

WOLFGANG MIEDER

Krótko o przysłowiu. By Grzegorz Szpila. Kraków: Collegium Columbinum, 2003. Pp. 142.

While Archer Taylor (1890-1973) wrote his classical study on *The Proverb* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1931; rpt. Hatboro, Pennsylvania: Folklore Associates, 1962; rpt. again with an introduction by Wolfgang Mieder. Bern: Peter Lang, 1985) for international paremiology, proverb scholars throughout the world have also published general overviews for the study of proverbs of national languages. There are too many general treatises of this type to mention them all, but here are at least some of the more recent ones for some cultures and languages: Matti Kuusi, *Parömiologische Betrachtungen* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1957), Louis Combet, *Recherches sur le "refranero" castillan* (Paris: Société d'édition "Les Belles Lettres", 1971), Jacques Pineaux, *Proverbes et dictons français*, 6th ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1973), Lutz Röhrich and Wolfgang Mieder, *Sprichwort* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1977), Jean Cauvin, *Comprendre: Les proverbes* (Issy les Moulineaux: Les Classiques Africains, 1981), Cezar Tabarcea, *Poetica proverbului* (Bucuresti: Minerva, 1982), Maria Conca, *Paremiologia* (Valencia: Universitat de Valencia, 1987), Julia Sevilla Muñoz, *Hacia una aproximación conceptual de las paremias francesas y españolas* (Madrid: Editorial Complutense, 1988), Katsuaki Takeda, *Kotowaza no retorikku* (Tokyo: Kaimeisha, 1992), Agnes Szemerényi, *"Közmondás nem hazug szólás": A proverbiumok használatának lehetőségei* (Budapest: Akadémiai kiadó, 1994), and Wolfgang Mieder, *Proverbs* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2004).

There are, of course, also older surveys of this type for various national languages, as for example Karl Friedrich Wilhelm Wander, *Das Sprichwort, betrachtet nach Form und Wesen* (Hirschberg: Zimmer, 1836; rpt. ed. by Wolfgang Mieder. Bern: Peter Lang, 1983), F. Edward Hulme, *Proverb Lore* (London: Stock, 1902; rpt. Detroit, Michigan: Gale Research Co., 1968),

Friedrich Seiler, *Deutsche Sprichwörterkunde* (München: C.H. Beck, 1922; rpt. München: C.H. Beck, 1967), and Jan Stanisław Bystroń, *Przysłowia polskie* (Kraków: Nakładem Polskiej Akademji Umiejętności, 1933). The latter is a significant book on Polish paremiography and paremiology, treating the definition, classification, origin, and function of proverbs. The author also discusses major Polish proverb collections, and he investigates the formulaic and stylistic aspects of Polish proverbs. Several chapters deal with the content of a large number of proverbs which refer to social matters, animals, war and peace, money, music, religion, medicine, law, beliefs, places, history, and ethnic groups. The final two chapters discuss the use and function of proverbs in Polish literature as well as the worldview expressed in them. But this inclusive study is seventy years old and long out of print. It was thus high time that a Polish scholar undertook the involved task of writing a new comprehensive study of the rich field of Polish proverbs.

Following in the footsteps of such great Polish paremiologists and paremiographers as Samuel Adalberg, Jan Stanisław Bystroń, Julian Krzyżanowski, and Stanisław Prędota, Grzegorz Szpila from Kraków was the ideal young scholar to write a new survey of proverb studies in the Polish language. He has already published numerous papers on phraseological and paremiological matters, and he is well acquainted with Polish and international proverb scholarship. In fact, he has visited me and my international proverb archive on two occasions, and it has been a pleasure and honor for me to work with him. In the past few years he has published numerous important papers, among them the following:

"Przysłowie jako element zdobywania wiedzy o języku obcym." *Kwartalnik neofilologiczny*, 41, nos. 3-4 (1999), 381-387.

"Przysłowie - semantyka tekstu jednozdaniowego." *Język polski*, 79, no. 5 (1999), 371-378.

"Tłumaczenie frazeologizmów: Przysłowia." *Prace językoznawcze*, no volume given, no. 119 (1999), 129-137.

"Semantyka kontekstualna leksemów zwierzęcych w przysłowiaach." *Literatura ludowa*, 44, no. 3 (2000), 13-22.

"Skamielina czy żywy organizm - przysłowie w prasie polskiej." *Jezyk trzeciego tysigclecia*. Ed. Grzegorz Szpila. Cracow: Tertium, 2000. 215-224.

"Archaic Lexis in Polish Proverbs." *"And Gladly Wolde He Lerne and Gladly Teche": Studies on Language and Literature in Honour of Professor Dr. Karl Heinz Göller*. Ed. Władysław Witalisz. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2001. 187-193.

"Opis konotacyjny leksemów w analizie kontrastywnej frazeologizmów." *Poradnik jezykowy*, no volume given, no. 3 (2001), 31-42.

"Rzecz o polskich priamelach." *Literatura ludowa*, 45, no. 1 (2001), 13-20.

"Angielsko-polskie słowniki frazeologiczne przełomu wieków." *Jezyk trzeciego tysiąclecia II*. Ed. Władysław Chłopicki. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Tertium, 2002. II,349-357.

"Minimum paremiologiczne języka polskiego - badanie pilotażowe." *Jezyk polski*, 82, no. 1 (2002), 36-42.

"Co mur, to mądrość narodu – przysłowie w graffiti po polsku." *Literatura ludowa*, 47, no. 3 (2003), 35-42.

This impressive scholarship prepared Grzegorz Szpila for the major undertaking of writing a comprehensive study on proverbs, the result being a small but informative book appropriately entitled *Krótko o przysłowiu* or in English translation *The Proverb in a Nutshell*. This book, with its cover beautifully illustrated by the dozen round proverb pictures from 1558 by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, should be required reading for any student or scholar interested in Polish paremiology and paremiography. But while this book of only 142 densely printed pages is going to serve folklorists, linguists, cultural and literary historians, and paremiologists for many years to come, it will also be a very readable and enjoyable study for the general reader who happens to be interested in the fascinating world of proverbs. It is a book written in a lucid style and with plenty of textual examples to exemplify major points. It should find hundreds if not thousands of readers

in Poland and elsewhere, and it is good to know that such a compact introductory text is now available for scholars, students, and general readers.

The study is divided into seven major chapters, with the first chapter (pp. 7-11) presenting a survey of the history of Polish proverb scholarship. The second chapter (pp. 13-20) looks at the international dissemination of certain proverbs, discussing their origin, loan translations, and dissemination throughout the world. The author emphasizes classical, Biblical, and medieval proverbs, showing how they appear in translation in numerous European languages. It should be noted that Grzegorz Szpila cites comparative examples from numerous languages throughout his book, while concentrating on Polish texts. The fact that the author knows several languages (his knowledge of English is superb) enables him to work comparatively, thus presenting national and international research results.

The major third chapter (pp. 21-65) is divided into fourteen sections. It is here where Szpila deals with the vexing problem of defining a proverb. He points out that a proverb is a complete and short sentence, that it exhibits certain poetic features (rhyme, alliteration, etc.), that it usually contains a metaphor, that it is based on experience, that it expresses a truth or wisdom, that it describes a situation, that it is didactic, that it is of folk origin, that it characterizes human nature, that it is generally known, that it is often of considerable age, and that it is based on tradition. All of these points are clearly explained, and the author includes many Polish examples with occasional references to similar proverbs from other languages. He also refers to some of the major scholarship on these matters. However, references and notes never take on a life of their own. Szpila's major goal is clearly to present a well-founded introduction to the study of proverbs without wanting to bother readers with too much superfluous or too detailed information. After reading these forty pages, readers will most certainly have a very good idea about the origin, nature, form, language, meaning, and content of proverbs.

In the fourth chapter (pp. 67-85) Grzegorz Szpila tackles the question of proverbial genres, dividing his discussion into four sections on the weather proverb, the dialogue proverb, the wellerism, and the priamel. Naturally he defines these sub-genres and presents numerous examples. He also deals with the mean-

ing and purpose of these special forms. The third section on wellerisms (pp. 75-80) is of special value, but the fourth section on priamels (pp. 80-85) is also most welcome, since paremiologists often ignore this particular sub-genre.

As one would expect, the fifth chapter (pp. 87-92) presents a short treatise on related forms to the proverb, namely the aphorism, the maxim, the sententious remark, and the winged word (quotation). Once again the author presents clear examples and shows that they are closely related to proverbs. In fact, it is certainly possible that such texts might become proverbs through repeated use and general currency. In any case, for this to appear, a text needs to gain acceptance among the people over a period of time.

It is good to see that Grzegorz Szpila has also included the sixth chapter (pp. 93-99) on the relationship between paremiology and phraseology. The field of phraseology basically covers all formulaic language, especially verbal phrases, but also twin formulas, idioms, proverbial expressions, proverbs, etc. It has been argued that paremiology is but a part of the larger field of phraseology, and it certainly behooves proverb scholars to pay attention that proverbial matters are not ignored by linguistically oriented phraseologists. Folklorists as well as cultural and literary historians usually stress proverbs and proverbial expressions in their studies, since they are especially interested in the wisdom that is expressed in them. In any case, phraseology and paremiology are two fields of study with similar interests, and this chapter shows that there is plenty of room for them to work together.

The seventh chapter (pp. 101-134) is based on much of Szpila's own research and deals with the proverb in the modern age. The section on the paremiological minimum (pp. 102-115) is of great importance, since the author presents a list of the most commonly known and most frequently used Polish proverbs. But Szpila also includes a discussion of the proverb in the mass media, in advertising, and in literature. He illustrates all of this by means of contextualized examples, showing that proverbs play a major communicative role in modern Polish society. As has been shown for other languages and cultures, proverbs continue to thrive in the modern world, since people still need formulaically

expressed wisdom to comment and reflect on their existence, behavior, and concerns.

A short conclusion (pp. 135-136), a small list of Polish and major international proverb collections (pp. 137-138), and a bibliography of important paremiological studies (pp. 138-142) conclude this compact volume. This information will lead leaders to additional sources that Szpila was not able to present in this volume. It might have been a good idea, however, to include the names of proverb journals and the titles of proverb bibliographies as well as a few more essay collections on proverbs.

Altogether, Grzegorz Szpila has put together an enjoyable, readable, informative, and scholarly survey on proverbs in the Polish language. It is a comprehensive introduction based primarily on Polish proverbs, but there are also many references to proverbs from other languages and cultures cited in their original languages. There is no doubt that this is an extremely useful and valuable book, a study that will find thousands of readers because of its intriguing content that is presented in a clear and understandable fashion. Paremiology needs more such short and compact introductions to the world of proverbs, and Grzegorz Szpila's exemplary study should serve as a model for similar introductions to proverbs in other languages.

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