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ARTICLES

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"Don't Swap Horses in the Middle of the Stream" An Intercultural and Historical Study of Abraham Lincoln's Apocryphal Proverb

The detailed study of the origin, history, dissemination, use, function, and meaning of a single proverb must by necessity be based on intercultural and interdisciplinary research methods. Such investigations can quickly become involved case studies that result in extensive monographs, drawing on such scholarly disciplines as anthropology, folklore, history, linguistics, literature, philology, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, sociology, etc.[1] Special attention must also be paid to the appearance of the particular proverb in the mass media and oral discourse, always citing references in context in order to interpret the polysituativity, polyfunctionality, and polysemanticity of the piece of folk wisdom. In the case of an internationally disseminated proverb, the fascinating aspects of loan processes enter into this complex picture, and all of this has great significance for the inclusion of the text in various types of dictionaries.

A fair number of investigations of individual proverbs demonstrate how proverbs originate and evolve into rather ambiguous metaphors, expressing general truths that are not necessarily universally true.[2] The relatively "new" proverb "Don't swap horses in the middle of the stream," its variants, and their international dissemination may serve as a further example to illustrate the complexity of paremiological scholarship once the questions regarding origin, history, and meaning of one proverb are raised.

For a long time, and still today, scholars have thought that it was Abraham Lincoln who coined this proverb in 1864 during his reelection campaign. Even though most Americans believe this to be true, nothing could be further from the truth. While the proverb definitely predates Lincoln, he deserves the credit for popularizing it in the English language. It has obtained an impressive sociopolitical prominence in the Unites States, and it is now approaching global currency due to the dominant role that English plays in modern communication. The proverb is thus gaining ground worldwide in English or in loan translations, and the time has surely come that lexicographers, phraseographers, and paremiographers should register it with proper explanations in their dictionaries.

The Role of Abraham Lincoln

There is no doubt that the proverb "Don't swap horses in the middle of the stream" is connected to Abraham Lincoln, not only in the consciousness of American citizens but also in the minds of those speakers who employ the proverb in English in other countries or in various loan translations throughout the world. And yet in 1931 Archer Taylor, the doyen of proverb studies in the twentieth century, expressed the following caveat without being able to offer any proof for his conjecture at that time: "Lincoln said, *Don't swap horses in the middle of a stream*. It is generally believed that he was inventing the proverb,

although it is possible that he was merely using one that was already current."[3] Taylor was, of course, well aware of the fact that proverbs have repeatedly become attached to certain historical persons without any proof that they ever uttered them. A famous example is the false claim that Martin Luther originated the proverb "Wer nicht liebt Wein, Weib und Gesang, der bleibt ein Narr sein Leben lang" (Who does not love wine, woman, and song, remains a fool his whole life long).[4] In Luther's case, the folk's image of Luther as a vivacious person who was fond of women and drink quite naturally led to the attribution of the epicurean proverb to the energetic reformer, even though its earliest recorded reference dates only from 1775.

But what did President Lincoln have to do with swapping horses? After all, he surely was not in charge of attending horses in his high-level position as president. The story is well documented, and as such it could be carried forth for decades to come. Lincoln's association with the proverb started on June 9, 1864, when he responded orally to a delegation from the National Union League that had informed him of his nomination for a second term as president. With typical humility Lincoln uttered the following words at Baltimore where the political convention was held:

> I can only say, in response to the kind remarks of your chairman [of the delegation from the National Union League], as I suppose, that I am very grateful for the renewed confidence which has been accorded to me, both by the convention and by the National League. I am not insensible at all to the personal compliment there is in this; yet I do not allow myself to believe that any but a small portion of it is to be appropriated as a personal compliment. The convention and the nation, I am assured, are alike animated by a higher view of the interests of the country for the present and the great future, and that part I am entitled to appropriate as a compliment is only that part which I may lay hold of as being the opinion of the convention and of the League, that I am not entirely unworthy to be intrusted with the place I have occupied for the last three years. I have not permitted myself, gentlemen, to conclude that I am the best man in the country; but I am reminded, in this connection, of a story of an old Dutch farmer, who remarked to a companion once that "it was not best to swap horses when crossing streams."[5]

This is the way Lincoln's statement was reported on June 10, 1864, in various newspapers, notably also the New York *Tribune*, whose story was picked up by other papers throughout the country.[6] How quickly such a journalistic account can change, however, can be seen from the following newspaper report concerning Lincoln's remarks from that time:

> I can only say in response to the kind remarks of your chairman [of the delegation from the National Union League], as I suppose, that I am very grateful for the renewed confidence which has been accorded to me both by the convention and by the National League. I am not insensible at all to the personal compliment there is in this, and yet I do not allow myself to believe that any but a small portion of it is to be appropriated as a personal compliment. That really the convention and the Union League assembled with a higher view–that of taking care of the interests of the country for the present and the great future–and that the part I am entitled to appropriate as a compliment is only that part which I may lay hold of as being the opinion of the convention and of the League, that I am not entirely unworthy to be intrusted with the place which I have occupied for the last three years. But I do not allow myself to suppose that either the convention or the League have concluded to decide that I am either the greatest or best man in America, but rather they have concluded it is not best to swap horses while crossing the river, and have further concluded that I am not so poor a horse that they might not make a botch of it in trying to swap.[7]

This account is indeed folklore in the making, with the embellishments ["I am not so poor a horse," etc.] intended to show Lincoln as a folksy raconteur of stories and tall tales, something that he did indeed delight in doing.[8] This reported version of Lincoln's remarks does not include the reference by Lincoln to the story by the "old Dutch farmer," leading lexicographers who cite only this text to believe that Lincoln might be the originator of the proverb. In any case, both variants are not especially "catchy," and it is thus not surprising that many variants exist in American parlance, as the folk have tried to find the special proverbial ring for this obvious piece of folk wisdom: "Don't change horses in the middle of the stream," "Don't change horses crossing a stream," "Don't change your horse in the middle of the stream if you want to keep your trousers dry," "Don't swap horses crossing a stream," "Don't swap horses in the middle of the road," "Don't swap horses in the middle of the stream," and "It's no time to swap horses when you are in the middle of the stream," etc.[9] As is true for folklore in general, proverbs also exist in variant forms, with a dominant text becoming the standard form over time.

Even though Lincoln's early variant is rarely cited today, the idea of the proverb served him extremely well in his reelection campaign,[10] and, as will be shown below, it also helped other presidents equally well in later years. Nearly every book on Lincoln includes the proverb somewhere, and from a folkloristic or linguistic point of view, it is interesting to note how Lincoln's statement has varied, even though it is cited within quotation marks:

> 1865: "it was not best to swap horses when crossing a stream."[11]
>
> 1890: "it was not best to swap horses while crossing the river."[12]
>
> 1962: "it was not best to swap horses in mid-stream."[13]

Lexicographers of quotation dictionaries are more or less split between Lincoln's two supposedly authentic statements "it was not best to swap horses when crossing streams"[14] and "it is not best to swap horses while crossing the river."[15] Nevertheless, Gabor S. Boritt did well in deciding for the variant "it was not best to swap horses when crossing streams" in his book on Lincoln quotations,[16] since it most likely is the more authentic version and since the "river" variant has gained little currency in folk speech in comparison with the "stream" variants. Perhaps the time has come for lexicographers of quotations to follow Boritt's lead, since they should report the most authentic text. Of course, they could also list both variants with a short commentary, as Gurney Benham tried to do in his *Complete Book of Quotations, Proverbs and Household Words* (1926):

> Never swap horses while crossing the stream.
> It is not best to swap horses while crossing the river.—Abr. Lincoln: Speech, 1864. (Given as the remark of "an old Dutch farmer.")[17]

Benham does not state that these are actually two different recordings of the same speech by Lincoln. In fact, the statement "Never swap horses while crossing a stream" appears

to be cited as a proverb with Lincoln being referenced as a mere variant. If so, then Benham is correct in stressing that Lincoln is actually citing a traditional proverb. President Lincoln, or "Honest Abe," as he became known among the people, emphasized that he was using a traditional text when he warned against swapping horses in the middle of the stream. Quotation lexicographers ought not lose sight of this important fact! But again, while it is clear that Lincoln did not originate the proverb, he certainly helped to promote it because of his position and popularity.

Pre- and Post-Lincoln References of the Proverb

Biographers of Lincoln, compilers of quotation dictionaries, cultural historians, linguists, and phraseologists or paremiologists have held on to the erroneous claim that Lincoln originated the proverb far too long. It is time to abandon unsubstantiated assertions, such as this one from 1934:

> *Don't Swap Horses When Crossing a Stream*
> On June 9, 1864, Abraham Lincoln replied to the congratulations of the National Union League upon his renomination. He said in part, "I have not permitted myself, gentlemen, to conclude that I am the best man in the country; but I am reminded in this connection of the story of an old Dutch farmer, who remarked to a companion that it was not best to swap horses when crossing a stream." Here originated the expression [proverb] now so common and generally heard as, *don't swap horses in the middle of a stream.*[18]

It is of interest to point out in this regard that the British journal *Notes and Queries* printed a number of short notes in 1911 that attempted to find the origin of the proverb "Never swap horses when crossing the stream." They cite both versions of Lincoln's remarks cited above, with Albert Matthews of Boston very acutely making this final comment: "But while this proves that Lincoln used the expression in 1864, it does not follow that he was the first to use it; and my impression, though I am unable to support it with proof, is that I have met with it earlier."[19]

If lexicographers were in fact checking the scholarship by cultural historians, phraseologists, and paremiologists instead of simply copying from each other for the most part, then quotation dictionaries that appeared after 1962 could long have corrected such misconceptions. It was at this time that the two German-American philologists Hans Sperber and Travis Trittschuh published their invaluable volume of *American Political Terms: An Historical Dictionary* that features two columns on "swap horses" with several contextualized references from 1864 (Lincoln) to 1932. Above all, however, the entry includes a reference from the American newspaper *Hamilton Intelligencer* from September 10, 1846, that shows once and for all that Lincoln did not originate the phrase:

> Widely attributed to Abraham Lincoln, the phrase "don't swap horses while crossing the stream," or a variant of this formula, may be found much earlier in American political lore. The following quotation suggests that the anecdote had a long tradition behind its adoption into the political vocabulary [by Lincoln].
> 1846 *Hamilton Intell.* 10 Sept. 2/2. No Time to Swap Horses. There is a story of an Irishman who was crossing a stream with mare and colt when finding it deeper than expected, and falling off the old mare,

> he seized the colt's tail to aid him in reaching the shore. Some persons on the bank called to him, advising him to take hold of the mare's tail, as she was the ablest to bring him out. His reply was, that it was a very unseasonable time for swapping horses.
> It seems to be something like this with Judge Vance.... [He] prefers the sure support of the judicial colt, to the chance of grasping the Congressional mare, which he would much prefer. He will accordingly cling to the colt's tail, under the full persuasion that this is no time for swapping horses.
> Lincoln's usage, however, is undoubtedly responsible for the popularity of the phrase and probably for its modern meaning—referring to the risks of changing incumbents during a crisis or in the middle of a long-range program.[20]

This is well stated, except for the fact that the author restricts the meaning of the proverb to the political realm. As will be shown below, the proverb today, like all proverbs, takes on various shades of meaning depending on its function in certain contexts.

It should be recognized that Sperber and Trittschuh located this fantastic reference long before the appearance of the internet and various electronic databases. Today, with the possibility to "Google" almost everything and with resources continually being added to websites, additional instances of the proverb predating Lincoln might come to light. Fred R. Shapiro, Associate Librarian for Collections and Access and Lecturer in Legal Research at the Law School of Yale University, who recently published his *Yale Book of Quotations* (2006), was kind enough to use his internet expertise to unearth another early occurrence of the proverb. On December 5, 2005, he provided the following reference that appeared in the *American Masonic Register and Literary Companion* on April 4, 1840:

> An Irishman in crossing a river in a boat, with his mare and colt, was thrown into the river, and clung to the colt's tail. The colt showed signs of exhaustion, and a man on the shore told him to leave the colt and cling to the mare's tail. Och! faith, honey! this is no time to swap horses.[21]

This text is obviously related to the previous one from 1846, with Lincoln picking it up by changing the Irishman of the story to the Dutch farmer. Variations like this belong to the tradition of folk narratives, and present no particular problem in the development and dissemination of the proverb. It is, however, a disappointment that I have not been able to find any reference to this somewhat humorous folktale (perhaps a tall tale) in any of the standard tale indices. Hans-Jörg Uther from the University of Göttingen, one of the world's specialists in tale type indices, was also unable to find it in the many catalogues at his disposal.[22] In any case, the tale with its proverbial punch line was current in the United States at least twenty-five years before Lincoln's use of it.

What is indisputable is that Lincoln's use of the proverb in his short speech on June 9, 1864, caught on quickly, as can be seen from four contextualized examples from 1864, 1866, 1867, and 1868. During Lincoln's reelection campaign, the use of this proverb must have disseminated it so widely that the following four excerpts don't refer to Lincoln's use of it at all. In other words, by the late 1860s the proverb "Don't swap horses in the middle of the stream" and its variants had gained general currency among the American people:

1864: [...], and when Col Morgan went to countermarch he finds that he has only about fifty of his men with him; here is a predicament, and the night (before day) is as dark as a "Stack of black Cats." But this is no time for "Swapping horses," this little squad must get out of here, and that quick.[23]

1866: Bully for you, Joshua. But now about that see-saw bisness you spoke of; you said in your speech that you was playin see-saw in politics, and if your end of the plank went down to Georgy, it would go up in Washington, by which I suppose you meant that you was ready to swap ends just to suit your peculiar circumstance; and that's what's the matter agin, Joshua. You have been see-sawin too long; and changin ends too often. 'Twasn't no time to be swappin hosses, my friend.[24]

1867: [...] and then will it be worse with us than it is now? And the king said, Right; it is not wise to swap horses in the middle of a stream. So Duke Micklemackle was sent forward with a great army.[25]

1868: The Republican party sinned, in 1864; it is now confessing that sin. We said, in 1864, that it was not good to swap horses in the middle of a stream; and yet we did swap one horse of the noble team which had carried us to victory [the exchange of Vice President Hannibal Hamlin by Andrew Johnson]. I take it that our platform will not be complete if, to the confession, we do not add the penitence. The error we did commit was greater, perhaps, than any one here would be willing to think of. Would our martyred President be a martyred President today if we had not swapped horses? What was said of honest Ben Wade, that he would be a shield to the life of General Grant, is true; but it was as true of the Hon. Hannibal Hamlin, in 1864, in regard to the life of the favorite son of Illinois. In that respect, and because we think that the best memories of the party would be revived by the name of Hannibal Hamlin, we second the nomination.[26]

The first two paragraphs, written by authors from the South, indicate that the proverb without referring to Lincoln had become current there as well. The fourth text reveals that the proverb played its political role in the presidential election after Lincoln's death, and it has continued to do so to this day especially when presidents were running for a second term in office. But here are a few more citations from the late nineteenth century from literary works that show that the proverb can be employed in a multitude of contexts without necessarily referring to presidential elections:

1882: At this time there must be no change of horses, for Senator Hamblin has served his constituency faithfully, his hands being free from the taint of corruption.[27]

1889: In his [Charles Gordon's] letters to his family, then in Gibraltar, he speaks of the trouble arising from the frequent changes of uniform recently ordered. Among many other long-ridden hobbies clothing and equipment were then undergoing a vigorous process of "swopping" at the moment the animals were in the mid-stream of the siege of Sebastopol.[28]

1893: When we were thus asked to exchange Abraham Lincoln for George B. McClellan–a successful Union President for an unsuccessful Union general–a party earnestly endeavoring to save the Union, torn and rent by a gigantic rebellion, I [Frederick Douglass] thought with Mr. Lincoln that it was not wise to "swap horses while crossing a stream." Regarding, as I did, the continuance of the war to the complete suppression of the rebellion and the retention in office of President Lincoln as essential to the total destruction of slavery, I certainly exerted myself to the uttermost in my small way to secure his reelection.[29]

While it is to be expected that Frederick Douglass writing in his autobiography about Lincoln's reelection would cite the president more or less exactly, it is very telling that the

other two texts merely allude to the proverb, a clear indication that it was indeed well established and known by the end of the nineteenth century.

Literary References from the Twentieth Century

During the next hundred years the dominant use of the proverb for political purposes remains intact, but it is also employed as a ready-made piece of folk wisdom to argue against various other types of change. Again, due to the fact that the proverb is well known, authors often do not cite the entire text, knowing very well that their readers will understand its authoritative if not manipulative message. The following selection of examples will also indicate that the proverb exists in several variants and that it is more and more cited without reference to Abraham Lincoln. It was the president who in 1864 lifted the proverb from its rather limited currency into the limelight of the political stage, but with time passing, the proverb that became solidly attached to him is falling back into the realm of anonymity that suggests a *bona fide* folk proverb:

> 1900: *The Argument Against "Swapping Horses."*
> Ordinarily the people of the United States think one term enough for a President. Since the election of Grant in 1872, nearly thirty years ago, no President has been chosen to succeed himself. But the present situation is exceptional. There are thousands of business and professional men, not very strong partisans, who believe that it would be prudent and wise to grant Mr. McKinley and his Cabinet a lease of four years more in which to complete many matters that are not now in a condition to be turned over to a new set of men. (anonymous)[30]

By 1929 it is clear that the proverb is well established in Great Britain, as can be seen from this dialogue in George Bernard Shaw's play *The Apple Cart*, where it is once again cited in a political context with plenty of ironic wordplay:

> 1929: Proteus: No use. I resign, I tell you. You can all go to the devil. I have lost my health, and almost lost my reason, trying to keep this Cabinet together in the face of the cunningest enemy popular government has ever had to face. I have had enough of it. I resign.
> Crassus: But not at such a moment as this. Don't let us swap horses when crossing a stream.
> Nicobar: Why not, if the horse you have got is subject to hysterics?
> Boanerges: Not to mention that you may have more than one horse at your disposal. (George Bernard Shaw)[31]

In the same year, the British author Robert Graves went so far as to claim the proverb for his native England in his autobiography *Good-bye to All That*, paying no heed to its association with Lincoln and the United States. All of this proves that the proverb had made the jump across the Atlantic and that it had established itself solidly as a folk proverb:

> 1929: 'But if ours [Catholicism] is the true religion, why do you not turn Catholic?' He put the question so simply that I felt shamed.
> Having to put him off somehow, I said: `Reverend Father, we have a proverb in England, never to swap horses while crossing a stream. I am still caught up in the War, you know.' (Robert Graves)[32]

In the following list of short contextualized excerpts from various works by lesser known authors, it is noticeable that the verb "to swap" is often replaced by the more common verb "to change." H. L. Mencken remarked in 1962 that "*To swap*, in the sense of to exchange, goes back to the end of the Sixteenth century, and the NED [New English Dictionary] says that it was 'probably orig. a horsedealer's term.' It has always been in more general use in the United States than in England, and it occurs in one of the most famous of American sayings—Abraham Lincoln's 'Don't *swap* horses crossing a stream.'"[33] Besides his misleading statement that the proverb "belongs" to Lincoln, the divide between the swap/change variants of the proverb according to American/British usage is not as clear-cut as one might assume from Mencken's comment. After all, Shaw and Graves stuck to the original "swap" variant in England. But be that as it may, the "change" variants dominate in these references:

1911: Yesterday a private member's [of the British House of Commons] Bill dealing with Poor Law Administration in London was discussed, but after an appeal from Mr Burns that the House 'should not swap institutional horses when crossing the Insurance stream' the measure was talked out without a decision being taken. (Winston S. Churchill)[34]

1929: But it never pays to change horses in mid-stream; changing wouldn't help you, it would set you back. (Sally and Jefferson Pierce)[35]

1931: At the same time my excellent chief [...] absolutely refused to have me removed, telling the Postmaster-General in no uncertain words that he would not "swap horses in the middle of the stream." (L. C. Arlington)[36]

1936: Many a woman has written under a man's name and it has not been her literary work which has given the secret away. However, it's no use changing horses in mid-stream; I'm working on the principle that a man named Vivian Lestrange has disappeared. (E. C. R. Lorac)[37]

1944: The cab had stopped for a red light at Fifth Avenue: "Don't come if you don't want to," Guy said. "Change horses in midstream if you want to." (Hugh Pentecost)[38]

1945: Mark reached in his pocket for the notebook, changed horses in midstream, and brought out a cigarette instead. (Hilda Lawrence)[39]

1948: 'Herodianism,' though it is an incomparably more effective response than 'Zealotism' to the inexorable 'Western question' that confronts the whole contemporary world, does not really offer a solution. For one thing, it is a dangerous game; for, to vary our metaphor, it is a form of swapping horses while crossing a stream, and the rider who fails to find his seat in the new saddle is swept off by the current to death as certain as that which awaits the 'Zealot' when, with spear and shield, he charges a machine-gun. (Arnold J. Toynbee)[40]

1951: "The first thing an Officer has to learn is to be able to switch horses often and in midstream without getting his feet wet." (James Jones)[41]

1953: From the point of view of strict old-fashioned grammar, this is obviously bad; it involves a change from the singular to the plural horse in mid-stream of the sentence, and without any justification in a change of number in the subject. (Hugh Sykes Davies)[42]

1958: But he [Lincoln] also knew that [General] McClellan was probably the ablest commander available to him. His instinct had been to stand by his chosen General. Instead he had yielded to political outcry. He had swapped horses in mid-stream. He found he had got a poorer mount. (Winston S. Churchill)[43]

1961: Tom: It's not because I don't care for you. I'd be a fool not to ... But I would mould you to me, and when it was too late ... you'd be no good to anybody else. You can change horses in midstream, Trina [a young American woman], only if you meet at the right moment ... in the middle. On your side, you're just wading in. Look across to me. I just drift along, quite comfortably, downstream, these days. So ... my sweet girl ... we do not change horses after all, though the thought is quite beautiful. (Andrew Rosenthal)[44]

1965: If indeed [King] James were allowed time to introduce enough Irish, he might again trust to the loyalty of his regiments; but meanwhile the morale of his army was in dire confusion. He was swapping horses in midstream, and the Revolution was deliberately timed to catch him in the act. (George M. Trevelyan)[45]

1968: He was setting a trap for her. The whole thing was a trap. Bernice had swapped horses in the middle of the stream and made a pretty good trade at that. (A. A. Fair)[46]

1999: *Horses in Midstream* (Andrew E. Busch)[47]

The last reference is a perfectly appropriate book title for a study on *U.S. Midterm Elections and Their Consequences, 1894-1998*, as the subtitle hastens to explain. Readers will understand the truncated proverb without any particular difficulty, recognizing once again that the proverb is often used to comment on political issues. The above references show as well that the proverb appears in numerous variants and that it is not as fixed as one would expect from a standard proverb. Altogether the authors make quite liberal use of the proverb, varying it as they see fit or also simply alluding to it. One thing is for certain, the proverb is very much alive in various types of books, where it adds much metaphorical color with but one reference to Abraham Lincoln in these particular cases.

Proverbial Chaos in the Mass Media

All the references cited thus far indicate that the proverb "Don't swap horses in the middle of the stream" lacks in the standardization of its wording, structure, and fixidity, something that presents a considerable challenge for lexicographers as well as paremiographers. Further, all of these examples relate only to the more or less "normal" use of the proverb or allusions to it without dealing with deliberate contextual variations in the form of so-called anti-proverbs. The appearance of the proverb in the mass media likewise shows that English speakers have not yet zeroed in on *the* standard form after all these years. In order not to amass too many textual references, let me only cite those from the mass media that employ this piece of folk wisdom as a full and complete sentence. It should be noted that I could never have located these materials without the help of the internet and various textual databases. Above all, I need to give credit to my work-study student Erin Regan for her computer expertise and her enthusiasm in hunting down most of the references in this section that I have divided into five sets of variants:

Don't change horses in midstream

The republican party's leading argument is perhaps best summed up in the maxim "Don't change horses in midstream."
(*The New York Times*, July 17, 1946, p. 6)

This would throw overboard Lincoln's old adage, "Don't change horses in midstream."
(*The New York Times*, February 27, 1951, p. 2)

Don't change horses in midstream may be good, time-honored advice for us laymen.
(*The New York Times*, November 18, 1962, p. XI)

"You don't change horses in midstream," he said. "[President] Ford is honest, and that's good enough for us."
(*The New York Times*, March 27, 1977, p. 10)

In Virginia, there is an old saying. "We don't change horses in midstream." We are not going to change now.
(*The New York Times*, October 14, 1981, p. A26)

You don't change horses in midstream. That's a disaster.
(*The New York Times*, October 20, 1995, p. B14)

It is an election year, and the country's randy, unnamed U.S. president (guess who?)—whose campaign motto is "Don't change horses in midstream"—is about to be ousted by a teenage girl allegedly sexually molesting her in the Oval Office.
(*The Boston Herald*, January 2, 1998, p. S3)

John Howard wants economic competence to be the overriding issue in this election. [...] his message is: don't change horses in midstream – particularly, he adds, when the Asian downpour has turned the stream into a raging torrent.
(*Sydney* [Australia] *Morning Herald*, September 25, 1998, p. 13)

Cancer [horoscope] (June 21-July 22): Important to finish project you once abandoned. You could be on precipice of fame, fortune. Don't quit now; Don't change horses in midstream.
(*The Washington Post*, June 24, 2000, p. C12)

FDR neatly summarized his rationale for remaining President in two of the most memorable campaign slogans in American political history. The first, a positive message, put it all quite simply: "Don't change horses in midstream." The second [...] "Better a third-termer than a third-rater [Wendell Lewis Willkie]."
(*Daily News* [New York], October 18, 2000, p. 31)

Don't change horses in the middle of the stream

He [Edward M. Keating] said that President [Lyndon] Johnson "wants to be able to say in 1968 that you can't change horses in the middle of the stream."
(*The New York Times*, October 29, 1966, p. 12)

"We did not play Maciejowski because of the way Rex [two football players] was going. You don't change horses in the middle of the stream."
(*The New York Times*, November 22, 1970, p. 185)

"Don't change horses in the middle of the stream." "A chicken in every pot." [..] For more than a century, such slogans have added zest to political campaigns.
(*The New York Times*, July 9, 1976, p. 56)

Bridge [the card game]: A Time to Change Horses in the Middle of the Stream.
(*The New York Times*, April 14, 1979, p. 17 [title])

Maybe [George W.] Bush wants to show up his father, who missed the opportunity years ago to capture Saddam Hussein. Or maybe he's thinking, as usual, of the next election. There's an old saying, "Don't change horses in the middle of the stream." Maybe he'd like to actually get the popular vote next time.
(*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, August 11, 2002, p. 5J)

Don't swap horses in the middle of the stream

In the dark hours of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln stood for reelection upon the slogan "Don't swap horses in the middle of the stream," Today I [Secretary Hyde] present the situation to my fellow American with the suggestion, "Don't swap crews in the middle of the storm."
(*The New York Times*, November 2, 1930, p. 21)

Lincoln said, "Don't swap horses in the middle of the stream." A school for democratic ladies is repeating that advice. They should be sure it is a horse. My belief is that it is a white rabbit.
(*The New York Times*, May 15, 1936, p. 18)

Talk of not swapping horses in the middle of the stream, as people talked in these United States but so many months ago. Great Britain is being advised by her resolute friends on the Left to swap social and economic systems when Hitler is in the middle of the Channel.
(*The New York Times*, February 26, 1941, p. 20)

He [President Lyndon Johnson] clearly intends to run as the Commander in Chief appealing to patriotism and national unity in a time of war and crisis. This approach has numerous precedents, including Lincoln's "don't swap horses in the middle of the stream" in 1864 and Franklin Roosevelt's 1940 and 1944 campaigns.
(*The New York Times*, July 2, 1967, p. 96)

Don't swap horses while crossing a stream

The argument in its favor [the Tariff Reform bill] is only that it is risky to "swap horses crossing a stream."
(*The New York Times*, July 13, 1888, p. 4)

Never Swap Horses While Crossing A Stream.
[Heading of a cartoon with a man sitting on a "G.O.P." elephant looking down on a small "DEMOCRACY" donkey crossing a stream. The caption states "AFRO-AMERICAN PROGRESS," alluding to the fact that the Republicans will not bring any improvements for African Americans.]
(*Cleveland Journal*, October 17, 1908, p. 1)

As one member [of the Governing Committee of the Stock Exchange] put it, it was considered better not to "swap horses while crossing a stream."
(*The New York Times*, April 16, 1913, p. 12)

Representative Wood of Indiana has again brought up the worn-out campaign slogan, "Don't swap horses while crossing a stream," in urging President Hoover's re-election.

(*The New York Times*, February 26, 1932, p. 18)

Predicting the certain triumph of President Roosevelt in the election, Mr. [Joseph P.] Kennedy said that the business man should not wish to "swap horses crossing a stream."
(*The New York Times*, October 22, 1936, p. 13)

"I can't see anything wrong with President Roosevelt," she [Mrs. Caroline Bacher] said. "I think he's all right, and it might be a bad thing to swap horses crossing a stream."
(*The New York Times*, October 25, 1936, p. N1)

[Ambassador to Great Britain John G. Winant arguing for President Roosevelt's reelection]: "Delay in war costs life. It isn't simply swapping horses crossing a stream. We cross oceans these days. We are engaged in global warfare."
(*The New York Times*, November 4, 1944, p. 12)

Don't switch horses in midstream

I [novelist Mark Helprin] will not speak about politics—unless they ask me a political question. I think it's an abuse to switch horses in midstream like that without invitation. I would never do that.
(*The New York Times*, March 25, 1984, p. BR16)

These contextualized references do not represent a complete statistical analysis of all occurrences in the mass media, of course. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that the variants "Don't change horses in midstream (in the middle of the stream)" and "Don't swap horses in the middle of the stream" might be the most popular in recent decades. Certainly a strong argument can be made to include at least these two alternate formulations in various types of dictionaries. However, they are somewhat removed from Lincoln, who spoke of crossing a stream or river and who did not speak of this happening in the middle of the waterways.

Franklin D. Roosevelt and "Swapping Horses" as Political Slogan

It would probably be possible to find at least isolated occurrences of the "swapping horses" proverb for most political campaigns with incumbents seeking reelection. The use of this proverb as a campaign slogan gained considerable popularity during Lincoln's attempt to gain a second term in the White House, and it is a known fact that it was also used in 1916 when Woodrow Wilson was seeking a second term.[48] This went so far that Harold A. Robe wrote a poem during that year, "Never Stop Horses When You're Crossing a Stream," which was put to music by Jesse Winter. The song certainly played its role in the campaign and helped to keep Woodrow Wilson as president in the middle of World War I. The poem was written but about fifty years after Lincoln's utterance, and its proverbial *leitmotif* in the chorus is still very close to Lincoln's formulation:

Never Swap Horses When You're Crossing a Stream

My old friend Cole
was an honest soul
Who lived for America first,
No piker, he,
He lived party free,
And for truth he was always a-thirst.

I asked the way
next Election Day
friend Bobby was going to vote,
He puffed on his pipe, and his eye shone bright,
Then slowly friend Bobby spoke:

(Chorus)
Never swap horses, when you're crossin' a stream.
And let well enough alone;
Plant all your confidence in that good team,
That's haulin' you straight to your home.
Don't overlook facts for the promise that's new
Let Wilson and Marshall keep haulin' you through,
Just stick to their backs, that's the sensible scheme,
And never swap horses, when you're crossin' a stream.

The stream is wide
and a mill race tide
Is rushin' against your good team,
They're full of pep,
and they'll land you yet,
Boy, they'll carry you over the stream.

Just take your time,
friend, and you will find,
that you all are landing ahead,
Lad, follow this tip on your whole life trip,
Remember some wise man said:

(Chorus)[49]

Many Americans will have thought of Abraham Lincoln as the "wise man" who had elevated the proverb into a campaign slogan. The Lincoln association added considerable support to Wilson's reelection effort.

But the proverb gained even more political clout during the four presidential campaigns of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. When Roosevelt ran for president the first time in 1932, the Democrats used a parody of the proverb to embarrass President Herbert Hoover and his failing economic policies. The Hoover camp had actually chosen the modified proverb "Don't swap horses—stand by Hoover" as its campaign slogan,[50] but with considerable irony the Democrats claimed that the Republican motto should be

"Don't swap barrels while going over Niagara."[51] In fact, the magazine *The New Republic* began an editorial on June 22, 1932, with the following observation:

> By the time this issue of *The New Republic* reaches most of its readers, the Republican Convention will have come to an end. Mr. Hoover will have been triumphantly renominated by a group of delegates who dislike him as heartily as possible, and the campaign will have been launched on the general philosophy of "don't change barrels while going over Niagara."[52]

In other words, the Republicans were selling the country down the river, but since Hoover was all the party had, they couldn't exchange him with another candidate at this time. This satirical slogan played a significant role in ridiculing Hoover and electing Roosevelt, whose supporters used the slogan "Swap horses or drown."[53]

As it turned out, then-Governor Roosevelt had already had some fun with the "swapping horses" proverb during a speech on April 18, 1932, as he began to attack President Hoover:

> There will be many in this nation during the coming months who will implore you not to swap horses crossing a stream: there will be others who will laughingly tell you that the appeal should have been worded—"do not swap toboggans while you are sliding downhill." But it seems to me that the more truthful, the more accurate plea to the people of the nation should be this: "If the old car in spite of frequent emergency repairs has been bumping along downhill on only two cylinders for three long years, it is time to get another car that will start uphill on all four."[54]

This is a revealing paragraph, showing not only Roosevelt's wit but also his obvious understanding and appreciation of the power of proverbial language as a communicative strategy.[55] He starts by more or less citing Lincoln's wording of the proverb, then he playfully changes it into a wintery new metaphor that alludes to the sliding performance of Hoover's presidency, and then he chooses a satirical image from the world of the automobile to once again explain how things are going downhill. However, Roosevelt will, of course, change all of this by jump-starting the economy car and running it full throttle on all four cylinders! This is a masterful political and proverbial piece of rhetoric, even though the image of the sliding toboggan eventually lost out to the barrels going over Niagara Falls.

Roosevelt and his campaign managers employed the proverb during the three subsequent reelection efforts in 1936, 1940, and 1944. However, in 1940 the Republicans wised up to the slogan and published a 23-page brochure for their candidate Wendell Lewis Willkie with the title *You Will Decide. Is It Time To Change Horses?* The proverbial question "Is It Time To Change Horses?" is repeated at the bottom of the odd pages that describe Willkie's qualifications in comparison to Roosevelt's supposedly weaker performance registered on the even pages. The famous question is once again repeated in large print on the last page, a final attempt at political manipulation.[56] All of this shows that the Republicans were quite capable of appropriating part of the proverbial slogan of the Democrats for their own purposes.

As expected, the Democrats used the "swapping horses" slogan once more in 1944 in the middle of World War II.[57] The variant "Don't change horses in the middle of the stream" became a powerful rallying cry at that time just as it had been for Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War. And just as in 1916, a song with the title "Don't Change Horses," with lyrics and music by Al Hoffman, Milton Drake, and Jerry Livingston made the rounds:

"Don't Change Horses"

If you're thinking of changing sweethearts
Listen to one who knows
You might be asking for trouble
As the saying goes:
Don't change horses in the middle of a stream.
Don't change horses in the middle of a stream,
If you want to keep your britches dry.

Don't change sweeties in the middle of a dream.
Don't change sweeties in the middle of a dream
or you're gonna be a sorry guy.
My wise old pappy done told me
"Don't ever change your bet.
You know what ya got when ya got it,
But you don't know what you're gonna get."
Hey! Don't change horses in the middle of a stream.
Don't change horses in the middle of a stream,
If you want to keep your britches dry.[58]

It is not difficult to read a political message into this song, composed at the time of the heated 1944 campaign between Roosevelt and Thomas Edmund Dewey. The proverbial slogan of "Don't change horses in the middle of a stream" was everywhere to be heard and read, and whoever listened to the song would surely think of the election and be confronted with the message of not abandoning Roosevelt at the time of his fourth bid for the presidency. Indeed, the song was interpreted as an indirect political statement, a perfect example for the folkloric use of proverbs as signs. Here is the proof from *The New York Times* from July 13, 1944:

FFC Won't Rule on Song, 'Don't Change Horses'
The question of whether the musical number, "Don't Change Horses in the Middle of the Stream," has any hidden political significance is a matter beyond the power of the Federal Communications Commission to determine, James L. Fly, FFC chairman, said today.
He made public his reply to the three composers and copyright owners of the song, who complained because the four major networks had banned the number from the air on the ground that it had "political significance."
The commission's power, wrote Chairman Fly, "is limited to determining, in the light of the station's entire operation, whether the station has been operating in the public interest. From the single incident which you (the composers) recite, it could not be concluded that the organizations involved are pursuing a one-sided and biased policy."[59]

Clearly the powers to be at the major networks had seen the indirect or coded message of the song, whether intended or not by the writer, Al Hoffman, and the two composers, Milton Drake and Jerry Livingston. It is not clear what motivated them to take the song off the air, i.e., was it their commitment to unbiased broadcasting or were they in the Dewey camp and thus against helping Roosevelt with the "political" song? In any case, such is the power of a good slogan, whether delivered straight-forwardly or metaphorically!

"Swapping Horses" Parodies and Anti-proverbs

The proverb parodies or anti-proverbs "Don't swap barrels while going over Niagara" and "Do not swap toboggans while you are sliding downhill" from the Hoover-Roosevelt election in 1932 have already been mentioned. But here are a few more intentionally changed or parodied references that play off the traditional proverb to add a bit of humor, irony, or satire:

1928: Don't swap horses in the middle of the street.[60]

1949: An election year and don't change horses while you're cleaning house.[61]

1956: Don't change horses in the middle of the Suez Canal.[62]

1968: One of the most important things to remember about infant care is: Never change diapers in midstream.[63]

1989: Don't change houses in mid-dream.[64]

1997: Don't swap horses in the middle of a raging river.[65]

1997: Don't swap horses while crossing a stream ... nor ever change diapers in midstream.[66]

2000: Dad, thanks to your lectures, I never change horses in the middle of a job worth doing, I know the squeaky wheel gets the worm, and I never count my chickens until I've walked a mile in their shoes.—And you thought I wasn't listening.—Happy Father's Day.[67]

2001: Changing camels in mid-dune.[68]

2006: Don't change horses ... until they stop running.[69]

2006: A leopard never changes underpants in mid-stream.[70]

Texts like these, often with appropriate illustrations in the form of cartoons and caricatures, can be understood as proof of the general popularity of the proverb. After all, it is the juxtaposition of the innovative anti-proverb with the traditional proverb that results in meaningful communication.[71]

The Berkeley Folklore Archives and "Swapping Horses"

The analysis of the use, function, and meaning of any given proverb ought also to include references from oral comments by informants. While I have done no particular field research of my own for this study, I have been able to once again make use of the rich holdings of the Berkeley Folklore Archives which Alan Dundes, together with his hundreds of folklore students, established at the University of California at Berkeley. Maria Teresa (Mabel) Agozzino, the long-time folklore assistant of Alan Dundes, located fifteen references that students collected from various informants over the past three decades. Interestingly, only two student reports mention the association of the proverb with Abraham Lincoln, yet another indication that the proverb is ever more becoming a folk proverb of its own. On the other hand, several informants recalled the use of the proverb as a reelection slogan for President Roosevelt, but even this association has for the most part been lost with the newer generations. Once again, as has already been shown for references from literary works and the mass media, the students registered the proverb in a number of variants. These texts together with the comments solicited from the informants are of utmost importance for the lexicographical and semantic treatment of the proverb in collections and dictionaries. The following excerpts follow the structure already used for the organization of references from the mass media:

Don't change horses in midstream

1955: The informant says that when you are in the middle of a situation that is unsteady, you should stick with the resources that you have already got and not change to something else. He remembers learning this proverb from his mother. She had used it to refer to the sentiment of people during the F. D. Roosevelt presidential administration of the United States. In other words she was saying that America felt it was better to stick with the same president for such a long time because of a war time situation.

1968: This means literally what it says, and could be used as a warning "during a war, for example, as an admonition not to change leaders" (informant's comments).

1969: This proverb means that once you start something then you should finish it. My informant also felt that it could mean that once you start something one way then you should continue to do it in that manner.

1978: Mr. McGee [a fifth grade teacher] was speaking of President Franklin Roosevelt running for a third term in 1940 [when using the proverb]. Mr. McGee said the people wanted to reelect Roosevelt, even though he wasn't supposed to run for another term, because they didn't want a new man in there. I guess it means that if you have something and it is going well, stay with the initial thing.

1995: The proverb means that once you start something one way you should finish it. I think this proverb is clearly made in America. The literal image of changing horses in midstream has connotations of a cowboy on a cattle drive. The figurative meaning is also very American. In the United States there is a lot of importance placed on loyalty. Americans place a lot of importance on finishing a job that you started. Both these attitudes are reflected in the proverb.

Don't change horses in the middle of a (the) stream

1968: My informant told me that this meant that once you have started on a project you shouldn't veer off in another direction. You should finish that project which was started.

1969: This proverb implies that you shouldn't change leadership during crises because you're taking a chance that the whole structure will collapse. It is taken from covered wagon days when traveling across the country. The animals weren't changed mid-stream or the owner might lose his whole rigging. My informant heard this in use by Pres. Roosevelt in a campaign speech in 1940 or 1944. It [The proverb] is used when someone is contemplating a major change in life to overcome some crisis or danger. You believe the present course of action is the best for them to continue with so you tell him the proverb.

1970: Eileen Gilbert [an informant] defines the proverb as meaning that once a course of action is decided upon, it should be followed through and not stopped midway to undertake another action. My informant tried to explain the terminology by adding that changing horses in the middle of a stream might prove disastrous because you might fall into the water or be swept away by it. So, the item was used to advise a person not to change his plans of action lest he lose out all the way around and not succeed at all.

1974: My [the student collector's] father used it [the proverb] when he wanted me not to change a decision that I had already made. I've never heard anybody else, my age or otherwise, say it. He would say it when talking with anybody, it didn't seem to matter who. Apparently he felt he could tell anybody that they shouldn't "change horses in the middle of the stream." In connection with this item, my father apparently holds the belief that once a decision is made it is better to stick with it, right or wrong, rather than switch to another line of thinking. I do not necessarily agree with this. [...] It seems that once my father invoked this little message it had a little more power, a little more traditional acceptance behind it, rather than if he had just said, "it's not good to change your mind." I say it [the proverb] once in a while, but not very often. I do not often feel in the position of telling someone they should think a certain way. I feel this is the kind of item that would be used more as you get older and more experienced in life. [...] The idea is to ride the horse through, whether you both ford the stream or drown in it.

1979: Mike Kessler's [an informant] explanation for the proverb is that, once a decision is made, and one has begun to act according to that decision, it is too late to change one's mind. Once a decision is made one has to stand by it. I think the proverb can teach responsibility and teaches one to view all the angles of a decision before making a commitment.

1981: While Larry Harvey [an informant] believes the proverb simply means that when you begin something you should finish it, I feel it goes deeper than that. If you literally changed horses in the middle of a stream you would get wet and possibly drown. In other words, metaphorically, starting something else before you finish the first could create complicated problems for you.

1986: I think the proverb is actually supposed to imply some danger analogous to falling into a stream upon placing oneself in the precarious position of changing horses while in the middle of a stream, or in the middle of some operation,

Don't swap horses in the middle of a (the) stream

1969: I [the student collector] learned this proverb from my history teacher, Mr. King, at Millikan Junior High School, Sherman Oaks, California. I was in my 8th year, circa 1964. It was a general American History course. This proverb is associated with Abraham Lincoln when he was running for re-election for the Presidency right in the middle of the Civil War. It essentially means that when you are in the midst of doing something difficult, you should not change over from traditional ways in trying to solve the problem.

Mr. Lincoln was running for re-election and he said this proverb to the people to encourage them to re-elect him and not change the leadership of the country right in the middle of the Civil War.

1988: My informant says that metaphorically it [the proverb] means don't change your mind after a major decision has been made because it could be detrimental. You should go with the decision you made because that decision is probably the best one. She says that her grandfather told her that when Abraham Lincoln was renominated for the presidency in 1864, although he thought he may not be the best man to be president, he thought it wouldn't be wise to change presidents in the middle of a national struggle. She said that literally, it probably meant that if you were riding along and were in the middle of a stream and suddenly wanted to swap horses with someone else, it would be difficult.

Don't switch horses in midstream

1968: This means that once you are about halfway through doing something, you should not start doing something else. An example of its use would be: If someone was doing a paper on a certain topic and they had already done something on it, but they were considering changing the topic, you would say "don't switch horses in midstream." The informant learned this from her mother who used to say this to her whenever she was about to give up on something and start on something else.

These invaluable references recorded by student collectors by interviewing various informants as part of a folkloric field research project reveal a number of telling facts, and it would be my conjecture that other archival materials would corroborate them. First of all, as already observed, only two informants connect the proverb with Abraham Lincoln, while three informants were aware of the use of the proverb during Franklin D. Roosevelt's reelection campaigns. For most informants the proverb—with its two major variants once again being "Don't change horses in midstream (in the middle of the stream)" and "Don't swap horses in the middle of the stream" is thus very much an anonymous folk proverb without any association with any historical persons. It should also be noted that in comparison to holdings regarding other proverbs in the archives the fifteen texts do not represent a very impressive number of references. In other words, the proverb does not appear to be one of particularly high frequency.[72] This is also somewhat indicated by the fact that the most recent student recording stems from 1988. In addition, the informants look at the proverb as an American piece of wisdom with its major meaning being that of arguing against change in the middle of an uncompleted action.

The Paremiographical Treatment of the "Swapping Horses" Proverb

All of the reference materials with their variants of the "swapping horses" proverb, together with the criticism regarding the lexicographers of quotation dictionaries, lead to the natural question of how paremiographers have dealt with this historically, culturally, and linguistically significant proverb. "Swapping horses" is not older than the beginning of the nineteenth century, yet it has gained solid currency in the English-speaking world and in many other languages, as will be shown in the next and final section of this study. One thing is certain: proverb scholars also have the unfortunate tendency of copying from each other without paying enough attention, if at all, to proverb variants, archaic proverbs that are no longer in common use, new proverbs that have hitherto not been recorded,

detailed studies of individual proverbs, and the necessity of conducting field research in order to record proverbs in oral communication rather than only from books and the print mass media. Paremiographers also need to be working together much more with lexicographers of language dictionaries so that the issue of proverb equivalencies will be handled in a more accurate fashion. As I will show in the last section, most lexicographers and paremiographers are unaware of the fact that the proverb "Don't swap (change) horses in midstream (the middle of the stream)" has long become proverbial in other languages as straightforward loan translations.

What follows is a review of the paremiographical treatment of the proverb under discussion, once again proceeding in chronological fashion. Since too many proverb collections do include variants in the introductory or the explanatory text, the following selection from the many volumes in my international proverb archives cannot be grouped according to major variants [As necessary, I have added boldface type to draw attention to each variant. "Swop" is an alternate spelling of "swap."]

1904: **It is a bad time to swop horses when you're crossing a stream.** – President Lincoln.
[even though this reference is clearly identified as belonging to Lincoln, it is considerably different from his actual remark and thus not a quotation in the narrow sense of that word. Vincent Stuckey Lean included it in a section on "English Aphorisms" in his five-volume proverb collection, sensing perhaps that it was indeed proverbial. In any case, it is interesting to note that it is a British paremiographer who first registered the phrase in a proverb collection.][73]

1922: **To change (swop) horses while crossing a stream**: to change one's instruments or weapons in a time of extreme difficulty. Phrase attributed by Abraham Lincoln to a Dutch farmer.
[second entry]: **To swap horses when crossing a stream**: to change one's instruments while in the midst of a difficult task. [followed by an excerpt from Lincoln's remarks][74]

1935: **Don't swap horses when crossing a stream.**
[with two contextualized references from 1864 (Lincoln) and 1889][75]

1948: [identical to 1935][76]

1948: **to swap horses in midstream** This homely American phrase is just our way of saying "to change leaders (generals, presidents, or what have you) during the course of an engagement (or at the height of a crisis)," and the point is always stressed that such change may lead to disaster. As a matter of literary record, Abraham Lincoln is credited with the utterance, though one historian of that period said that Lincoln quoted an old Dutch farmer [actually it was Lincoln himself, as repeatedly cited here!], and [H.L.] Mencken reports the occurrence of the phrase some twenty-four years before Lincoln used it [yes, but again, as shown, without proof]. [What follows is a quotation of Lincoln's comments with the "river"—variant.][77]

1948: [...] **it is not best to swap horses while crossing the river**, [...]. This is the official version [of Lincoln's comments on June 9, 1864], but it is usually quoted "**Don't swap horses while crossing a stream**," perhaps derived from a [differently recorded] version of the speech, "[...] **it was not best to swap horses while crossing a stream.**"
[with two contextualized references from 1940][78]

1952: **Don't swap horses while crossing a river.**
[with four references to other proverb collections][79]

1958: **Never swap horses crossing a stream.**
[no commentary][80]

1958: **It was best not to swap horses when crossing streams** [plus part of Lincoln's remarks as context].
[with two literary references from 1866 and 1929, and four references to other proverb collections][81]

1964: **swap horses while crossing a stream**: change a system or commander in the midst of a difficult task. From Abraham Lincoln, who is reported to have said on being renominated for the office of President [plus part of Lincoln's remarks].
[with three contextualized references from 1938, 1948, and 1953][82]

1967: **Don't change horses in mid-stream.** Crossing a stream on horseback is not always easy, and to transfer oneself from one horse to another during the process is inviting a ducking, if nothing worse. In the same way, if we think it necessary to make changes, we must choose the right moment to make them. In 1864, at the height of the American Civil War, there were demands for a change in the presidency. The then president, Abraham Lincoln, replied to his critics: [followed by parts of his remarks].[83]

1970: [identical to 1935 and 1948, indicating that the three editions of the famous *Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs* made no progress in a period of thirty-five years regarding historical references of this proverb!][84]

1982: **Don't change horses in mid-stream.** The proverb is also used in the phrase **to change horses in mid-stream.**
[with four contextualized references from 1864 (Lincoln), 1889, 1929, and 1979; and one reference to another proverb collection][85]

1983: **Don't change horses in mid-stream.** To try and change horses in this situation is obviously difficult and unwise, and the phrase against it suggests that one should think twice before changing one's opinion once things are under way. If one must make a change one should choose the right moment. The phrase became famous when Abraham Lincoln told his critics, who were demanding a change in the presidency, that although many of his fellow Republicans were dissatisfied with his conduct of the American Civil War, they had renominated him and that the best thing was for him to remain as president rather than for them to elect to change horses in mid-stream.[86]

1983: **Don't change horses in midstream.** A variant of this proverb substitutes "swap" for "change."
[without any explanatory comments][87]

1987: **don't change horses in mid stream.**
[second entry]: **don't change horses in mid-stream.**
[third entry]: **don't change horses in the middle of the stream.**
[all without comment][88]

1988: **Don't change horses in mid-stream.** While you are crossing a river on horseback, you should not transfer yourself from one horse to another. If you do so, you are likely to fall into the river. Similarly, in anything else that you do, you should make changes only at the right moment. If you change your approach or view while you are half way through doing something, you will not achieve success.
Similar Proverb: **Don't swap horses while crossing a stream.**
Related Proverb: A tree often transplanted bears not much fruit.
[with one invented contextualized example][89]

1989: **To swap horses while crossing a stream** (varied).
[no explanatory comments, but 13 contextualized references from 1929 to 1968, and one reference to another proverb collection][90]

1992: **don't change/swap horses in midstream.** Don't change methods or leaders in the middle of a crisis. Although predating the occasion by a quarter of a century, the expression became famous through its use by Abraham Lincoln in 1864 when he learned that his renomination for a second term was being backed by the National Union League. Several versions of this speech were recorded, some having it **change** and others **swap.**[91]

1992: **Don't change horses in the middle of the stream** Vars.: (a) **Don't change horses crossing a stream.** (b) **Don't change your horse[s] in the middle of the stream if you want to keep your trousers dry.** (c) **Don't swap horses crossing a stream.** (d) **Don't swap horses in the middle of the road.** (e) **Don't swap horses in the middle of the stream.** (f) **It's no time to swap horses when you are in the middle of the stream.**
[no explanatory comment, but with six variants collected from informants in the United States and Canada between 1945-1985, two references from 1864 (Lincoln) and 1929, and five references to other proverb collections][92]

1992: [identical to 1982][93]

1993: **Don't change horses in midstream.** Do not make changes when you are in the middle of doing something.
[with two invented contextualized examples][94]

1993: **Don't change horses in mid-stream.** If you must change your mind, choose your moment well; don't change direction or tactics in the middle of a difficult undertaking. Variant: **Don't swap horses while crossing a stream.** [...] By far the safest way to change one's horse, if it is really necessary, is to dismount first. To swap horses while crossing a stream is difficult and hazardous. The proverb owes its popularity to U.S. president Abraham Lincoln [plus explanation of Lincoln's renomination and quotation of his remarks].
[with two contextualized references from 1938 and 1953][95]

1993: **never swap/change horses in midstream.** Meaning "don't alter course in the middle of doing something," [H. L.] Mencken has "Never swap horses crossing a stream" as an "American proverb, traced to c. 1840. *CODP*'s [*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*] earliest citation is Abraham Lincoln saying in 1864: 'I am reminded ... of a story of an old Dutch farmer, who remarked to a companion once that "**it was best not to swap horses when crossing streams.**'" This would seem to confirm the likely U.S. origin.
[with a discussion of the "Niagara"-parody][96]

1994: English: a) **don't change horses in midstream,** b) **don't change horses while crossing a stream,** c) **don't swap horses when crossing a stream,** d) **don't swap your horses in midstream,** e) **it is not best to swap horses while crossing the river,** f) **never swap horses in midstream,** g) **never swap horses when crossing a stream.** German: **in der Furt soll man die Pferde nicht wechseln.** French: a) **il ne faut pas changer d'attelage [harnessing] au milieu d'un gué [ford],** b) **on ne change pas de chevaux au milieu d'un gué.**
[without any explanatory comments, but the only Anglo-American proverb collection that lists precise equivalents in two other languages, i.e. loan translations, as I will argue below][97]

1996: **Don't swap horses in midstream.** Don't change leaders when they are in the midst of important projects. Probably originated in the United States. Used by Abraham Lincoln in his 1864 presidential

campaign. The proverb is found in varying forms: **Don't change horses in the middle of the stream; Don't change horses in the midstream, Don't swap horses while crossing a stream, Don't switch horses in the middle of the river, It never pays to change horses in midstream, It's no use changing horses in midstream, Never change horses in the middle of the stream,** etc. The proverb is often shortened to **swap (change) horses in midstream.** The main entry is listed in all major dictionaries of American proverbs. It is one of the 265 proverbs that every American needs to know, according to E. D. Hirsch, Jr. [who included the reference "**swap (switch) horses in midstream.** To change leaders or adopt a different strategy in the middle of a course of action" in E. D. Hirsch, Joseph F. Kett, and James Trefil, *The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), p. 77.] See also "Don't change the rules in the middle of the game" [which is somewhat of an equivalent of more recent origin (1984) to the "swapping-horses" proverb.]
[with five references from 1864 (both variants by Lincoln) to 1993][98]

1997: **don't change horses in midstream.** Also, **don't swap horses in midstream.** It's unwise to alter methods or choose new leaders during a crisis [...]. This expression was popularized (although not originated) by Abraham Lincoln in a speech in 1864 when he discovered that the National Union League was supporting him for a second term as President.
[with one invented contextualized example][99]

1997: **change horses in midstream** change one's ideas or plans in the middle of a project or process. Also in proverbial form, "**Don't change horses in midstream.**"[100]

1997: **don't change horses in mid-stream** (US) Don't switch allegiances half way through whatever you are doing. Abraham Lincoln, 1864. Lincoln himself, who is largely responsible for popularizing the proverb, claimed to be quoting an old Dutch farmer. [...]
[with one reference to another proverb collection][101]

1998: [identical to 1982 and 1992, indicating that the three editions of the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* made no progress in a period of sixteen years regarding historical references of this proverb!][102]

2002: **don't swap horses in midstream.** Once you have embarked on a course of action or an undertaking, it is better not to change your tactics or methods along the way. [...] The proverb was first recorded in 1864, in the works of Abraham Lincoln. [...] Variant of this proverb: **don't change horses in the middle of the stream.**
[with two references from 1864 (Lincoln) and 1929][103]

2003: [identical to 1982, 1992, and 1998; this is actually the 4th edition of *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* that was published with the misleading title *The Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* and that can easily be confused with the much larger 3rd edition of *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs* from 1970][104]

What then does this survey of thirty-two major proverb collections spanning a time period of one hundred years tell us? First of all, paremiographers have done an impressive job of registering the many variants of the proverb, frequently stating that the proverb probably was coined in the early nineteenth century. They also now and then refer to the two versions that have been recorded of Lincoln's spontaneous remarks, and they show by means of numerous contextualized references that the proverb is well established in the Anglo-American language. Some of these scholarly proverb collections list up to seven variants, showing that this proverb is not at all as fixed as paremiologists might have assumed. Folklore by definition is based on variation, and there is no reason to think that

proverbs do not follow this general trend. However, there are also plenty of collections that do not deal with the issue of variants, and future paremiographers should indeed list at least the major variants that communicate the same idea: "Don't swap (change) horses in midstream (the middle of the stream). It might be added here that although this study includes perhaps more references that employ the verb "change," paremiographers seem to lean towards preferring the more descriptive verb "swap." I certainly count myself into this camp and know that I use the proverb in that way quite often. It is doubtless the older variant and is prevalent from the earliest reference from 1840 via Lincoln and through the nineteenth century. The use of the verb "change" comes in only in the twentieth century, most likely since "swap" is not as common any longer and never was particularly current in Great Britain, as was pointed out earlier.

Even though the paremiographical picture is actually quite solid for this particular proverb, it is clear that many of the paremiographers rely primarily on the proverb collections preceding their own. Many include the same contextualized references, without a whole-hearted attempt to locate additional references. Without wanting to diminish the value of two of the major Anglo-American proverb collections and their editors, I am including the following remarks to illustrate a basic problem in lexicography in general and in paremiography in particular. Both lexicographers and paremiographers need to pay more attention to the scholarship that is carried out by cultural historians, folklorists, linguists, phraseologists, and scholars from other disciplines who engage in the study of the wide field of phraseology. It simply is not acceptable that major research tools go through a number of editions without making use of new findings. Here are two examples to prove the point. William George Smith published the first edition of the invaluable *Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs* in 1935. The second edition was prepared by Paul Harvey in 1948, and in 1970 F. P. Wilson took care of the third edition, with a fourth and enlarged edition being long overdue. And yet, in thirty-five years nothing whatsoever was changed under the lemma of "Don't swap horses when crossing a stream." The same is true for most other entries, and it must be stated that this is not impressive for one of the leading academic publishers. Unfortunately, the same is true for the smaller but very useful *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* that John A. Simpson from the Oxford University Press edited for the first time in 1982. Again, the entry under the more modern lemma "Don't change horses in mid-stream" is not bad at all, and it offers considerably more references than the third edition of the much larger *Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs*, in that it cites Lincoln as well as three contextualized references and also refers to another proverb collection. And yet, the second (1992) and third (1998) editions prepared by John Simpson with the assistance of Jennifer Speake feature the absolutely identical entry. And the fourth edition, prepared by Jennifer Speake with the title of *Dictionary of English Proverbs* (2003) (easily to be confused with the large *Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs* [1970]) has again printed this entry without any changes or additions. As is well known, John Simpson is the renowned editor of the second edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, having proven himself as a word sleuth *par excellence*. But why should editors of scholarly paremiographical publications not hunt with the same eagerness for new proverbs (Simpson/Speake have added some new proverbs to their

editions) and for additional references for older proverbs,[105] especially since the internet and giant data-bases will lead to truly revealing contextualized references that might otherwise never be located?[106] Again, this is not meant as an attack on paremiographical colleagues, but paremiography and paremiology do need to join the modern age of scholarship. Some of the younger paremiologists and paremiographers are clearly engaged in modern, electronically based research—but for heaven's sake let us not throw out the proverbial baby with the bath water[107] and ignore the older scholarship and the vast printed sources that are not yet digitalized! As we move ahead, it behooves us all to approach our studies and collections from a truly interdisciplinary and intercultural perspective based on diachronic and synchronic research methods.

The Internationalization of the American Proverb

It is now time to take a look at whether the proverb "Don't swap horses in the middle of the stream" or its variants has been able to conquer the international market. The question might also be phrased as whether this American proverb has undergone an internationalization by way of being spread in its original English language or by loan translations into other languages. Much is known about how proverbs from classical antiquity, the Bible, and the Latin of the Middle Ages were translated into most European languages, with Erasmus of Rotterdam's *Adagia* (1500ff.) being one of the vehicles that was of considerable help in this process.[108] The numerous polyglot proverb collections present ample proof of how some of the most common proverbs in many languages have the same root in distant times, with Gyula Paczolay's magisterial collection of *European Proverbs in 55 Languages* (1997) being the *magnum opus* of modern comparative paremiography.[109] But paremiologists and scholars from other disciplines have concentrated long enough on how proverbs entered the various European languages during the past two thousand years, with classical and medieval Latin as the major vehicle of dissemination that eventually was pushed aside by loan translation into the vernacular. But we must also take a look at the modern *lingua franca* of English and its role in the dissemination of proverbs during the recent past and, of course, today.

By looking at the influence of the Anglo-American language and culture on others, scholars are once again confronted by interdisciplinary and intercultural questions and phenomena. But I would argue after several decades of tilling the paremiological field that it is exactly these hands-on studies that encompass what I would call with Friedrich Nietzsche the "fröhliche Wissenschaft" (joyful scholarship). Looking at individual proverbs and their origin, history, dissemination, use, function, and meaning from an inclusive point of view is a truly rewarding and revealing task, with many specific and general discoveries to be made that will be of use for paremiographical and paremiological goals. During the past few years, I have executed a number of such studies showing how the American proverbs "A picture is worth a thousand words," "The only good Indian is a dead Indian," "The early bird gets the worm," "Don't put all your eggs into one basket," "An apple a day keeps the doctor away," "Good fences make good neighbors," and "The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence" have become current as loan

translations in the German language as "Ein Bild sagt mehr als tausend Worte,"[110] "Nur ein toter Indianer ist ein guter Indianer,"[111] "Der frühe Vogel fängt den Wurm,"[112] "Man soll nicht alle Eier in einen Korb legen,"[113] "Ein Apfel pro Tag hält den Arzt fern,"[114] "Gute Zäune machen gute Nachbarn,"[115] and "Das Gras auf der anderen Seite des Zaunes ist immer grüner."[116] But this intercultural dissemination of English and American proverbs obviously does not only take place from the United States to Germany, as I have tried to show in my book chapter on "American Proverbs as an International, National, and Global Phenomenon."[117]

As expected, the "swap horses"-proverb has long spread to other English speaking countries of the world. As Elizabeth Dawes, a phraseologist at the University of Winnipeg, informed me in a letter of March 21, 2006, the proverb appears already in 1865 with direct reference to Abraham Lincoln in a speech by Archibald Woodbury McLelan before the Nova Scotia House of Assembly: "The illustration given by the late Abraham Lincoln, that 'it is no time to swap horses when you are crossing a stream,' ought to be sufficient for these gentlemen."[118] This shows that Lincoln's short remark of June 9, 1864, was picked up by the early Canadian press. But already by 1870, the proverb appears in Canada without reference to Lincoln. In fact, it is even employed with the introductory formula "old saying" to add traditional authority to a proverb that, as far as we know right now, must have had its beginning in the early nineteenth century: "There had been talk of turning the present government out of office, but the House [of Commons] ought to remember the old saying that it was dangerous to swap horses crossing the stream."[119] Dawes provided me with two additional references from debates that took place in the Canadian House of Commons, one with and the other without mentioning Lincoln: "Here we are in the midst of our revisions, and, as Lincoln said: 'It does not do to swap horses while crossing a stream'" (1886) and "Was it not well known to the Government that it was a very unwise and very unsafe thing to swap horses in crossing a stream?" (1887).[120] Nevertheless, Dawes was not particularly successful in finding modern occurrences in the Canadian mass media, but she was able to locate several French references from between 1993 to 1998 in the newspaper *Le Monde* that show that the proverb is at least somewhat current in France in the loan translation of "On ne change pas les chevaux au milieu du gué" or its variant "On ne change pas de cheval au milieu du gué." French speakers of Canada, especially in the province of Québec, might well have come across the French version of the proverb in this newspaper, and Dawes did supply me with the French variant "Les gens ne veulent pas changer de cheval au milieu de la course" from the Québec newspaper *La Presse*,[121] thus indicating that the proverb is being used in French-speaking Canada.

Koenraad Kuiper, linguist and phraseologist at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand, also had no difficulty in supplying me with English texts that prove the currency of the proverb down under. He assured me in his letter of March 10, 2006, that the proverb "certainly is a familiar expression here." His "Google" search for New Zealand references included "hits" like "Don't be scared to change horses in mid-stream, Wayne Mcllwraith tells his students. And he gives his own life story as an example," "If it became clear that the second-largest party had the best shot at forming a government, then

they could quickly switch horses in mid-stream," and "They will change horses in mid stream and take the saddle with them." It is clear that the proverb appears in variants, and this same picture would also result from similar searches for Australia, India, and other countries where English is spoken.

Irish folklorist and paremiologist Fionnuala Carson Williams was once again, as so often before, a great help in establishing the currency of the "swapping-horses" proverb in her country. In fact, she found the four variants "Never swap horses when crossing a stream," "Don't swap horses crossing a stream," "Don't swap horses in crossing a stream" and "Don't exchange horses crossing the stream" that were collected from oral use in Ireland around 1938 and are part of the Schools' [folklore] Collection. She also located the Irish text "Na tabhair malairt de do chapall nuair ata tu ag dul trasna ar an abhainn" (Don't exchange your horse when you are about to cross the river) in Enri O Muirgheasa's Ulster proverb collection *Seanfhocla Uladh* (1907). This indicates that the proverb must have been known in Irish around 1900, and it is certainly in use and known in Ireland both in English and Irish today, as Williams was able to ascertain by way of a questionnaire with informants declaring the knowledge and use of the proverb. But here is what she wrote to me on February 14, 2006: "Yes, the proverb is known in Ireland currently and in the twentieth century, but not common. As I recall, I did not come across a narrative about it, although simple stories giving a well-known international proverb a local Irish origin certainly exist in the 1930s Schools' Mss. etc. I don't know why this proverb, in nineteenth-century America, would be attached to an Irish farmer. I will delve." And delve she did, but alas, without finding any Irish folk narrative that could possibly relate to those two early American accounts from 1840 and 1846. The result of Fionnuala Williams' detailed research on my behalf has thus not led to prove any possible Irish origin of the proverb. For now, it must be concluded that the story and the proverb must have been created in the United States.

At this point it is best for me to admit that my conjecture in my article from 2005 of the proverb being of possible German origin is most likely not valid.[122] Based on the fact that I had found the German proverb "Mitten im Strom soll man die Pferde nicht wechseln" (Don't swap horses in the middle of the stream) in the fourth volume of Karl Friedrich Wilhelm Wander's *Deutsches Sprichwörter-Lexikon* (1876),[123] I thought that the "Dutch farmer" mentioned by Lincoln might in fact be referring to a "German farmer," quite a common confusion of national identity in the United States. Pursuant to this, I reasoned that German immigrants might have taken the proverb with them to the United States where it was loan-translated into English. Of course, with the two references from 1840 and 1846 speaking of an "Irish farmer," I have now become less certain of the German connection. There is also the problem that no other German proverb dictionary registered the proverb, except for Horst and Annelies Beyer's *Sprichwörterlexikon* (1985) which is an unscholarly compilation out of Wander's lexicon comprised of five massive volumes.[124] The Beyers did, of course, do well to select the "swapping horses" proverb for their collection since it was gaining currency in Germany at that time. If only Wander had listed a source for the proverb! In this case, he simply jotted it down from memory of having come across it somewhere.

I now have a new conjecture of how the proverb found its way into Wander's dictionary: It is my belief that he might have found it in the German press in the summer of 1864 that reported on Abraham Lincoln's short address and his reelection campaign. I can, for example, imagine that *The New York Staats-Zeitung* covered the matter shortly after June 9, 1864, and that the story from this paper or any of the other German-language papers published in the United States found its way into the German press. However (and this is an important point), the German loan translation did not become proverbial at that time! As I have shown by way of numerous contextualized examples, the proverb started to appear in German quotation dictionaries with direct reference to Abraham Lincoln only in the 1970s. Kathrin Steyer, phraseologist at the Institut für deutsche Sprache at Mannheim, helped me in finding many German references in the mass media from 1971 to the present time, showing that the proverb without mentioning Lincoln has indeed become commonplace in the German language during the past three decades. In fact, the proverb with its variants is so current in modern German that it is time to register it in language dictionaries and proverb collections of that language. I even located a poem by the East German poet Wolf Biermann that in 1968 includes the proverb as "Man kann nicht mitten im Fluß die Pferde wechseln" (You can't change horses in the middle of the stream).[125] But since I was not able to find references before then, I doubt very much that the 1873 entry in Wander had any influence on the dissemination of the proverb. Its modern German history thus begins in the 1960s as a loan translation from the American proverb. This theory is logical unless, of course, we want to claim polygenesis.

In my investigation of Germanic languages, I have not been able to locate any references in my many Dutch proverb collections, leading me to the conclusion that Lincoln's "Dutch farmer" did not carry the proverb to North America. H. L. Cox, a specialist on Dutch proverbs at the University of Bonn, also informed me in a letter of November 29, 2002, that he was unable to find the proverb in the sources that he checked. Of course, this does not mean that the proverb could not be found as a Dutch loan translation in the printed media that have become part of the internet.

I also got Christine Palm Meister, a phraseologist at the University of Uppsala, involved in this hunt for loan translations of the proverb. She located it for me in Pelle Holm's Swedish collection of quotations from the year 1939, where it is registered as "Man skall ine byta häst mitt i strömmen" (Don't change the horse in the middle of the stream) with a reference to Abraham Lincoln's remarks of June 9, 1864.[126] Although Meister informed me in her letter of March 28, 2006, that nobody in Sweden knows or uses this quotation or proverb, I subsequently located it as a proverb in Pelle Holm's standard Swedish proverb collection *Ordspråk och talesätt* (1965) as "Man ska ine byta häst mitt i strömmen" (Don't change the horse in the middle of the stream).[127] How did Holm justify the inclusion of this text as a proverb? Had he in fact heard it in oral use in Swedish? This would be hard to believe, since Jarmo Korhonen, a phraseologist at the University of Helsinki, informed me in a letter of March 28, 2006, that he could only find one Swedish reference of the proverb in the internet. He also found only one Finnish reference that referred to the fact that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt used the proverb during his 1944 reelection campaign. Korhonen also comes to the obvious

conclusion that the American proverb as Swedish and Finnish loan translations is basically unknown. I would not be surprised that the situation is quite similar for Norwegian and Danish. In other words, the loan process has barely reached into northern Europe, with the German-speaking countries being far ahead in having accepted the loan translation to such a degree that I have registered references that speak of the "German" proverb when citing it. I can, however, foresee that the proverb will gain in currency in Scandinavia and Finland either through the influence of English or even German in the future.

The picture is similarly sparse for the Romance languages, although, as mentioned above, Elisabeth Dawes was able to locate a few examples of the French loan translation "On ne change pas les chevaux au milieu du gué" in the Paris newspaper *Le Monde*. I have also found the variant "Il ne faut pas changer de cheval au milieu de la rivière" in the large *Dictionnaire de proverbes et dictons* (1993), where it is part of a list of "Proverbes américains," a clear indication that this is nothing more but a translation without any claim for a wide French currency.[128] The same variant also appeared four years later in *Dictionnaire des proverbes français-anglais/The Dictionary of Proverbs French-English* (1997): "don't change horses in midstream—il ne faut pas changer de cheval au milieu de la rivière."[129] However, such entries in bilingual proverb dictionaries do not necessarily indicate that both linguistic versions are in common use. Most likely they are simply direct translations without any claim to proverbiality. Nevertheless, the inclusion of such direct translations might help to spread the proverb in the target language as users of such dictionaries might start citing these texts. The same holds true for polyglot proverb dictionaries that contain no explanatory comments whatsoever. In other words, it is not clear from the French and Portuguese texts in Teodor Flonta's *Dictionary of English and Romance Languages: Equivalent Proverbs* (2001) whether they are true proverb equivalents or only direct translations:

> **Don't change horses in midstream**
> F. Il ne faut pas changer de cheval au milieu de la rivière.
> P. Não se muda de cavalo no meio do banhado.[130]

As shown, Flonta is correct about the proverbiality of the French text, but the Portuguese "equivalent" is somewhat doubtful. Eva Glenk, a phraseologist at the University São Paulo in Brazil, informed me in a letter of March 22, 2006, that the proverb is not current among Brazilians and that she was also unable to find references in Portuguese on the internet. The proverb also does not appear to have made its way into Italian and Spanish with any considerable distribution. The very few texts I have been able to locate cited the American proverb in English or translated it with reference to American presidential campaigns. But there is no indication that it is in oral use or that it is known very much in the Romance languages except for French. Again, I am convinced that the proverb as a loan translation will continue to conquer its European market and beyond. This is something for proverb scholars of the Romance languages to watch in the future.

Let me offer what has happened in Russia as an example that the American proverb with its easily understandable metaphor and in its multifaceted applicability will be accepted into ever more linguistic cultures. Just as in Germany, the American proverb has

by now gained a strong foothold in Russia, despite the many years of the Iron Curtain. Editors of a series of English-Russian proverb dictionaries published between 1956 and 1987 do not give a Russian equivalent for the American proverb but instead provide only translations and explanations of its meaning.[131] However, starting with a collection of *English Proverbs and Sayings* (1987) with Russian translations or equivalents, the Russian text "Konei na pereprave ne meniaiut" (Don't change horses at the [river] crossing) appears that now has been picked up by other paremiographers as well,[132] with a rare variant being "Loshaei na pereprave ne meniaiut" (When you are in the middle of fulfilling some task, you should not make drastic changes) for which a major *Russian-English Dictionary of Proverbs and Sayings* (2000) quite correctly cites "Don't change horses in the middle of the stream" and the variants "Don't swap horses crossing a stream (in midstream, in the middle of the road, in the middle of the stream), Don't swap horses while crossing the stream, Never change horses in midstream" as equivalents."[133] In other words, these paremiographers consider the American proverb "Don't change (swap) horses in midstream (in the middle of the stream)" to have a direct equivalent in the Russian loan translation "Konei na pereprave ne meniaiut." That this is so can be seen clearly from the fact that Harry Walter and Valerii Mokienko included it as a Russian proverb with three anti-proverbs in their collection of *Antiposlovitsy russkogo naroda* (2005), of which two (from the printed media of 2000 and 2005 respectively) are particularly interesting: "Na pereprave zhenshchin legkogo povedeniia ne meniaiut" (Don't change women of loose morals in midstream) and "Na pereprave meniaiut konei ... ezhegodno" (Change horses in midstream ... annually).[134] The fact that anti-proverbs have been formed on the basis of "Konei na pereprave ne meniaiut" is ample proof that this text must be current as a proverb loan translation in Russia. It is, however, somewhat surprising that Mokienko did not yet include it two years earlier in his collection *Novaia russkaia frazeologiia* (2003), which registers new phraseologisms.[135]

All of this shows that paremiography is an evolving science and that it takes time until paremiographers do in fact register the truly new proverbs. In any case, when I contacted Valerii Mokienko at the University of Greifswald for help in establishing that "Konei na pereprave ne meniaiut" is truly current as a loan proverb in Russian, he, with the much appreciated help of T. N. Buceva, responded on March 10, 2006, with a list of 18 (selected from many others) contextualized references that he found on the Russian internet. With the help of my colleague Kevin McKenna, I was able to establish that the proverb is used in discussions of economics, jobs, sports, and everyday life, with most contexts coming from the world of politics. None of the references found in the Russian mass media from between 1998 to 2005 mention Abraham Lincoln, which is yet another sign that we are dealing with a proverb and not a quotation. There is no need or space to cite all of them here, but let me at least quote this one reference that helps to establish that the American proverb in its Russian loan translation has become current among native Russian speakers: "Odno iz vyrazhenii, osobenno ponrovivsheesia angloiazychnoi publike, khorosho znakomo russkoychnomu hitateliu: `Konei na pereprave ne meniaiut, a vot oslov - obiazatel'no'. *Finansovye Izvestiia*; 05.11.2002" (One of the expressions particularly appealing to the English language public is well known to the Russian

speaking reader: "Don't change horses at the [river] crossing, but for asses—you must". *Financial News*). This reference might even be considered an anti-proverb, but its true significance lies in the fact that it establishes the intercultural relationship between the American proverb and its Russian loan translation that has become proverbial.

Grzegorz Szpila, Polish linguist and paremiologist at the University of Kraków, was able to inform me on April 23, 2006, that the proverb is also quite well known in Poland. In fact, he too attached nine contextualized references found on the Polish internet, with only one of them referring to Abraham Lincoln. The proverb is usually cited as "Nie zmienia sie koni w srodku rzeki" which is basically a literal translation of "Don't change horses in the middle of the stream." Again, I cannot cite all the references that Szpila located, but this one is of particular and telling interest: "Nie zmienia sie koni w srodku rzeki, glosi stare porzekadlo. I to prawda" (Don't change horses in the middle of the stream, as the old proverb says. And it is a true proverb). Considering that the proverb is not registered in Polish proverb collections and that it is definitely not an old proverb for Poles, one can see that the average speaker looks at it as an old piece of wisdom without knowing that it is actually a relatively new proverbial addition to the Polish language by way of a loan translation.

František Čermak, a well-known Czech phraseologist, provided me on March 15, 2006, with two contextualized references from the Czech National Corpus database, proving that the Czech loan translation "Přepřahat koně uprostřed řeky" (Don't change horses in the middle of the stream) also has caught on in the Czech Republic. And finally, Peter Ďurčo, Slowakian phraseologist and paremiologist, wrote me on March 1, 2006, that he found the proverb in Czech as a loan translation from a German newspaper: "Boris Jel'cin nemenil kone uprostred rieky" (Boris Yeltsin did not just change horses in the middle of the stream). This leads to the question of how the American proverb is in fact entering other languages. Since the proverb as a loan translation is already well established in German and Russian especially, these two languages might well help to spread the proverb to other languages. However, I would think that English, the *lingua franca* of the world, is disseminating the proverb slowly but surely throughout Europe and beyond.

Clearly much more work needs to be done just on this one American proverb to see how widely it has been distributed by now. I have just given some major developments, and I have concentrated my comments on American-European intercultural aspects. Other scholars with additional linguistic expertise can carry on from here to see how international this proverb has become.[136] It is my informed conjecture now that the proverb is not of German but of American origin, with Abraham Lincoln deserving the credit of having popularized it in the United States and beyond. In several European languages the proverb "Don't swap (change) horses in midstream (in the middle of the stream)" has gained considerable currency as a loan translation, and in those cases it is high time that it is registered in new proverb collections and bilingual dictionaries.

There is no doubt that the proverb finds its primary use in political rhetoric, where it is a ready-made metaphorical piece of wisdom to be employed whenever an argument is being made against change in any type of leadership. But the proverb is also employed in many situations where the desirability or unwillingness of change come into play. In any

case, the American proverb "Don't swap horses in the middle of the stream" serves as a strategically employed rhetorical sign in effective human communication. As such, it is quickly becoming an international metaphor, not just in English but in a multitude of languages.

Notes

1. For a description of how these disciplines enter into proverb studies see Wolfgang Mieder, *Proverbs. A Handbook* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2004), pp. 117-159.

2. For numerous examples see Wolfgang Mieder, *International Bibliography of Explanatory Essays on Individual Proverbs and Proverbial Expressions* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1977); and W. Mieder, *International Proverb Scholarship: An Annotated Bibliography*, 4 vols. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1982-1993; and New York: Peter Lang, 2001).

3. Archer Taylor, *The Proverb* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1931; rpt. ed. by Wolfgang Mieder. Bern: Peter Lang, 1985), p. 37.

4. See Wolfgang Mieder, *"Wein, Weib und Gesang": Zum angeblichen Luther-Spruch in Kunst, Musik, Literatur, Medien und Karikaturen* (Wien: Edition Praesens, 2004).

5. Cited from Roy P. Basler (ed.), *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1953), vol. 7, pp. 383-384.

6. *Tribune* (June 10, 1864), p. 5, col. 2, with the dialect spelling of "swop" instead of "swap".

7. Abraham Lincoln, *Complete Works, Comprising His Speeches, Letters, State Papers, and Miscellaneous Writings*, ed. by. John G. Nicolay and John Hay (New Work: The Century Co., 1894), vol. 2, pp. 531-532.

8. For a scholarly treatise of tales and anecdotes ascribed to Lincoln see Don E. and Virginia Fehrenbacher (eds.), *Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1996). The "swapping horses"-account by Lincoln is not included in this study.

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10. See the chapter entitled "Don't Swap Horses While Crossing the River" in James Morgan, *Abraham Lincoln: The Boy and the Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1908), pp. 253-265.

11. Henry J. Raymond, *The Life and Public Services of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Derby and Miller, 1865), p. 560.

12. John G. Nicolay and John Hay, *Abraham Lincoln. A History* (New York: The Century Company, 1890), vol. 9, p. 76.

13. Robin Hyman, *The Pan Dictionary of Famous Quotations* (London: Pan Books, 1962), p. 196 (in a section on quotations by Lincoln).

14. See for example David Kin, *Dictionary of American Maxims* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1955), p. 241; J. M. and M. J. Cohen, *The Penguin Dictionary of Quotations* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1960), p. 235; D. C. Browning, *Dictionary of Quotations and Proverbs* (London: Chancellor Press, 1982), p. 148; Antony Jay, *The Oxford Dictionary of Political Quotations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 226; and Elizabeth Knowles, *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 468.

15. See Kate Louise Roberts, *Hoyt's New Cyclopedia of Practical Quotations* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1922), p. 95; Henry F. Woods, *American Sayings* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1945), p. 38; Bergen Evans, *Dictionary of Quotations* (New York: Avenel Books, 1968), p. 95; Gorton Carruth and Eugene Ehrlich, *The Harper Book of American Quotations* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), p. 443; John Bartlett,

Familiar Quotations, 16h ed. by Justin Kaplan (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1992), p. 450; and A. Norman Jeffares and Martin Gray, *A Dictionary of Quotations* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1997), p. 412.

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50. Laurence Urdang and Ceila Dame Robbins, *Slogans* (Detroit, Michigan: Gale Research Company, 1984), p. 276.

51. H. L. Mencken, *A New Dictionary of Quotations on Historical Principles* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1942), p. 1168. See also Nigel Rees, *Phrases & Sayings* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995), p. 340; and Hugh Rawson and Margaret Miner, *The Oxford Dictionary of American Quotations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 104 and p. 516.

52. Anonymous, "Republicans and Prohibition," *The New Republic* (June 22, 1932), p. 141.

53. William Safire, *Political Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (New York: Random House, 1978), p. 181.

54. Cited from *The New York Times* (April 19, 1932), p. 16.

55. For Roosevelt's proverbial prowess see Wolfgang Mieder, "'We Are All in the Same Boat Now': Proverbial Discourse in the Churchill-Roosevelt Correspondence," in W. Mieder, *Proverbs Are the Best Policy: Folk Wisdom and American Politics* (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2005), pp. 187-209 and pp. 284-287.

56. Anonymous, *You Will Decide, Is It Time To Change Horses?* (Chicago, Illinois: Citizens Information Committee, 1940).

57. See Margaret Redfield, "The Expressive Utterance, Folk and Popular," *Journal of American Folklore*, 69 (1956), 357-362, with the short observation: "Yet even today the proverb [proverbs in general] may exert powerful influence. We recall the 'Don't change horses in the middle of the stream' cited with effect during Roosevelt's last [1944] election" (p. 358).

58. *Don't Change Horses*, music score. Words and music by Al Hoffman, Milton Drake, and Jerry Livingston (New York: Drake, Hoffman, Livingston, 1944).

59. Anonymous, "FFC Won't Rule on Song, 'Don't Change Horses'," *The New York Times* (July 13, 1944), p. 18.

60. *The New York Times* (October 22, 1928), p. 6.

61. John Evans, *Halo in Brass. A Paul Pine Mystery* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1949), p. 172.

62. *The New York Times* (August 11, 1956), p. 4.

63. Don Marquis, cited from Evan Esar, *20,000 Quips and Quotes* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1969), p. 423.

64. John Farman, *You Can't Tell a Rook by Its Cover* [*sic*] (London: Pan Books, 1989), no pages given.

65. Ida Ewing, *Cow Pie Ain't No Dish You Take to the County Fair and Other Cowboy Facts of Life* (Phoenix, Arizona: Arizona Highways, 1997), p. 28. With an appropriate illustration by Jim Willoughby of a cowboy trying to jump from one horse to another in the middle of the river,

66. Louis Berman, *Proverb Wit & Wisdom: A Treasury of Proverbs, Parodies, Quips, Quotes, Clichés, Catchwords, Epigrams and Aphorisms* (Berkeley, California: A Perigee Book, 1997), p. 196.

67. This is a text of a greeting card by Ambassador Cards, purchased in July 2000 in Burlington, Vermont.

68. *The Economist* (February 24, 2001), p. 29. The caricature shows Secretary of State Colin Powell changing from a focus on Israel to Iraq.

69. A response from a first grader who was asked to complete the first part of the proverb. It is one text of a set of twenty-five such completions by first-graders. The list of anti-proverbs was sent to me by my friend Robert Georges on May 3, 2006, after he had found it on the internet. Such lists of "Wisdom of Children" have been posted repeatedly on the internet for the past ten years or so.

70. A wonderful contamination of the two proverbs "A leopard cannot change his spots" and "Don't change horses in midstream" collected on March 1, 2006, from Gordon McCoy by Fionnuala Carson Williams at Belfast, Ireland.

71. See Wolfgang Mieder and Anna Tóthné Litovkina, *Twisted Wisdom: Modern Anti-Proverbs* (Burlington, Vermont: The University of Vermont, 1999), pp. 70-71.

72. It should be noted that the "swapping horses"-proverb is not included in the list of 315 frequently used Anglo-American proverbs that was assembled by Kimberly J. Lau in her study on "'It's About Time': The Ten Proverbs Most Frequently Used in Newspapers and Their Relation to American Values," *Proverbium*, 13 (1996), 135-159 (here pp. 146-153); also in Wolfgang Mieder (ed.), *Cognition, Comprehension, and Communication: A Decade of North American Proverb Studies (1990-2000)* (Baltmannsweiler: Schneider Verlag Hohengehren, 2003), pp. 231-254 (here pp. 242-248). I also did not include it in my study on "'Proverbs Everyone Ought to Know': Paremiological Minimum and Cultural Literacy," in W. Mieder, *Proverbs Are Never Out of Season: Popular Wisdom in the Modern Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 41-57. The same is true for the list in Anna Tóthné Litovkina, "The Most Powerful Markers of Proverbiality: Perception of Proverbs and Familiarity with Them Among 40 Americans," *Semiotische Berichte*, no volume given, nos. 1-4 (1994), 327-353.

73. Vincent Stuckey Lean, *Proverbs (English & Foreign), Folk Lore, and Superstitions, also Compilations towards Dictionaries of Proverbial Phrases and Words, Old and Disused*, 5 vols. (Bristol: J. W. Arrowsmith, 1906; rpt. Detroit, Michigan: Gale Research Company, 1969), vol. 4, p. 9.

74. Albert M. Hyamson, *A Dictionary of English Phrases* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1922; rpt. Detroit, Michigan: Gale Research Company, 1970), p. 80 and p. 334.

75. William George Smith, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), pp. 87-88.

76. Paul Harvey, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), p. 634.

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78. Burton Stevenson, *The Home Book of Proverbs, Maxims, and Famous Phrases* (New York: Macmillan, 1948), p. 1178.

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81. Archer Taylor and Bartlett Jere Whiting, *A Dictionary of American Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases, 1820-1880* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 191.

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83. Ronald Ridout and Clifford Witting, *English Proverbs Explained* (London: Pan Books, 1967), p. 48.

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93. John A. Simpson and Jennifer Speake, *The Concise Dictionary of Proverbs*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 40.

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98. Gregory Titelman, *Popular Proverbs & Sayings* (New York: Random House, 1996), p. 73. The reference to the proverb "Don't change the rules in the middle of the game" appears on p. 62.

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105. See Charles Clay Doyle, "On 'New' Proverbs and the Conservativeness of Proverb Dictionaries [especially *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*]," *Proverbium*, 13 (1996), 69-84. See also Anna Tóthné Litovkina's valuable thoughts on paremiographical matters in her voluminous article on "A Few Aspects of a Semiotic Approach to Proverbs, with Special Reference to Two Important American Publications [W. Mieder, *American Proverbs* (1989) and W. Mieder et al., *A Dictionary of American Proverbs* (1992)]," *Semiotica*, 108 (1996), 307-380.

106. See Stephen D. Winick, "'Garbage In, Garbage Out,' and Other Dangers: Using Computer Databases to Study Proverbs," *Proverbium*, 18 (2001), 353-364; and Christa Rittersbacher and Matthias Mösch, "A Haystack of Precious Needles: The Internet and Its Utility for Paremiologists," *Proverbium*, 22 (2005), 337-362.

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W. Mieder, *Proverbs Are Never Out of Season: Popular Wisdom in the Modern Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 193-224.

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111. Wolfgang Mieder, "'Nur ein toter Indianer ist ein guter Indianer': Zur Geschichte eines nicht nur amerikanischen Sprichwortes," *Der Sprachdienst*, 37, no. 5 (1993), 137-142.

112. Wolfgang Mieder, "Der frühe Vogel und die goldene Morgenstunde. Zu einer deutschen Sprichwortentlehnung aus dem Angloamerikanischen," in Irma Hyvärinen, Petri Kallio, and Jarmo Korhonen (eds.), *Etymologie, Entlehnungen und Entwicklungen. Festschrift für Jorma Koivulehto* (Helsinki: Société Néophilologique, 2004), pp. 193-206.

113. Wolfgang Mieder, "'Man soll nicht alle Eier in einen Korb legen'. Zur deutschsprachigen Entlehnung eines angloamerikanischen Sprichwortes," *Nauchnyi vestnik. Seriia: Sovremennye lingvisticheskie i metodiko-didakticheskie issledovaniia*, no volume given, no. 1 (2004), 21-31.

114. Wolfgang Mieder, "'Ein Apfel pro Tag hält den Arzt fern'. Zu einigen amerikanischen Lehnsprichwörtern im Deutschen," *Revista de Filologia Alemana*, 12 (2004), 135-149.

115. *Ibid.*, pp. 145-147.

116. *Ibid.*, pp. 147-149.

117. See Wolfgang Mieder, *Proverbs Are the Best Policy: Folk Wisdom and American Politics* (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2005), pp. 1-14.

118. Archibald Woodbury McLelan, *Speech on the Union of the Colonies* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: House of Assembly, 1865), p. 3.

119. Cited from *House of Commons Debates [1870]* (Ottowa, Ontario: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1979), p. 1130 (April 21, 1870).

120. Cited from the *Official Report of the Debates of the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada* (Ottowa, Ontario: Roger MacLean, 1886), p. 1481, and (1887), p. 39.

121. See *La Presse* (September 26, 1998), p. B4.

122. See Wolfgang Mieder, "'Mitten im Strom soll man die Pferde nicht wechseln': Zur Geschichte eines deutsch-amerikanischen Sprichworts," *Zeitschrift für germanistische Linguistik*, 33 (2005), 106-124.

123. See Karl Friedrich Wilhelm Wander, *Deutsches Sprichwörter-Lexikon*, 5 vols. (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1867-1880), vol. 4, col. 922, no. 22.

124. Horst and Annelies Beyer, *Sprichwörterlexikon* (Leipzig: VEB Bibliographisches Institut, 1984; rpt. München: C. H. Beck, 1985), p. 567. These two paremiographers probably included this proverb out of Wander because it had become quite well known in Germany by 1984. I have no idea where Emanuel Strauss found the German variant "In der Furt soll man die Pferde nicht wechseln" (Don't change horses in the ford) that he included in his *Dictionary of European Proverbs*, 3 vols. (London: Routledge, 1994), vol. 2, p. 722. I have found it in the form of a wellerism "'In der Furt soll man die Pferde nicht wechseln', sagte der Reiter, als er merkte, daß er sich auf ein Flußpferd gesetzt hatte" ("Don't change horses in the ford," said the rider, when he noticed that he had sat down on a hippopotamus) in the magazine *Der Stern*, 48 (November 22, 1973), p. 136.

125. The poem is entitled "Frage und Antwort und Frage" and is included in Wolf Biermann, *Mit Marx und Engelszungen. Gedichte, Balladen, Lieder* (Berlin: Klaus Wagenbach, 1968), p. 18.

126. See Pelle Holm, *Bevingade ord och andra stående uttryck och benämningar* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers, 1939), p. 111.

127. Pelle Holm, *Ordspråk och talesätt* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers, 1965), p. 51.

128. Florence Montreynaud, Agnès Pierron, François Suzzoni, *Dictionnaire de proverbes et dictons* (Paris: Dictionnaires Le Robert, 1993), p. 228 (the American section on pp. 227-229).

129. Monique Brezin-Rossignol, *Dictionnaire des proverbes français-anglais/Dictionary of Proverbs French-English* (Paris: La Maison du Dictionnaire, 1997), p. 271.

130. Teodor Flonta, *A Dictionary of English and Romance Languages: Equivalent Proverbs* (Hobart, Tasmania: DeProverbio.com, 2001), p. 253.

131. See A. V. Kunin, *Anglo-russkii frazeologicheskii slovar'* (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Inostrannykh i Natsional'nykh Slovarei, 1956), p. 565; Tofiq Abasquliyev, *English Proverbs with Their Azerbaijan and Russian Equivalents* (Baku: "Elm" Publishing House, 1981), pp. 54-55; and M. V. Bukovskaia, *A Dictionary of English Proverbs in Modern Use* (Moscow: Russkii Iazyk, 1985), p. 110.

132. See S. Kuskovskaya, *English Proverbs and Sayings* (Minsk: Vysheishaya Shkola Publishers, 1987), p. 72, and M. Dubrovin, *A Book of English and Russian Proverbs and Sayings, Illustrated* (Moscow: Prosveshcheniye, 1993), p. 81.

133. Alexander Margulis and Asya Kholodnaya, *Russian-English Dictionary of Proverbs and Sayings* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2000). p. 116.

134. Harry Walter and Valerii M. Mokienko, *Antiposlovitsy russkogo naroda* (Sankt-Peterburg: Heva, 2005), p. 224.

135. See Valerii M. Mokienko, *Novaia russkaia frazeologiia* (Opole: Uniwersytet Opolski - Instytut Filologii Polskiej, 2003).

136. For example, my Latvian phraseological friend Anita Naciscione informed me on March 20, 2006, that as far as she could ascertain the proverb has not entered the Latvian language as yet. My Bulgarian paremiological friend Roumyana Petrova likewise wrote to me on February 15, 2006, that the proverb appears to be still unknown in Bulgaria. On the other hand, I have found the American proverb as the Turkish loan translation "Irmaktan geçerken at değiştirilmez" in two collections, albeit without any indication how current it actually is in normal parlance; see Aydin Dağpinar, *A Dictionary of Turkish-English English-Turkish Proverbs and Idioms* (Istanbul: Doyuran Matbaasi, 1982), pp. 186-187; and Metin Yurtbaşi, *A Dictionary of Turkish Proverbs* (Ankara: Turkish Daily News, 1993), p. 44.

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Woodsmen, Shanty Boys, Bawdy Songs, and Folklorists in America's Upper Midwest

Ignored and suppressed by some folklorists, actively sought and even relished by others, so-called bawdy or vulgar songs were an integral part of the repertoires of many woods singers, including those who toiled in the "pinery" of America's Upper Midwest. Although the published record is scant, field recordings and unpublished archival materials reveal plenty concerning the such songs, as well as the methods and motives of folklorists who censored or sought them. Operating within an exclusively male genre, Sidney Robertson and Helene Stratman-Thomas, women who published sparely and have not been recognized widely as authorities on woods songs, were genuinely committed to documenting bawdy performances. Meanwhile two men, Franz Rickaby and Earl C. Beck, the authors of four books on lumberjack folksongs, were just as energetic in disregarding, dismissing, or altering what they heard. The relationships between these and other song catchers and singers have much to tell us not only about the bawdy repertoires of woodsmen and shanty boys, but also about their representation by folklorists whose work and reputations, in turn, were affected by constructions of class and gender.[1]

In early September, 1919, Franz Rickaby checked into the Northern Hotel in Mercer, Wisconsin, a rough logging town—like Florence, Hayward, and Hurley—whose hotels often served as taverns, gambling dens, and whorehouses. Violinist, native of southern Illinois, Harvard-trained ballad scholar, and newly appointed English professor at the University of North Dakota, Rickaby was searching for lumber camp songs and singers. John Lomax had published *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads*, demonstrating that America's frontier possessed a vigorous indigenous narrative folksong tradition, and Rickaby—like Roland Gray in Maine—was determined to do the same for woods workers.

Although the big lumber camps fostering games, storytelling, songs, and dances on Saturday night were dwindling by 1919, they held on for several decades more in the heavily-timbered Iron County environs surrounding Mercer. Indeed, in 1919, logging was still largely winter work, with men and horses toiling on the frozen ground required for moving heavy timber. September, consequently, was a month of relative leisure for loggers, sawmill workers, and farmhands who, awaiting plunging temperatures that would summon them into the woods, thronged to places like the Northern Hotel. And so it was that Rickaby, as he set down in his journal, "stalked in a side door to where ten or twelve loafers, in all states of intoxication, were holding forth, drinking, spitting, singing foul songs, telling fouler stories, and giving character to the place generally . . . " (Peters 1977:21).

Shown to his room by a fellow named Walker, "a big fatty-soft, heavy-featured, unshaven creature who had just been singing an obscene song about a doctor" (Peters 1977:21), Rickaby apparently neither engaged Walker and his fellows in conversation, nor learned about their lives, nor sought their songs, whether foul or fair. Instead, as revealed

by his extended correspondence with William Bartlett, a historian of lumber camp life from Eau Claire, Wisconsin, Rickaby gleaned most of his songs at programs that he gave for people one generation removed from the woods—such as female would-be teachers in Upper Midwestern Normal Schools or members of the Presbyterian Men's Club, whose fathers had worked in the woods—or from correspondence with local collectors like Bartlett, Michael Cassius Dean of Virginia, Minnesota, and Otto Rindlisbacher of Rice Lake, Wisconsin (Rickaby 1922-1925).[2]

As far as I can tell, none of these people conveyed or even hinted at the existence of raunchy lumber-camp songs to Franz Rickaby. Certainly no such material turns up in Bartlett's papers, or in his essay "Logging Camp Humor" (1923), or in his book *History, Tradition, and Adventure in the Chippewa Valley* (1929). Dean's *The Flying Cloud, and One Hundred and Fifty Other Old Time Songs and Ballads* (1922) is similarly clean, while Rindlisbacher's *Twenty Original Jigs, Reels, and Hornpipes* (1931) includes only dance tunes, neglecting the calls that sometimes accompanied them. Rickaby's own *Ballads and Songs of the Shanty-Boy* (1926) does a superb job of presenting us with texts, tunes, variants, and annotations for fifty-one lumber-camp songs, along with exemplary biographical information on the woods singer and composer William N. "Billy" Allen, but offers no vulgar material whatsoever, and does not mention Walker and his fellows at the Northern Hotel. While *Ballads and Songs of the Shanty-Boy* was overwhelmingly well received by reviewers, the author and critic Ernest Sutherland Bates, writing in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, castigated Rickaby for publishing "pseudo-folklore" and for creating a falsely antiseptic portrayal of lumber-camp singing (McNeill 1993:7).

In the 1970s, as a fledgling folklorist from Rice Lake who had known Otto Rindlisbacher and had just discovered Rickaby, I began to wonder, like Ernest Sutherland Bates, about the presence of vulgar songs in Upper Midwestern lumber camps. By then I had recorded a broad span of "clean" and "dirty" woods tales from old timers born in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and had also read, for example, Richard Dorson's renditions of "off-color stories" from Michigan loggers about what happened when the Blue Ox would "crap" and how a fellow stranded in a high tree slid to safety on an icicle of his own frozen piss (Dorson 1959:222). I had even turned up accounts of foul-mouthed Upper Midwestern loggers that extended back to the 1850s. Observers like Olaus Duus, a Lutheran minister with five years of theological training beyond his master of arts degree from Oslo's Royal Fredrik University, had this to say about the Wisconsin River Valley loggers he encountered during a stay in Stevens Point.

> They earn from $1.50 to $4.00 a day but they are unfortunately the scum of humanity, the dregs both of Europe and America. They live a life of constant drinking, gambling, swearing and cursing, and even of occasional murder (Blegen 1955:373, 378).

Most significantly, beyond hearing plenty of accomplished "swearing and cursing" from assorted former lumberjacks and their offspring, I had heard, mostly as fragments, raunchy variations on "clean" songs and poetic recitations that had circulated in the camps.

One such song was an alternative to the "A is for axes" first line of the "Lumberman's Alphabet": "A is for asshole all covered with hair." Another, sung around 1964 by a school pal, Victor Roux, whose French Canadian grandparents had settled north of Rice Lake to farm and work in the woods, fused the British tune of "The Girl I Left Behind Me" with a north woods metaphor that dazzled us fourteen-year-old boys: "Oh, she run downstairs in the midnight air / With the wind blowing up her nightie / Her tits hung loose like the balls on a moose / Jesus Christ Almighty!" In 1978, during a prolonged joke-telling session in a Stevens Point tavern, I recorded Jon Mason's rendition of "Ze Skunk," which he learned as a boy in Schofield, a lumber-mill hamlet bordering Wausau (Mason 1978). In the final verse, a musk-spattered Norsky Nimrod vows he'll never again pursue polecats: "And so I hunt the skunk no more / For his fur and meat / For if his peepee smell so bad / Yee Whiz!, what if he sheet?"[3]

From the late 1970s through the early 1990s, while doing field research with working loggers and their descendants, as well as with traditional musicians and singers throughout the Upper Midwest, I encountered sketchy memories of off-color versifying in the woods. One old timer, Alexei Siedlecki (b. 1906), whose Polish immigrant father had worked Ashland's ore docks in summers and in winter lumber camps, had a singing brother, Ed, who performed a broad range of old country and immigrant workers' songs, among them some "tough ones that can't be sung in church" (Siedlecki 1981). Jerry Novak (b. 1895), a Czech immigrant from nearby Moquah, had worked in a Bad River lumber camp east of Ashland in the winter of 1914. As he recalled, there was a lot of singing in the camp and, although Jerry knew a clean version of the "Lumberjack's Alphabet," he had heard but could not recall plenty of songs that were "not nice" (Novak 1979). Bill Hendrickson (b. 1901) and his neighbor Olavi Wintturi (b. 1910) had both worked in the woods around their homes in the Finnish-American hamlet of Herbster, Wisconsin. In their younger days they knew an immigrant, Bill Kauppi, who sang "dirty lumberjack songs" that "came over from Finland." One song, "Ten Fingers," concerned a man tickling a woman's genitals with both hands (Hendrickson and Wintturi 1981). They could recall only the clean version of "Mama Naki" (Mama Saw), but Jingo Viitala Vachon (b. 1918) of Toivola, in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, knew a pair of floating verses that an old fellow named Kiviranti used to sing "before he got religion" (Vachon 1981):

Ennen mä hyppään kuuseen ja mäntyyn,
Ennen ku tämän kylän tyttöjan sänkyyn.
[I'd rather leap into spruce or pine
Than into these neighborhood girls' beds.]
and
Lammas syöpi lehtiä, lehemä syöpi heiniä,
Ruikku se lentää ympäri seiniä.
[The sheep eats leaves, the cow eats hay,
Wet crap flies all over the walls.]

Another "Yooper" (a resident of the "UP," or Upper Peninsula) Ray DeLongchamp of Ishpeming, was born into a French-Canadian logging family in 1927 and started working

in camps as a cook's helper while in his early teens. By the early 1950s, he was running camps. As he told me in August, 1990, "a lot of guys would try to sing when they got half in the bag." On one occasion, he had to round up four or five fellows who had been on a drunk in Champion and bring them back to camp: "When the boys got back on the logging roads they would drink beer and wine, would start singing songs about some of the old operations they had worked on: about some of their employers or the employees. What I really needed was production, I didn't need songs . . . I really missed a golden opportunity to record some lumberjack folklore or folk art" (DeLongchamp 1990).

The grandson of Finnish immigrants, Les Ross, Sr., was more attentive. Born in Eben Junction, Michigan, in 1923, he grew up in a "harmonica" family that favored mostly "church hymns." The Blue Moon Tavern, however, was nearby. Lumberjacks came in to spend their money "when they got paid. I'd ask them to sing a song and I'd play along with the harmonica. Many a time I was told, you're underage. I'd go outside and then they'd accommodate me. There's many, many songs I learned from them boys." These fellows, "a rowdy bunch," were "mostly Finn," and sang in Finnish. When Les played the tune for "The Five Cards" to his grandpa, he was told, "My boy, that's a sin." Confessing that "we mixed our signals" thereafter, Les persisted in learning both sacred and uncensored ditties. Like many Yoopers, he toiled in Detroit as a young man, fraternizing with kindred Finns at Palomaki's Tavern, and rooming with a pair of fellow economic migrants named Risto and Olavi.

"Risto was kind of straight-laced," Les told me, "but Olavi was *hulivili* or happy." Les learned and sang for me a Finnish song learned from Olavi Hamalainen, then offered the following rough translation.

> I know a stream where the water doesn't freeze.
> The sun never shines there, nor does the moon glow there.
> It's very hard to find its source because it's all covered with grass.
> The east winds do not blow there, and the hailstones do not penetrate.
> But sometimes a little glow-worm will visit.
> Then he takes his canoe out.
> When the evening sun sinks in the west, I take my canoe out.
> From the narrow source, I paddle in.
> And after awhile, while I am paddling there, I feel a leak in my canoe.
> I pull it to the shore and put it under a blanket to dry out.

He closed with a classificatory comment: "It's all nature words in the original. You can draw your own conclusions" (Ross 2002).

After spending an afternoon with Les Ross, Sr. in 2002, I concluded that it was long past time to investigate and account for, as fully as possible, the presence of these and other bawdy songs in Upper Midwestern lumber camps. The books and documentary recordings that constituted our published record of Upper Midwest lumber camp folksongs yielded little in the way of overtly vulgar materials. In addition to Rickaby, published sources included: a trio of books by Earl Clifton Beck, *Songs of the Michigan Lumberjacks* (1941), *Lore of the Lumber Camps* (1948); and *They Knew Paul Bunyan*

(1956); the documentary LP records *Wolf River Songs* (Folkways 1956) with field recordings and notes by Sidney Robertson Cowell, *Songs of the Michigan Lumberjacks* (Library of Congress 1959) with field recordings by Alan Lomax and notes by E.C. Beck, and *Folk Music from Wisconsin* (Library of Congress 1960) with field recordings and notes by Helene Stratman-Thomas; as well as Harry Peters' *Folksongs Out of Wisconsin* (1977), which drew mostly on Anglo-American songs recorded by Helene Stratman Thomas, with a smattering of previously unpublished texts from Franz Rickaby's fieldwork. In the same volume, Peters published the field journals of both Stratman-Thomas and Rickaby, including the latter's probably not-intended-for-publication account of goings-on at the Northern Hotel.

Although the notes accompanying these LPs are uniformly silent on the matter of bawdy songs, three of the four post-Rickaby books emulate his ghost by hinting that such songs not only existed but sometimes flourished in the Upper Midwest. In the first of his three volumes that are only slightly different versions of one another, Earl Beck, an English professor at Central Michigan University, equivocates coyly:

> Obscene ballads and songs have not been included. It may surprise the reader to learn that the relative number of such songs to be found is not large. Though many were sung, most of them have been forgotten. An occasional singer knows a shameful repertoire of obscenity, but he is an individual rather than a type. Men rich in lumber-wood song, like William McBride of Isabella City, Clarence Clark of Alma, Frank Scribner of West Branch, Ottis Turpenning of Ithaca, Alf Levely of old Camp Sixteen, Bird Williams of Tustin, and Sid Jones of Boyne Falls, know surprisingly few unprintable songs. On the other hand, a certain old-timer whose songs have been collected through bars knew almost nothing that one would care to repeat. (Beck 1941:6)

Fostering further contradiction and curiosity, Beck has more to say about William McBride:

> Bill McBride, wiry old river hog from Isabella City, is one of the most remarkable ballad singers. . . . Bill learned many songs in the shanties, on the decking grounds and along the rivers, and he seems to have remembered all of them. I rode with him once for twenty-four waking hours, during twenty of which he sang and recited with almost no repetitions. There were lumberjack songs, Civil War songs, Irish ballads, English ballads, slavery songs, barroom songs. Most of the material was printable. He must know as much more, or nearly as much more, that is not printable. (Beck:6-7)

These passages, prominent in Beck's 1941 *Songs of the Michigan*, were deleted from the "revised and enlarged" later collection, *Lore of the Lumber Camps* (1948:v), although brief allusions to bawdry survived in a pair of headnotes.

Regarding the "Alphabet Song," Beck tells us: "A folklorist might ask what manner of life does not have an alphabet song. The hobo has one; so does the queen of the red lights. In fact, the filthiest jingle I ever heard was the tenderloin madam's alphabet" (1948:37). As for "Ze Skunk," most versions "can be classed as questionable for publication, but at long last I have picked up two that are publishable" (190). Inexplicably, however, under the title "The Red-Light Saloon," Beck presents a narrative concerning a fight between a Frenchman and a Scot that was "versified by Judge George Angus

Belding of Dearborn and won first prize in 1946 at the Detroit Writer's Club contest" (136). The "vulgar" ballad of the same name, which Beck surely had heard and which, as we shall see, was widely sung in the region's lumber camps, is not even mentioned. References to "obscene" songs and singers vanish altogether in Beck's third collection, *They Knew Paul Bunyan*. Beck, it would seem, incrementally abandoned a polite yet frank submission to his era's publishing conventions for intentional, perhaps pious, obfuscation. Judy Selewski, a student in Ellen Stekert's advanced folklore class at Wayne State University in 1970, interviewed and wrote a paper about Beck. She provided this confirmation: "Beck purposely did destroy some of the things which he collected because they were so dirty that he did not want his name in any way associated with them" (1970:19).

Harry Peters' "Introduction" to *Folk Songs out of Wisconsin* was written in the mid-1970s about folksongs gathered in the 1940s by Helene Stratman-Thomas. It is far more forthright and revelatory, although Peters also fell short of printing all: "A few songs were excluded because they were thought to be too vulgar even by today's standards." (9) "Loggers liked the bawdy, the flamboyant, the unprintable songs of which *The Red Light Saloon* is a worthy representative. (Only its more acceptable stanzas are reproduced in this collection, but indeed they are bawdy enough)" (7).

Most intriguing of all, however, are two passages from Peters' publication of Stratman-Thomas's field notes. Regarding the summer of 1940, she tell us:

> One type of folk singer for whom we were constantly looking was the true lumberjack. H.J. Kent of Wautoma, who had a great interest in local history, knew many of the older lumberjacks in Waushara and neighboring counties. He took us to visit John Christian of Coloma, Henry Humphrey of Hancock, and Lewis Winfield Moody of Plainfield. Since not all lumberjack songs are intended for ladies' ears, it was sometimes suggested that I "just wait in the car" (25).

Unlike Franz Rickaby and Earl Beck, neither of whom made sound recordings, Stratman-Thomas relied on portable disk-cutting equipment. She also employed an undergraduate student, Bob Draves, as an audio engineer in 1940 and 1941. Not only did he record this trio of singers while his boss remained outside, but he also returned at her direction to record the same singers and others the following summer. She recalled:

> A field trip for July and August was planned. Bob Draves was again selected as recording technician. Since I was scheduled to teach summer school, Bob set out alone, going first into the lumberjack country of Waushara County. The lumberjacks whose songs he recorded were Charles Robinson, Charles Mills, Bert Taplin, Lewis Winfield Moody, Michael Leary, Henry Humphries [Humphrey], and F.S. Putz [Puty], whose average age was about eighty years: some of the last Paul Bunyans. (Peters 1977:26-27)

Stratman-Thomas's field notes make it clear that she, unlike Rickaby, had no qualms about capturing and conserving songs supposedly not intended "for ladies' ears." She was the last of a song-catching trio who, from 1937 to 1946, actively sought out and wrote about bawdy lumber camp songs, yet never publicly presented the specifics of their findings. The others were the female scholar Sidney Robertson Cowell and Alan Lomax.

Robertson (1903-1995), who would eventually marry the composer Henry Cowell, was born in San Francisco and studied music and Romance languages at Stanford and in Paris prior to becoming the School Music Program Director for the Henry Street Settlement School in New York City's Lower East Side in 1935. The next year she took a job with the federal Resettlement Administration, followed by a stint with the Farm Security Administration wherein the prominent ethnomusicologist Charles Seeger headed a program emphasizing folk music as a key antidote to the Depression's spiritual malaise. Stationed in the Upper Midwest, Robertson sought out traditional musicians, eventually making a succession of field recordings for the Archive of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress in 1937 and 1938 (Topping 1980; Kerst 1999; Saylor 2004). From her correspondence, it is clear that she actively sought lumberjack songs, bawdy and otherwise, in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan, but was initially frustrated.

On July 25, 1937, while in Duluth, she wrote to Harold Spivacke, chief of the music division, Library of Congress, regarding meeting Earl C. Beck and the Michigan Lumberjacks at the National Folk Festival in Chicago: "I made friends with this funny crew and they look forward to singing for me; and Dr. Beck said he would take me around in Michigan if I would come there in September or October. With his help the danger of polite expurgation is eliminated" (Robertson 1937-1938). The trip, unfortunately, never materialized, nor did another possibility that she recounted in the same letter.

> I found a young man in Crandon who sang a few of the lumberjack songs fairly well, and he led me to a real old-timer who was so shy of me he backed off into a corner and would I think have been pleased if the wall had opened behind him to allow him to retreat still further . . . Yet he promised to record for me later, and he had a song in his pocket he'd just written, which he wouldn't let me see. We arrived at a bad time, the house was full of children and visitors, and he said he'd prefer to sing away from home.

Well aware of Rickaby's work and intrigued by what more might be collected from his principal informant, Billy Allen (a.k.a Shan T. Boy), Robertson traveled to Wausau in hopes of discovering the full extent of his repertoire. As she wrote to Alan Lomax on June 14, 1938, "Shanty Boy, on whom Rickaby so relied, is dead; I talked to his sister, who said his papers were all burned. She seemed to disapprove of him, as given to 'low' companions" (Robertson 1937-38). One of these "low" companions might have been a reference to Luke Sylvester "Lake Shore" Kearney, another former woods worker who published many of Allen's poems in *The Hodag* (1928). Robertson did succeed, however, in recording a pair of lumber-camp satirical songs from Warde Ford of Crandon, "The Keith and Hiles Line" and "The River Drivers Song," witty complaints about overly hard work, poor pay, and, worst of all, bad food (Cowell 1956; see also Ives 1964:40,143-146,167-171). One song suggested that a cook's baking was "harder than the hubs of hell," while another bid the boss a "to hell with you" farewell (Cowell 1956). But beyond these mild oaths, Ford's recorded singing never ventured far into the vulgar realm, at least while in Wisconsin.

In early July, 1937, Robertson recorded a version of "Sweet Betsy from Pike" from Grant "Bud" Faulkner, who tended Robbin's Bar in Crandon, a logging and milling

hamlet in northern Wisconsin. After only two verses, he stopped abruptly. According to Robertson's song notes:

> Bud insisted that was all, but I don't believe him, and the roars of the audience when Bud said firmly: "Nope, that's all—Betsy take'n died right there!"showed that they really knew better too. I think he started to sing it without realizing what he was getting into. If Mr. Lomax has never collected the unprintable version of Betsy[,] Warde Ford would probably write it down for me; but I don't want to ask for too many of that type of song, and Ford has two rather old English songs of that sort that I want later. I must admit it never occurred to me that parts of Betsy were too highly colored. . . . (Wisconsin Folksong Collection 2004; see also Saylor 2004).

In summer 1938, the opportunity to direct a field recording project in her home state of California spurred Robertson to leave the Upper Midwest. Fortuitously, she kept in touch with Warde Ford, who would soon be living in the Central Valley of California, working construction jobs with his brother Pat, another fine singer. Perhaps because the Fords were far from their home community, perhaps because by then they knew Robertson well, she was able, amid roughly 100 songs the two had learned in northern Wisconsin, to record four mildly vulgar songs of sexual innuendo (California Gold website:1998). Performed during several sessions—December 26-27, 1938, and September 4, 1939—the bawdy songs included Pat Ford's rendition of the "Keyhole in the Door," and Warde Ford's versions of "The Darby Ram," "Sergeant Tally-Ho" (concerning a lusty Irish NCO's romp with his colonel's wife), and "The Mowing of the Hay," regarding a "mower" having at his sweetheart's uncut "patch of grass."

By the time these recordings were made, Alan Lomax, particularly encouraged by Robertson's many leads, had begun his own forays into the Upper Midwest's logging communities. In late summer and early fall, 1938, Lomax embarked on what he imagined would be a three-month "rapid recording survey"of folksongs in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. Contrary to plan, he never made it to Minnesota and spent barely a day in Wisconsin, instead recording "about a thousand songs" from lake sailors and lumberjacks of varying ethnicities, with "the Upper Peninsula of Michigan" proving to be "the most fertile source of material" (1939:230-231). Lomax's field notes and recording provide our fullest evidence of, to use the Archive of American Folk Song's generic designation, the "vulgar"songs of Upper Midwestern woods workers.

While his father, John Lomax, embraced a paternalist Southern agrarian ideology, Alan Lomax favored a lusty populism fusing Freud and Marx, albeit with vestiges of Darwin. His three "Michigan 1938" field notebooks are strewn with richly interpretive descriptions like the following, from September 10, 1938, St. Ignace:

> He [77 year old Frank Potter] asked if E. [presumably Alan Lomax's wife, Elizabeth] could hump good, remarking that his first wife could do it better than anyone he ever slept with. The people here have pioneer candor. Potter, Delmas and the rest loved their wives and loved them because they were good partners in the bed and say so. Delmas, the old man, was terribly sentimental about his dead Indian wife—proud of her ability to cook and her good body. He expressed disgust at the idea of sleeping with her when she was pregnant or menstruating. "I'm no dog," he said. And he swore he had not touched another woman since

she died or at any time after they were married. "Not that I've not had plenty of chances but what comes so easy is bound to be dangerous."

September 22, 1938:

Newberry—the toughest little town I have seen in Michigan—Larsen's Luce Hotel—the young loafers, football players, fighters around the dreary bar, potential fascists, boasting about how the strikers had been beaten up and the Finn Workers Hall smashed. We showed them reds—radio stations all over the country congratulated the little town of Newberry—whistles blowing at 6AM–chased strikers for five miles out of town—beating them. "Hey boys here's a Roosevelt man."—Dude Larsen, the youngest, talks stupid, a boaster, soft, golden hair falling in forelock over high sloping Swede forehead—brother John the brightest complexion I've ever seen—reputed a terrible fighter–always drunk— dangerous—very handsome—a godlike selfish Nordic mouth—Old Man Larsen, hirsute, heavy, ape-like—short worn Neanderthal teeth—always drunk—his business gone to Hell and him indifferent—Mrs. Larsen is a perennial invalid—unseen—she hopes to die. The bar is dreary—the hangout for the bums and the Finns—Kali [Kalle] Kallio—the Ape Man—lank straw colored hair—stubby hands—thick low body—hard pale blue eyes.

Lomax's notebooks and his correspondence with Harold Spivacke, his boss at the Library of Congress, both indicate the need to "entertain" or "treat" singers through the purchase of beer and whiskey. And a succession of vulgar anecdotes, toasts, full and fragmentary lyrics for the "Alphabet Song" and "The Old Chisholm Trail," accounts of their performance, and brief indications of fieldwork undertaken in a barroom or while enjoying a few drinks elsewhere abound. For instance:

Here's to the maid that's dressed in black
Always neat and never slack.
When she kisses, kisses sweet
And makes things stand that have no feet.

* * *

Oh her tits hung down like
a 10 gallon bucket,
And the crabs and the lice
were fucking one another.

* * *

I sold my 'oss and I sold my saddle
And I bid farewell to the shitty ass cattle.
Charley C./learned from a lumberjack, the barroom, Newberry, Michigan

* * *

The "Alphabet Song" was very popular and there was a companion piece that was often sung immediately after—"A is for asshole all covered with hair, etc."

Regarding a particular double entendre song, the notebook pages for which have been torn out, a lumberjack, apparently Earl Beck's main source, Bill McBride, is quoted about performing it in a whorehouse. "It don't speak it out so plain, but it pints it out so near that you'll know what it means. / The chippies like these, just like the lumberjacks did. They'll give me a dollar and a drink to sing it in these places where there ain't no decent girls."

During Alan Lomax's Michigan foray, he made sound recordings of at least 35 bawdy songs or poetic recitations, several in more than one version, sung by and for working loggers (along with, of course, many more "clean" songs). That most of the "dirty" ditties belong to a wider stock of male songs—some of which involve such occupations as farming, cattle herding, sailing, and soldiering—is hardly surprising given both the seasonal nature of Upper Midwestern woods work and the fact that several of the "woods" singers Lomax recorded had also fished commercially and toiled on freight-hauling ships on the Great Lakes, had been both agricultural hired hands and independent farmers, had served in the military, and/or had hoboed west to work as cowboys in North Dakota and Montana. In addition to Anglo-American and Irish men, the singing loggers Lomax recorded were French Canadians, Germans, Swedes, and, especially, Finns.

> Amasa—Sept. 22—clean, bare little town, gray and deserted, surrounding the Finnish Co-op—the people grave, intelligent and well-informed like the other Finns I've met—the old songs are going but their intelligence persists—the houses have books and toilets—even in the country, the floors are of hard wood and the farmers talk like they've been to college—Frank Viita is the local poet—a small man, former lumberjack—still a Wobbly—strike on the West Coast they sang Joe Hill's songs.

Nearly all of the various bawdy songs Lomax recorded or wrote down have parallels and semi-standardized titles in the writings of such fine scholars of bawdy and lumber camp folksongs as Ed Cray (1992), Edith Fowke (1966), Robert Winslow Gordon (Kodish 1986:208), Edward D. Ives (1978), Gershon Legman (1992), Guy Logsdon (1989), and Vance Randolph (1992). These include: "Boring for Oil," "The Chisholm Trail," "The Darby Ram," parodies of "The Girl I Left Behind Me," "I Went Down to New Orleans," "The Keyhole in the Door," "Nellie Coming Home from the Wake," "No Balls at All," "One-Eyed Reilly," "The Persian Kitty," parodies of "Red Wing," "The Sea Crab," "Snappoo" a.k.a. "The Little Dutch Soldier," "The Spanish Lady" ("No, John, No"), "The Tinker," "Three Old Whores from Canada," "Walking Down Canal Street," and "The Whorehouse Bells Were Ringing."

Alan Lomax also recorded four bawdy songs directly concerned with lumberjacks at work and play. One exemplary song of complaint skewered the cook and bosses at a notably dreadful camp. According to the unidentified singer who performed it for Lomax, the song was composed in the Torch Lake camp by "the boys" who sang it to their boss, Tad Minton, and then walked out (AFS 2303 A3).[4]

> There's a fine boarding house on the shores of Torch Lake
> Where four fucking larrups would sit on your plate,
> And more fucking larrups was sure to be there,
> And in the rank butter you'd always find hair,[5]
> Derry-di-oh-day. Whack for the di-oh-diddle-oh-day.

Oh our cook, she's the daughter of Honest John Clark,
One taste of her biscuits would make an ox fart.
Her puddings are tough and as green as the grass,
And if you would taste'em, you'd hock off your ass.
Derry-di-oh-day. Whack for the di-oh-diddle-oh-day.

Oh there's Peter, Joe, William, there's Frankfort and Knott,
And there's sweet little Mary with a wart on her twat.
There's Jumper our push, he's a good one too.
But the long-legged bastard, he shit in our shoes,
Derry-di-oh-day. Whack for the di-oh-diddle-oh-day.

Oh here's to Tad Minton, that son-of-a-bitch,
May his ballocks rot off with the seven year itch.
His pecker will turn on the point of a screw,
And his arsehole'd whistle the red, white, and blue,
Derry-di-oh-day. Whack for the di-oh-diddle-oh-day.

A second song, derived in part from "The Son of a Gambolier" and performed in Newberry by Bert Graham, is "Joe Williams," regarding a foul-mouthed, lusty ox-driver who ventures from the woods to town and back again in search of female companionship (AFS 2344 A1).

Oh my name it is Joe Williams and my age is twenty-one,
I'm a rambling wreck of poverty and a roving son-of-a-gun.
From driving ox teams in Comstock lumber woods,
To hear me curse and swear at them it'll do your asshole good.

Whoa Buck! Gee haw Diamond! You broad-horned son-of-a-bitch.
It's don't you dare to kish at me, or I'll slog you till you tip.
Come swamper, cut that knot off, you lobcocked son-of-a-whore,
Or I'll make you suck that off-ox tit till your upper lip gets sore.

Now I'm like any old bullpuncher, I like my lager beer.
Like any old bullpuncher, I like my whisky clear.
Like any old bullpuncher, I like my gin and tod,
For I'm a rambling wreck of poverty and a son-of-a-gun, b'god.

Oh it's now I go down to Cheboygan,[6] I think I'm quite a man.
I promenade around the streets, my aleck in my hand.
In going up Broadway, I met a pretty lass.
I introduced her to my aleck and slap 'er up her ass.

Oh I tangled up her little guts till she was in a fit,
And when I pulled out old Reuben, he was covered in blood and shit.
Oh the spendings from her asshole would run a water mill,
And if you had a fatter sow, you'd a-got a barrel of swill.

For I'm like any old bullpuncher, I like my lager beer.
Like any old bullpuncher, I chase me whisky clear.
Like any old bullpuncher, I like my gin and tod,
For I'm a rambling wreck of poverty and a son-of-a-gun, b'god.

So now I go back to the woods, I found I've got the pox,
I wish to Christ I'd stayed at home and shagged that old off-ox.
Put on a little wagon grease and did it up in a rag,
For when I think of that old whore, I wish I were a stag.

So now my song is ended and I'll sing to you no more.
So health to all you shanty boys and hell to that old whore.
So now my song is ended and I'll sing to you, alas!
And if any of you don't like this song, you can kiss that off-ox ass.[7]

Two more songs, both cautionary, also dwell on a woods worker's experience with prostitutes. One of them, performed in Finnish by Frank Maki of Amasa, is a poetic rendition of widespread story and song concerning an apparently lovely young woman who is actually quite the opposite (AFS 2364 B2 & 2365 A1). Maki appropriately includes the *kantele*–a distinctive zither-like instrument associated with Finland's national epic, the *Kalevala*. Here is Susanna Linna Moliski's translation.

I start this song of mine
And warn the boys of Duluth
With this little piece of song
About what happened to this lumberjack.

I walked down Superior Street right next to the Astoria.
So the girl said, "Let's go to the hotel and have a little."
When we stepped into the hotel,
And wetted our necks a little,
My sweetheart so charmed me that
I thought I was going to heaven.
We rented a room upstairs,
And there we fussed with love action.

I admired my fine sweetheart,
Kissed her and served her.
I dreamed of heaven, hosts of angels.
There guitars and kanteles were playing

And love songs were sung.
In the morning when I opened my eyes
The hair on my head stood up.
Oh damn!

The face was like ugly frogs,
The mouth all toothless.
The head was bald like a cabbage.
Even an arm was missing.

The wig was lying beside the bed,
The fake teeth next to them.
And all sorts of paints and jars
Were on a chair by the bed.[8]

A. William Hoglund's survey of humor circulating in the Upper Midwest's Finnish-American newspapers from the 1890s to the 1930s offers corroborative mention of "the composers of comic songs" who "stressed the sensual pleasures of lovemaking . . . Ikki Ikinen portrayed lumberjacks rushing back to camp after their fling with the opposite sex in Duluth. Ikinen also gave exaggerated description of domestic servants dressing and painting themselves to attract the opposite sex on their weekly day off" (1985:166-167). Several left-wing Finnish workers newspapers favoring humor, verse, and frank expression were published in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and were certainly read and contributed to by immigrants like Frank Maki.[9]

During Alan Lomax's Michigan fieldwork, he hoped also to record a version of the "real" "Red Light Saloon," as opposed to the genteel, fundamentally unrelated stand-in Beck later published. Lomax clearly heard of this ballad and wrote its title in his notebook, but he apparently never succeeded in hearing or recording it. Thwarted in his desire to make a folksong sweep throughout the entire Upper Midwest, hoping for more recordings from the region, and assured by Sidney Robertson's earlier forays that fine songs aplenty were still sung, Lomax and his Library of Congress colleagues worked out a joint venture with Professor Leland Coon, chair of the Music Department at the University of Wisconsin. The Library and Lomax would provide a disk-cutting machine, blank disks, and, via letters, some very basic instructions in equipment operation and folksong-seeking. The University of Wisconsin would provide the field workers and their expenses. Helene Stratman-Thomas, an assistant professor and the manager of the Pro Arte Quartet, was game for the job. Despite having had no formal training in either folklore or fieldwork, she had grown up in Dodgeville, a rural southwestern Wisconsin community where her German and Cornish relations and neighbors sang traditional songs. Eventually Stratman-Thomas, accompanied by two student engineers—Bob Draves in the summers of 1940-1941 and Aubrey Snider in summer 1946—recorded more than 700 songs and tunes from nearly 30 ethnic groups and in as many languages.

Only a small percentage of the songs in the Stratman-Thomas collection, of course, came from woods singers or chronicled woods work, and of those a still smaller number were off-color, but there is little doubt that she was looking for them actively. On July 18. 1940, Alan Lomax wrote to Stratman-Thomas's chair, Leland Coon, recommending that field recordings from Wisconsin should include "(a) Lumberjack songs, (b) Lake sailor songs, (c) Anglo-American songs and ballads, (d) Fiddle tunes and game songs, (e) Vulgar ballads and songs, (f) Finnish songs, (g) French-Canadian songs, (h) Norweign [sic] songs, (i) Swedish songs, (j) Icelambic [sic] songs from Washington Island" (Lomax 1940).

Soon Stratman-Thomas and Draves were in Waushara County where Hubert J. Kent of the *Waushara County Argus* had lined up three woods singers: John Christian, Henry

Humphrey, and Lewis Winfield Moody. Their ten recorded performances included versions of well-known woods songs—published by the likes of Rickaby and Beck—such as "A Lumbering We Will Go," "Harry Bale," "Shanty Boy on the Big Eau Claire," and "Shantyman's Life," and Christian's somewhat faltering but decidedly raunchy rendition of the coveted "Red Light Saloon," as well as an additional bawdy trio: "Boring for Oil," "Paddy Miles the Fisherman," and "The Sea Crab." It was apparently on this occasion that Stratman-Thomas adroitly adopted the fieldwork method that she and her engineers would use with repeated success. "Fading Folk Songs of Wisconsin Trapped on Discs," an article based on an interview of Stratman-Thomas by the *Milwaukee Journal* (October 20, 1940) describes it: "The old lumberjacks looked embarrassed and stared at Miss Thomas until she, suddenly understanding, tactfully wandered out of earshot. And then came the hardy old songs; the lusty old songs never recorded before and filled with life and living" (Anonymous 1940a).

Having received and listened to the first batch of field recordings, Alan Lomax, in a letter written to Leland Coon on May 1, 1941, made a very specific request. "There's one item in the collection I'd particularly like to have and that is the full version of 'Red Light Saloon' which I'd heard only in part." On subsequent excursions, aided by her sound engineer, Stratman-Thomas recorded additional versions of this whorehouse ballad from woods singers Henry Humphrey, Bill Neupert, and Gene Silsbe. Humphrey's version (AFS 4977 A1) went like this:

Come ladies and gents, and I'll sing you a song.
Just give me your attention and it won't take me long.
It was of a misfortune, which to me did befall
By taking a trip to the noted White Hall.

'Twas in the early month of July,
To make connections with a train I did try.
I was left at Muskegon and there I was doomed
To spend a few minutes in the Red Light Saloon.

She boldly walked in and sat down on my knee.
Saying: "You are a gay lad, and that I can see.
Yes, you are a pinery boy, that I well know,
Your muscles are hard from your head to your toe."

I bowed up my back, and my dodger did play.
Then onto her breast I panting did lay.
She quarreled [twirled?] with my whiskers and on me did smile,
"You upriver bummer, you've got me with child."

When I got through, the sweat it poured down,
To wash off my dodger, she quickly pulled round.
And with some cold water she swobbed off her cunt,
And went tripping upstairs, some fresh victim to hunt.

Now come all you kind friends, my song is nigh done.
If ever to Muskegon you chance for to run,
Go search this fair damsel carousing full-blown.
She'll fuck for two dollars in the Red Light Saloon.

Altogether Stratman-Thomas and her assistants recorded at least seventeen vulgar songs that had been sung in Wisconsin lumber camps, thirteen of which were part of a larger mostly male repertoire (e.g. "Bob Goes Gunning," "Little Ball of Yarn," "The Whore with the Curly Hair," "One-Eyed Riley," "The Alphabet Song"), and four of which were grounded in lumberjack life: "The Red Light Saloon," the aforementioned ox-driver's song "Joe Williams," "Fond du Lac Jail," concerning the vile conditions awaiting rowdy jacks run afoul of the law, and "Old Hazeltine," a needle directed at an "old screw" of a camp boss.

What are we to make of these songs full of sly innuendo, outright cursing and swearing, drinking and carousing, sex and blood, shit and piss? They may reveal the fundamental depravity of all those who have sung and listened to them (including folklorists past and present). Or they may be a code of sorts; a consciously constructed mode of gender performance; a manifestation of a dangerous, prolonged, collective occupation that is ritually confined to liminal moments when upright sober woodsmen briefly transform themselves into wanton boys. Although the idea of sheer depravity might apply to some who have performed and enjoyed these songs, I'm convinced that the latter explanation, to steal a line from "The Little Brown Bulls," "tips the beam" more often.

In his widely-sung woods ballad, "Shanty Boy on the Big Eau Claire," Billy Allen (who despite associating with characters his sister deemed "low" was a highly respected Wausau citizen) juxtaposed a rough yet fundamentally decent logger with the stereotype of woods workers as thoroughgoing ruffians who were perpetually swearing, drinking, gambling, and roving. It's clear from Allen's song that he regarded his fictitious "shanty boy," not the negative stereotype, as typifying his fellow woodsmen. John Emmett Nelligan, a lumberjack and eventual camp boss in the Michigan/Wisconsin border country, echoed Allen in identifying what he regarded as a nearly universal code of conduct in existence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

> They had their code and it was a chivalrous code. Rough in dress and speech and manners, gaining their livelihood by the hardest kind of manual labor, living, loving, and laughing crudely. No man could offend, insult, or molest a woman on the street; no man could even speak lightly of a woman of good reputation without suffering swift and violent justice at the hands of his fellows (Nelligan 1929:37-38).

Earl Beck quoted this passage from Nelligan, then offered his own testimony from the 1930s and 1940s: "In my collecting among lumberjacks my women folks have met many woodsmen, but they have never heard any blasphemy. The lumberjack respects ladies" (Beck 1948:6). Richard Dorson likewise found what he termed the "Lumberjack Code" to be prevalent in the late 1940s and early 1950s. "Toward women the woodsmen behaved with a scrupulous decorum. This attitude seems odd in view of the widely celebrated whoring activity of jacks . . . But the jacks never trafficked with nor molested women outside the profession" (Dorson 1952:195). From the mid-1950s through the mid-

1970s, I, too, found this code at work in the person of George Russell (1886-1976), a former timber scaler who sponsored me when I was confirmed in the Catholic Church in 1963 and whom my parents invariably characterized as "an Irish gentleman" because of his generous, courtly manners. There was, however, another side to George. In summer 1975, as we sipped beer and brandy, he told me many true and traditional stories, including an account of youthful whorehouse pleasures followed by speculation over whether there was still such a place in nearby Ladysmith where a man could, as he put it, "get blowed off" (Leary 1980). Although mildly shocked at first, since I'd mostly talked with George in my parents' company, I realized on quick reflection that such deeds and desires from a bachelor logger were not surprising, nor was his decision to confine their revelation to an evening of drink and talk between men.

Although I'm convinced that most of the singers and audiences for bawdy lumber camp songs were, to use another of George Russell's phrases, "all right," there's also little doubt that their relationship to the Lumberjack Code indicates a powerful gender-based "double standard." Undeniably persisting in contemporary society, this double standard was powerfully entrenched in the era when the songs under discussion were collected. While a "man" might enjoy "bad" stuff with the "boys" and still be "good," even a "good woman" who showed interest in such material might be permanently and devastatingly branded as "bad." In that regard, consider more directly a theme suffusing this essay: the effect of gender codes and politics on the documentation of bawdy lumber camp songs by folklorists.

Rickaby could have collected such songs but wouldn't. Beck could and apparently did but also apparently undid what he'd done. Robertson would've if she could've but, for the most part, couldn't. Lomax could and did. Stratman-Thomas couldn't but her engineers could and so she did by proxy. Such personal and methodological permutations suggest relationships between certain folklorists and the intellectual and ideological movements prevailing in their respective eras.

Franz Rickaby's journals, his correspondence with William Bartlett, and his biography as set down by Daniel W. Greene (1968) reveal a refined Victorian scholar with romantic inclinations, raised on parlor soirees with poetic recitations and classical music, who was nonetheless inspired by the Irish Dramatic Movement's early twentieth-century engagement with peasant culture to seek instances of folklore at the northern fringes of his Midwestern home territory. Like many of his generation, he was not open to whatever he might encounter. In addition to avoiding songs at the Northern Hotel, Rickaby tells us in his journal that he thankfully forgot the details of a storytelling session at Sisson's Resort near Eagle River.

> There are four rooms in the cabin I am in, with a common room in the middle. The other rooms are occupied by men who come up here without family, for some fishing and general outing. The bunch sat in the common room talking last night when I came in. I listened awhile. They were very profane, especially one named Tom Rooney—a Swede! The talk was about everything. Soon after I retired, the talk took the form of dirty stories, and I don't think I have ever heard a more complete line of rotten tales than last night. Many of them were by no means funny, the humor seeming to be merely in the distension of

> a situation with vulgar and obscene ideas. A night's sleep, however, seems to have washed all this mud from my mind, for I don't believe I can recall a drop of it (Peters 1977:19).

Rickaby's morally infused aesthetic sensibilities find a strong parallel in the contemporaneous churchified New Englanders who sought pristine unaccompanied Elizabethan ballads in the Southern Appalachians while spurning banjo-driven songs of coal-camp rounders.

Earl Beck, on the other hand, was born into a family of dryland Nebraska tenant farmers and did a bit of cowboying while studying at the University of Nebraska, raising himself up the hard way until he had earned a Ph.D. in English and begun a teaching career that led him to Central Michigan. A student of the renowned ballad scholar, Louise Pound, Beck had encountered both cowboy and hobo ballads prior to seeking songs from Michigan lumberjacks. Unlike Rickaby, who was often ill and died at the age of thirty-six, Beck reveled in the outdoor life and didn't mind telling us that he had "heard" much that was "unprintable." He was, however, more a performer than a committed scholar. In addition to serving as impresario for a troupe of Michigan lumberjacks at the National Folk Festival in the 1930s, Beck gave frequent public performances of lumberjack songs. As a college teacher, a public performer, and a husband with several daughters, Beck, as he indicated to Judy Selewski, was sufficiently concerned about his public reputation. Rather than risk guilt by association, he decided to destroy any potentially incriminating evidence(Selewski 1970).In the end, he emerged, in the Ernest Thompson Seton/Theodore Roosevelt vein, as a sort of Boy Scout-cum-muscular Christian—a man who knew the savage world but nobly protected civilization by withholding its darkest secrets.

Sidney Robertson's frank and witty correspondence and memoirs reveal a politically engaged, independent-minded, anything-but-naive, spunky "new woman," who had already lived in San Francisco, Paris, and New York City before venturing into the wilds of Wisconsin. Even so, nothing quite prepared her for the lumberjack code. In her April, 1937, journal entry, she offers an anecdote, heard from an unnamed "sweet old man" in Oconto, about the code's bright side:

> It seems that it was not uncommon for women to rove through the woods in pairs taking up collections for missionary enterprises of various sorts, mostly foundling homes—an institution for which the lumberjack, with his habit of prolonged semi-annual binges, felt a certain sheepish responsibility in the pre-Sanger days. The usual practice was for the time-keeper of the camp to make this kind of visitor comfortable in his small cabin, and apparently they were treated with an embarrassed respect. On one occasion two women arrived very late, having got lost in the snow, and they couldn't get up at the same early hour as the crew in the morning, which led to a suggestive comment from the cook during breakfast. Nothing was said at the time, and the men finished eating, but once the meal was over they rose as one man and ejected the cook from camp a sore and wiser man. If this tale is apocryphal, at least the man who told it to me believed it![10]

The telling phrase, "pre-Sanger days," referring to birth-control advocate Margaret Sanger and the dark times for women preceding her campaigns, signals an optimistic modernist assumption that the days when women lacked the rights of men were waning. Robertson

soon learned otherwise, despite following the suggestions of a local county agent and compiler of what he called "lumberjack lingo," L. G. Sorden. This is Robertson's account:

> I went into three taverns on the main street in Rhinelander, in the morning, at Mr. Sorden's suggestion, looking for a miniature carved logging-camp that some tavern-keeper owned; and I swear, I was a marked character the rest of the day—I've never been so stared at, nor so suggestively appraised, anywhere in the world—wherever I went,—and by the toughest-looking characters,—I swear my lower East Side gang couldn't touch 'em.

Here a woman, especially a lone woman, doing what any man might do—an innocent, albeit unusual, quest—resulted in her being cast as, at best, an anomalous being and, at worst, a whore. This perception was confirmed by a pair of unidentified part-time lumberjacks, probably Ed Thrasher and Ed McCormick, whom Alan Lomax interviewed the following year.

I have already mentioned Lomax's allegiance to Freud and Marx, to his earthy and egalitarian demeanor, and there is little doubt that the performers he recorded, male and female alike, found him charming and gave him plenty of license. The following interview was recorded by Lomax amidst a series of songs (AFS 2329A):

> First speaker: I think when they manufactured those cars and built those great pavements all over the United States and the world, it made more whores than ever was before in the United States.
> Alan Lomax: How did that happen?
> First speaker: Well, because they used to have whore houses them days, here and there and all over—away from the city. The boys used to go there, see, you understand—and the boys would go there. And a decent girl could walk the streets, anytime, and never be insulted. Now they can't, see. And now the whorehouses—where they barred them all out—they take 'em out in these cars, see. And the girls will go out now and they'll stop ya: "Give us a ride. Give me a ride."
> Second speaker: Nowadays they don't want to be insulted, they'll insult you.
> First speaker: Years ago, when I remember, now when I was a young feller, why if a girl would stop a man on the street with a horse and buggy, that would be a dirty insult, see. Oh, they'd think that was awful. Now I'll tell you something. I was in Wisconsin, I was living in Wisconsin, and I was a young man. And I was [commercial] fishing there. My brother had a horse and buggy. I was fishing with him. I went to a farmer's daughter one night. Christ, I knew her, I had danced with her and all that. I went there one evening to get her for a buggy ride. And she was willing to go. She had to ask her father and mother, see. She asked them. "Yes, you can go, but you got to take Johnny with you." That was a little boy, about ten years old, twelve years old. He's got to go with you. You think you could get a girl out in them days, alone in a buggy? Not by a goddam sight. You had to take Johnny with you, or Jimmy, or whoever his name was. That's the way it was in them days.

"Them days" certainly prevailed when Sidney Robertson was seeking all kinds of lumber camp songs and, despite her uninhibited yet anything but salacious manner, she could not turn the backwoods cultural clock ahead.

Helene Stratman-Thomas, raised in small-town Wisconsin, intuitively grasped that the male Lumberjack Code, with its double standard towards women, was hardly limited to woods workers; instead it could be found, as far as her world extended, in every imaginable male-female social setting—even in avowedly progressive universities. From what I can tell she didn't particularly like these songs. Of all the English language songs

she collected, they are the only ones she did not transcribe. Rather than including a sheaf of lyrics, her "Vulgar Folksongs" file holds a series of cards with song titles, performer information, and a telling classification system. "The Keyhole in the Door" is "Genteel Vulgar" "As I Went Out One Morning in Spring" is "Vulgar." "Alec Brown" ["The Highland Tinker"] is "Vulgar!" and "Big Brick House in a Georgia Town" is "Vulgar !!!" Even so, she made no effort to hide this material. Various newspaper articles written during the years of her fieldwork refer to "earthy ballads," "lusty ballads," and "pungent lumberjack songs." One reporter wrote, "lumberjack songs, many native to the state, [were] picked up at Coloma, Hancock, Plainfield, and Bryant. Some were cataloged as 'vulgar,' Miss Stratman-Thomas sat in the car while Draves recorded them" (Anonymous 1940a, 1941, 1946; Doudna 1941). In July, 1946, the *Wisconsin State Journal* even published a potentially embarrassing anecdote they most likely heard from Stratman-Thomas herself: "There was a time when, the story goes, Miss Thomas made the mistake of playing one of the lustier records—with no label to identify it—to a group of professors upon her return to the university. She sat there, getting redder and redder, until finally she just up and left the room to the accompaniment of male laughter" (Anonymous, 1946). Unmarried and potentially suspect, untenured and lacking job security, Stratman-Thomas was nonetheless undaunted in her search for bawdy songs. She emerges as a nervy, plucky scholar, tolerant of all manner of human beings, who was dedicated to preserving, warts and all, a full record of the traditional songs that the people of her state actually sang.

Far more than a straightforward collection of songs, singers, and scholars, the history of bawdy or vulgar songs and the codes and meanings governing their presence and absence reveal much about constructions of gender in the discipline of folklore and the larger society within which folklorists work. We owe an undeniable debt to such honest, earthy men as Alan Lomax who first recorded such songs and coaxed others to do the same, but we owe even more to Sidney Robertson and Helene Stratman-Thomas—women who had the nerve and larger sense of purpose to risk their good names in bringing us the full range of songs performed and pondered by shanty boys and woodsmen.

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Notes

1. An earlier version of this essay was presented at the American Folklore Society meeting, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, October 19, 2006, as the Phillips Barry Lecture sponsored by the Music and Song section.

2. Franz Rickaby was not alone in gleaning instances of male workers' songs from female correspondents. I am grateful to David Stanley for reminding me that John Lomax, "despite his portrayal of himself as a horseback fieldworker," gathered "most of the songs and poems in *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* and *Songs of the Cattle Trail and Cow Camp*" from letters sent by female correspondents who had read his advertisements in weekly newspapers.

3. Upon reading an earlier draft of this essay, Paul Gifford, an archivist and old time music authority, wrote to inform me of similar experiences from rural Michigan in the 1970s: "I've heard the dirty version of the "Lumberjack's Alphabet," with the first line "A is for the asshole," etc., but don't remember where and I didn't tape it . . . I heard "Ze Skunk" from Fenton Watkins, a dulcimer player (born in 1885) originally from South Haven, MI but who had lived on the outskirts of Detroit since 1906" (Gifford 2007).

4. "AFS" is the Archive of American Folk Song, now the Archive of Folk Culture, at the Library of Congress, while the accompanying number designates a particular recording within the overall recorded sound collection.

5. "Larrups" refers to a sweet syrup, presumably served along with pancakes (Cassidy and Hall 1996:293).

6. Cheboygan, Michigan.

7. In addition to common woods terms like "bullpuncher" and "swamper," the rarer "kish" is a "call to cows or calves" previously reported from Dutch and Flemish settlements in North Dakota and "on the Upper Delaware and in the Catskills"—perhaps indicating its route into the Michigan lumber camps (Cassidy and Hall 1996:228). Presumably an ox that would "kish" at its driver is "talking back." Paul Gifford confirmed that this song was in oral tradition in Michigan in the 1970s: "I taped a man named Orin Miller, of Scottville, MI (a fiddler) sing a version of this. His version had "Ludington" instead of "Cheboygan," but it was equally filthy ("swamper, cut that knot off, you lop-cock son of a whore, or suck my old snotty old fuck-stick until your upper lip gets sore," etc.)" (Gifford 2007) .

8. Laws surveys a pair of ballads—"The Old Maid and the Burglar" (H23) and "The Warranty Deed /The Wealthy Old Maid" (H24)—about "old maids" with false teeth, glass eyes, wigs, and cotton padding (1964:241). Logsdon chronicles several cowboy versions of "Oh! My! You're A Dandy for Nineteen Years Old" that add false fingers, a cork leg, and a "bushel of paint" to the old maid's artifices (1989:197-199). Hoffman offers the tale motif X757.2: "' . . . just hand me the part I want.' Exclamation of horrified groom as he watches his old maid bride remove her artificial beauty" (1973:286).

9. A railroad laborer and trickster, Lapatossu or "shoe pack," dubbed for the felt insulation lining the boots of Finnish American workers, was also the namesake for a Finnish worker's periodical filled with cartoons, as well as comic and satirical prose, poems, and songs. It was published in Hancock, Michigan, from 1911-1921. When *Lapatossu* ceased publication, its successor, *Punikki* (The Red), included similar material during its existence from 1921-1936 (Ross 1994:79-80; see also Hoglund 1960: 25-26, 30-32). Copies may be examined at the University of Minnesota's Immigration History Research Center.

10. Robertson may have heard this anecdote from John Nelligan who, if still living, would have been eighty-five. More likely, the "sweet old man" of Robertson's acquaintance had either learned the story via oral tradition or read Nelligan's autobiographical account concerning "women from the Good Will Farm," an orphanage at Houghton, Michigan:

> A couple of them came to one of our camps once and the foreman, in accordance with our usual custom, turned the camp office over to them, supplied them with towels, gave them kindling for wood for starting their fire in the morning, and furnished what other meager comforts he could. They spent the night there. The following morning, when they did not get up at the usual early rising hour of the lumberjacks, the miserable cur who was acting as cook passed some insinuating remarks about them. The crew paid no attention at the time, for they were eating, and eating is a thing of paramount importance in a lumber camp. But when breakfast was over, they rose in a body and went after the cook. They wanted to lynch him, but he was a fast runner and he got away. For all their rough edges, the lumberjacks were a chivalrous breed and the man who dared to be careless in his comments on respectable women was taking chances. (1929:130)

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