

My Proverbial Life: Selected English, Latin & Italian Proverbs

Anthony Benevento

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With *My Proverbial Life*, Anthony Benevento has created a compendium of proverbs from the English, Latin, and Italian languages. Inspired by the dual purpose of proverbs—to delight while instructing—Benevento set out to translate some of the most common Italian and Latin and cross-reference them with similar English proverbs. The result is a dictionary of aphorisms, set up in alphabetical order.

As Benevento points out in the introduction, proverbs “have represented a kind of compact encyclopedia of knowledge based mostly upon the experience of those who toiled the soil.” They are “common wisdom,” and their earthy origins are reflected in the proverbs gathered here. Many reveal their peasant sources, “The eye of the master fattens the horse,” for example, or “It’s a sad house where the hen crows louder than the rooster.”

Benevento relates that the foundation for the book is his own unauthorized, synthesized translation of Professor Renzo Tosi’s *Dizionario Delle Sentenze Latine e Greche*; he has cast the net beyond that work to include several other sources. For each entry, Benevento has given an English version of the proverb, often with variations. He follows the English version first with the Latin and then the Italian translation. For some proverbs, he elaborates on the meaning or source, as well as giving other proverbs for comparison. For an example, see this entry:

They are not all saints that use holy water / All are not saints who go to church

Non omnes sancti qui calcant limina templi / Non omnis rasmus Christi Mariaeque sacerdos

Non son tutti santi quelli che vanno in chiesa

Sanctity is not worn for all to see, but it is something that is carried within and with humility; Cf. All are not merry that dance lightly; all are not hunters that blow the horn; *non son tutti cacciatori quelli che suonano il corno.* (p 126)

The result is an amusing and delightfully browse-able resource. In addition to such familiar proverbs as “let sleeping dogs lie” and “pride goes before a fall,” there are plenty of less common ones as well. Many have a wonderful astringency—“God deliver me from the man with one book” and “fine words butter no parsnips.” This charming collection is a delightful resource for the writer, the word lover, and the reader in search of the perfect retort.

Anthony Benevento is an attorney practicing in Totowa, New Jersey. Born in Tricarico (Lucania), Italy, he came to America in 1961 at the age of 15. He taught history, coached soccer and wrestling, and came to the law after twelve years in the classroom.

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