

“Make love, not war...get married and do both”: Negative aspects of marriage in anti-proverbs and wellerisms

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Abstract

In the present study I am going to explore negative aspects of marriage and the ways it is viewed and conceptualized in the body of Anglo-American anti-proverbs (i.e., deliberate proverb innovations (also known as alterations, parodies, transformations, variations, wisecracks, mutations, or fractured proverbs) and wellerisms (a form of folklore normally made up of three parts: 1) a statement, 2) a speaker who makes this remark, and 3) a phrase that places the utterance into an unexpected, contrived situation. The meaning of the proverb, proverbial phrase or other statement is usually distorted by being placed into striking juxtaposition with the third part of the wellerisms). Another aim of the study is also to depict those who adhere to the institution of marriage, that is, wives and husbands, and analyse their nature, qualities, attributes and behaviours as revealed through Anglo-American anti-proverbs and wellerisms. My discussion is organized in two parts. The anti-proverbs and wellerisms discussed in the present study were taken primarily from American and British written sources. The texts of anti-proverbs were drawn from hundreds of books and articles on puns, one-liners, toasts, wisecracks, quotations, aphorisms, maxims, quips, epigrams, and graffiti collected in two dictionaries of anti-proverbs compiled by Anna T. Litovkina and Wolfgang Mieder (see Mieder & Litovkina 1999; Litovkina & Mieder 2006). The texts of wellerisms are primarily quoted from the dictionary of wellerisms (see Mieder & Kingsbury 1994).

Keywords: aggression, anti-proverb, wellerism, Anglo-American, marriage.

1. The focus of the study

In the present study, I am going to explore the negative perception of marriage in Anglo-American anti-proverbs and wellerisms. The first part of the study that is divided into four sections treats the background of anti-proverb and wellerisms research and terminology. In the first section the focus of my attention is anti-proverbs, while the second explores wellerisms. The third section briefly comments what marriage is associated with in anti-

proverbs and wellerisms, while the fourth section touches upon the topic of hostility towards spouses. There is a wide range of aspects of marriage discussed in anti-proverbs and wellerisms. Most of them diminish the institution of marriage. To name just a few, matrimony is conceptualized as a burden and form of torture, bossiness and dominance, constant blaming and arguing, slavery and imprisonment, war and fighting, the tomb of love and diminishing of lust, madness and folly, seeing and enlarging each other's shortcomings, hiding and lying, aggression and even murder. Thus, the second part of this study highlights negative aspects of matrimony and stereotypical features of spouses as revealed in anti-proverbs and wellerisms.

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Although the study focuses on anti-proverbs and wellerisms, in order to make a point, to confirm or argue with some statements expressed in our anti-proverbs and wellerisms, sometimes American/English proverbs are also cited. The American proverbs are quoted from the largest dictionary of American proverbs edited by Wolfgang Mieder (see Mieder *et al.* 1992) and Kerschen's book on American proverbs about women (see Kerschen 1998).

2. Background of anti-proverb and wellerism research and terminology

2.1. Anti-proverbs

For centuries, proverbs have provided a framework for endless transformation. In the last few decades they have been perverted and parodied so extensively that their variations have been sometimes heard more often than their original forms. Wolfgang Mieder has coined the term "*Antispruchwort*" (anti-proverb) for such deliberate proverb innovations (also known as alterations, parodies, transformations, variations, wisecracks, mutations, or fractured proverbs) and has published several collections of anti-proverbs in German and English (for a summary of relevant research, see Litovkina & Mieder 2006: 1–54). Anti-proverbs may contain revealing social comments. More often than not, however, being based on mere wordplay or puns, they are playful texts generated primarily for the goal of amusement. As Mieder states, "Just as proverbs continue to comment on all levels and occurrences in our daily life, so do anti-proverbs react by means of alienating and shocking linguistic strategies to everything that surrounds us" (Mieder 1989b: 244).

Some anti-proverbs question the truth of a proverb through:

employing antonyms: "An exception disproves the rule"

(A. C. Doyle, *The Sign of the Four*) {An exception proves the rule}²),

transforming the proverb into its opposite: "A friend that isn't in need is a friend indeed"

(Barbour 1963: 99 {A friend in need is a friend indeed}),

posing a naive question: "If love is blind, how can there be love at first sight?" {Love is blind}).

(Esar 1968: 491)

The vast majority of anti-proverbs, however, put proverbial wisdom only partially into question, primarily by relating it to a particular context or thought in which the traditional wording does not fit, e.g., “Money isn’t everything—but it’s way ahead of what’s in second place” (Metcalf 1993: 148 {Money isn’t everything}).

Typically, an anti-proverb will elicit humour only if the traditional proverb upon which it is based is also known, thus allowing the reader or listener to perceive the incongruity between the two expressions. Otherwise, the innovative strategy of communication based on the juxtaposition of old and “new” proverb is lost. Thus, using Neal Norrick’s terminology, anti-proverbs may be called “intertextual jokes.” “Intertextuality occurs any time one text suggests or requires reference to some other identifiable text or stretch of discourse, spoken or written” (Norrick 1989: 117; for intertextuality in a definition of the proverb genre, see Winick 2003).

Anti-proverbs may contain revealing social comments, e.g., “American money talks in just about every foreign country” (McKenzie 1980: 343 {Money talks}), but they may also be based on mere wordplay or puns, and they may very often be generated solely for the goal of deriving play forms e.g. “A fool and his monkey are soon parted” (Margo 1982 {A fool and his money are soon parted}).

2.2. Wellerisms

Wellerisms, derived from Charles Dickens’ character Samuel Weller (see “Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club”), are particularly common in the USA, Great Britain and Ireland (Carson Williams 2002, 2007; Mieder 1982, 1989: 223–238; Mieder & Kingsbury 1994). This form of folklore is normally made up of three parts: 1) a statement (which often consists of a proverb or proverbial phrase), 2) a speaker who makes this remark, and 3) a phrase that places the utterance into an unexpected, contrived situation. The meaning of the proverb, proverbial phrase or other statement is usually distorted by being placed into striking juxtaposition with the third part of the wellerism. “In this way a wellerism often parodies the traditional wisdom of proverbs by showing the disparity between the wisdom of the proverb and actual reality” (Mieder 1989b: 225). Observe, for example:

“Eaves dropping again,” said Adam, as his wife fell out of a tree.
(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 38)

“There’s nae ill in a merry wind,” quo’ the wife when she whistled through the kirk.
(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 66 {It’s an ill wind that blows nobody any good})

“A lass! I am no more,” as the girl said when she got married.
(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 71)

Wellerisms consisting of a proverb or proverbial phrase in its original form might not be considered anti-proverbs by some scholars but they offer too clear a parallel to omit and are certainly considered to be anti-proverbs by Mieder and T. Litovkina, and, therefore, are included in their collections of anti-proverbs (see Mieder & Litovkina 1999; Litovkina & Mieder 2006):

“Time works wonders,” as the lady said when she got married after an eight year’ courtship.
(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 138 {Time works wonders})

2.3. Marriage as revealed through anti-proverbs and wellerisms

All's fair for anti-proverbs and wellerisms: there is hardly a topic that they do not address. The most common themes are sexuality and love, men and women, professions and occupations. Marriage is undoubtedly one of the most frequent topics in Anglo-American anti-proverbs and wellerisms.

In anti-proverbs and wellerisms marriage is very often associated with unhappiness, which is summarized in the witty proverb transformation "Matrimony is the root of all evil" (Edmund & Workman Williams 1921: 275 {Money is the root of all evil}). A number of anti-proverbs comment on the sobering effect of married life, which can lead not only to the diminished intensity of young love and lust, but even to their utter disappearance:

Marriage makes strange bedfellows.

(Berman 1997: 335 {Politics makes strange bedfellows})

The course of true love never runs smooth—it usually leads to marriage.

(Esar 1968: 491 {The course of true love never runs smooth})

Spouses frequently become accustomed to each other, and even bored with each other, and sex in such cases is sometimes thought of as a chore. In the following two wellerisms, both transformations of the proverb "Business before pleasure", 'business' refers to the mere kiss given to one's wife, while 'pleasure' alludes to sexual intercourse with the lover:

"Business before pleasure," as the man said when he kissed his wife before calling on his sweetheart.

(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 17)

"Business before pleasure," as the man said when he kissed his wife before he went out to make love to his neighbour's.

(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 16)

Instead of being the atmosphere of love, peace, safety and mutual appreciation, home in our examples is frequently seen as a place of constant turmoil and turbulence, the place where spouses show their worst qualities, including rudeness, selfishness, as well as the lack of politeness, empathy and proper respect:

Home is where you go when you're tired of being polite to people.

(Esar 1968: 390 {Home is where the heart is}).

In the transformation of the proverb "Life is not a bed of roses", a picture of marriage is shown as being very far from idyllic, indicating the great dangers of marriage, warning us of the possibilities of being hurt, and comparing matrimony to "a bed of roses" in which a spouse, instead of enjoying the beauty of the flowers, is warned of wounds which might be caused by their thorns:

Marriage is a bed of roses—look out for the thorns.

(Kilroy 1985: 420)

2.4. Hostility towards spouses in wellerisms and anti-proverbs

Many researchers have recognized hostility as the basis of humour. Freud (1960) talks about "hostile jokes" (serving the purpose of aggressiveness, satire or defence). Rapp proposed a whole theory of evolution of humour based on hostility. "For laughter is born out of hatred

and aggressiveness. It is basically and categorically savage...Laughter was born out of hostility. If there had been no hostility in man, there had been no laughter (and incidentally, no need for laughter)” (Rapp 1951: 13). Legman starts the introduction to his book *Rationale of the Dirty Joke: An Analysis of Sexual Humor* with the following words: “Under the mask of humor, our society allows infinite aggressions, by everyone and against everyone” (Legman 1968: 9). According to Gary Alan Fine, the aim of aggressive humour is to achieve or maintain superiority (Fine 1983). William Keough points out, “American humor is violent—and often sexist, racist, brutal, and disgusting as well” (Keough 1990: xi).

Hostility toward women is very prominent in the following transformations, which rework one of the most widespread anti-feminist proverbs in English language, “A woman’s place is in the home” (generally interpreted to mean, “a woman should stay at home, doing housework and raising children”; see Mieder & Litovkina 1999: 26):

The male was made to lie and roam, but woman’s place is in the home.
(James Thurber, *The Stork Who Married a Dumb Wife*, see Thurber 1940: 41)

A woman’s place is in the home
That’s why she’s so eager to find a man to put her in her place.
(Safian 1967: 25)

Another anti-proverb indicating hostile treatment of women by their husbands is:

Charity begins at home, but that’s no reason to treat your wife like a pauper.
(Esar 1968: 123 {Charity begins at home}).

Hostility toward women is also reflected in numerous wellerisms. For instance, talkativeness is usually depicted as an inborn female characteristic. Ideally, the ability to be silent is considered to be one of the most appreciated female characteristics by men. Therefore, if a wife is engaged in permanent talking, she should be silenced:

“Silence that dreadful belle,” as the husband said when his wife was giving him the length of her tongue.
(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 120 {Silence that dreadful bell³})

According to the wellerism below, addressing a very popular category of old (or elderly) women (or wives), the disappearance of sexual infatuation and passion towards one’s wife might be due to the fact that almost nothing natural is left in her:

“Wife is just one sham thing after another,” thought the husband, as his spouse placed her teeth, hair, shape, and complexion on the bureau.
(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 151 {Life is just one damned thing after another}).

3. Negative aspects of marriage as revealed through anti-proverbs and wellerisms

This part of the study examines anti-proverbs and wellerisms addressing negative aspects of marriage, and stereotypical features of wives and husbands. While the first section focuses on features of spouses such as bossiness, dominance, and a despotic nature, and therefore, the institution of matrimony is seen as a constant fight for power, the second section treats marriage as slavery, a burden and like a prison, and also makes an attempt to show its members as slaves and servants. The third and fourth sections subsequently treat spouses’

harmful behaviours such as blaming and criticism (third section) which lead to constant conflicts, arguments, and disputes (Section 4). The focus of the fifth section is on physical aggression as a constant feature of a marital union, and the sixth section addresses conceptualisation of marriage as a battlefield in war. Last but not least, the last section examines spouses' wishes for their other halves be dead or to even to kill them, and it also discusses spouses' thoughts about their own demise.

3.1. "If at first you don't succeed, do it the way your wife told you"

Many a man never has to show his wife who's boss in the house—she has a mirror.
(Esar 1968: 90)

However oppressed and inferior wives have been through the centuries, they have always known how to exercise influence on their husbands. According to Stone:

Their monopoly of certain work responsibilities, their capacity to give or withhold sexual favors, their control over the children, their ability to scold, all gave them useful potential levers of power within the home.
(Stone 1979: 139)

This might be seen as one of the main reasons why some people (in particular, confirmed bachelors) might consider it much better to stay out of marriage than to be bossed:

'Tis better to have loved and lost than to marry and be bossed.
(Esar 1968: 90 {It's better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all}).

According to John Gottman, the author or co-author of over 200 published academic articles and of 40 books on marital stability and divorce prediction, including such bestsellers as *What Predicts Divorce?* (1994a); *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail* (1994b); *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (Gottman & Silver 1999), struggle for power and dominance is one of the main causes of all marital conflicts. Indeed, exercising power, influence, bossiness and dominance is one of the most important issues in a wife-husband relationship all the way through their marriage, according to our anti-proverbs. Let us examine below how this happens. Who starts and wins this power battle, according to our anti-proverbs and wellerisms? This section will make an attempt to answer this crucial question.

As is shown in Litovkina (2014) according to Anglo-American anti-proverbs, one of the most deep-rooted stereotypes of women in a role of wife is that of the demanding, manipulating, commanding, bossy and ruling woman. She is the one who constantly tells her husband what he should do:

Behind every successful man is a wife who tells him what to do, and a secretary who does it.
(Esar 1968: 868 {Behind every successful man there's a woman})

Her 'poor' husband needs to pull his socks up and accomplish her wishes:

If at first you don't succeed, do it the way your wife told you.
(Prochnow 1985: 142 {If at first you don't succeed, try, try again}).

The proverb "A man's home is his castle" is frequently transformed in order to indicate that what once upon a time used to be a man's castle, after he gets married, becomes "his wife's castle":

A man's home is his wife's castle.

(Anonymous 1908: 12)

A man's castle is his home, and his wife has the keys to all the rooms.

(Safian 1967: 16)

Wives' dominance and power may be demonstrated in the following two alterations of a very well-known proverb from the Bible "No man can serve two masters". In the first example below pointing out again the alleged undermined position of husbands, a 'poor' man is surrounded by two bossy women, or 'masters': this time they are his wife and his daughter who, in line with the proverb "Like mother, like daughter", possesses similar qualities her mother has:

No man can serve two masters, unless he has a wife and grown-up daughter.

(Esar 1968: 721 {No man can serve two masters}).

The second example touches upon polygamy, a form of marriage in which a person has more than one spouse at a same time and which is not permitted in the USA. While in the Bible the two masters are God and mammon (that is, money), in the example below two masters are two wives who have to be served by their husband. It is an absolutely impossible task to satisfy the needs of two women:

Polygamy is proposed for Europe, but it is contrary to Scripture. No man can serve two masters.

(Greenville (S. C.) Piedmont, in Lawson 1924: 150).

The anti-proverb below points out the main role of wives in orchestrating the 'performance' of their marriage, and "writing the script" for it:

Home is where the husband runs the show, but the wife writes the script.

(Esar 1968: 389 {Home is where the heart is}).

Generally, it is wife—and not the husband—who, according to these anti-proverbs, turns their own home into a prison, the place where the husband does not have enough freedom to do certain things when she is around. Thus, even eating, drinking and (most important!) "being merry", or "doing as he pleases" are each depicted as activities possible for a husband only when his wife is not around. Indeed, the wife's arrival home is considered to be as bad as a husband's own death. Therefore, husbands should take advantage of their wives' absence and enjoy their freedom as much as it is possible:

Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow your wife may come home.

(Mieder et al. 1992: 175 {Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we may die}).

Home is the only place where a man can do as he pleases—when his wife's away.

(Esar 1968: 390 {Home is where the heart is}).

Many American proverbs concern the dominant wife who twists her henpecked husband round her finger, e.g., "If you make your wife an ass, she will make you an ox"; "There is little peace in that house where the hen crows and the cock is mute"; "It is a sad house where the hen crows louder than the cock". Having a strong will, women persistently try to get their way and, therefore, whenever they can, they exercise their power and dominance on men, e.g., "Man has his will, but woman has her way". It is women—and not men—who always have their last word: "Women will have the last word". The proverb "The husband is the

head of the house, but the wife is the neck—and the neck moves the head” testifies the case of the wife being the prime mover of marriage.

Since men are scared of losing their power and dominance, not surprisingly, a number of our anti-proverbs picture wives, entirely usurping their husbands’ alleged position as head of the household. The two examples below even employ the words “boss” or “bossed”, alluding to wives wearing the breeches:

If experience is the best teacher, how is it that some husbands still think they’re the boss of the family?

(McKenzie 1980: 166 {Experience is the best teacher}).

A bachelor is a rolling stone that gathers no boss.

(Woods 1967: 274 {A rolling stone gathers no moss}).

One of the reasons the former old bachelor cries “Alas! Alas!” after getting married, might be that his wife has started ruling him:

“A lass, a lass!” exclaimed an old bachelor, who wanted to marry. “Alas! Alas!” he cried after he had been married awhile.

(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 71)

In Section 2.1 we have discussed how power, dominance and bossiness are reflected in our examples. Let us examine in the following section how marriage is conceptualized as a prison, a burden and like slavery, and who is depicted in this institution as a slave and servant.

3.2. “All men are born free and equal, but some of them grow up and get married”

Marriage is not a word, it’s a sentence—a life sentence.

(David Minkoff, Oy!⁴)

For centuries nothing else has been considered to be more important for a woman than serving her husband and children. While a husband’s duties are usually over when he comes home from work and, therefore, he can be involved in any kind of free time activity, a wife’s household jobs do not seem to have an end, i.e., “A woman’s work is never done” and “Man works from sun to sun, but a woman’s work is never done”. Cooking for men or doing other domestic work is considered one of such kinds of pleasure women must provide. The proverbs “A woman’s place is in the home”; “A woman, a cat, and a chimney should never leave the house” even emphasize that women should be restricted to the domestic sphere and not leave their homes.

Marriage is conceptualized as slavery, a burden and a prison in a number of American proverbs, e.g., “Wedlock is a padlock”; “The chain of wedlock is heavy that it takes two to carry it, and sometimes three”. Both men and women might be depicted as slaves. A number of proverbs reflect marriage as a source of pleasure for men—and not for women. Therefore, husbands should be looked at as deities by their wives, and wives, whose mission it is to serve their husbands are frequently depicted as slaves—“A good wife is a perfect lady in the living room, a good cook in the kitchen, and a harlot in the bedroom”; “Better to be an old man’s darling than a young man’s slave”; “A wife is a young man’s slave and an old man’s darling”. Quite the opposite view is reflected in the following proverbs, according to which husbands—and not wives—are shown as slaves: “He who has a wife has a master”; “Men are born the slaves of women”.

Now let us examine what our anti-proverbs say to us about the aspect of matrimonial union discussed in proverbs. If being single is paralleled to freedom and equality, being married equals to one's lack of freedom and equality:

“All men are born free and equal, but some of them grow up and get married”.

(Nashville Tennessean, in Lawson 1924: 111 {All men are created equal}).

Indeed, similarly to original proverbs, according to scores of Anglo-American anti-proverbs from our corpus, marriage also constitutes slavery, a burden, and entanglement. In fact, to be married might even equal a life sentence to prison:

The trouble with wedlock is that there's not enough wed and too much lock.

(Christopher Morley, in Esar 1968: 503 {Wedlock is a padlock})

The anti-proverb above is a very interesting and rare example in which one word from the original proverb text (“wedlock”) is split into two in its transformation (“wed” and “lock”). Indeed, after you get married, you will not have time for any leisure activities, because, becoming and being a slave, you have to work hard. This idea is emphasized by the following transformations of the proverb “Marry in haste and repent at leisure”:

Marry in haste, and you'll never have any leisure to repent it.

(Esar 1968: 469)

If one marries in haste, there is sometimes no leisure for repentance.

(Herbert V. Prochnow, in Prochnow 1955: 189).

Who is generally depicted as a master and who is portrayed as a slave, according to these anti-proverbs? Who turns matrimony into prison for another and who is sentenced to prison? Whose is the heaviest burden and load?

Contrary to the idea claimed in the proverbs cited at the beginning of this section, very few anti-proverbs and wellerisms support the idea that women were created for housework, and, consequently, for slavery of matrimony:

“Love lightens labor,” as the man said when he saw his wife doing his work for him.

(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 81)

Numerous examples of anti-proverbs have been identified in which husbands—and not wives—are depicted as slaves. Generally, they are portrayed as men whose wives are extremely bossy and arrogant (see section 2.1 above). The “henpecked” husband of such a powerful, dominant, bossy woman discussed in Section 2.1 is even compared to a worm (that is a weak, submissive man, obeying his wife's orders and being afraid of doing anything against her will, not even to “turn” the way he wishes) in a number of our anti-proverbs:

Two men were traveling together. The first morning out one of them was up bright and early. “Come, come,” he said, prodding the other. “Don't you know that it's the early bird that catches the worm?” “Well, it serves the worm right for being up so early,” mumbled the other as he turned over, “and my wife says that I'm a worm.”

(Esar 1945: 143 {The early bird catches the worm})

A henpecked husband is the only species of worm that's afraid to turn.

(Esar 1968: 381 {Even a worm will turn}).

In the section about wives' bossiness above we have discussed some variations of the proverb "A man's home is his castle". A number of additional transformations of this proverb point out some other negative aspects of marriage for a husband. A married man is shown as a vassal in his castle, and his house becomes merely "his project":

To a do-it-yourselfer, a man's home is not his castle, but his project.
(Esar 1968: 390).

A married man's home is his castle, with him being his vassal.
(Esar 1968: 775)

Furthermore, the man living in "his castle" is even cynically advised to do all the cleaning at his home himself:

An Englishman's home is his castle—so let him clean it!
(Kilroy 1985: 431)

Even food preparation, one of the most stereotypical female activities, might be delegated by bossy women to their husbands and might become husbands' duty, especially if they wake up early:

Early to bed and early to rise makes a man get his own breakfast.
(Esar 1968: 95 {Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise}).

As we can see from numerous proverb mutations above and below, the husband simply turns into his wife's underling. Hence two transformations of the proverb "The early bird catches the worm", in both of which husbands are depicted as "the early bird" diligently working in the morning, preparing breakfast for either their wives or only for themselves. The husband who wakes up before his wife does it and who prepares and serves her "breakfast in bed", contributes to an idyllic picture of matrimonial union for a wife:

The early bird gets up to serve his wife breakfast in bed.
(Safian 1967: 35)

"And remember, my son," said the father of the groom, "the early husband gets his own breakfast."
(Copeland 1965: 238).

While the father of the groom above warns his son to be reluctant and not to hurry with doing any kind of female activities—or otherwise his poor fate will be to serve his wife for ever—the anti-proverb below addresses a diligent, overworking bridegroom, trying to please his 'better half'. Is he treated with appreciation or rather with despise and contempt? The latter might be more probable:

A new groom sweeps clean, and also washes dishes.
(Esar 1968: 97 {A new broom sweeps clean}).

All three transformations above reflect the idea that it is a weak man who helps his wife with household chores. This point basically appears to be in accordance with the observation in *The Economist* (1992: 75) that, even at the end of the 20th century in the industrialized world, "husbands do not help much in the home". In other words, as emerged from his analysis of English and Yoruba proverbs on marriage, "proverbs show marriage as a male-propping and female-enslaving institution" (Yusuf 1999: 47).

If historically the husband was the breadwinner and it was he who was the main financial provider in the family, this trend is changing nowadays. Indeed, wives in many families have managed to earn money to support their families and to gain financial independence for themselves. According to the *New York Magazine*, “In 2001, for example, wives earned more than their spouses in almost a third of married households where the wife worked” (Gardner 2003).

The following proverb transformation expresses the fear of the husband who is not given enough closet space by his ‘better half’:

Give a husband an inch, and it’s all the closet space he’ll get.
(Safian 1967: 29 {Give him an inch and he’ll take a mile}).

Naturally, it is not only a question of closet space that the husband in the example above is afraid not to get, but it is also a question of freedom, dominance, power, and control which men do not want to lose, even despite the fact that their well-being in the family largely depends on their wives, and the way they are treated by them. The proverb transformation also points out that if a husband is too kind and generous to his wife, she will take advantage of him and will demand for more and more.

The ‘miserable’ fate of many husbands who naively think that they are the bosses in their houses—and not their wife’s underlings—does not change for better even after they become fathers, they remain unheard and unseen by their wives, and they simply continue “playing a supporting role” in the stage performance called marriage:

All the world’s a stage, and every father plays a supporting role.
(Esar 1968: 784 {All the world’s a stage})

Fathers should be neither seen or heard. That is only proper basis for family life.
(Oscar Wilde, in Prochnow 1958: 159) {Children should be seen and not heard}).

3.3. “If at first you don’t succeed, blame it on your wife”

God made Eve out of Adam’s rib so that He might be able to shift half the blame on him.
(Esar 1968: 10)

After the honeymoon phase in a couple’s married life is over, spouses clearly see each other’s faults, shortcomings and failings, and they begin to enlarge them and blame each other for them. Moreover, they even put the blame on their other halves for something they hadn’t even done or for the qualities they don’t possess at all. This section makes an attempt to analyse one most common types of verbal abuse, in the form of blame and criticism, as it is reflected in our anti-proverbs and wellerisms.

Husbands in anti-proverbs or wellerisms are extremely rarely depicted as people who put the blame of their wives for something. One of such rare examples indicates that when a man cannot manage something, whether it is fair or not, he makes his wife a scapegoat:

If at first you don’t succeed, blame it on your wife.
(Esar 1968: 292 {If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again})

Wives, more frequently than husbands, are portrayed as complainers, naggers and critics. Let us exemplify this through four variations of the most frequently transformed proverb treating women in our corpus of Anglo-American anti-proverbs, the proverb “Behind every famous man there’s a woman” (the number of its transformations in Litovkina & Mieder ‘corpus of anti-proverbs’ is 36, see Litovkina & Mieder 2006: 103–105):

Behind every successful man there's a great...nag, nag, nag.
(Alexander 2004: 140).

Behind every famous man there's a woman—telling him he's not so hot.
(McKenzie 1980: 175)

Behind every successful man is a woman who keeps reminding him that she knows men who would have done even better.
(McKenzie 1980: 334)

Behind every successful man there's a woman sneering that she knows a man who's more successful.
(Esar 1968: 161).

In his book *What Predicts Divorce?* (1994a) Gottman claimed that in couples heading for divorce versus stable couples, the wife's initial opening presentation of the problem is usually a criticism, rather than a complain. According to Carrère and Gottman (1999: 299):

A criticism differs from a complaint in implying that this is a global issue reflecting something defective in the husband's character that has caused the problem, whereas the complaint is more specific and does not suggest that the problem is with the husband's defective personality.

A very good example of wife's verbal abuse and criticism are the words of the grumbling and belligerent wife from the joke below employing a proverb as a punch-line:

Wife (heatedly)—“You're lazy, you're worthless, you're bad-tempered, you're shiftless, you're a thorough liar.”
Husband (reasonably)—“Well, my dear, no man is perfect.”
(Copeland 1965: 227 {Nobody's perfect}).

If the husband comes home late, consequently he should be prepared to listen to his wife reprimanding and lecturing him (another form of verbal abuse and criticism):

It is the late husband that catches the lecture.
(Loomis 1949: 354 {The early bird catches the worm}).

Blaming or criticising one's spouse most frequently doesn't result in a wish to change him/her but, rather it only almost immediately initiates a negative spiral leading to a raw and escalating a conflict or quarrel (the theme of our next section).

3.4. “A word to the wife is sufficient—to start a quarrel”

We've been married fifteen years now and we've only had one quarrel. It started on our wedding day and it hasn't finished yet!
(Metcalf 1993: 12)

This section focuses on wellerisms and anti-proverbs depicting perpetual marital quarrels, disagreements, arguments and disputes. Matrimony is associated with lack of peace and constant quarrelling:

Two can live as cheaply as one, but not so peacefully.
(Esar 1968: 654 {Two can live as cheaply as one})

It takes two to make a quarrel, and the same number to get married.

(Prochnow 1955: 191 {It takes two to make a quarrel}).

There might be valid reasons for spouses' holding opposing opinions, and they should never be neglected by the other. While being involved in a conflict, spouses might not be able to listen to each other but only struggle for power and victory:

There are two sides to every argument, and they're usually married to each other.

(Esar 1968: 41 {There are two sides to every argument})

Both the spouses are shown as equally responsible for initiating and continuing quarrels:

If marriage makes a husband and wife one, then it doesn't take two to make a quarrel.

(Esar 1968: 653 {It takes two to make a quarrel})

Interestingly, all four mutations quoted and discussed above are based on proverbs containing the word "two", thus demonstrating again and again the responsibility of both the spouses for the outcome of their marriage.

Naturally, sometimes the help of marital therapist might be needed in order to help the spouses to handle their conflicts and fights in a constructive way:

Marital therapists: "A man's house is his hassle."

(MacHovec 1988: 134 {A man's home is his castle}).

Who usually initiates quarrelling and arguing? Just in line with the proverbs: "Three things drive a man out of his home: smoke, rain and a scolding wife"; "Women and dogs cause too much strife"; "There's hardly a strife in which a woman has not been a prime mover", etc., numerous anti-proverbs and wellerisms emphasize women's role in such conflicts. There are hardly any examples bringing men's faults in initiation or escalation of such conflicts or quarrels. A very rare example, showing husbands' negative qualities such as their disrespect towards their wives, as well as their selfishness and meanness which might lead to a conflict:

"What's hers is mine; what's mine is my own," quoth the husband.

(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 85)

The two anti-proverbs below—each transformation of the proverb "A word to the wise is sufficient"—have one thing in common, both of them play on semantic opposition ("wise" is placed in contrast to "wife"), that is the wife is viewed as lacking in wisdom (definitely by men). In the texts of the anti-proverbs the word "wise" is not even mentioned:

To most husbands: A word from the wives is sufficient.

(Loomis 1949: 357) {A word to the wise is sufficient}

A word to the wife is sufficient—to start a quarrel.

(Esar 1968: 653) {A word to the wise is sufficient}.

Wives are sometimes shown as revengeful furies with terrible outbursts of anger, and it is definitely adds the oil to the fire of the conflict. See the variation of the proverb "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned" in which a woman's place is not "the home", indicated by the traditional proverb "A woman's place is in the home" but something worse—"hell", the Devil's dwelling place. This is consistent with some proverbs which bring a parallel between a woman and Hell, e.g., "When a man takes a wife, he ceases to dread hell":

Hell hath no fury like a woman who has waited an hour for her husband on the wrong corner.
(Esar 1968: 32 {Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned}).

Additional examples demonstrating wives' anger and revengefulness:

When angry with her husband, a wise woman always counts ten—but not over him.
(Esar 1968: 184 {When angry count to ten})

There is no fury like an ex-wife searching for a new lover.
(C. Nonnolly, *The Unquiet Grave* {Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned})

“Tit for tat,” quoth the wife when she farted at the thunder.
(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 140 {Tit for tat}).

In the last example, “tit for tat” as a “reward” for the thunder’s wrong against the wife is also combined with her lack of capacity for logical thinking, and outright stupidity. If the wife is portrayed as being revengeful towards the thunder, it is better for us not even to think about what she could do in response to her husband’s improper behaviour?! Thus, wives’ wishes have to be accomplished and granted without any disputes or arguments; otherwise, there might be immediately problems for their husbands. ‘Poor’ husbands feel “pressed” by their dominant and bossy wives:

“I’m very much pressed for time,” as the man said when his wife hugged and kissed him to coax a gold watch out of him.
(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 100)

It doesn’t matter what the cause of an argument is, a quarrelsome, belligerent wife can always find a good reason for quarrelling. If it is not one thing she is not satisfied with, it might be another. Experienced husbands supposedly know it too well. This is the reason why in order to preserve peace in their families they are advised to keep their thoughts to themselves and keep their mouths shut, so that they do not provoke the eruption of volcano:

Experience teaches wisdom: the experienced husband has learned to think twice before saying nothing.
(Esar 1968: 286 {Experience teaches wisdom; Think twice before you speak}).

If the husband’s answer to his wife’s “pressing” or request is “not”, his wife might explode in anger. Indeed, not much is needed for such an explosion, one word is enough, and here comes a burst. Who needs such explosion? Not surprisingly, husbands in our numerous anti-proverbs and wellerisms—in order not to have any problems with their wives and not to experience the outbursts of their anger—are recommended to always say “yes” and to give their wives their will:

One word to the wife is sufficient: say “Yes.”
(Berman 1997: 455 {A word to the wise is sufficient})

My wife always lets me have the last word. It’s usually, “Yes.”
(Metcalf 1993: 114 {Women will have the last word})

“Give her her will or she’ll burst” quoth the goodman when his wife was dinging him.
(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 151).

The quarrelsome, domineering, belligerent, and stubborn wife's wish to always have her word last might endanger her matrimonial union and might lead the couple to divorce:

The wife who always has the last word often gets it as the divorcee.

(Esar 1968: 237 {Women will have the last word}).

3.5. "I punish my wife with good words," said the old man as he threw the Bible at his wife

Physical violence and aggression are also the topic of a number of examples under our examination. Our examples—mostly wellerisms—quoted and examined in this section most frequently portray husbands as aggressors and wives as victims of their aggression, just in line with denigrating and sexist proverbs encouraging men to use physical aggression and to beat up their wives, e.g., "A woman, a dog, and a walnut tree: the more you beat them, the better they be"; "A woman and a ship ever want mending". Let us start this discussion with analysis of the examples addressing physical punishment of wives by their husbands:

"That's the kick," said Paddy when he kicked his wife into the fire.

(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 69 {That's the kick}).

Anything goes for wives' battering; a yardstick, a beer pot, a pound of butter, or even a heavy volume of the Bible are equally acceptable. Body parts most frequently hit are their buttocks:

"Measure in all things," said the tailor and beat his wife with a yardstick.

(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 83 {Measure in all things})

"Well hit," quoth Hickman when he smote his wife on the buttock with a beer pot.

(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 62 {Well hit})

"Dab," quoth Dawkings when he hit his wife in the arse with a pound of butter.

(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 29)

In the following wellerism we see the juxtaposition of the expression "good words" in the first part of the wellerism with a heavy volume of the Bible in the third part of the wellerism containing these "good words" and been thrown by an old man into his wife:

"I punish my wife with good words," said the old man as he threw the Bible at his wife.

(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 53)

The following joke employing part of the proverb "Don't make a mountain out of a molehill "in the form of an idiom" to make a mountain out of a molehill" touches upon a frequent theme of wife battering by her husband leading to a trial:

On trial for blackening his wife's eye and knocking out a couple of her teeth, the wife-beater declared, "Judge, maybe I made a mistake, but she's making a mountain out of a molehill."

"Your Honor," wept his spouse, "when he makes a mistake, it's a butte⁵."

(Safian 1966: 19)

In some very rare examples the wife might also adopt the role of an aggressor. Among the instruments the aggressive wives from the wellerisms below use might be "a lighted lamp", a "rolling pin", or even "a broom". Such simple peaceful devices immediately turn into a deadly weapon, "missal", and the whole wife-husband interaction becomes "the sweeping catastrophe. The husband's body part hit or thrown at is his head:

“Here’s an illuminated missal for you,” remarked the wife of the book-collector, as she threw a lighted lamp at her husband’s head.

(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 85).

“I’m beginning to miss my husband,” said Mrs. Murphy, as the rolling pin grazed her husband’s head and hit the wall.

(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 65)

“This is the sweeping catastrophe,” as the man said when his wife knocked him down with a broom.

(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 132)

A wife’s physical aggression might be directed as a response to the denigrating, derogative, or deprecating, humour of her husband and is reflected in the wellerism below. By physically tying and capturing him, she communicates to him that “Enough is enough”:

“Laugh that off,” said the fat man’s wife, as she sewed his vest button on with wire.

(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 71)

Gottman’s research has indicated that a little bit of affiliative, kind humour used in the middle of a conflict may very frequently help a couple to solve their conflict (see Gottman 1994a; 1994ba; Gottman & Silver 1999). The phrases “You don’t have a sense of humour” or “It was just a joke” are, however, just some of the types of manipulation used by toxic, abusive, and controlling men in order to divert the problem or complaint brought up by their wives (see Bancroft 2002; Evans 2006, 2010).

3.6. “Marriage is an adventure, like going to war” (Gilbert K. Chesterton⁶)

Matrimony is the only state of conflict where the battles take place after the war has been won.

(Esar 1968: 504)

What do you and your wife fight about all the time?

I don’t know She won’t tell me!

(Metcalf 1993: 115)

As has been stressed elsewhere (see Litovkina & Csábi 2002: 388), the “love is war” metaphor belongs to the most prevalent metaphorical conceptualizations of love in American proverbs. Indeed, one of the most popular proverbs about love in America is “All is fair in love and war” which states that in courtship just as on the battlefield, you are allowed to take advantage of every opportunity. According to Kövecses, the love-as-war metaphor “highlights those instances of love where the idea of love’s mutuality is absent in some way” (1988: 72). This is due to the fact that the person who is in love has to fight in order to have his or her love returned. It belongs to the most prevalent metaphorical conceptualizations of love. Let us view three additional American proverbs which link love and war: “In love and war no time should be lost”; “In love, as in war, each man must gain his own victories” and “Make love, not war”. We should not be surprised to discover that marriage is also conceptualized as constant war and fight in a number of our examples.

The two anti-proverbs below—both transformations of the idiomatic expression “Make love, not war”, the anti-war slogan from the 60’s which has become proverbial—besides addressing ups and downs in marriage, also emphasize the war-like aspects of marriage. When the spouses feel up, they might be engaged in making love, but there is also another side of a marital union, the side of war:

Make love, not war.
I'm married, I do both.

(Rees 1980: 80)

Make love, not war...Get married and do both.

(Berman 1997: 251).

The two mutations above reflect the dual nature of marriage—it can cure and kill, it might bring you happiness and unhappiness, it can be both war and peace at the same time. The anti-proverb below emphasizes great dangers of marriage as well, depicting it as a battlefield in which anyone can be wounded (or even killed):

Marriage is like life in this—that it is a field of battle, and not a bed of roses.

(Robert Louis Stevenson, *Virginibus Puerisque*⁷)

Marriage is also seen as a battlefield in the wellerisms and anti-proverb below. The wife who “stoops to conquer”, pretends being meek and lowers herself to “reaching down for the poker” is definitely seen by her husband as maliciously engaged in fight, the only purpose of which is to achieve her end, and to conquer:

“She stoops to conquer,” as the man said when his wife reached down for the poker.

(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 26)

3.7. “Every little helps,” as the captain said when he threw his wife overboard to lighten the ship

Numerous wellerisms and anti-proverbs depict spouses wishing for the demise of their other half. The topic of I shall examine examples in which women wish for their husbands' death, or who may even want to kill them themselves. The second part of the section addresses males wishing for the death of their wives. Afterwards widows and widowers are briefly discussed. At the very end of this section I will discuss how spouses treat their own death.

Let us start with one of the ‘favourite’ ways of eradicating one’s husband in our corpus, drowning. The following wellerisms reflecting women’s fantasies to get rid of their husbands and employing the proverb “Every little bit helps” show the figures of desperate women who have suffered so much during their marriages that they are ready to do the most absurd things in order to contribute at least a little bit to their husbands’ death. Even something very small such as a little bit of her urine or some water, which is really grotesque, can help a woman to drown her husband:

“Every little bit helps,” as the old lady said when she pissed in the ocean to help drown her husband.

(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 76)

“Every little bit helps,” said the old woman as she threw the water on the ceiling to drown her husband with.

(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 76)

Drowning a husband is not the only way to exterminate him: our examples suggest that there is more than one way to kill one’s husband, i.e., via hanging him. A death wish of an unlovable husband is jokingly referred to in the following wellerism:

“That char is charr’d⁸,” as the good wife said when she had hanged her husband.

(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 20)

While the wellerism above portrays a woman who has hanged her husband herself, in the wellerism below a wife is shown very happy and excited to discover the secret of where her “clothes line went to”, i.e., her husband has used it for hanging himself. No pity towards him is expressed:

“There, that explains where my clothes line went to!” exclaimed an Ohio woman as she found her husband hanging in the stable.

(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 22).

Men in our corpus also want their spouses’ death, although not as frequently. In what follows below, the examples reflect males’ wishes to kill their wives. Again, husbands, similarly to wives, also like murdering their spouses by drowning. The proverb “Every little bit helps” is used as a base for the wellerisms below as well:

“Every little helps,” as the captain said when he threw his wife overboard to lighten the ship.

(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 75).

By throwing his wife overboard, the captain from the wellerisms above shows very clearly that she has become an incredible burden for him. This is not surprising, since one’s marriage is frequently seen in anti-proverbs and wellerisms as burden, especially by men. Naturally, it is also assumed that it will not be a problem for the captain to replace his wife by another woman.

A wish to kill one’s spouse is jokingly expressed in wellerisms from many other cultures as well, either from the perspective of the wife, or from that of the husband. And here, again, drowning is the favourite way to eradicate one’s spouse:

“Every little bit lightens,” said the skipper, and he threw his wife overboard.

(Frisian)

“Never make a toil of pleasure,” as the man said when he dug his wife’s grave only three feet deep.

(Irish)

“Every man for himself and God for us all,” said the farmer who saw his wife drown, without lifting a finger.

(Dutch)

“A feast with no breakages is rubbish,” said the woman, when her husband broke his neck.

(Danish)

“That clears a space,” said Grietje, when her husband died.

(Dutch) (Schipper 2003: 122).

In the excerpt below, transforming the most frequently parodied proverbs in English according to Litovkina and Mieder (see Litovkina & Mieder 2006: 244–248), “Old soldiers never die, they just fade away”, a comedian has tried to kill his wife by “joking her to death”. Not surprisingly, she sues him for divorce:

Good jokes never die; they only pass along. Example: The comedian’s wife sued for divorce, claiming he tried to joke her to death.

(Crosbie 1977: 182)

The vast majority of anti-proverbs and wellerisms, address widows, and not widowers and focus on the topic of widows' fast remarriage. Moreover, widows are sometimes seen as a commodity which might be sold or bought. In this vein, the proverb mutation below in the form of wellerisms even uses the expression "swapped herself off" instead of the words "married again" or "remarried":

"An even exchange is no robbery," as the widow said when she swapped herself off for a widower.

(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 40 {An even exchange is no robbery}).

The fact that the "swapped herself off" from the example above is put into the mouth of the widow herself—and not anyone else—shows that she treats herself as an object which might be given, sold or swapped off. Just in line, another wellerism, this time not containing a proverb:

"If it wasn't for hope the heart would break," as Mrs. Perkins said, when she buried her seventh husband and looked anxiously among the funeral crowd for another.

(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 64)

The proverb alteration below humorously shows the ease with which widows can get remarried:

Many a widow finds it easy to marry again because dead men tell no tales.

(Esar 1968: 865 {Dead men tell no tales}).

The mutation above also suggests that a widow's negative traits of nature and behaviour might remain secret to her second husband. Since her first husband is dead, who will reveal to him any unpleasant truth about her? Who will tell him if his successor has died due to natural causes or has been murdered by his wife?

The figure of widower doesn't appear even once in anti-proverbs, he is only present in wellerisms. Let us address now some of them. Just in line with the American proverb "Grief for a dead wife and a troublesome guest continues to the threshold, and there is at rest", wives' deaths are seen as a relief and something desirable and not grieved by their husbands in the following wellerisms:

"Every evil is followed by some good," as the man said when his wife died the day after he became bankrupt.

(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 53 {Every evil is followed by some good}).

"It's a saving of one half," as the toper said when his wife died.

(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 111).

Interestingly enough, while widows' grief over their deceased husbands is not even shown once in our examples, widowers sometimes faint at their wives' funerals or depicted as "sorrowing":

"Or, for a better half!" said the sorrowing widower when he found a counterfeit fifty-cent piece among his coins.

(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 9)

"I guess he'll re-wife," as the gentleman said when his friend fainted away at his wife's funeral.

(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 106)

Most probably the widowers' fainting or sorrow is nothing but hypocrisy. Granting all their seeming sadness, widowers, nevertheless, are portrayed as those who are going to shortly substitute their spouses, as in the last wellerism above playing on the terms "revive" and "re-wife".

As reflected in the anti-proverb below, life with some spouses (in our example—wives) might seem like permanent torture by being fried alive in "the frying pan" of matrimony:

When a wicked married man dies he gets out of the frying pan and into the fire.

(Reflections of a Bachelor, 1903, in Adams 1969: 347 {Out of the frying pan into the fire}).

Even his own death and getting "into the fire" of hell might be considered by the wicked man from the proverb mutation above as a relief and a possible way to 'escape' from this torture of marriage.

We can empathically understand all the fears of a man hearing about being together with his wife not only "till death do us part" but in the afterlife world as well. He doesn't even want to imagine this:

"We won't indulge in such horrid anticipations," as the hen-pecked husband said when the parson told him he would be joined to his wife in another world, never to separate.

(Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 3)

I have come to the end of my discussion. Many more marital themes could have been brought up in the present study but I must come to a conclusion now.

4. Conclusion

This study provides an attempt to portray various negative aspects of marriage and the ways it is seen in the Anglo-American anti-proverbs and wellerisms, with a special focus on the figures of wife and husband, their stereotypical traits and features, as well as their behavioural patterns.

As demonstrated in the present study, similar to traditional proverbs in general, Anglo-American anti-proverbs and wellerisms do not paint a purely rosy portrait of matrimony. The vast majority of our texts give the most unpleasant, disappointing, pessimistic and denigrating picture of marriage, emphasizing its most negative and dark sides.

Matrimony in Anglo-American anti-proverbs and wellerisms is conceptualized as a state of having arguments and quarrels leading to constant fighting and even war. Wives—and not husbands—have a main role in such fights, being seen as nagging, dominant, overcritical, manipulative and bossy. Not surprisingly, husbands are typically portrayed as poor weak creatures who are bossed around by their wives, and are even depicted in a number of proverb mutations as worms that are afraid to turn. Marriage is also shown in our material as a form of slavery. Generally, husbands tend to be seen as slaves overworking themselves to death, restlessly serving their wives. Matrimony also constitutes a prison. Stereotypically it is husbands—and not wives—who are sentenced to it.

As has already been pointed out above, matrimony in our examples is frequently associated with constant fighting and war. Not surprisingly, both spouses instead of being engaged in passionate sexual activities are frequently shown as simply wishing to kill their partners. Indeed, until the 20th century, in many cultures within the Christian tradition divorce practically did not exist and was even prohibited (except for some very special grounds). Therefore, spouses were 'sentenced' to living with each other for life, whether they liked each other or not, whether they had a satisfactory marriage or not. Death was the only

way of dissolving marriage. This might be one of the reasons why in our corpus there are anti-proverbs and wellerisms expressing the wish for a spouse's death. A number of our examples show various pursuits aiming to kill one's spouse; and as we have examined scores of our examples, there is more than one way to do this: the most frequently used ways are through hanging and drowning. Our examples express fantasies of spouses being hurt or battered, by blackening their spouses' eyes, knocking out their teeth, beating them with a yardstick or a beer pot, joking them to death, or even throwing a heavy bible at them. Furthermore, matrimony in the corpus of Anglo-American anti-proverbs and wellerisms is very often associated with a burden and torture.

As discussed earlier in this study, proverb parodies and wellerisms respect nobody. Nothing is too holy or sacrosanct to avoid exposure to ridicule. Anti-proverbs and wellerisms may contain elements not only of funniness, but also of offensiveness, hostility and aggression directed, as we have seen from the numerous texts above, primarily towards women. And in this respect none the traditional proverb *Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me* or its parody—"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but joke will never hurt me" (Saper 1991: 238)—are true; many anti-proverbs and wellerisms are far from innocent.

Many more anti-proverbs and wellerisms in our material portray wives in much more negative terms/ways than their husbands. In fact, husbands' negative qualities are incredibly rarely brought up in our corpus which might be a clear sign of misogyny and sexism in anti-proverbs and wellerisms. As explored in this study, the overwhelming majority of the proverb parodies and wellerisms discussing marriage are biased from a male standpoint, and are also extremely misogynist and demeaning to women. Despite modern enlightenment, wives are still frequently shown as subordinate to their husbands, as people of a second sort, as a species who can constantly be criticized, blamed, ridiculed and made fun of. Wives, more frequently than husbands, are portrayed as dominant and pushy, demanding, nagging, quarrelsome, belligerent, complaining and critical.

The fact that wives are depicted as primarily possessing negative stereotypical qualities might show once again that not only proverbs but anti-proverbs tend to be created primarily by men, in the male dominant world. Indeed, much humour research (e.g., Crawford 1988b; Stillion & White 1987; Marlowe 1984, 1985) argue that most humour is created by and for men. Furthermore, the fact that the anti-proverbs and wellerisms about wives' negative features outnumber the examples concerning their husbands' negative sides, might also mean that, similar to proverb coiners, anti-proverb and wellerisms coiners also lean more to the belief that it is the wife and not the husband who causes the most problems within a marriage:

A wife is a woman who stands by her husband through all the trouble he wouldn't have had if he'd stayed single.

(Metcalf 1993: 227)

There's only one thing that keeps me from being happily married—my wife.

(Metcalf 1993: 143)

Why are wives constantly assigned inferior or abnormal qualities? Why are they still shown as species of a second sort? One of the possible answers to these questions might be: men create and use the anti-proverbs and wellerisms in order to provide themselves with a sense of their own worth and therefore feel better about themselves, enhance their own self-esteem and superiority.

Notes

¹ One can find precise sources of all the wellerisms quoted in this study in Mieder & Kingsbury 1994.

² For the reader's convenience all anti-proverbs in this book are followed by their original forms, given in { } brackets.

³ A remark to the "Silence that dreadful bell! it frights the isle from her propriety." (Shakespeare's Othello, act 2, scene 3).

⁴ http://www.notable-quotes.com/m/marriage_quotes.html (accessed 20 August 2017)

⁵ Definition of BUTTE: "an isolated hill or mountain with steep or precipitous sides usually having a smaller summit area than a mesa" (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/butte>)

⁶ http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/topics/topic_marriage.html (accessed 10 July 2017)

⁷ http://www.notable-quotes.com/m/marriage_quotes (accessed 25 September 2017)

⁸ "Char is charr'd, chore is finished" (Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 20).

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