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A created proverb in a novel becomes broadly used in society: "'Easily in but not easily out', as the lobster said in his lobster pot."

Abstract. C.S. Lewis created several proverbs in his novel *The Horse and His Boy*. One of these has now become broadly used in English-speaking society. This article cites evidence that this new proverb is now being used in novels, poetry, short stories, blogs, and in giving advice. Wolfgang Mieder has noted that there are very few published studies about proverbs created in the last century, so this article fills this gap regarding this proverb. The focus of this article is on the growing use of this proverb, not on proverbs generally.

Proverbs are an ancient way of expressing significant advice, lessons, or observations in a memorable, often colorful way. They are recorded from ancient Sumer, Egypt, Israel, China, India, Greece, and most modern cultures. Because a proverb is a familiar fixed form, a proverb such as "Don't judge a book by its cover" is quickly recognized and understood as not being about books, but about evaluating something else in the immediate conversational context.

There is a record of an ancient king of Assyria advising his son not to do "as in the ancient proverb, 'The bitch by her acting too hastily brought forth the blind'" (Moran 1978: 17, 18). In this ancient proverb the son recognized that his father was not thinking about him giving birth to any blind offspring, but was rather that his father was warning him against acting hastily.

But even this proverb, the world's oldest known proverb (Alster 1979: 5), was first coined by somebody, a person now unknown. After it was first created, others thought the proverb memorable and useful and added it to their speech. In this way, proverbs coined by one person can become the shared riches of an entire community of speakers. This proverb spread not only within the language community, but was later borrowed into other languages, and then passed on again and again so that it has spread as widely as English (Apperson 1929: 289) and Alaaba of Ethiopia (Schneider-Blum 2009: 95).

All proverbs were new creations at some point, even if created long ago by Solomon or Confucius. Many sayings may be considered clever, but only a small number spread among the speakers of a language and become known and used as proverbs across the language community. It is unusual when scholars are able to document the specific origin of a proverb and then document its spread, though Doyle, Mieder, Shapiro (2012) have made a significant contribution by doing this for a number of proverbs first coined in the 20th century.

In his 1954 novel *The Horse and His Boy* (one volume of the *Chronicles of Narnia*), C. S. Lewis (1898-1963) inserts about a dozen proverbs that he created specifically for this book

(Unseth 2011 and Melnyk 2013). For these proverbs, we know the exact year they were introduced to the English-speakers: 1954. One of these proverbs has now become used in the broader English speaking world: "'Easily in but not easily out', as the lobster said in his lobster pot." In their study of new English proverbs created in the 20th century, Doyle, Mieder, Shapiro (2012) did not detect this one. Mieder noted that proverb scholars "have studied not even two dozen individual modern Anglo-American proverbs in detail" (2009: 243), so a study such as this, even on just one little-documented proverb, is useful. The other proverbs from this novel were not found with any frequency; they have not become established in the English speaking world. The question of why this proverb has become more established than the others in the book is beyond the scope of this study.

Other authors have created proverbs in fiction,[1] also. Probably the best known examples currently in English fiction are the wealth of created proverbs found in the film *Forrest Gump*, (Winick 1998: 83ff), for which more credit is due to screenplay writer Eric Roth than the novel's author Winston Groom (Winick 2013). Invented proverbs from *Forrest Gump*, such as "Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you're gonna get" and "Stupid is as stupid does" are now well established in English-speaking culture, the latter being noted by Doyle, Mieder, Shapiro (2012:143). A sign of how established these two proverbs have become is that they are each quoted or twisted on at least a dozen different T-shirt designs for sale on the Web.[2] As another sign of their establishment in pop-culture, these two proverbs are included with several common English proverbs by Bruce Springsteen in his song "My best was never good enough."

Proverb scholars have also paid much attention to J.R.R. Tolkien's (1892-1973) creation of many proverbs (Clinton 2014), both in *The Hobbit* (Trokhimenko 2003) and in *The Lord of the Rings* (Boswell 1969, Stanton 1996). Of these, at least two of Tolkien's created proverbs have gained some currency in English usage: "Not all who wander are lost" and "All that is gold does not glitter" (a twisted form of a proverb based on an existing English one known from Shakespeare). As a sign of their currency in the English-speaking world, these proverbs, too, are for sale on T-shirts and bumper stickers, though neither was included in the collection of Doyle, Mieder, Shapiro (2012).

A few of the other authors who have created proverbs in English fiction include Herman Melville (1819-1891) in his novel about the imaginary island *Mardi* (Hayes 1999: 30), R. D. Blackmore (1825-1900) in his British rural novels (Kirwin 1973), a proverb by Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930) in the mouth of Sherlock Holmes (Waterhouse 1990), E. M. Forster (1879-1970) in *A Passage to India* (de Caro 1986 and Gish 1972), Graham Greene (1904-1991) in *The Power and the Glory* (de Caro 1989), and Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) in *Molloy* (Sherzer 1976). However, none of the proverbs created by the authors just listed have come to be used in broader society.

Artists creating new proverbs are not found only in English novels. To mention only a few, there are newly coined proverbs in the Russian movie *Aleksandr Nevsky* (McKenna 2009: 227), in the Polish poems and essays of Stanisław Jerzy Lec (Frackiewicz 1990), in the Portuguese fiction of Mia Couto (Coutinho 2008), and in Ignatius Mabasa's novel *Mapenzi*

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[1] This present discussion is about authors of prose fiction, excluding the invented proverbs of poets, such as William Blake's "Proverbs of Hell". Also, I do not include the many sayings of Charles Dickens' character Samuel Weller in *The Pickwick Papers*. Scholars of phraseology have often referred to his quotation sayings as "wellerisms", but Samuel Weller's quotations, though many are quite witty, are not true proverbs. Many wellerisms are indeed true proverbs, but not the ones spoken by Weller in Dickens' novel.

[2] The shirts that misquote these proverbs knowingly do so, creating anti-proverbs, such as "Life is like a box of chocolates, now get your own box!" and "Cupid is as cupid does."

(Fools) written in the developing mix of Shona and English in Zimbabwe (Veit-Wild 2009: 696).

The proverb that is the topic of this article is found in the novel *The Horse and His Boy*, spoken by an advisor to the king and queen of Narnia who have become virtual prisoners while visiting a neighboring kingdom. The advisor sums up their predicament saying, "'Easily in but not easily out', as the lobster said in his lobster pot" (Lewis 1954: 63).[3]

This type of proverb structure is known as a "wellerism", a saying containing a quotation, a speaker, and an unusual setting (Mieder and Kingsbury 1994: x). Proverbs expressed as wellerisms are an ancient form. From ancient Sumer we find the wellerism, "The fox, having urinated into the sea, said: 'The depths of the sea are my urine!'" (http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.6.1.02#). This structure, even this same urine motif, was found in 20th century America: "'Every little bit helps,' said the ant as he peed into the ocean" and "'Every little bit helps,' said the old lady as she pissed into the sea" (Mieder and Kingsbury 1994: 76,77). A wellerism with a talking lobster is not entirely original, "'I'm turned soger,'[4] as the lobster said when he popped his head out of the boiler" found in "The Boarding house: or, Five hours at Brighton" by Samuel Beazley (1786-1851) (Kitton 1886: 450). Note that this is indeed a wellerism, but it is not a proverb.

A variety of recent writers have quoted Lewis' proverb, "'Easily in but not easily out', as the lobster said in his lobster pot." The search for quotations of this proverb was done via the Web, following the example of Doyle, Mieder, and Shapiro (2012). Searches were first done using the exact shape of the original Narnian proverb, then additional searches were done with key words to find instances where authors had quoted the proverb inexactly.

I have found over a dozen examples of this proverb in a variety of genres: novels, poetry, short stories, blogs, and in giving advice about problems. Though all these authors have captured the essence of the proverb, many did not quote it in the exact from that Lewis wrote it. This strongly suggests that these authors had heard the proverb somewhere, not read it in Lewis' novel. Some examples of later writers using this new proverb follow.[5]

Not surprisingly, writers cited it in contexts where a proverb was appropriate. For example, on an advice website, a Catholic priest replied to a questioner about getting a tattoo: "Unless your friend is absolutely sure, I'd advise he wait. Easier in than out, said the lobster in the pot" (http://forums.catholic.com/showthread.php?t=54013).

A blogger writing about the complications of emigrating to New Zealand used the proverb to express his frustrated views, "*Easily in, but not easily out, as the lobster said in the lobster pot.* For all the hassle of immigration paperwork, getting into NZ was the easy part" (http://www.expatexposed.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=1079).

Concerning American military involvement in Iraq, two different people on the web quoted this proverb. One used it to criticize Bush, overtly acknowledging Lewis as the source, "This is one reason why we counseled against Iraq in the first place. 'Easily in, but not easily out, as the lobster said in the lobster pot,' to quote CS Lewis" (http://majikthise.typepad.com/majikthise_/2006/12/false_hope_and_.html).

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[3] Page references to the text are to the Collier edition of 1974. The book has also been accessible online: http://ru.scribd.com/doc/93138204/The-Horse-and-His-Boy-by-C-S-Lewis.

[4] "Soger" is a colloquial form for "soldier". British soldiers formerly wore red jackets and were referred to as "lobster backs".

[5] The citations are given without much additional comment since the purpose of this paper is to simply document that the proverb is being used by others.

Another writer used the proverb in criticizing Obama's policy as naïve, "Iraq is kind of like a lobster pot. Easily in, but not easily out" (https://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20081102130033AA84Hrt).

In Cynthia Harrod-Eagles' (2011) novel *The Restless Sea*, two characters discuss marriage, one confiding, "Marriage itself is lovely… But there's no denying it's a big step. Easily in by not easily out, as the lobster said of the lobster pot." The same author also used this same proverb in her novel *The Homecoming*.

An author posting a story on the Web wrote, "Srya watched the horses. She cleared her throat, silencing [sic] them. 'Easily in, but not easily out, said the lobster in the lobster pot,' she said. 'If you choose to fight, they will search you out'" (http://board.youngrider.com/Topic979750-18-7.aspx#bm979968).

On a website where people bantered with silly questions, one writer wrote,

> "Why does fuzz collect in the belly button?
> Easily in, but not easily out, As the lobster said in the lobster pot."
> (http://cosmoquest.org/forum/archive/index.php/t-14367-p-2.html)

Writing on a role-playing website, one writer explained (for those who already knew the basic rules of a seemingly complex game), "In the license college, anyone is free to enter (contribute content), but no one can leave (take licensed material and transfer it to another license college). *Easily in, not easily out, says the Lobster in the lobster pot"* (italics in original). (http://wiki.planetmath.org/cgi-bin/wiki.pl/totalizing_projects)

Discussing the grim movie *Shawshank Redemption*, one person wrote, "That movie was perfect. Evil things, cages. We're building one for ourselves with this thing. 'Easily in but not easily out, said the lobster in the lobster pot.'" (http://politics.gather.com/viewArticle.action?articleId=281474981449018)

In the short story "Convergence of Interest", by an author identified as Britpacker, two people in a conversation use the proverb, each citing half of it:

> "'Easily in but not easily out, huh?' he asked, deliberately bland.
> 'As the lobster cried in the pot,' Malcolm agreed."
> (http://archiveofourown.org/works/531038)

A poet identified as Golden Hare wrote a poem titled "Kiss" that includes the proverb as follows:

> easily in, but not easily out
> the lobster said in the lobster pot.
> (http://undertheaether.wordpress.com/2011/03/)

On a site discussing software problems, one writer described his frustrating experiences by using the proverb, "It saved the file automatically also as a .mht file, which Internet Explorer could open and I could read it, but couldn't act upon the message. This reminds me of the proverb, 'Easily in, but not easily out said the lobster in the lobster pot.'" (http://www.gwmicro.com/Support/Email_Lists/Archives/GW-Info/index.php?message_id=140704&media=print)

Writing about a piece of computer equipment, one person noted that it has "a halt button but it's recessed and kind of sticky. Easily in but not easily out, as the lobster said". http://comp.os.vms.narkive.com/AGmBRD28/auto-reboot-fails-on-ds10

In all, I have found over a dozen documented citations of this colorful proverb. Since Lewis was a bold Christian and *The Horse and His Boy* is a Christian allegory, it would not be surprising if the use of this proverb was limited to people like the two users on the Web who identified themselves as clergymen, and people like myself. However the users on the Web also include those of different bent, showing that the proverb is being diffused across a variety of boundaries into broader society, clear evidence of a proverb becoming established in the general population. It can therefore be concluded that "'Easily in but not easily out', as the lobster said in his lobster pot" has gained currency as an English proverb.

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