Marriage Seen through Proverbs and Anti-Proverbs

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By

Anna T. Litovkina and Wolfgang Mieder

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PREFACE

In 1999 *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship* in cooperation with the International Studies Program (The University of Vermont, Burlington) published our book *Twisted Wisdom: Modern Anti-Proverbs*, which represented the first collection of proverb transformations (or anti-proverbs) in the English language. In 2006, our second collection of anti-proverbs was published: *Old Proverbs Never Die, They Just Diversify: a Collection of Anti-Proverbs*. While our first compilation contained about 3,000 texts based on 320 traditional Anglo-American proverbs, the second included over 5,000 texts based on 580 traditional Anglo-American proverbs, also providing a much longer and more detailed introduction. The collections were merely a step in the right direction of registering the wealth of extremely rich material that awaited a more systematic collection and study. The books have generated additional interest in the fascinating world of anti-proverbs from other languages and cultures, inspiring reviews as well as a score of dissertations, books, and articles.

This book is our fourth one written together. The second, *"A közmondást nem hiába mondják": Vizsgálatok a proverbiumok természetéről és használatáról* {"A Proverb is not Said in Vain": a Study of the Nature and Use of Proverbs}, was published in 2005 by the Tinta Publishing House (Budapest). It might be of interest that both of us as the authors of this book do not live in the country we were born in, and furthermore are not even native speakers of English.

Originally from Russia, Anna T. Litovkina lives in Hungary and is currently associate professor in the Department of English Language and Literature at J. Selye University, Komárno, Slovakia. She holds a PhD in ethnography and is a habilitated doctor in linguistics. She has taught courses on linguistics, folklore, and cultural studies, including Anglo-American proverbs, American humour, and American folklore. Besides more than one hundred articles on folklore and linguistics, she is the author of eighteen books on proverbs, including "*Do You Serve Lawyers and Politicians Here*?*": Stereotyped Lawyers and Politicians in Anglo-American Jokes and Anti-Proverbs* (2016) and *Women through Anti-Proverbs* (2018a). She is the co-editor of eleven volumes on humour, including a special issue of *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica* 52, no. 1, on

Anti-Proverbs in Contemporary Societies (2007, with Carl Lindahl) and "*Hungarian Humour*" (2012, with Péter Medgyes, Judith Sollosy, and Dorota Brzozowska).

Wolfgang Mieder comes from Germany but makes his home in Vermont, United States, where he is a professor of German and Folklore at the University of Vermont in Burlington. He earned his PhD from Michigan State University in 1970. From 1977 to 2008 he was chairperson of the Department of German and Russian. In 1980 he was named a university scholar, and in 1987 received the Outstanding Faculty Award. He also obtained a Certificate of Merit from the American Association of Teachers of German in 1995, and was recognized in the same year with an Award for Excellence in Teaching. In 1997 he was honoured with the Giuseppe Pitrè International Folklore Prize and the European Fairy Tale Prize, and the Lifetime Scholarly Achievement Award from the American Folklore Society followed in 2012. He was named University Distinguished Professor of German and Folklore in May 2013, and recognized with a "doctor honoris causa" from the University of Athens in 2014 and the University of Bucharest in 2015. While his scholarship ranges from fairy tales, legends, and folk songs to philological and literary studies, his expertise lies above all in international paremiology, i.e. the study of proverbs. Many of his publications deal with the use and function of proverbs in literature, the mass media, art, politics, advertising, etc. His numerous books and articles have appeared in the United States and several European, African, and Asian countries. He is also the founding editor of *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship* (1984ff.).

We hope that *Marriage Seen Through Proverbs and Anti-Proverbs* will appeal to a wide range of readers – from the casually interested general reader to the scholar, namely paremiologist (proverb scholar), paremiographer (proverb collector), lexicographer, linguist, anthropologist, literary scholar, sociologist, semiotician, folklorist, psychologist, humour researcher, sociologist, cultural historian, and anyone interested in Anglo-American proverbs and humour. As Europeans with a keen interest in American culture, and especially its proverbs and humour, we feel that, similar to our collections of anti-proverbs, *Marriage Seen Through Proverbs and Anti-Proverbs* will also be of significance to scholars and students both in and outside of the United States.

As a caveat, we want to stress that we do not condone any of the chauvinistic, misogynist, or otherwise stereotypical views expressed in the many texts included in our book. Since they are part and parcel of

proverbs, anti-proverbs, and quotations of various types, we think it our scholarly obligation to include them as part of a complete picture. We also want to point out that our large corpus does not yet include texts dealing with same-sex marriage.

Our joint efforts towards putting our fourth book together have brought us much joy and excitement, and the fact that a Russian and German scholar can assemble yet another book together can well be seen as a positive sign of international cooperation and friendship. It gives us much pleasure to dedicate this book in fond memory to our parents.

April 2019 Anna T. Litovkina, Budapest,
and Wolfgang Mieder, Burlington, Vermont

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Wolfgang Mieder thanks his five deceased friends Alan Dundes, Arvo Krikmann, Matti Kuusi, Elisabeth Piirainen, and Lutz Röhrich for many wonderful years of working together on various scholarly projects. He has also benefited greatly from his paremiological friends Shirley Arora, Harald Burger, František Čermák, Charles Clay Doyle, Peter Ďurčo, Wolfgang Eismann, Sabine Fiedler, Lisa Haas, Liisa Granbom-Herranen, Peter Grzybek, Pekka Hakamies, Hrisztalina Hrisztova-Gotthardt, Anna Konstantinova, Jarmo Korhonen, Outi Lauhakangas, Marcas Mac Coinnigh, Valerij Mokienko, Andreas Nolte, Neal R. Norrick, Roumyana Petrova, Andrey Reznikov, Kathrin Steyer, Daniel Villers, Harry Walter, Fionnuala Carson Williams, Stephen Winick, and many others from the

[1] The book was written in the framework of KEGA grant project *Improving creativity and teaching English as a foreign language creatively at primary and secondary schools* Project no. 006UJS-4/2019 at the J. Selye University, Faculty of Education.

international community of proverb scholars. Since 1984, it has been such an honour for him to serve paremiologists throughout the world in his role as the founding editor of *Proverbium: International Yearbook of Proverb Scholarship*. He is especially thankful for all those colleagues and friends who have taken up his concept of anti-proverbs and done pioneering work on such innovative texts in their languages and cultures. Of course, he also wishes to express his sincere appreciation for all the spirited interest and helpful work that his students have provided for so many years.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK

The Importance of Marriage in Proverbs from Different Cultures

A cursory glance at any collection of proverbs of various nations instantly reveals many striking similarities between proverbs about marriage. Let the proverbs below speak for themselves (for more on marriage in proverbs from different cultures, see also Thiselton-Dyer (1906), Kerschen (1998), Mieder (1985; 1986; 1989), Mieder, Kingsbury, and Harder (1992), Mieder and Kingsbury (1994), Schipper (2003), Rittersbacher (2002), Perlinska (1996), Daniel (2008), Yusuf (1995; 1997; 1999), Kansu-Yetkiner (2006), Webster (1982), and Williams (1984)).

The huge amount of proverbs from various cultures of the world signifies the importance people attach to married life. Many proverbs, no matter from which culture, sometimes have almost identical meanings and wordings, for example: *He that marries for love has good nights but sorry days* (English, United Kingdom; French; Spanish; Italian).

Matrimony is considered in proverbs from various cultures of the world to be one of the most important undertakings in one's life, with extremely serious consequences: *It takes two to rub each other's backs* (Swahili); *Marriage is no joke; it is not like rice which can be spat out if it is too hot* (Philippine); *Marriage is not like a patch which you can take off whenever you like* (Maltese). Matrimony is seen as a much harder enterprise than going to war or to sea: *If you go to war, pray; if you go on a sea journey, pray twice; but pray three times when you are going to be married* (Russian); *Pray for one hour before going to war, for two before going to sea, for three before going to be married* (Indian). Therefore, God's blessings are most needed.

The need to find a true partner for life is claimed in: *Man without woman is head without body; woman without man is body without head* (German). In this proverb, the complementary nature of spouses is reflected: the man is depicted as the head (that is, his intellect is emphasized), and the woman is portrayed as the body (that is, her sensual qualities are underlined). Just as head and body belong together, women and men can't exist without each other. Hundreds of proverbs from various cultures and languages, however, focus on the desire and needs of

either men or women to find and have a true spouse. Let us look at some of them.

A man without a wife is seen as incomplete, as half a man, and deserving of pity and sorrow: *A man without a wife is but half a man* (English, Indian /Tamil/); *A man without a wife is like a man in winter without a fur cap* (Russian); *A man without a woman is a tree without leaves and branches* (Corsican); *Without a wife a man is not established* (Chinese); *A man without a woman is a dog without hair* (Indian /Kashmiri/); *No man is complete without marriage* (Swahili); *A Jew without a wife will not find peace in this life* (Hebrew); *It is a hard life without a wife* (Irish); *Without a wife the house doth howl* (Hindustani); *With the housewife the house is lively, without the housewife the house is dull* (Hindustani); *A man without a wife is like a vase without flowers* (African).

Similar needs are commented on regarding the importance of finding a husband for a woman. Thus, a woman without a husband is seen as incomplete, unhappy, or even a pitiable soul: *A woman without husband is like a fire without firewood* (Spanish); *A woman without a husband is like a boat without a helmsman* (Vietnamese); *A woman without a husband is like a distaff without the spindle* (Romanian); *A woman without a man is a field without seed* (African /Zaire: Luba/); *A woman without a veil is like food without salt* (Pashto); *A woman without a husband has no happiness* (Indian /Tamil/); *A woman without a husband is like the sand of a river* (Indian /Tamil/); *The husband is the life of the woman* (Marathi).

American culture is not different with regards to the proverbial treatment of marriage. Take a look at just a few American proverbs about different aspects of marriage. You can be happy and fulfilled only if you have a partner: *Man can't live in this world alone*. A man without a wife is seen as unhappy, an incomplete and miserable soul, a half-man: *A man without a wife is like a fork without a knife; A man without a woman is like a ship without a sail; A man is only half a man without a wife; He that has not got a wife is not yet a complete man.* And the opposite is true for women: *A woman without a man is like a handle without a pan.* The husband and wife are seen as complementary to each other, and therefore each one brings their most unique qualities into the marital union: *Men build houses, women build homes*. The wife's role in creating a good husband is emphasized in: *The best husbands aren't caught, they're made; The happiest wife is not she that gets the best husband, but she that makes the best of that which she gets.*

Sanctuary of Marriage in Proverbs from Different Cultures and the Bible

A number of proverbs from different cultures point out that everything in our lives happens according to God's will and that providence provides the partner: *Hanging and wiving go by destiny* (English); *Marriage and hanging go by destiny* (English); *Wedding and death are preordained in heaven* (Spanish); *The fate which brings marriage partners together was predestined five hundred years ago* (Chinese); *When lovers meet their compassion is predestinated* (Japanese). This idea is also supported in one of the most well-known and widespread proverbs about marriage in English and many other languages: *Marriages are made in heaven.* Not surprisingly, scores of proverbs from around the world advise one to pray and trust in God's good will before choosing a marital partner: *In buying a horse and taking a wife, shut your eyes and commend yourself to God* (Italian).

According to Genesis, the institution of marriage was established by God in the Garden of Eden:

> The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" … and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. (Genesis 2:18, 2:21–24)

The clear message is that people are not meant to live alone and that marriage is a desirable way of life.

For centuries, the following lines from Ecclesiastes have given guidance to the young generation and have tried to persuade them why getting married is worthwhile:

> Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone. And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him: and a threefold cord is not quickly broken. (Ecclesiastes 4: 9–12)

The Old Testament depicts a number of marriages and examples of real companionship and intimacy, for instance: Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:15–3:13), Abraham and Sarah (17:1–8, 15–22, 21:1–7), Isaac and Rebekah (24:24–67), Jacob and Rachel (29:1–30), Boaz and Ruth (Ruth 2:1–13, 4:1–17), and David and Abigail (1 Sam. 25:14–42). Let us prove this with the following lines:

> For wherever you go, I will go:
> And wherever you lodge, I will lodge,
> Your people will be my people,
> And, your God, my God. (Ruth 1:16)

Ideally, marriage was seen as the faithful, exclusive, and mutually loving union of a man and woman lasting for one's whole life:

> Have you not read that at the beginning the Creator "made them male and female," and said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh"? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate. (Matth. 19:4–6; Mark 10:7–9)

Of course, even though partners in marriage promise this to each other, they separate more often today than in older times.

The thoughts expressed in the Bible are confirmed in the following remarks of Margaret Mead, the well-known American cultural anthropologist (1901–78), and a specialist in sexuality and gender studies:

> No matter how free divorce, how frequently marriages break up, in most societies there is the assumption of permanent mating, of the idea that the marriage should last as long as both live … No known society has ever invented a form of marriage strong enough to stick that did not contain the "till death us do part" assumption.[1]

Negative Attitudes towards Marriage and Wives

While examining proverbs from different cultures and languages, what stands out is **a great number of proverbs** that **devalue, discriminate and undermine marriage**: *The best part of marriage is from the day of engagement to the wedding* (Maltese); *Marriage teaches you to live alone* (French). Love and lust disappear with marriage: *Love ends at the altar* (Estonian); *Love provides wings, but wings of wax melt with the torch of*

[1] http://www.smartmarriages.com/marriage.quotes.html (accessed October 25, 2013).

marriage (Russian). There is no real partnership among spouses, each of them pays attention to only their own interests: *In everything there is partnership with the exception of marriage and the blessed prayer* (Moroccan). Matrimony equals constant fighting and war, portrayed as hell and not as paradise: *Marriage is a battlefield and not a bed of roses* (Hebrew, Israel).

Wives are treated in the most pejorative, misogynist, and degrading way: *A bad wife ruins a family* (Chinese); *Girls are beautiful, sweet and tender; where do all those wicked wives come from?* (Russian); *There is only one wicked wife and every man supposes he has got her* (Dutch); *It is as difficult to rule a bad wife as it is a hard thing to climb a fierce horse* (Chinese); *If a man becomes lean, ask his wife why* (Yoruba). A number of proverbs stress that women cause troubles and problems, and are burdens to men: *A man without a woman is like a neck without a pain* (Irish). Men's problems with marriage might arise from their wives' murderous tendencies: *If a man is not dead, it's because his wife has not yet killed him* (Yoruba). Painting an extremely gloomy picture of marriage for men, scores of additional proverbs claim that only an unmarried man can be happy, fulfilled, and free. Therefore, the best a man can do is to not get married at all: *A man without a wife is like a horse without a bridle* (Vietnamese); *He enjoys life who has no wife* (Persian). Yusuf, in his analysis of the way proverbs are used to show the philosophical and conceptual view of marriage in the English and Yoruba worlds, concludes that both cultures view marriage as an "essentially male-serving institution and yet claim that marriage diminishes a man's happiness and increases his exposure to destruction" (Yusuf 1999, 55). What is the agent of this destruction? Naturally, the female, the greatest enemy of man and "a necessary evil."

The vast majority of American proverbs express prevailing negative attitudes towards marriage. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to find a true spouse: *Every couple is not a pair.* People who wed are considered blind: *Marriage is an institution for the blind.* Marriage cools love: *Marriage is a novel in which the hero dies in the first chapter*; *Marriage is like a tub of water: after a while, it is not so hot.* Marriage is seen as a burden, prison, and slavery: *Wedlock is a padlock.* Its inevitably problematic nature is reflected in: *Marriage is a quick solution to more problems.* Matrimony ruins your health and leads to your early death: *Earlier wed, sooner dead.* Thus, the following proverb is given as a piece of advice: *Marry late or never.*

Similar to proverbs from other cultures, **a particularly bad treatment** in American proverbs concerning marriage **is given to the wife**: *He that*

takes a wife takes care; *God help the man who won't marry until he finds a perfect woman, and God help him still more if he finds her*; *Two good days for a man in his life: when he weds, and when he buries his wife*; *Never praise your wife until you have been married ten years*; *When a man takes a wife, he ceases to dread hell*; *Lots of men get women, but few get wives*.

Similar to the proverbs from other cultures, many American proverbs treating different aspects of marriage can be inconsistent in their judgements, or may even have the opposite meaning. This is not surprising. In other words, in a particular society and at a particular point in time, marriage may seem to have both advantageous and disadvantageous sides (Yusuf 1995; 1997; 1999). Just a few pairs of contradictory American proverbs treating marriage are:

He that has a wife, has strife ↔ *Who finds a wife finds a good thing.*
It is good to marry later or never ↔ *He that marries late, marries ill.*
Marriage is the tomb of love ↔ *Marry first and love will follow.*
A woman without a man is like a handle without a pan ↔ *A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle.*
A man without a woman is like a ship without a sail ↔ *When a man takes a wife, he ceases to dread hell.*

Wives' negative treatment is reflected in a number of wisecracks, witty remarks, and epigrams:

Some men are afraid to marry; others don't know what fear is until they marry. (Esar 1968, 381)
Man is the head, and woman his headache. (Esar 1968, 499)
There are two periods in his life when a man doesn't understand women – before marriage and after marriage. (Metcalf 1993, 146).

Marriage in anti-proverbs

Marriage is undoubtedly one of the most frequent themes in Anglo-American anti-proverbs, also known as proverb transformations (or deliberate proverb innovations, alterations, parodies, variations, wisecracks, fractured proverbs, or proverb mutations). There is a wide range of aspects of marriage pointed out in anti-proverbs. First of all, anti-proverbs touch the premarital, marital, or post-marital roles people might play at a certain phase of their lives (to name just a few: the roles of fiancées and fiancés, brides and bridegrooms, wives and husbands, parents and children, mothers and fathers, mothers-in-law and children-in-law, widows and

widowers, divorced women and men). Undoubtedly, the vast majority of Anglo-American anti-proverbs depicting people in a role significant for marriage revolve around wives. Other popular themes discussed in anti-proverbs about marriage are courtship and dating, as well as factors taken into account while one is considering marriage and looking for a proper spouse. Engagement, wedding, divorce, remarriage, and many other marital phases are also themes. The overwhelming majority of Anglo-American anti-proverbs depicting marriage deal with it mostly in a negative way.

The Aim of the Book

The main aim of the book *Marriage Seen Through Proverbs and Anti-Proverbs* is to explore various aspects of marriage and the ways it is viewed and conceptualized in the body of Anglo-American anti-proverbs. The book also makes an attempt to depict those who contribute to the institution of marriage (that is, husbands and wives), and analyse their nature, qualities, attributes, and behaviours as revealed through Anglo-American anti-proverbs. Furthermore, the book also briefly explores those who remain single and do not belong to the institution of marriage (that is, spinsters and bachelors), as well as brides and bridegrooms, parents and children, mothers-in-law and children-in-law, widows and widowers, and divorced women and men, but contribute to the institution of marriage.

While certain themes occur pervasively in anti-proverbs about matrimony, others appear in only a few. For this reason, our discussion might sometimes seem uneven, and the treatment of certain thematic categories might be either narrower or broader. It must also be mentioned here that a number of our anti-proverbs treat several thematic categories simultaneously. Such examples could be discussed in various sections of the book, under various headings. As a rule, anti-proverbs that embrace more than one theme will be quoted and discussed only once, except in cases in which only a few anti-proverbs have been identified to illustrate a specific theme.

Although the book focuses on anti-proverbs, American proverbs or proverbs from around the world are also cited throughout the book. Sometimes we might start or finish a chapter or a section with reference to them, or use proverbs in order to prove or disprove the messages carried in anti-proverbs.

Although the title of this book features the words “proverbs” and “anti-proverbs,” in a few cases we could not resist the temptation to quote wellerisms as well: *“Time works wonders,” as the lady said when she got*

*married after an eight years' courtshi*p (Mieder and Kingsbury 1994, 138); *"Every little bit helps," said the old fisherman to his wife, as he threw the fish net on the bed on a cold winter night* (Mieder and Kingsbury 1994, 76) (see the discussion of this genre of folklore in the Introduction). Furthermore, in order to make a point, to confirm or argue with some statements expressed in anti-proverbs, various humorous texts, including jokes, quips, quotes, wisecracks, and other witty remarks – e.g. "Marriage is a fine institution. But who wants to live in an institution?" (Metcalf 1993, 143); "Men are better off than women: for one thing, men marry later; for another, they die earlier" (Esar 1968, 499) – primarily from Esar's collection of twenty thousand quips and quotes (see Esar 1968) about marriage, husbands and wives, spinsters, and bachelors, are also cited throughout the book (with precise reference to their sources).

Selection of Material

The anti-proverbs selected for this book were found primarily in American and British written sources, with just a few exceptions.[2] The texts, and others too numerous to include here, were drawn from hundreds of books and articles on puns, one-liners, toasts, wisecracks, quotations, aphorisms, maxims, quips, epigrams, and graffiti,[3] most of which are part of Wolfgang Mieder's International Proverb Archives in Burlington, Vermont.[4] Most of the anti-proverbs quoted here can also be found in the books *Twisted Wisdom: Modern Anti-Proverbs* (see Mieder and Tóthné Litovkina 1999) and *Old Proverbs Never Die, They Just Diversify: a Collection of Anti-Proverbs* (see T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006). While

[2] This refers to a few texts submitted to T. Litovkina at Berkeley in May 1999 by the late Christie Davies after he had read the collection *Twisted Wisdom: Modern Anti-Proverbs*.

[3] See the list of references at the end of the book, in particular Kilroy (1985), Read (1978), Rees (1979; 1980; 1981; 1999), Reisner (1971), Reisner and Wechsler (1980), Yu and Yang (1975), Edmund and Workman Williams (1921), Feibleman (1978), Kandel (1976), Esar (1945; 1968), Berman (1997), Loomis (1949), Kehl (1977), Nierenberg (1994), Mieder (1989), Mieder, Kingsbury, and Harder (1992), Mieder and Kingsbury (1994), Prochnow (1955; 1958; 1985), and Prochnow and Prochnow Jr. (1964; 1987; 1988).

[4] The vast majority of examples were discovered when Anna T. Litovkina was in the United States and United Kingdom, supported by a Fulbright research grant and a Hungarian State Eötvös Scholarship which enabled her to conduct research at the Department of Anthropology at the University of California at Berkeley (1998–9) and Oxford University Press (2003).

American proverbs are quoted primarily from the largest dictionary of American proverbs – that edited by Wolfgang Mieder (see Mieder, Kingsbury, and Harder 1992) – proverbs from around the world have been collected from hundreds of collections (see the list of references at the end of the book). Wellerisms are primarily quoted from Mieder and Kingsbury's (1994) collection. Humorous texts, including jokes, quips, quotes, wisecracks, and other witty remarks, were sourced from the internet, as well as hundreds of books and articles on puns, one-liners, toasts, wisecracks, quotations, aphorisms, maxims, quips, epigrams, and graffiti (see the bibliographical list at the end of the book).

Organization of the Book

The book consists of an Introduction followed by six chapters, a Conclusion and a Reference section.

The Introduction addresses anti-proverbs and the background of anti-proverb research and terminology, and explores the most popular proverbs for variation; furthermore, it analyses the most frequent types of proverb alteration, as well as the most common themes treated in Anglo-American proverb innovations. The Introduction also looks at the proverbs most popular for variation, while highlighting proverbs about marriage most frequently transformed in our corpus.

The first chapter addresses various pieces of advice summarized in the folk wisdom from around the world and anti-proverbs concerning crucial factors influencing one's choice of a partner for life, discussing, among many factors, wealth, appearance, and age. The chapter also discusses the role parents play in their children's marriage. Last but not least, the chapter briefly touches upon spinsters and bachelors, as well as weddings, brides, and bridegrooms.

The second chapter focuses on the relation between love and marriage in proverbs and anti-proverbs from around the world. Thus, we explore changes that take place in couples' love during the course of their relationship. At the very beginning of love, or at the first stage of matrimony, both matrimony and love are associated with folly, madness, loss of control, and partial or entire loss of eyesight. With time, however, matrimony starts having a sobering and eye-opening effect. Furthermore, marriage is also seen as the tomb of love and is associated with the diminished intensity of young love and lust.

Chapter three explores the most common topics appearing in sexual proverb variations about spouses. At first, we focus on procreation, pregnancy, and birth control. Afterwards, such themes as monogamy,

bigamy, polygamy, and adultery are also highlighted. Last but not least, the chapter addresses other aspects of sexuality, such as sexual intercourse itself, chastity, and female and male body parts.

In chapter four (the longest chapter in our book) we focus on various aspects of matrimony and the ways it is viewed and conceptualized in the body of proverbs from around the world, Anglo-American anti-proverbs, and wellerisms. To name just a few, matrimony is conceptualized as a burden and a form of torture, bossiness and dominance, constant blaming and arguing, slavery and imprisonment, war and fighting, hiding and lying, aggression, and even murder. Another aim of the chapter is to focus on wives and husbands, and to analyse their nature, qualities, attributes, and behaviours, as revealed through proverbs from around the world, Anglo-American anti-proverbs, and wellerisms.

Chapter five treats the main reasons for divorce, as well as its positive and negative sides, as they are mirrored in Anglo-American anti-proverbs and humorous quotes.

In chapter six we explore proverbs from around the world, Anglo-American anti-proverbs, wellerisms, and humorous quotes addressing the theme of remarriage. Besides treating remarriage in general, we concentrate on two groups of people most frequently remarrying in our material: representatives of the acting profession, as well as widows and widowers.

The bibliography at the end of the book includes complete bibliographical data to which we refer in the book. The vast majority of sources can be found in Wolfgang Mieder's International Proverb Archives in Burlington, Vermont.

INTRODUCTION TO ANTI-PROVERBS

The focus of the Introduction

While the first section of this Introduction gives a definition of the anti-proverb and terminology and the second section discusses its occurrence, the third section addresses different mechanisms of proverb variation, and the fourth section analyses themes treated in proverb transformations.[1] The fifth section treats proverbs most popular for variation, and the sixth and final section highlights some proverbs about marriage that are most frequently transformed in our corpus, containing the words "marriage" or "marry" (*Marry in haste and repent at leisure*; *Marriages are made in heaven*; and *Marriage is a lottery*) or not (*Two can live as cheaply as one*; *Absence makes the heart grow fonder*; *Behind every great [successful] man there is a woman*; *Love is blind*; *It's better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all*).

1. Terminology

Proverbs have never been considered sacrosanct; on the contrary, they have frequently been used as satirical, ironic, or humorous comments about a given situation. For centuries, they have provided a framework for endless transformation. In the last few decades they have been perverted and parodied so extensively that their variations have sometimes been heard more often than their original forms. Wolfgang Mieder coined the term ***Antisprichwort*** (**anti-proverb**) for such deliberate proverb innovations (also known in English as *alterations*, *mutations*, *parodies*, *transformations*, *variations*, *wisecracks*, *deliberate proverb innovations*, or *fractured proverbs*), and has published several collections of anti-proverbs in both German (see Mieder 1982a; 1985; 1989a; 1998) and English (see T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006; Mieder 2003; Mieder and Tóthné Litovkina 1999).

Wolfgang Mieder's term *Antisprichwort* has been widely accepted by proverb scholars all over the world as a general label for such innovative

[1] Some parts of the Introduction have already been published in T. Litovkina (2015a, 2018a).

alterations of and reactions to traditional proverbs: *anti-proverb* (English), *anti(-)proverbe* (French), *антипословица* (Russian), and *antiproverbium* (Hungarian) (see the general discussion of the genre of anti-proverbs in T. Litovkina [2007b; 2015a]; T. Litovkina and Mieder [2006, 1–54]; Mieder [2004, 2007]; Hrisztova-Gotthardt et al. [2018]). Besides the term *anti-proverb*, many other terms exist in different languages for such phenomena, e.g.:

German: *verballhornte Parömien*, *Sprichwortparodien*, *verdrehte Weisheiten*, *"entstellte" Sprichwörter*, *sprichwörtliche Verfremdungen.*
French: *faux proverbe*, *perverbe*, *proverbe déformé*, *proverbe dérivé*, *proverbe détourné*, *proverbe modifié*, *proverbe perverti*, *proverbe tordu*, *pseudo-proverbe*.
Russian: *трансформа*, *пословичная "переделка*," *прикол.*
Hungarian: *szokásmondás-közhely*, *közmondás-paródia*, *közmondás tréfás ferdítése*, *(el)ferdített közmondás*, *közmondás-persziflázs*, *kvázi-közmondás*.

Some anti-proverbs question the truth of a proverb through employing antonyms (*An exception disproves the rule* [A. C. Doyle, *The Sign of the Four*] {An exception proves the rule}[2]), transforming the proverb into its opposite (*A friend that isn't in need is a friend indeed* [Barbour 1963, 99 {A friend in need is a friend indeed}; *Crime pays – be a lawyer* [Nierenberg 1994, 555] {Crime doesn't pay}), or posing a naive question (*Still waters run deep – but how can they run if they are still?* [Esar 1968, 856] {Still waters run deep}; *If love is blind, how can there be love at first sight?* [Esar 1968, 491] {Love is blind}). The vast majority of anti-proverbs, however, put the proverbial wisdom only partially into question, primarily by relating it to a particular context or thought in which the traditional wording does not fit (*Money isn't everything – but it's way ahead of what's in second place* [Metcalf 1993, 148] {Money isn't everything}). Typically, an anti-proverb will elicit humour only if the traditional proverb upon which it is based is also known. Otherwise, the innovative strategy of communication based on the juxtaposition of the old with the "new" proverb is lost.

Anti-proverbs may contain revealing social comments (*American money talks in just about every foreign country* [McKenzie 1980, 343]

[2] For the reader's convenience all anti-proverbs in this book are followed by their original forms, given in {} brackets.

{Money talks}; *A condom a day keeps AIDS away* {An apple a day keeps the doctor away}), but they may also be based on mere wordplay or puns, and very often be generated solely for the goal of deriving at play forms (*A fool and his monkey are soon parted* (Margo 1982) {A fool and his money are soon parted}).

2. Occurrence of anti-proverbs

Like traditional gems of wisdom, anti-proverbs appear in a broad range of generic contexts, from personal letters to philosophical journals, from public lectures and sermons to songs, and from science fiction to comics and cartoons (Mieder 1989b, 2007). Anti-proverbs are also found in great abundance on the internet (Mieder 2007; for a detailed discussion of the use of Hungarian anti-proverbs on the internet, see Vargha [2005]; for a discussion on the use of Bulgarian anti-proverbs on the internet see Hrisztova-Gotthardt [2006; 2007], in advertising slogans see Forgács [1997a], and in the titles of books and articles, and magazine and newspaper headlines, see Mieder [1989b; 2007]). They are commonly quoted in collections of puns, one-liners, toasts, wisecracks, quotations, aphorisms, maxims, quips, epigrams, and graffiti (see the bibliographical lists in T. Litovkina [2005, 211–28], T. Litovkina and Mieder [2006, 349–57], and Mieder and Tóthné Litovkina [1999, 246–54]). There is no sphere of life where anti-proverbs are not used.

But the anti-proverb is not a new genre born in the era of mass media and the internet (Mieder 2007); rather, it can be traced back to the distant past. Proverb alterations are as old as proverbs themselves – they flourished in classical times, and in all subsequent eras. Thus, in the eighteenth century the traditional wisdom of many proverbial gems was questioned by a number of philosophers, writers, and poets (e.g. Lichtenberg, Kant, Schiller, Goethe, and Voltaire), who created and inspired many proverb transformations.

The vast majority of anti-proverbs are the product of the playfulness of a solitary author; they do not catch on, and thus will be found in just one source. There are some texts, however, which appear in many sources, in exactly the same form (for more see T. Litovkina and Mieder [2006, xv–xvi]). For some anti-proverbs, numerous variants have been found. The difference may lie in the use of an article, conjunction, or punctuation mark, or in the substitution of one more-or-less synonymous term for another. Let us view the variants of anti-proverbs based on the proverb *To err is human, to forgive divine* below:

To err is human – to totally muck things up needs a computer. (Kilroy 1985, 220)
To err is human, but to really foul things up requires a computer. (Bloch 1990, 140)
To err is human, but it takes a computer to completely fuck things up. (Nierenberg 1994, 552)
To err is human, but to really screw things up you need a computer. (Metcalf 1993, 41) (for more see T. Litovkina and Mieder [2006, xvi–xvii])

Some anti-proverbs have even become proverbial in themselves, and have been frequently included in recent proverb collections (e.g. Mieder, Kingsbury, and Harder 1992), for example, *A new broom sweeps clean, but the old one knows the corners* {A new broom sweeps clean}; *Absence makes the heart grow fonder – for somebody else* {Absence makes the heart grow fonder}.

3. Types of proverb alterations

Although proverb transformations arise in a variety of forms, several types stand out. There are different mechanisms of proverb variation (which are by no means mutually exclusive), e.g. replacing a single word; substituting two or more words; changing the second part of the proverb; adding a tail to the original text; adding literal interpretations; punning; word-repetition; melding two proverbs; word-order reversal (T. Litovkina 2007a). The most common mechanisms will be demonstrated separately here, with some representative examples.

Very popular are such proverb parodies that pervert the basic meaning of a proverb by simply replacing a single word: *He who hesitates is constipated* (Kandel 1976) {He who hesitates is lost}. The authors of our anti-proverbs very often try to find a word phonologically similar to the one from the original proverb, as in the following example: *Hair today, gone tomorrow* (Safian 1967, 42) {Here today, gone tomorrow}. Of particular interest are such proverb transformations in which only one letter of the alphabet is changed, added, or omitted: *A good beginning is half the bottle* (Esar 1968, 91) {A good beginning is half the battle}; *The best things in life are fee* (Safian 1967, 44) {The best things in life are free}; *Strike while the irony is hot* (Safian 1967, 37) {Strike while the iron is hot}.

Another characteristic mechanism of proverb parody is the substitution of two words which appeared to the coiners of our examples as not fitting their own observations of human life. As Mieder (1989b, 241) points out,

proverbs that possess binary structures (Dundes 1975) have become especially popular formulas on which to base multiple proverb variations, for example "One X is worth a thousand Ys," "Where there's X, there's Y," "One man's X is another man's Y," "An X a day keeps the Y away," "A(n) X in the hand is worth Y in the bush," "An ounce of X is worth a pound of Y," and "Different Xs for different Ys." Many anti-proverbs are based on linguistic structures that remain the same even as slight verbal changes introduce dramatically new images and ideas. The proverb "One man's meat is another man's poison," which is among the most popular proverbs for this kind of variation, is simply reduced to the pattern "One man's X is another man's Y," and X and Y can be substituted by whatever variables are necessary in the context. To illustrate this, let us refer to three examples: *One man's drive is another man's funeral* (Safian 1967, 30); *One man's fish is another man's poisson* (Carolyn Wells, in Esar 1952, 96); *One man's junk is another man's antique* (Safian 1967, 30). Again, phonologically similar words are very often chosen for this purpose, such as in these proverb alterations: *Taste makes waist* (Safian 1967, 41) {Haste makes waste}; *A brain is no stronger than its weakest think* (Esar 1968, 93) {A chain is no stronger than its weakest link}.

Very frequent are such anti-proverbs in which the second part of the proverb is entirely changed. One of the most popular proverbs for this type of variation in T. Litovkina and Mieder's anti-proverb collection of Anglo-American anti-proverbs (2006) is *If at first you don't succeed, try, try again*, which has generated the second largest number of parodies (sixty-five texts). Here are just three of them: *If at first you don't succeed, consider yourself average* (Alexander 2004, 22); *If at first you don't succeed, cry, cry again* (Esar 1968, 863); *If at first you don't succeed, give up* (Anonymous 1961, 200).

Many proverb transformations keep the actual text of the proverb without any change, adding new words, or a tail. Evan Esar calls this type of twisted proverbs "the extended proverb" (Esar 1952, 201). It is amazing the ease with which some proverbs (e.g. "Half the world doesn't know how the other half lives") have been extended into a great number of twists of this kind:

> Half the world doesn't know how the other half lives, but it has its suspicions. (Esar 1968, 787)
> Half the world doesn't know how the other half lives – but it isn't the fault of the confession magazines or the gossip columns. (Safian 1967, 15)
> Half the world doesn't know how the other half lives – but they're sure trying to find out. (Safian 1967, 15)

The extended type of proverb variation and parody can also be clearly shown through wellerisms. Wellerisms, named for Charles Dickens' character Samuel Weller (see *Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*), are particularly common in the US, the UK, and Ireland (Williams 2002; 2007; Mieder 1982b; 1989b, 223–38; Mieder and Kingsbury 1994). This form of folklore is normally made up of three parts: (1) a statement (which often consists of a proverb or proverbial phrase), (2) a speaker who makes this remark, and (3) a phrase that places the utterance into an unexpected, contrived situation. The meaning of the proverb is usually distorted by being placed into striking juxtaposition with the third part of the wellerism. "In this way a wellerism often parodies the traditional wisdom of proverbs by showing the disparity between the wisdom of the proverb and actual reality" (Mieder 1989b, 225). Observe, for example:

> "Eaves dropping again," said Adam, as his wife fell out of a tree. (Mieder and Kingsbury 1994, 38)
> "There's nae ill in a merry wind," quo' the wife when she whistled through the kirk. (Mieder and Kingsbury 1994, 66) {It's an *ill wind* that blows nobody any good}
> "A lass! I am no more," as the girl said when she got married. (Mieder and Kingsbury 1994, 71)

Wellerisms consisting of a proverb or proverbial phrase in its original form might not be considered anti-proverbs by some scholars, but they offer too clear a parallel to omit and are certainly considered to be anti-proverbs by Mieder and T. Litovkina, and are included in their collections of anti-proverbs (Mieder and Tóthné Litovkina 1999; T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006):

> "Time works wonders," as the lady said when she got married after an eight-year courtship (Mieder and Kingsbury 1994, 138) {Time works wonders}

According to Shirley Arora, metaphor is one of the most effective indicators of proverbiality (1984, 12). Metaphor is one of the most common devices (among personification, hyperbole, etc.) which helps to achieve figurativeness in proverbs.[3] The metaphor belongs to the most

[3] Tóthné Litovkina's research (1998) has shown that 68.2% of the 151 best-known American proverbs from the Folklore Archives at the University of California at Berkeley lend themselves to figurative interpretation. By contrast, out of the 102 proverbs from five randomly selected pages from "A Dictionary of American

powerful markers of proverbiality,[4] and it is exactly this vivid imagery of many proverbs that makes them so appealing to us. Thus, metaphorical proverbs are remarkably common and typically used figuratively. In numerous anti-proverbs in our material, however, the meaning of a metaphorical proverb is narrowed by putting it in a context in which it is to be interpreted literally, i.e. the literal-metaphorical relationship is exploited, to wit the following proverb transformations: *When one door shuts, another opens ... which means that you live in a drafty house* (Berman 1997, 105) {When one door shuts, another opens}; *"No friend like a bosom friend," as the man said when he pulled out a louse* (Mieder and Kingsbury 1994, 50) {No friend like a bosom friend}; *A bird in hand is probably contaminated with salmonella* (The Burlington Free Press, June 3, 1995) {A bird in hand is worth two in the bush}.

While talking about various forms of proverb alteration, we have to mention one of the most popular humorous techniques created through puns.[5] Numerous proverbs in our material have provided good models for exploiting ambiguity through the use of a single word that is polysemous (i.e. having two meanings) or two words that are homonymous (i.e. having identical graphemic and phonemic representation), thus creating comic surprise with unforeseen links between words or ideas. Puns have been frequently attacked as being "the lowest form of wit," especially in English-speaking communities. Taking issue with the detractors, Berger states, "good puns are excellent examples of wit. It is only when the pun stretches too far or is too off base that puns elicit the customary groan from people – a response we all learn as proper when dealing with a pun that doesn't work" (Berger 1995, 68). According to Victor Raskin:

> For many speakers, the mere exposure to a homonymous or polysemous word or phrase constitutes an irresistible temptation to make a joke … It is the easy availability of puns which makes them a cheap and somewhat despicable type of humour for many individuals and social groups. However, the same factor prevents them from disappearing, and every new

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Proverbs" (see Mieder et al. 1992), 49% of proverbs have imagery that would lend itself to figurative interpretation.

[4] Such markers can be: certain grammatical or syntactical features (e.g. omission of the article is a conspicuous and frequent cue in Spanish and Danish proverbs), semantic markers (e.g. metaphor, parallelism, paradox, irony), lexical markers (e.g. archaic or old-fashioned words; quantifiers such as "never," "always," "everybody," etc.), phonic markers (e.g. rhyme, alliteration, meter), etc. (see Arora 1984).

[5] For a detailed discussion of categories of puns, as well as punning in Anglo-American anti-proverbs, see T. Litovkina (2005, 55–86; 2006a; 2006b; 2009a; 2009b).

> generation goes through many cycles of discovering the puns, getting tired of them, rejecting them and eventually rediscovering them again. (1985, 116)

Raskin points out that, "If the trigger is there but the scripts and the oppositeness relation are not, the pun remains an artificial, low-quality product" (1985, 116). Proverbs very frequently lend themselves to manipulation exclusively for the sake of manipulation.

Certain ambiguous words have become real favourites of punsters in our material, such as for the word "will" in the proverb *Where there's a will, there's a way*:

> Where there's a will, there's an inheritance tax. (Kandel 1976)
> Where there's a will – there's a delay. (Safian 1967, 33)
> Where there's a will there's a wait. (Safian 1967, 44)
> Where there's a will there's a won't. (Bierce 1958, 120)

In the following three anti-proverbs the word "lie" (deceive) is opposed to the "lie" (be found, exist):

> Figures don't lie – except on the beach. (Esar 1968, 67) {Figures don't lie}
> As you have made your bed, why lie about it? (Berman 1997, 25) {As you have made your bed, lie in it}
> Truth lies at the bottom of a well, but if it lies, how can it be the truth? (Esar 1968, 829) {Truth lies at the bottom of a well}

The list of polysemous or homonymous words employed in our anti-proverbs could be extended beyond the limits of patience: "time," "shot," "rod," "blood," "miss," "bridge," and "port" are only a few of them. Some examples include:

> "How time flies," as the monkey said when it threw the clock at the missionary. (Mieder and Kingsbury 1994, 139) {Time flies}
> Blood will tell: nobody criticizes your faults quicker than your relatives. (Esar 1968, 669) {Blood will tell}
> Any port in a storm – preferably expensive port. (Esar 1968, 872) {Any port in a storm}

One meaning of an ambiguous word may be risqué or indecorous. Anti-proverbs of this type, which combine a sexual meaning with a non-sexual one, present examples of double entendre in its strictest sense. The humour of many proverb parodies is based on the incongruous use of the vulgar or taboo word, as well as the contrast between an innocent text of a