



«Proverbs Speak Louder Than Words»: Wisdom in Art, Culture, Folklore, History, Literature and Mass Media

Wolfgang Mieder

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The ten chapters of «*Proverbs Speak Louder Than Words*» present a composite picture of the richness of proverbs as significant expressions of folk wisdom as is manifest from their appearance in art, culture, folklore, history, literature, and the mass media. The first chapter surveys the multifaceted aspects of paremiology (the study of proverbs), with the second chapter illustrating the paremiological work by the American folklorist Alan Dundes. The next two chapters look at the effective role that proverbs play in the mass media, where they are cited in their traditional wording or as innovative anti-proverbs. The fifth chapter discusses proverbs as expressions of the worldview of New England. This is followed by two chapters on the proverbial prowess of American presidents, to wit the proverbial style in the correspondence between John and Abigail Adams and a discussion of Abraham Lincoln's apocryphal proverb «Don't swap horses in the middle of the stream.» The eighth chapter traces the tradition of proverb iconography from medieval woodcuts to Pieter Bruegel the Elder and on to modern caricatures, cartoons, and comic strips. The last two chapters deal with the origin and history of the proverbial expression «to tilt at windmills» as an allusion to Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and the many proverbial utterances in Mozart's letters. The book draws attention to the fact that proverbs as metaphorical signs continue to play an important role in oral and written communication. Proverbs as so-called monumenta humana are omnipresent in all facets of life, and while they are neither sacrosanct nor saccharine, they usually offer much common sense or wisdom based on recurrent experiences and observations.

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