "to *spend* money like a drunken sailor," "to *squeal* like a pig," and "to *vanish* like snow." As can be seen from just these examples, such texts add much metaphorical expressiveness both to oral and written communication. Nevertheless, English teachers tend to discourage their students from using what they call "clichés" in their various writing assignments. They might be partially correct in these admonitions, especially when their students overuse them. But an occasional proverbial statement at the right place and time is quite appropriate for emphasis and colorful imagery. One need only to look at the writings of such Nobel prize winners for literature as Thomas Mann, Eugene O'Neill, or Winston S. Churchill to see that they made repeated and effective use of proverbial language (see Bryan and Mieder 1995; Mieder and Bryan 1995).

Proverbial exaggerations can also take on important stylistic functions, especially if one wants to ridicule a person or situation. Such exaggerations usually describe the extraordinary degree to which someone or something possesses a certain characteristic. Many of these formulaic phrases are based on the structural pattern "so ... (that)," as is the case in the following examples: "He's so *angry* he can't spit straight," "She is so *stupid* that she is unable to boil water without burning it," "It *rained* so hard that the water stood 10 feet out of the well," "He is so *miserly* that he crawls under the door to save the hinges," "She moves so *slowly* that you can watch the snails whiz by," and "You are so *stingy* you would take candy from a child." There is a great deal of folk humor in these exaggerations, but depending on how and in what context they are uttered, they can take on a very satirical tone. But still, these phrases are certainly more entertaining and creative than some of the standard curses based on scatological expletives.

So-called twin (binary) formulas are traditional word pairs that are linked together by alliteration and/or rhyme, as for example "*short* and sweet," "*tit* for tat," "*spick* and span," "*rags* and riches," "*live* and learn," "*sink* or swim," and "*men* and mice." None of these proverbial phrases or phraseological units (phraseologisms), as the linguists prefer to refer to them, contain any complete thought or wisdom. But they are proverbial in that they are traditional and metaphorical, being employed even more frequently than actual proverbs. While they supply colorful elements of folk speech to oral and written communication, they cannot take on an existence by themselves. Employing a metaphor from the building trade, one might say that proverbs are the bricks, while proverbial phrases are the mortar.

But proverbs can at times hit people like a hard brick with their continuous claim of moral authority and didactic intent. While the folk has usually accepted proverbs at face value, eagerly handing them on from generation to generation, there have obviously also been moments where people have been fed up with all of this straightforward wisdom. Some comic relief was desired, and just as tall tales provide an outlet for folk humor in the realm of folk narratives, so-called wellerisms are replete with humor, irony, and satire. Wellerisms consist of a triadic structure: (1) a statement (often a proverb), (2) an identification of a speaker (a person or animal), and (3) a phrase that places the statement into an unexpected situation. In the case where proverbs make up the first part, their claim to truth or wisdom is questioned by the resulting pun. The term "wellerism" is a scholarly designation and has made its way into only a few dictionaries. It is based on the character of Sam Weller in Charles Dickens's novel *The Pickwick Papers* (1837), because Weller delighted in using these triadic structures (see Baer 1983; Bryan and Mieder 1997). Following the success of the novel in the nineteenth century, there was quite a craze of publishing made-up wellerisms in the British and American press. Some of them were reprinted again and again and took on a life of their own as traditional wellerisms. But the genre was well established long before Dickens, and wellerisms have been recorded for centuries in many languages. Here then are a few traditional texts that employ a proverb in their first part:

"*Business* before pleasure," as the man said when he kissed his wife before he went out to make love to his neighbor's.

"Much *cry* and sm' wool," as the barber said when he sheared the sow.

"All *flesh* is grass," as the horse said when he bit a piece out of a man's arm.

"Every *evil* is followed by some good," as the man said when his wife died the day after he became bankrupt.

"Every *little* bit helps," as the old lady said when she pissed in the ocean to help drown her husband.

"*Silence* gives consent," as the man said when he kissed the dumb [mute] woman.

"Where there's a *will,* there's a way," as the hog said when he rooted the back gate off its hinges to come at the kitchen swill barrel.

"Everyone to his own *taste,*" as the farmer said when he kissed the cow.

"*Tit* for tat," quoth the wife when she farted at the thunder.

"One good *turn* deserves another," said the customer, as he padded the chorus girls' tights.

But enough already. As can be seen from these examples and from many more in Wolfgang Mieder's and Stewart A. Kingsbury's *A Dictionary of Wellerisms* (1994), the traditional humor of wellerisms quite easily enters the sexual and scatological spheres. Wellerisms are thus clear indications that solid proverbs could serve as the start of some very basic humor. All of this is not to say that there are no folk proverbs that contain imagery from the vulgar tongue. New proverbs are still created along this line, as for example "If you got them by the *balls,* their hearts and minds will follow," "*Opinions* are like assholes—everybody's got one," and "It's better to be *pissed* off than pissed on." And, of course, there is also the American proverb "*Shit* happens" that started to appear on bumper stickers during the 1980s (see Doyle 1996). It is a succinct text, it consists of a topic and a comment, it expresses a truth in metaphorical language, and it has definitely gained currency among my students. But it can also be heard among the older generation, leaving no doubt that it has become a bona fide proverb. It will be interesting to see whether paremiographers of the future will include the text in their proverb collections. Their earlier colleagues have left most proverbs of this type out of their compilations, an unfortunate example of censorship in light of the fact that folk proverbs do indeed contain elements of *all* aspects of life.

THE INTERNATIONAL TYPE SYSTEM OF PROVERBS

The organization of thousands of proverbs into a meaningful order presents major lexicographical challenges. Fortunately Matti Kuusi (1914–1998) and subsequently his daughter Outi Lauhakangas have created an international classification system of proverbs that starts out with 13 main themes, which for the most part represent basic aspects of human life:

A. Practical knowledge of nature
B. Faith and basic attitudes
C. Basic observations and socio-logic
D. The world and human life
E. Sense of proportion
F. Concepts of morality
G. Social life
H. Social interaction
J. Communication

K. Social position
L. Agreements and norms
M. Coping and learning
T. Time and sense of time

Under the 13 main themes there are 52 main classes (from A1 to T4). The main theme of "G Social life," having 8 main classes, may serve as an example here:

G. Social life
  G1 kinship
  G2 development—a person's background
  G3 child : parents / upbringing
  G4 man : woman / ranking and position of both sexes
  G5 marriage
  G6 youth : old age
  G7 health : illness
  G8 death / the dead

The 52 main classes are once again subdivided into 325 subgroups with different numbers of subgroups for each main class. Some subgroups register 7 or fewer proverb types, but there are also those subgroups that list 50 or more types. Thus subgroup "G8g life from death" contains merely 6 proverb types, while subgroup "G5e woman and man—the right moment of offer of marriage, norms, criteria of choosing (mostly by men)" offers 73 proverb types! An example from subgroup G8g is the Japanese text "A *candle,* by consuming itself, gives light to others," and another example from subgroup G5e is the English proverb "Never seemed a *prison* fair or a mistress foul."

This obviously is a very complex classification system with the intent of establishing universals or archetypes of human thinking. Basing his studies on a large comparative database of proverbs from basically every corner of the world, Kuusi's idea of a universal "proverb type" in the broadest sense of that word "encompasses similar proverb types from different nations, presenting them as a global type having a common idea. That is why we can speak of universal proverb types if we wish to compare them to our local proverb titles or proverb types in the narrowest sense of the word. [. . .] There are no standard models or patterns for a proverb type. In the Matti Kuusi type system the concept of type is not very strict and it moves between a relatively abstract proverb title [...] to a cluster of proverbs using different images but having the same idea" (Lauhakangas 2001: 62–63; see Mieder 2001).

Since the death of Matti Kuusi in 1998, his daughter Outi Lauhakangas has continued his fascinating and extremely important work, presenting a list of over 700 "universal [proverb] types and their criteria" (Lauhakangas 2001: 125–158), which are in most cases more like clusters of proverb types, having variants from four main cultural areas: European, African, Islamic, and Asiatic cultures. With the new classification system now finished, and with its inclusion of universal proverb types, international studies of an individual proverb type can be carried out synchronically *and* diachronically as well as contextually, semantically, functionally, and so on.

Let me give at least one example of the universal proverb types that can be found under the main theme "C" (Basic observations and socio-logic) and its main class "C6" (appearance : internal values). The subgroup "C6c" (everything is not as it appears; the deceptiveness of identifying marks [- -]) includes the following universal types:

> All that glitters is not *gold.*
>
> All are not *hunters* that blow the horn.
>
> There are more *maids* than Maukin and more men than Michael.
>
> A *wolf* in sheep's clothing.
>
> All are good *maids,* but whence come the bad wives?

The classification system includes elaborate notations with incredible information and, above all, also cross-references to other proverb types. This takes care of the problem of the at times somewhat subjective assignment of proverbs to a certain position in the classification system.. And, to be sure, the computerized database does (thank God!) permit a precise search by key words (usually nouns) that will help to locate each and every proverb in the system if one is not certain under what main theme, main class, and subgroup it might have been registered by Matti Kuusi and Outi Lauhakangas.

Lauhakangas makes a number of honest and critical comments regarding her father's and her classification system, basically admitting to its somewhat subjective nature:

> It is obvious that the viewpoint or the aim of the interpreter has an effect on defining proverb texts as a proverb type. [...] The Matti Kuusi international type system of proverbs represents only one solution to

> the classification of proverbs—and not necessarily the best. It has primarily been an attempt to find a practical way to arrange a large collection of literature [i.e., proverbs found in collections] references. [...] We can and we should say that the Matti Kuusi index is permanently "under construction." Consequently also the file of universal proverb types is unfinished. (Lauhakangas 2001: 76)

This is the way it should be! Yes, the classification system might not be the very best solution, but there is no better index at this time. And perhaps there will never be another research team as that of Matti Kuusi and Outi Lauhakangas who would be willing to even attempt to work out a practical and international type system. It should gladly, enthusiastically, and thankfully be accepted and worked with by international scholars.

It is indeed an open system that will permanently be under construction, and much work lies ahead for Outi Lauhakangas. Her father did indeed cast his net very widely regarding the hundreds of proverb collections used in establishing the classification system. And yet, there are many older and above all newer major proverb collections waiting to be included in the database. A few comparative collections that must be integrated are: Jens Aage Stabell Bilgrav, *20,000 Proverbs and Their Equivalents in German, French, Swedish, Danish* (1985), Henryk L. Cox, *Spreekwoordenboek: Nederlands, Fries, Afrikaans, Engels, Duits, Frans, Spaans, Latijn* (2000), Harold V. Cordry, *The Multicultural Dictionary of Proverbs* (1997), Luis Iscla, *English Proverbs and Their Near Equivalents in Spanish, French, Italian and Latin* (1995), and Emanuel Strauss, *Dictionary of European Proverbs* (1994). Of utmost importance, especially for diachronic purposes, are the 13 volumes of Samuel Singer's and Ricarda Liver's *Thesaurus proverbiorum medii aevi. Lexikon der Sprichwörter des romanisch-germanischen Mittelalters* (1995–2002). The numerous proverbs of important bilingual and single-language collections that also need to be incorporated are among others those by John Lazarus, *A Dictionary of Tamil Proverbs* (1894 [1991]), Peter Mertvago, *The Comparative Russian-English Dictionary of Russian Proverbs and Sayings* (1995), Wolfgang Mieder, Stewart A. Kingsbury, and Kelsie B. Harder, *A Dictionary of American Proverbs* (1992), Ryszard Pachocinski, *Proverbs of Africa* (1996), Albert Scheven, *Swahili Proverbs* (1981), Bartlett Jere Whiting, *Modern Proverbs and Proverbial Sayings* (1989), and Metin Yurtbasi, *A Dictionary of Turkish Proverbs* (1993).

There is much work to be done, as Matti Kuusi knew and Outi Lauhakangas is only too aware of at this time. In the best of all worlds, Lauhakangas should now continue with the "work in progress" of this truly unique international type system of proverbs. She knows its structure and intricacies the best, and she can go on to expand the system in the most consistent way possible, both according to the ideas of her father as well as her own. This relates not only to older proverbs but also to such new texts as for example "*Hurry* up and wait," "One man's *trash* is another man's treasure," and "It's the *thought* that counts." After all, the creation of new proverbs is not over, and it behooves scholars to integrate them into the international classification system to see how such innovative texts fit into the universal type system.

Even if the work on this international type system of proverbs were to stop completely at this time, paremiologists have a fantastic and beneficial research tool at their disposal for serious comparative proverb scholarship. The work must go on, but doubtlessly the *International Type System of Proverbs* with its computer database will reign as *the* standard work in comparative paremiography and paremiology. Generations of scholars will benefit from this classification system as they continue to look for universal bits of human wisdom in the form of proverbs.

TYPES OF INTERNATIONAL PROVERB COLLECTIONS

The *International Type System of Proverbs* just described is intended for serious comparative work by experts. But for most proverb research there are numerous extremely useful multilingual proverb collections available that simply list proverb equivalents. The preferred setup is to list the proverbs alphabetically by key word in the language of the compiler with the various foreign language equivalents registered underneath. The value of such collections is clearly enhanced if they also contain key-word indices of the proverbs in the target languages, making them accessible reference works especially for translators. While some collections do include sources and other scholarly references (see for example Kuusi et al. 1985; Paczolay 1997), most of these volumes on the market cite texts alone. They are dictionaries and don't claim to be more than that. A typical example is the entry for "*Love* is blind" in Jerzy Gluski's *Proverbs: A Comparative Book of English, French, German, Italian, Spanish and Russian Proverbs with a Latin Appendix* (1971):

En	Love is blind.*
Fr	L'amour est aveugle.
De	Die Liebe ist blind.
It	L'amore è ceco.
El	El amor es ciego
Ru	Liubov' clepa.

(Gluski 1971: 159)

The asterisk after the English text indicates that a Latin version is listed in the appendix as "Amor caecus." As can be seen from the linguistically identical foreign language texts, the Latin proverb was loan translated in its precise wording. Since the proverb goes back to classical antiquity, it actually entered many more languages that are included in those international proverb dictionaries that list additional foreign languages.

There is a second group of international proverb collections that has quite another purpose. Their compilers simply want to indicate what proverbs exist in other cultures about a certain theme. The proverbs are all cited in translation and the individual texts are not necessarily equivalents of each other. Harold V. Cordry's *The Multicultural Dictionary of Proverbs* (1997) offers a good example for proverbs from different cultures about "possession":

Possession

Better hold by a *hair* than draw by a tether. *Scottish*
Better to *have* than to wish. *English*
Blessed are those who *possess. Latin*
Everything goes to him who has *nothing. French*
Father's *having* and mother's having is not like having oneself. *Chinese*
Great *possessions* are great cares. *American*
So much as you *have,* so much are you sure of. *Spanish*
To each his *own. Latin*
Who has the *hilt* has the blade. *Welsh*
You can't *take* it with you. *American*

(Cordry 1997: 204–205)

These examples represent only about a fourth of the proverbs listed under the theme of "possession," but it suffices to show that this type of classification makes it possible to find various types of proverbs that express wisdom along these lines without necessarily being equivalents of each other.

A third group of international dictionaries again registers hundreds of proverbs from around the world in but one language, but this time each text contains the same key word and the individual proverbs are arranged alphabetically. My own *Encyclopedia of World Proverbs* (1986) follows this particular classification system, as can be seen from this selection of examples under the noun "life":

Life

A good *life* defers wrinkles. *Spanish*
An ill *life* makes an ill end. *Scottish*
All of *life* is a struggle. *Yiddish*

Human *life* is like a candle. *Albanian*
Life is more fragile than the morning dew. *Japanese*
Living *life* is not like crossing a field. *Russian*
Long *life* has misery. *English*
The *life* of man is as spotted as a woodpecker's coat. *Latvian*
There is *life* and death in the quiver. *African (Ovambo)*
When *life* is exhausted, death comes. *Vietnamese*
(Mieder 1986: 276–277)

And finally, there is a fourth group of international proverb collections that just lists proverbs from different languages in groups of their own. Gerd de Ley has arranged his *International Dictionary of Proverbs* (1998) in this fashion. He lists proverbs from 300 different nations and languages in English translation, ranging from just a few proverbs to several pages of them per language. For Iraq he offers the following selection:

Iraq

A beautiful *bride* needs no dowry.
Tell me who your *friends* are, and I'll tell you who you are.
One night of *anarchy* does more harm than a hundred years of tyranny.
Whoever writes a *book,* should be ready to accept criticism.
Stealing leads to poverty.
Sometimes you have to sacrifice your *beard* in order to save your head.
The *poor* are the silent of the land.
The *day* will wipe out all the promises of the night.
(Ley 1998: 192–193)

Unless a collection of this type has at least a comprehensive key-word index of the proverbs, it is extremely difficult to find proverbs dealing with a particular subject among the various languages.

The many bilingual collections follow similar classification systems. The proverbs are arranged either by key words or by general themes. The smaller popular volumes do not contain indices, but the larger dictionaries provide them so that proverbs in both languages can be located with ease. There are, of course, literally hundreds of bilingual collections, once again being of particular use to translators and people acquiring a foreign language.

MAJOR ANGLO-AMERICAN PROVERB COLLECTIONS

Single-language proverb collections also follow two basic classification systems, arranging the texts either by key words or by themes. There are thousands of collections for the many languages of the world. To be sure, hundreds of collections exist also for the English language, of which many are intended for the popular market. This is especially the case for regional or dialect collections, although they too can adhere to rigid scholarly standards by providing detailed linguistic and historical annotations (see bibliography).

Regarding the major scholarly English-language proverb collections, it can be said with justifiable pride that the work by Anglo-American paremiographers has served as the model for serious historical proverb dictionaries in other countries. As early as the 1920s, G.L. Apperson published his impressive *English Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases: A Historical Dictionary* (1929 [1969, 1993]), which was followed by William George Smith's *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs* (1935 [1970, 3rd edition by F.P. Wilson]). There is also Morris Palmer Tilley's monumental *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1950), and when Bartlett Jere Whiting published his equally invaluable dictionary of *Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases from English Writings Mainly Before 1500* (1968), paremiographers had assembled historical references for English proverbs ranging from the Middle Ages to the mid-twentieth century. In the 1950s the two friends Archer Taylor and Bartlett Jere Whiting decided to add an American component to this historical survey by jointly assembling *A Dictionary of American Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases, 1820–1880* (1958). And then, while Taylor busied himself with other paremiological and folkloristic projects, the avid reader Bartlett Jere Whiting came out with his important volume of *Early American Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases* (1977). A dozen years later Whiting completed the survey of American references for English-language proverbs with his large collection of *Modern Proverbs and Proverbial Sayings* (1989). Three years later my co-editors Stewart A. Kingsbury and Kelsie B. Harder and I added *A Dictionary of American Proverbs* (1992) to these volumes. Our dictionary is based on thousands of proverbs and their variants collected during 1945 to 1985 in the United States and parts of Canada, thus giving a picture of the proverbs that were in fact in oral use. Where possible, we provided historical references from the earlier volumes mentioned here. But there are certainly many proverbs in this volume that had not been registered before, taking Anglo-American paremiography a few steps further as well. And finally, Gregory Titelman's *Dictionary of Popular Proverbs & Sayings* (1996) needs to be added to this list, since he includes many historical references from the mass media of the twentieth century. It should also be noted that these valuable dictionaries, with the exception of *A Dictionary of American Proverbs,* also include proverbial expressions, proverbial comparisons, twin formulas, and at least some wellerisms.

Scholars or students seriously interested in the origin and history of an English-language proverb have thus incredible and unmatched resources at their disposal. Assuming as an example that they wish to know the origin and dissemination of the proverb "A burnt *child* dreads the fire" in English (it was loan translated into English and other languages from medieval Latin; see Singer and Liver 1995–2002: II,93), they will find a truly impressive number of historical references, albeit with some duplications:

Apperson 1929 (1969, 1993): 73: 7 references from the years 1300, 1400, 1580, 1616, 1725, 1760, 1820.

Smith 1935: no references, but in the 2nd edition of 1948: 70: 12 references from the years 1300 (twice), 1350, 1400, 1450, 1470, 1546, 1553, 1580, 1592, 1670, 1837 (no change in the 3rd edition of 1970: 92).

Tilley 1950: 96: 17 references from the years 1515, 1536, 1540, 1552, 1566, 1578, 1598, 1614, 1616 (twice), 1639, 1659, 1666, 1668, 1670, 1721, 1732.

Whiting 1968: 81: 16 references from the years 1250, 1325, 1340, 1395, 1400 (twice), 1406, 1410, 1412, 1450 (twice), 1470 (twice), 1484, 1515, 1546.

Taylor and Whiting 1958: 68: 3 references from the years 1817, 1818, 1855.

Whiting 1977: 69–70: 13 references from the years 1755, 1775 (thrice), 1777, 1781, 1787 (twice), 1815 (twice), 1816, 1817, 1844.

Whiting 1989: 110–111: 9 references from the years 1913, 1919, 1922, 1935 (twice), 1950, 1957, 1968, 1975.

Mieder, Kingsbury, and Harder 1992: 95: 6 references of variants recorded in the United States between 1945 and 1985.

Titelman 1996: 35: 5 references from the years 1250, 1546, 1755, 1913, 1984.

This is an imposing historical record of 88 references counting a few duplicates. The following citations represent some highlights, with names of authors in whose works they were located in parentheses:

1250:	Brend child fuir fordredeth. (Hendyng)
1395:	O! fy, for shame! they that han been brent, Allas! kan they nat flee the fires heete? (Chaucer)
1410:	For brent child dredith fyer. (Lydgate)
1484:	Brent chylde fyre dredeth. (Caxton)
1515:	For children brent still after drede the fire. (Barclay)
1546:	And burnt childe fyre dredth. (Heywood)
1580:	A burnt childe dreadeth the fire. (Lyly)

1614: Burnt child fire dreades. (Camden)
1670: The burnt child dreads the fire. (Ray)
1787: I hope and pray our own country may have wisdom sufficient to keep herself out of the fire. I am sure she has been a sufficiently burnt child. (John Adams)
1855: It's only the child that burns its fingers that dreads the fire. (Haliburton)
1913: As a burnt child would recoil from fire. (Dreiser)
1935: He's a burnt child who dreads the fire. (Gardner)
1975: A burnt child dreads the fire. (Russell)

Just these few examples suffice to show that as with all folklore, there are variants also of folk proverbs. In this case the wording "A burnt child dreads the fire" has become the standard form. The main point is that the consulted nine proverb dictionaries supplied this information in just the time it took to find the proverb under discussion in them. And, to be sure, there are a number of other helpful Anglo-American proverb collections to round out the results (see Dent 1981 and 1984, Flavell 1993, Hazlitt 1869 [1969], Lean 1902–1904 [1969, 2000], Simpson 1982 [1998], etc.).

VARIOUS SPECIALIZED PROVERB COLLECTIONS

While the major proverb collections register as many proverbs as possible, there exist also specialized proverb dictionaries for various subject matters, as for example collections of regional proverbs, medical proverbs, weather proverbs, anti-proverbs, and so on. They too are set up according to key words or themes, and many of them are of a more popular nature. There is no need to list titles here (see "Regional and Thematic Proverb Collections" in the bibliography), but a few comments regarding their content and purpose are warranted.

It should be noted that it is extremely difficult to ascertain which proverbs might belong to a particular region of the United States (see above all Hendrickson 1992–2000). The problem is even more vexing when scholars have put forth proverb collections of particular states. Thus, when I published my small popular book *Talk Less and Say More: Vermont Proverbs* (1986), I added the following statement at the end of the introduction:

> Some proverbs in this small collection like "*Vermont* has only two seasons—winter and the Fourth of July" or "It's time to plant *corn* when the icicles fall off the ledge on Snake Mountain" are obviously truly Vermont proverbs, but how about such proverbs as "*Sap* runs best after a sharp frost," "The *world* is your cow, but you have to do the milking,"

> or "Every cider *apple* has a worm?" They sound like they originated in Vermont, but why not in New Hampshire or New York? Only through painstaking research of each individual proverb might the actual origin come to light, but for many such texts the proof of a Vermont source would be impossible. What is of importance is that many of the proverbs in the present collection probably originated among Vermonters and that the rest are without doubt current in the state of Vermont. Heeding these points, we can legitimately call the present collection "Vermont Proverbs." (Mieder 1986: 9)

What I was trying to say in this paragraph was that collections that indicate in their title that they contain texts from a particular region or state always imply the more general claim that they are known and used there, but that they did not necessarily originate at that location. It follows that regional or state collections are of considerably higher value if the proverbs were in fact collected from oral sources.

Weather proverbs also present a problem since many of them are not really bona fide proverbs in the scholarly interpretation of the proverb genre. While normal folk proverbs can be used in multiple contexts, many weather proverbs are prognostic signs and do not exhibit any metaphorical character (see Arora 1991; Dundes 1984). Their major function is to predict the weather. They are based on long observations of natural phenomena by people who couched their findings into proverbial form. Since weather proverbs usually contain prognostic statements, they have also been called predictive sayings, weather rules, and weather signs. Their intent is to establish a causal or logical relationship between two natural events that will predict the weather of the next hour, day, week, month, or even year. Little wonder that many predictive sayings follow the basic structure of "If (When) A then B," as for example in "If it *rains* before seven, it will clear by eleven," "When the *cat* in February lies in the sun, she will again creep behind the stove in March," and "If the *spring* is cold and wet, then the autumn will be hot and dry." Some of these "proverbs" are in fact superstitions, as illustrated by "When it *rains* and the sun shines, the devil is beating his grandmother." Matti Kuusi wrote a 420-page book on *Regen bei Sonnenschein* (1957) about the many variants that exist around the world of this superstition couched in proverbial language, to wit the following examples:

> When it rains and the sun shines,
> ... foxes are on a marriage parade. (Japanese)
> ... the devil is getting married. (Bulgarian)

...the devil is beating his wife. (Hungarian)
...witches are doing their wash. (Polish)
...the gypsies are washing their children. (Finnish)
...a tailor is going to hell. (Danish)
...mushrooms are growing. (Russian)
...good weather is coming. (German)
...husband and wife are quarreling. (Vietnamese)

But there are also such proverbs as "Make *hay* while the sun shines," "Every *cloud* has a silver lining," "*Lightning* never strikes twice in the same place," and "*April* showers bring May flowers" that can be used figuratively even though they relate to some weather matters. In any case, not all of these weather signs can be reduced to superstitions, and modern meteorologists have gone to great lengths to prove some of the proverbial weather signs as scientifically valid (see Brunt 1946; Mieder 1996b), including the well-known predictive saying "Red *sky* at night, sailor's delight; red sky in the morning, sailor take warning." In any case, the folk and the collectors usually look at various weather expressions as proverbs (see Dunwoody 1883; Freier 1992; Garriott 1903 [1971]; Inwards 1898 [1994]; Lee 1976). Cognizant of the problems with the so-called genre of "weather proverbs," my co-editors Stewart A. and Mildred E. Kingsbury and I chose the title *Weather Wisdom: Proverbs, Superstitions, and Signs* (1996) for our annotated collection of over four thousand such sayings that were recorded in North America during the second half of the twentieth century.

While there are a number of major collections registering legal and medical proverbs in German, there are only some minor treatises of them with a few examples in English (see Bond 1936; Elmquist 1934–1935; Mieder 1991). Already Jacob Grimm had shown much interest in rules of law couched in proverbs, with the study of folk law being part of the curriculum of folklore studies at German universities. It would certainly be desirable if someone were to put together an English-language collection of such legal proverbs as "*Possession* is nine (eleven) points of the law" (see Geise 1999), "*Finders,* keepers," "*Ignorance* of the law is no excuse," "A man's *home* is his castle," and "First *come,* first served." The same holds true for medical proverbs, as for example, "Stuff a *cold* and starve a fever" (see Gallacher 1942), "One hour's *sleep* before midnight is worth three after," "Never rub your *eye* but with your elbow," "An *apple* a day keeps the doctor away," and the more recent "When you hear *hoofbeats,* think horses, not zebras" (Dundes, Streiff, and Dundes 1999). The last proverb is a medical diagnostic proverb, telling especially young physicians to look for the obvious first when trying to determine the illness of a patient. Helmut Seidl has put together at least a German-English comparative collection of medical proverbs with many annotations with the title of *Medizinische Sprichwörter im Englischen und Deutschen* (1982). There are also E.U.C. Ezejideaku's paper on "Disability and the Disabled in Igbo Proverbs" (2003) and Yisa Kehinde Yusuf's and Joyce T. Methangwane's study on "Proverbs and HIV/AIDS" (2003) that show how proverbs are used to describe and combat illnesses. Of course, many other specialized collections could follow on other subjects. There are plenty of small collections of proverbs on love, animals, plants, the sea, and so on. There are also two major treatises with hundreds of proverbs about women (see Kerschen 1998; Rittersbacher 2002), many of them unfortunately of a misogynist nature, to wit "A woman's *tongue* wags like a lamb's tail" from the sixteenth century or "*Diamonds* are a girl's best friend" of newer twentieth-century vintage. Little wonder that feminists created the slogan turned proverb "A *woman* without a man is like a fish without a bicycle" during the 1970s to combat such gender stereotyping.

Of late, paremiographers have also delighted in putting together collections of so-called anti-proverbs, that is, parodied, twisted, or fractured proverbs that reveal humorous or satirical speech play with traditional proverbial wisdom (see Mieder and Litovkina 1999; Mieder 2003). For example, the proverb "A *fool* and his money are soon parted" has resulted in such anti-proverbs as "A fool and his father's money are soon parted," "A fool and his money are soon popular," "A fool and his money stabilize the economy," "A fool and his wife are soon parted," "A married man and his money are soon parted," "A widow and her money are soon courted," "If a fool and his money are soon parted, why are there so many rich fools?," and "There was a time when a fool and his money were soon parted, but now it happens to everybody" (Mieder 2003: 33). As can be seen, anti-proverbs often follow the structure of the original proverb while changing some of the individual words. At other times the wisdom of the proverb is put into question by adding a contradictory phrase beginning with the conjunction "but." Of course, it is the juxtaposition of the traditional proverb with the innovative anti-proverb that makes these puns so effective. The anti-proverbs also indicate clearly that the structure and wording of proverbs are by no means sacrosanct. The fixity of proverbs is not as rigid as it once was believed to be. Unintentional variants have always existed in as much as proverbs are part of folklore, but intentional variations have also been part of the use and function of proverbs, both oral and written. And yet, more often than not proverbs are cited in their standard traditional form to add some common sense to human communication.

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