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MIEDER, WOLFGANG. *Proverbs Are Never Out of Season: Popular Wisdom in the Modern Age*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993. xviii + 284 pages. Photographs, cartoons, bibliography, indices of names, subjects, and proverbs. Hardcover US\$25.00; ISBN 0–19–507728–8.

Publishers are hesitant about producing collections of essays, saying that whole books sell better. Personally, I like collections of essays, particularly those that result from a lifetime's interest in a subject. I feel that the articles selected tend to reflect various facets of the topic, like a diamond, and that progress through such collections proceeds at a more leisurely pace than it does in book-length treatments with their more demanding arguments.

In the present collection Wolfgang Mieder provides a model overview of the subject of proverbs, one that demonstrates his familiarity with the topic and his thoughtful consideration about which pieces to share. The basic point of the collection, as stated in the title and subtitle, is that though individual proverbs may go out of fashion, proverbial speech and wisdom is very much part of contemporary language use. Chapter 10, in particular, shows how in the modern age proverbs have been put to use in the service of ideology, and how scientists, supposedly objective, can turn their talents and methods into tools of evil. It is a book with an unexpected punch.

If I may borrow an item recently gleaned from an e-mail discussion, the book seems to be organized according to the *jo-ha-kyuu* of the Noh play. The beginning is slow and easy; the middle develops; and the ending is loud, quick, and impressive. In *Proverbs Are Never Out of Season* the first chapters treat problems of definition and usage; the middle chapters turn to history, the use of proverbs and subgenres, and treatments of regional Vermontisms and a German-born American proverb; then, at the end, the sudden slap of proverb use in Nazi Germany.

Chapter 1 examines scholars' definitions of the proverb. In chapter 2 some of this information is repeated so that more popular conceptions of the proverb may be

introduced. People know one when they hear one. Chapter 3 uses frequency lists of proverbs to discuss proverb "cultural literacy." Mieder supports Russian paremiologist G. L. Permiakov's idea that in language learning a knowledge of the most-used proverbs is necessary: "No speaker of a foreign language can hope to gain cultural literacy in the target language without the knowledge of its paremiological minimum" (45). How many such lists exist for the languages of Asia? Chapter 4 details the use of proverbs in political cartoons, advertising, and even poetry to show that proverbs are indeed alive and that they need to be known if one is to understand what people are talking about.

How proverbs come and go and change their form is seen through the study of a single proverb in chapter 5: "Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise." At first I thought this chapter devoted too much space to proving that Benjamin Franklin did not "invent" this proverb—isn't it general knowledge that Franklin borrowed and refashioned constantly when producing his sayings for *Poor Richard's Almanack*? I realized the necessity of this, however, when Mieder pointed out that even such authorities as E. D. Hirsch's *Dictionary of Cultural Literacy* and John Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations* credit Franklin with "Early to bed." Chapter 6 is also a study of a single proverb, "A picture is worth a thousand words." This proverb originated in advertising, and is proof not only that proverbs are in current use but that they have assumed modern forms. These fascinating studies of individual proverbs attest to the years Mieder devoted to gathering information about them, information often gained only serendipitously.

"An apple a day keeps the doctor away," the subject of chapter 7, leads into the genre of medical proverbs. Chapter 8 turns to the genre of regional proverbs; Vermont is selected because that is where Mieder has made his home. In chapter 9 the author draws upon his ancestry to study a German proverb that has emigrated and become American: "Don't throw the baby out with the bath" (a proverb my father often used when advising moderation). Mieder uses this chapter to issue a mild warning, one that takes on more importance in the last chapter: "There is a certain danger connected with deducing national or regional characteristics from folklore in general and proverbs in particular" (178).

Chapter 10 shows the way in which the power of proverbs was misused in Nazi Germany to spread anti-Semitism. Mieder says:

It was here that proverbs played directly into the propagandistic hands of the Nazis, since proverbs are usually used to spread insights and wisdom in an authoritative and generalized fashion. The danger of accepting proverbs at face value is best illustrated in the use the Nazis made of them as ready-made weapons against the Jewish population. They became convincing formulaic statements of Nazi ideology, and because of their traditional ring were accepted only too quickly as another proof of Hitler's reactionary racial theory. (239)

Proverbs are useful, proverbs are powerful. They need to be known and studied, not only for one's own cultural literacy but also to help prevent them from becoming dangerous tools against minorities or other nations. Though the final chapter makes this point in the most compelling way, the entire book leads up to it, and each chapter offers its own rewards.

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