



Proverbs Are Never Out of Season: Popular Wisdom in the Modern Age

Wolfgang Mieder

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From "Look before you leap" and "You can't sell the cow and have the milk too" to "There's no fool like an old fool" and "Practice what you preach," the wisdom of proverbs has delighted people throughout the ages. Now, *Proverbs Are Never Out of Season* provides an engaging look at the significance of traditional proverbs and their variations in the modern world.

Wolfgang Mieder takes a fascinating tour of the many roles proverbs have played and continue to play today--from sales pitch to propagandistic tool. He looks at how we adapt proverbs to rapidly changing social attitudes--the original wording of proverbs changes to fit modern advertising slogans or political rhetoric, misogynist sayings become feminist slogans, and late medieval woodcuts illustrating proverbs find their modern equivalents in political cartoons and comic strips. In an investigation of the origin of the proverb "Early to bed and early to rise," Mieder not only reveals that Benjamin Franklin was by no means the coiner of this popular saying, but that of the 1,044 proverbs in *Poor Richard's Almanack*, only 5% were actually coined by Franklin himself (among them "There will be sleeping enough in the grave" and "Laziness travels so slowly, that poverty soon overtakes it").

Mieder also traces the origin of the proverb "A picture is worth a thousand words," back to an advertising slogan used in 1921. He points out the truth of such medical proverbs as "An apple a day keeps the doctor away," and "Stuff a cold and starve a fever," revealing that while this medical advice may be quite general, it expresses some common-sense insights gained from experience and supported by medical scholarship. And he shows how the frequently cited "Don't throw the baby out with the bath water" found its way from 16th century Germany to the United States (Among those who have used it in their literary works are Martin Luther, George Bernard Shaw, and Günter Grass).

Wolfgang Mieder, the world's foremost proverb expert, has been studying proverbs for most of his life. He has published more than fifty books on his favorite subject, including the mammoth *Dictionary of American Proverbs*. Complete with thirty-eight illustrations, here is a rich compendium of the many uses of proverbs throughout history and undeniable proof that proverbs are never out of season.

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