

## Book review

**Litovkina, Anna T. & Mieder, Wolfgang (2019). *Marriage Seen through Proverbs and Anti-Proverbs*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.**

Marriage is considered to be one of the most important undertakings in a person's life, thus it can be expected that its perception will be reflected in the broadly understood proverb lore, including anti-proverbs, i.e. deliberate proverb innovations. Irrespective of this fact, so far, it has not been a focal issue of comprehensive studies which comprise anti-proverbs. The institution of marriage and related aspects tend to be included mainly in the analyses of sexes and related issues in proverbs. Therefore, the monograph written by Anna T. Litovkina and Wolfgang Mieder is a most welcome contribution, offering an insight into the paremiological picture of matrimony, with a special focus on its depiction in anti-proverbs. Modified paremia tend to perform the ludic function and to be carriers of humour, thus the analysis of such units is of paramount importance for humour studies.

The two scholars, internationally recognised paremiologists, have conducted in-depth research on anti-proverbs. Suffice it to say that apart from many individually written papers on this phenomenon, they have co-authored four books, three of which are devoted to anti-proverbs: *Twisted Wisdom: Modern Anti-Proverbs* (1999), *Old Proverbs Never Die, They Just Diversify: A Collection of Anti-Proverbs* (2006) and the reviewed monograph.

The aim of the book is to “explore various aspects of marriage and the ways it is viewed and conceptualised in the body of Anglo-American proverbs” (p. 7). The monograph describes the husband and the wife, discussing their qualities and behaviours. It also presents marriage-related roles and functions such as brides and bridegrooms, parents and children, mothers-in-law and children-in-law, widows and widowers as well as the divorced. Moreover, it depicts those who remain single, i.e. spinsters and bachelors.

The analysed material is rich and varied: it comprises anti-proverbs excerpted from various American and British written sources, the vast majority of which are part of Wolfgang Mieder's International Proverb Archives in Burlington, Vermont. American proverbs are primarily those included in the dictionary edited by Wolfgang Mieder, Stewart A. Kingsbury & Kelsie B. Harder (1992) and the paremia from around the world come from various collections. The majority of wellerisms are taken from Mieder & Kingsbury's collection (1994), while the sources of various humorous texts such as quips, quotes, wisecracks are the Internet and books on such forms of folklore.

The book consists of six chapters, preceded by two introductions: one to the monograph, presenting its organisation, and the other to anti-proverbs. The chapters are followed by conclusions and a reference section, which contains an exhaustive bibliography. The second introduction discusses the phenomenon of anti-proverbs, related terminology and presents the proverbs which exhibit a tendency to be modified.

The focal issue of Chapter 1 titled “‘Keep your eyes wide open before marriage’: Courtship and other factors in mate selection” is to discuss advice on choosing a life partner contained in proverbs, both in those from around the world and in anti-proverbs. Courting and many factors conditioning one's choice of a future spouse are discussed, including wealth, appearance and age.

The subchapters are devoted to a particular aspect, around which observations are grouped. All of them are enumerated and exemplified: for instance, in the subchapter titled *Wealth*, the statement “According to anti-proverbs, **wealth** plays the most important role in finding a suitable spouse” is illustrated by the following anti-proverbs: *Kisses may be the language of love, but money still does the talking; Money cannot buy you love but it can put you in a good bargaining position; Money cannot buy love, but it makes shopping for it a lot easier* (pp. 34-35). The key notion is then specified: “A number of anti-proverbs clearly show the importance of wealth for a girl in her future spouse: *Man proposes and the girl weighs his pocketbook and decides (...)*” (p. 35). Moreover, the chapter sheds light on the views which proverbs present on parents’ role in their children’s marriage. It also discusses the picture of the day of the wedding. Furthermore, the proverbial images of brides and bridegrooms are presented.

The relation between love and marriage reflected in proverbs from around the world and Anglo-American anti-proverbs is the focal issue of Chapter 2, “Love is blind and marriage is an eye-opener: Multifaceted features of holy matrimony”. Section 1 presents marriage as a result of loss of control and madness, which is encapsulated in the anti-proverb used as its title *Marriages are made in heaven knows what state of mind*. The proverbial units collected as illustrative material verbalise two observations: first, a person in love loses control over love; second, those who get married are considered crazy and mindless. Section 2 describes getting or being married as folly, as attested by the proverbs such as *Where singleness is bliss ‘tis folly to be married; A man may be a fool and not know it, but not if he is married* and modified units, for instance, *One man’s folly is another man’s wife; There’s no fool like an old fool who marries a young fool; Fools rush in where bachelors fear to wed*. Section 3 discusses the association of marriage with entire or partial loss of eyesight and blindness. For example, many proverbs from different cultures express the belief that the object of love is seen as wonderful and all defects are not noticed: *Blind love mistakes a harelip for a dimple* (American); *Love turns pimples into dimples* (Japanese); *Nobody’s sweetheart is ugly* (Dutch); *Love and blindness are twin sisters* (Russian); *The toad thinks his bride beautiful* (African Kongo). The authors draw attention to the fact that eyes are the body organ which is most frequently referred to, as attested by the following proverbs: *Keep your eyes wide open before marriage, half shut afterwards; In marriage the husband should have two eyes, and the wife but one; He who hasn’t anything to do pulls his wife’s eyes out*. Section 4 depicts the marriage as the period when spouses begin to notice their partner’s faults and defects: *Love is blind and marriage is an eye doctor; Love is blind – and when you get married you get your eyesight back*.

Finally, Section 5, “Marriage makes strange bedfellows”, investigates the decrease in young love and lust in the course of marriage. This phenomenon is described not only in American proverbs such as *Love intoxicates a man; marriage sobers him; The lover is often lost in the husband; Marriage is like a tub of water: after a while, it is not so hot*, but also in those from other parts of the world: *Marriage is the sunset of love* (French); *There is no cure for love but marriage* (Irish); *Love has wings on its shoulders; matrimony has crutches under its arms* (Russian). As the authors observe, very few proverbs describe the relation of love and marriage in a positive way like the Icelandic proverb *Love comes after marriage* or the French one *Love is often the fruit of marriage*. The decreased intensity of love and lust can result in their disappearance: twenty-seven mutations of the proverb *It’s better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all* state that love disappears in marriage and suggest one should not get married, for instance, *It’s better to have love and lost – yeah, lots better*, while only three express a positive image of marriage.

The sexual aspect of marriage is the main theme of Chapter 3 titled “‘Variety is the spice of love’: The role of sexuality in marriage”. Section 1 discusses how procreation and birth control is reflected in proverb lore. The depiction of conception and birth tends to be negative, as illustrated by the following modifications: *Children should be seen and not had; Familiarity breeds contempt*

– and children; Familiarity breeds; Two is company, three is the result; Two is company, three is poor birth control; Small things come to those who mate. According to anti-proverbs, it is much better to have sex or even to leave one's lover than to procreate. This belief is expressed by several modifications, including *It is better to have loved and lost than to have to do homework for the kids every night*; *Make love, not Irishmen*. The anti-proverbs analysed also allude to the stork of folklore: *Pregnancy: The calm before the stork*; *A pill a day keeps the stork away*. Section 2 is devoted to monogamy, bigamy and polygamy. With one proverb emphasising the benefits of monogamy (*Most men believe in monogamy because enough is enough*), many others advise that one should have a number of partners: *Spice can be found in a variety of wives*; *One man's Claire is another man's affair*; *One man's Jill is another man's thrill*; *One man's mate is another man's passion*. In a number of analysed units, bigamy is viewed as wrong or rude, which is exemplified by the following anti-proverbs: *Bigamy is when two rites make a wrong*; *Bigamy is the only crime on the books where two rites make a wrong*; *A bigamist is a man who loves not wisely but two*; *A bigamist is a man who makes his bed and tries to lie out of it*. Polygamy is described by a modification of a biblical proverb: *Polygamy is proposed for Europe, but it is contrary to Scripture*. *No man can serve two masters*, while adultery is humorously defined as *Two wrong people doing the right thing*.

Some anti-proverbs justify an extramarital relationship: *Before marriage, two's company and three's crowd*; *after marriage, two's company and three's a great relief*; *The proof of the pudding is in the eating and the proof of the marriage is in the cheating*; *Variety is the spice of life, including married life*. Furthermore, they convey the belief that it is more acceptable for husbands to be engaged in such relationships, as exemplified by the transformation *Boys will be boys, particularly when they're away from their wives*, while the wives should keep their affair a secret, which is reflected in the following proverbs: *Early to bed, early to rise makes sure you get out before her husband arrives*; *When the husband is away, the wife will play*. Some anti-proverbs include the motif of the disappearance of the lover on the husband's arrival: *When the husband comes in at the door, the lover flies out of the window*; *When pa comes in at the door, ma's boyfriend flies out of the window*. Babies born out of wedlock are also referred to, for instance, *An oriental wife gave birth to a white child and explained: "Occidents will happen"*.

Unfaithfulness may have different reasons, one of which is the spouse's behaviour: *Each husband gets the infidelity he deserves*; *A kind wife makes a faithful husband*, another may be the wife's beauty: *If you marry a beautiful woman, you marry trouble*; *He that has a fair wife needs more than two eyes*; *You cannot pluck roses without fear of thorns nor enjoy a fair wife without danger of horns*. In anti-proverbs, the motif of sexual intercourse is employed: *Coito ergo sum*; *People who live in glass houses should screw in the basement*. Chastity or abstinence is not viewed as a great virtue, as summarised by the proverb innovation *Chaste makes waste*, while orgasm is highlighted in anti-proverbs: *The family that shoots together loots together!*; *The family that kicks together sticks together!*. The analysed proverb modifications also allude to female and male body parts, with the male organs being mentioned far more frequently (*penis, cock, rod, prick, meat*). For instance, in the proverb *Spare the rod and spoil the child*, the constituent *rod* gains a phallic meaning.

Chapter 4, titled "“Make love, not war – Get married and do both’: Human relations as part of married life”, discusses the presentation of various aspects of marriage in proverbs from around the world, Anglo-American anti-proverbs, and wellerisms. The theme of Section 1 is the bossiness, dominance, and despotic nature of some husbands and wives. Several American proverbs describe the woman as the prime mover in marriage: *Two things govern the world – women and gold*; *Man has his will, but woman has her way*; *Women will have the last word*. This belief is also reflected in proverbs from different cultures, for instance, *Women do with men whatever they want*

(Spanish); *The silkworm moth eyebrow of a woman is the axe that cuts down the wisdom of a man* (Chinese); *A man in the power of a woman dances to her like a donkey* (Hindustani), with some more expressing a negative evaluation of such dominance: *Where a wife wears the breeches, and a husband the apron, things don't go well* (Italian); *Where a woman rules the house, the devil is a serving-man* (German). Exercising power in marriage is also highlighted in various anti-proverbs such as *'Tis better to have loved and lost than to marry and be bossed*; *Behind every successful man is a wife who tells him what to do, and a secretary who does it*.

Section 2 analyses the proverbial depiction of marriage as a burden and a prison. This view on matrimony is conveyed by several proverbs, for instance, *Wedlock is a padlock*. For centuries, a woman has been viewed as the person obliged to serve her husband and children, which is reflected both in proverbs (*A woman's work is never done*; *A woman's place is in the house*) and anti-proverbs (*All work and no pay makes a housewife*). For a husband, matrimony may also have some negative aspects: *A married man's home is his castle, with him being his vassal*; *An Englishman's home is his castle – so let him clean it*.

Sections 3-4 deal with spouses' harmful behaviour. The vast majority of proverbs present wives as ill-natured and quarrelsome: *A wife's long tongue is the staircase by which misfortunes ascend to the house* (Chinese); *Never quarrel with a woman* (American), with far fewer describing husbands as blamers and complainers: *A bachelor blames fate for his mistake, a married man blames his wife*. Matrimony is also viewed as a state of constant quarrelling: *There are two sides to every argument, and they're usually married to each other*. The focal issue of the Section 5 is physical aggression as part of matrimony, while the Section 6 analyses the conceptualisation of marriage as a battlefield in war. Section 7 is devoted to spouses' threats, such as wishing their partners to be dead. In turn, Section 8 examines marriage as a financial unit (*Never marry for money, but marry where money is*; *If you marry money, you sell your freedom*), the ninth reflects on it as an economic exchange and bargain (*Many marriages are simply working partnerships between business men and housekeepers*), while the tenth as a gamble or a lottery (*Man proposes, woman supposes, marriage decomposes and divorce exposes*). Section 11 discusses lying and hiding (*There are two sides to every man: the side his wife knows, and the side he thinks she doesn't know*), the next two ones as a catch or prey (*Early marriages all too often prove that the early bird catches the worm*) and mechanism (*Marriages are made in heaven, but the maintenance work has to be done on earth*).

The two following Sections focus on negative aspects: Section 15 presents marriage as repenting (*Marry in haste and repent at leisure*; *Marry in haste, and you'll never have any leisure to repent it*), and the next one as unhappiness, misery, trouble, torture and evil (*Marriage is a three-ring circus – engagement ring, wedding ring, and suffering*). The theme of the Section 17 is the divine nature of marriage (*Marriages are made in heaven... So is thunder and lightning*) and Section 18 presents a positive picture of matrimony in proverbs (*A good husband makes a good wife*; *A good wife makes a good husband*; *Eat, drink and be married*).

The title of Chapter 5, “‘Divorces are made in heaven’: The many causes for eventual separation”, discusses how anti-proverbs and humorous proverbial expressions describe the main reasons for divorce as well as its advantages and disadvantages. Section 1 focuses on causes for divorce such as diminished intensity of young love and lust, adultery, the negative qualities of one's spouse, mother-in-law, including additional ones, as exemplified by the following anti-proverbs: *Two's company and three's a divorce*; *Absence makes the heart grow fonder, unless it's our mother-in-law*; *The wife who always has the last word often gets it as the divorcee*; *A compliment a day keeps divorce away*. Subchapter 2 is devoted to pros and cons of divorce: negative aspects include those of emotional, physical and financial nature, with the last ones being most frequently described in anti-proverbs: *Marry in haste, and pay alimony at leisure*; *Divorce*

*often turns a short matrimony into a long alimony.* In proverb lore, there are also some references to the positive aspects of divorce: *Alimony often enables a woman who lived unhappily married to live happily unmarried; Divorces are made in heaven.*

The question of remarriage is discussed in Chapter 6 titled “‘Marriage is a lottery – try it several times’: The pros and cons of remarriage”. Section 1 offers a study of general aspects of remarriage as reflected in proverbs, anti-proverbs and other proverbial expressions. Proverbs both warn against marrying twice (*To marry once is a mistake; to marry twice is fatal*) and recommend it (*The second wife always sits on the right knee*). Section 2 investigates the remarriage of representatives of the acting profession. Proverbial units emphasise the fact that in this sphere, remarriage is common: *A movie star is destined never to be a bridesmaid but always a bride; Life of a movie star is full of aggravations: if it isn't one husband, it's another.* The main theme of Section 3 is the remarriage of widows and widowers. Many proverbs underline that the widow's grief lasts short: *The widow weeps for the dead and thinks of the living* (Italian). A rich widow can expect to be remarried soon, as attested by the American proverb *The rich woman cries with one eye and rejoices with the other.*

As the above presentation of the book shows, the monograph offers a comprehensive discussion of the results of a comprehensive analysis of the conceptualisations of various marital themes in proverbs from different cultures and Anglo-American anti-proverbs, offering an insight into the problems discussed. The exemplification is rich and varied, with many interesting examples from a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural perspective.

Being focused on anti-proverbs, the work draws attention to the ludic function of transformed paremia which reflect views on matrimony. It presents the humorous aspect of such modifications, shedding light on their function of humour carriers. Anti-proverbs, namely creatively adapted paremia meant to entertain the receiver, have a great potential as humour vehicles, which is exemplified by the analysis of transformed proverbs on marriage conducted by the authors. The reviewed book emphasises the humorous character of twisted proverbs and its complexity, it is of great importance for humour studies.

The monograph is also an important contribution to linguo-cultural studies, showing how the perception of marriage is reflected in paremia and anti-proverbs that verbalise beliefs and observations concerning a plethora of aspects of views on marriage. The studies are particularly valuable because of the choice of the units: since the research corpus included both proverbs proper and modified units, the authors were able to make a comparison on how marriage is pictured in both, thus drawing attention to the way certain social changes that have occurred over time are expressed in the latter in a creative way by language users.

Thanks to the approach adopted by the authors, the reviewed work addresses a wide readership, ranging from students who would like to analyse proverb lore from various perspectives to experienced scholars. The book will be of interest to paremiologists and phraseologists, humour researchers, ethnolinguists, and scholars specialising in contrastive and cultural linguistics. It will also appeal to those who focus on creative use of language, in particular the persons studying modifications of fixed expressions.

To sum up, it can be concluded that the book shows how proverbs on certain issues can be analysed cross-linguistically and cross-culturally, thus it constitutes a study that enables other scholars to develop their methodology of research on proverbs, offering new perspectives on proverb studies. It is informative, interesting, stimulating and inspiring, which makes it a highly recommended text on the depiction of marriage in anti-proverbs and proverbs.

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## References

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