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"BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL" HANS-JÜRGEN MASSAQUOI'S PROVERBIAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY *DESTINED TO WITNESS* (1999)

Abstract: Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi's (1926-2013) autobiography *Destined to Witness. Growing up Black in Nazi Germany* (1999) appeared simultaneously in German translation as *Neger, Neger, Schornsteinfeger. Meine Kindheit in Deutschland* (1999, 2006 as a film). The bestseller recounts Massaquoi's birth in 1926 at Hamburg as a biracial child of a German mother and a black father from Liberia who returns to Africa leaving his wife and Afro-German son to fend for themselves in a working-class neighborhood. Their struggle to survive Nazi Germany is described in numerous small chapters that are informed by the journalistic as well as literary style that Massaquoi became accustomed to once he became established in the United States as managing editor of the African American magazine *Ebony*. The book is replete with proverbs and proverbial expressions that add metaphorical expressiveness to this emotional and informative account of survival among prejudice, stereotypes, and racism. Many of the proverbs, often quoted by Massaquoi's mother, are cited in German with English translations or only in English. Thus the book is a telling example of how proverbs function in a family and beyond as social strategies to carve out a marginalized existence between 1926 and the early 1950s in Germany, Liberia, and the United States. Numerous contextualized references are cited, and there is also a large index of 509 (645 counting 136 duplicates) proverbial texts.

Keywords: Afro-German, autobiography, Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi, prejudice, racism, stereotype

Several decades ago nobody could have foreseen that Black German Studies would become an important subfield of *Germanistik* (Blackshire-Belay 1996; Nenno 2016). By now it has been ascertained that "there exists a wide range of texts by Black Germans that covers the colonial period through the Third Reich and up to the present. The proliferation of autobiographical texts by Black Germans and Germans of African descent – as well as by migrants from Africa – illustrates the heterogeneity of Black Germans' experiences" (Nenno 2019: 169). A particularly valuable autobiography is Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi's sizable *Destined to Witness. Growing up Black in Nazi Germany* (1999) that appeared simultaneously in German translation as *Neger, Neger, Schornsteinfeger. Meine Kindheit in Deutschland* (1999, 2006 as a film). The bestseller recounts Massaquoi's birth in 1926 at Hamburg as a biracial child of a German mother and a black father from Liberia who returns to Africa leaving his wife and son to fend for themselves in a working-class neighborhood in that large city. Their struggle to survive Nazi Germany is described in numerous small chapters of two to three pages that are informed somewhat by the journalistic style that Massaquoi became accustomed to once he became established in the United States as managing editor of the African American magazine *Ebony*. His troublesome survival at school with teachers and others mistreating him as a non-Aryan black youngster, his strenuous attempt to fit in, his early romantic experience, his development into a skilled metal worker, and his survival at the catastrophic bombing of Hamburg in 1943 are all told in vivid language that includes plenty of Germanisms. After all, German is his native language, but by 1946 he has also learned some English and leaves for Liberia for two years in 1948. There he meets his father and other relatives, but once again is confronted with not quite fitting in as an Afro-German (Campt 2004: 8-9). At the age of twenty-four his ardent wish of emigrating to the United States becomes a reality with the help of relatives on his mother's side. And yet, his idealized image of America being the country of freedom and liberty is shattered as he experiences racism once again, wondering how he will ever find his identity. In due time his mother, whom he respects and adores to the point that his account "is more or less a love letter" (Nganang 2005: 235) to

her, joins him outside of Chicago and lives to see him become a respected and accomplished journalist who at his death in 2013 in Jacksonville, Florida could look back at a remarkable life's journey that deserved and needed to be told.

The autobiography is thus divided into three parts. About three quarters of the book (1-332) deal with his life and survival in war-torn Germany, his time in Liberia fills not quite hundred pages (333-411), and his early experiences in the United States take ap a mere thirty pages (411-443). Clearly then, readers "are provided with the fascinating case of a mixed-race man, considered 'black' by the Nazi regime (and in the United States) seeking to survive and make his way to adulthood in one of the most racist and anti-black regimes that the world has produced" (Barkin 2009: 259). As he writes proverbially in the prologue: "As a black person in white Nazi Germany, I was highly visible and thus could neither run nor hide, to paraphrase my childhood idol Joe Louis" (xii). Indeed, the famous boxer Joe Louis (1914-1981) supposedly first uttered "You can run but you can't hide" in 1946 with the meaning that evasion will not avert a defeat. Due to his popularity it quickly became a common proverb in the United States (Doyle et al. 2012: 221).

It took Massaquoi years to write his significant account. It began with a trip in early 1966 to his old hometown Hamburg as an aspiring staffer of the *Ebony* magazine that resulted in the two lengthy accounts "A Journey into the Past" with numerous illustrations in its February and March issues (Massaquoi 1966). Just as a somewhat later autobiographical sketch (Massaquoi 1984), they contain several reminiscences of his socialization process that reappear in the autobiography (Walden 2004). In addition, colleagues and friends, notably Alex Haley of *Roots* (1976) fame, encouraged him to expand his memories into a full-fledged book. Frank Mehring explains that Massaquoi's "tricultural background, his racial encounters in Nazi Germany, Liberia, and the United States made him suspicious of the American dream of liberty, equality, and opportunity" (Mehring 2009: 66-69, Mehring 2014), and yet, his second autobiography, published unfortunately only in its German translation as *Hänschen klein, ging allein ... Mein Weg in die Neue Welt* (2004), tells about his professional success – from rags to riches – as an American jour-

nalist (Mehring 2014: 275). From a sociolinguistic point of view it is interesting to note that he mastered both German and English eloquently with all their cultural nuances. While he clearly was not schizophrenic, he certainly had two mother-tongues, so to speak, that make his autobiographies so special as he "wrestles with the vicissitudes of racial identity formation" (Hodges 2001: 54) as an Afro-German eventually living among African Americans in the United States. As Elaine Martin has observed so eloquently in her remarkable scholarly review of *Destined to Witness*: "This somewhat peripatetic life results in a revelatory juxtaposition of three different cultures, their attitudes toward race, and the author's complex identity shifts in accordance with an ever-changing milieu. […] he remains irrevocably an outsider, culturally, linguistically, and even physically. In the United States seeming and being are similarly at odds: he is taken for an American black, but neither of his parents is American, and English is not his native language" (Martin 2001: 91-92; see also Nganang 2005: 235). As Massaquoi states: "I kept being dogged by my old habit of not fitting in" (261) and "I realized that I was still light-years away from feeling that I belonged" (413).

Speaking of language, Martin is an isolated literary critic who does at least in one sentence say something about Massaquoi's impressive linguistic register: "The narrative tone belongs to the tradition of oral literature, often using colloquial or clichéd expressions ('[he] hated my ten-year-old guts,' 'the ripe old age of 88.' 'in sunny California') as well as numerous phrases and short sentences in German" (Martin 2001:94). Alexandra Lindhout in her otherwise revealing article on Massaquoi's autobiography as an "act of identity formation" also singles out Massaquoi's use of numerous German expressions but merely gives a few individual words as examples (2006: 3). And Frank Mehring in his otherwise superb analysis of Massaquoi's two autobiographies ignores any linguistic, folkloric, or phraseological matters altogether (Mehring 2014). And yet, Massaquoi's appealing and intriguing style is richly informed by his word choices, his allusions to folkloric matters, and his effective employment of German and English proverbs, proverbial expressions, and other phraseologisms. These materials are without doubt part of making his unique autobiography such a compelling narrative. Re-

alizing that it contains 509 (645 counting 136 duplicates) fixed phrases, it is clearly worthwhile to have a closer look at Massaquoi's proverbial style.

As one might expect, Massaquoi employs some of the standard Nazi vocabulary for titles and offices, but there are also colloquial German terms that come to him naturally as they belong to his native language. This sort of explanatory comments adds much to this macaronic style, as the following contextualized examples show:

(1) *Among the more intriguing neighborhood events was the occasional sighting of a siren-blaring police paddy wagon, nicknamed* ***Grüner August*** *because of its dark green color.* (20)

(2) *My mother would invariably dress me up in my* ***Sonntagsanzug*** *(Sunday suit) and we would head outdoors.* (23)

(3) *It was through the newsreels that I received my first, albeit lopsided, impression of the* ***Land der unbegrenzten Möglichkeiten*** *(land of unlimited possibilities), as the United States was called.* (51)

(4) *I gave her my* ***Ehrenwort*** (word of honor) *and sealed my promise with a solemn handshake. German boys, it had been drilled into me from as far back as I could remember, never break their* ***Ehrenwort****, no matter what.* (58)

(5) *"The Brown Bomber [the boxer Joe Louis] turned out to be a* ***Flasche****," another boy chimed in, using the derisive street term for "weakling."* (117)

(6) *"What* ***um Himmels Willen*** *(in heaven's name) was on your mind when you decided not to show up for work as you had been ordered?"* (223)

(7) *I thanked my good Samaritan who, in turn, wished me* ***"Hals und Beinbruch"*** *(neck and leg fracture) – a German expression for* ***Good luck.*** (237)

(8) *"Anyone who has a problem with that is an* ***Arschloch*** *(asshole) and can go straight to hell."* (418)

Massaquoi is also steeped in German folkloric references that he picked up as a child growing up in his native Germany. An especially interesting case early in the book is his description of a scene with his beloved African grandfather in pre-war Hamburg:

> (9) *There were even times when Momolu had my mother wake me up after I had already gone to bed because he wanted me to demonstrate my linguistic prowess to some African and German dinner guests. On such occasions, the old man would ask me to sing a German nursery song, such as* ***"Hänschen Klein Ging Allein"*** *(Little Hans Walked Alone), and I would be only too happy to oblige. For my trouble, I could bask in the adulation of the guests, who never failed to be impressed by the fact that not only did I speak accent-free German, but that I did so with unmistakably Hamburgian brogue.* (14)

The memory of this song remained with him for seventy years, using its beginning as the title of his second autobiography in 2004 to describe his life's story as an immigrant to the United States. But speaking of language, in his revealing chapter "Mistaken Identity" (233-237) he gets out of a scrape by communicating in solid German with a police lieutenant: "When I told him what had happened to me at the plant, he soon became convinced that, my brown skin notwithstanding, my unadulterated Hamburger dialect was unmistakably homegrown" (236). Speaking of color identity, his self-assured African aunt Fatima is a model for young Hans-Jürgen of accepting and dealing with his blackness:

> (10) *Tante Fatima, on the other hand, loved nothing more than being the center of attention, and deliberately dressed and acted in a way that made it impossible for her to be overlooked. Long before I made the discovery that black was beautiful, she wore an Afro so huge it would have aroused the envy of a Fiji Islander.* (60)

While Massaquoi does not draw any special attention to the proverb "Black is beautiful," it must have been on his mind when working on his autobiography. In fact, in the year of his birth Langston Hughes (1902-1967) had declared it the "duty of the younger Negro artist […] to change […] that old whispering 'I want to be White,' hidden in the aspiration of his people, to 'Why

should I want to be white? I am a Negro – and beautiful'." One year later in 1927, the first reference of the proverb appeared in a newspaper: "Marcus Garvey [1887-1940, Jamaican-born political activist and journalist] made black people proud of their race. In a world where black is despised he taught them that black is beautiful" (Doyle et al. 2012: 22). Perhaps Massaquoi had come across Hughes's statement, but no matter what, he most certainly was conversant in the slogan turned modern proverb. It doubtlessly played a significant role in his decision to identify himself as an African American in due time.

It comes as a surprise then that Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi agreed to have the German translation of his autobiography appear with the title *Neger, Neger, Schornsteinfeger*, a stereotypical children's chant directed against black people out of mischievous ignorance. At the end of his second autobiography he explains the choice of the title of his first book as follows:

> (11) *Der Verleger von Scherz [Verlag]. Peter Lohmann, war so begeistert, dass er persönlich nach New Orleans kam, um mit mir die Einzelheiten des Projektes zu besprechen. Wir mussten uns vor allen Dingen einen Titel einfallen lassen, der in Deutschland funktionieren würde. Stundenlang zermarterten wir uns das Hirn, bis Lohmann schließlich vorschlug, mein Buch* ***Neger, Neger, Schornsteinfeger****! zu nennen, was mir in der Kindheit andere Kinder hinterher gerufen hatten. Zuerst war ich entsetzt, Das Wort „Neger" weckte in mir eine Fülle schmerzhafter Erinnerungen, und auch sein englisches Pendant* ***Negro*** *war bei Afroamerikanern in den USA genauso unbeliebt. Doch Lohmann meinte, wenn der Titel mit Anführungsstrichen als Zitat kenntlich gemacht würde, wäre es nicht beleidigend, er würde sogar noch stärker veranschaulichen, was ich als Kind durchgemacht hatte. Da ich keine bessere Idee hatte, erklärte ich mich zögerlich einverstanden.* (Massaquoi 2004: 256-257)

The controversial title did indeed draw attention to the book and helped it on its way to become a bestseller in Germany. But be that as it may, here is the heart-wrenching way he describes his first encounter with the racist expression, and it is well to remember that the black-clad chimney sweep in German folklore can also represent the devil (Röhrich 1991-1992: III, 1397-1398, Rölleke 1993):

(12) *Instead of the friendly glances and flattering comments I had been used to, I suddenly drew curious, at times even hostile stares and insulting remarks. Most offensive to me were two words that I had never heard before and that I soon discovered were used by people for the sole purpose of describing the way I looked. One word was Mischling, which, after pressing Mutti for an explanation, she defined as someone who, like me, was of racially mixed parentage. The other word was* ***Neger*** *– according to Mutti, a misnomer as far as I was concerned, since she insisted that I was definitely not a* ***Neger****, a term that she applied only to black people in America. But street urchins, who were my worst tormenters, apparently did not know, or care, about such fine distinctions. As soon as they spotted me, they would start to chant, "****Neger, Neger, Schornsteinfeger*** *(Negro, Negro, chimney sweep)!" and they would keep it up with sadistic insistence until I was out of their sight.* (18, additional references on pp. 37, 431, and 433)

There is a fascinating quite similar autobiographical account by the African medical student Martin Aku, who was confronted by the stereotypical expression "Neger, Neger, Schornsteinfeger" in the mid-1930s at Bremen:

(13) *Nun war ich also in Bremen [aus Afrika angekommen]. Meine Träume verflogen, und an ihre Stelle trat die Wirklichkeit. […] Auf der Straße versetzte meine Erscheinung die Leute in Aufregung. Finger deuteten auf mich, und unzählige Augen waren auf mich gerichtet, neugierig, mitleidsvoll. Die Kinder schrien hinter mir her: „Neger, Neger, Schornsteinfeger', und sangen noch andere Lieder dazu. Ich kam mir wirklich wie ein Weltwunder vor. Unter diesen Leuten als einziger Farbiger zu leben, dieses Bild Tag für Tag, wißt ihr, was das bedeutet für einen Menschen […]?* (Westermann 1938: 270-271)

And there is also Karl Gengenbach's account from his youth that begins with the expression followed by a linguistic "joke" and an explanatory comment:

(14) ***Neger, Neger, Schornsteinfeger***
Weißer zum Neger: Du schwarz
Neger zum Weißen: Ich weiß

> *Diesen Spruch habe ich als Junge immer wieder aufgesagt. Nach dem Krieg waren amerikanische Soldaten in Pforzheim stationiert und ein großer Teil davon schwarz. Diese Schwarzen waren für uns Neger. Das Wort Nigger kannten wir überhaupt nicht, das kam von den weißen Amerikanern.* (Gengenbach 2016: 108)

There is then no doubt that the expression was quite current some decades ago, and it is surprising that it has not been recorded in any scholarly collections. In any case, children being children, things changed in due time for the better for Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi with friendships resulting with other children:

> (15) *Luckily, after a short time, the status and taunts became fewer as the novelty of my appearance began to wear off. Soon, some of the kids who had shouted the loudest became my closets pals. To my great relief, it seemed as if all of a sudden they had become oblivious to the visual differences that set us apart.* (18)

> (16) *One is inclined to ask why some adults to this day have not learned to be blind to color and race? Why can people not be convinced "that true human decency is […] simply a matter of the heart?"* (419).

But here then are a few more textual examples of Massaquoi's remembrance of German folklore that he had encountered as a child and student in Germany. The stereotypical names for chocolate pastries in the first statement remained part of German culture well into the 1960s (Yeo 2011: 119; Mehring 2014: 257) when they began to be sold under the innocuous term of "Schaumküsse (Foam kisses)":

> (17) *Each time Tante Fatima came around, she insisted on taking me out to some nearby* ***Konditorei*** *for a pastry and whipped cream treat. […] Neither of us was amused when at one* ***Konditorei*** *the waitress snidely suggested that we try some of the establishment's delicious* ***Negerküsse*** *(Negro kisses) or* ***Mohrenköpfe*** *(Moors' heads), two popular chocolate-coated pastries.* (60-61).

> (18) *The mere thought of being seen in the street with a violin case – that we kids contemptuously called a* ***Kindersarg*** *(children's coffin) – gave me the creeps.* (74)

(19) *Ironically, among my favorite books during my formative years were those that dealt with the old Germanic legends of Siegfried, the fairest of fair knights, which provided much of the National Socialists' racial mythology.* (80)

(20) *Dozens of young men carrying small swastika streamers marched up and down Salza's Hauptstrasse, shouting and rabble-rousing and singing "Muss i denn zum Städtele hinaus," the traditional German farewell song.* (90)

(21) *Mirror, mirror on the Wall.* (91, chapter heading)

(22) *We would sing* ***"Das Lied vom Guten Kamerad*** *(The Song of the Good Comrade)," Germany's traditional military burial song.* (96)

(23) *Somehow the scene reminded me of the conclusion of that old German fairy tale when the seven little goats dance with their mother around the well in which the big bad wolf has just drowned.* (259)

But there are also references to English folklore and classical mythology that are part of Massaquoi's writing style steeped in cultural literacy. These allusions do not just appear as curiosities, but are cited as parallels of his own situation:

(24) *When I reached the school and saw my mother's eyes light up as I presented her with my treasures – a couple of chocolate bars, some sardine cans, and a few bars of soap – I felt like Robin Hood must have felt when he robbed the rich to give to the poor.* (250)

(25) *At one point I lost my grip on my suitcase and it slipped down the muddy hill, causing me to repeat part of my strenuous climb all over. It reminded me of the legendary King Sisyphus of Greek mythology, whom the gods condemned to push a huge rock to the top of a steep hill in Hades, only to have the rock slip from his grasp and roll back down the hill, forcing him to start his backbreaking labor over again. I recalled that Sisyphus, a former Mount Olympus insider, had offended the gods by cheating death, and wondered what I had done to suffer a similar fate.* (378)

Turning to the proverbial language, the conjecture might be appropriate that Massaquoi had been introduced to it by his reading obsession, as he mentions in a two-page mini-chapter on "Books to the Rescue" (79-80):

> (26) *If the relentless barrage of Nazi propaganda to which we were constantly exposed [as school children] failed to close my mind permanently, it was because of a childhood habit of mine that reached compulsive proportions. As soon as I had learned to read, my mother fostered my interest in books, and by the time I was eight years old, I had become hopelessly addicted to reading books – any books.* (79)

Among other authors he mentions having read Cervantes' *Don Quixote* with its amassments of proverbs (Mieder 2016) as well as works by Charles Dickens (Bryan and Mieder 1997) and Mark Twain (West 1930) whose novels are replete with proverbs and proverbial expressions. Of course, journalistic writing is also often informed by proverbial phrases as catchy titles and as expressive metaphors throughout (Mieder 2004: 150-153). His predisposition towards phraseologisms of all types is apparent from the headings of some of his short chapters:

(27) *The Good Life at the Alster* (12-16)
(28) *The New Kid on the Block* (17-23)
(29) *Head Start* (28-30)
(30) *Hitler Strikes Home* (54-56)
(31) *Mutti's Inner Circle* (83-85)
(32) *Making Ends Meet* (88-89)
(33) *Life Goes on* (145-148)
(34) *Forbidden Fruit* (187-191)
(35) *The Beginning of the End* (196-200)
(36) *Operation Gomorrah* (201-207)
(37) *No Room at the Inn* (242-247)
(38) *Free at Last!* (250-261)
(39) *The Razor's Edge* (262-264)
(40) *Home, Sweet Home* (265-267)
(41) *Reconciliation in the Nick of Time* (390-395)
(42) *In the "Home of the Brave"* (411-430)

It is of interest to note how Massaquoi with an ironic twist superimposes well-known American expressions on his German predicament. Thus he employs "Free at Last!" that is based on an African American spiritual that was popularized by its use at the end of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech of August 28, 1963 (Mieder 2010: 194-201), to describe the newly found freedom at the news of Hitler's death on April 30, 1945. Understandably so, it is also in this chapter where he overcomes his insider/outsider German identity (Nganang 2005: 235-237):

> (43) *I was now "on the other side." It dawned on me that in one fell swoop I had ceased to be what I had always considered myself – a German. But somehow the thought didn't bother me. The Germans never let me fully share in their happy past. Now I didn't need any part of their miserable present. I concluded that I had reached a watershed in my life. I could sense that the pendulum of fate was swinging my way for a change and wondered what had taken it so long. For the first time in years, I felt totally free of the paralyzing fear that my pride had never permitted me to admit to anyone, least to myself, but that had stalked me relentlessly by day and by night. It was not an ordinary kind of fear, such as the fear of being killed in a bombing raid or in a Nazi concentration camp. Instead, it was the fear of being humiliated, of being ridiculed, of being degraded, of having my dignity stripped from me, of being made to feel that I was less a human being, less a man than the people in whose midst I lived. Suddenly, that fear was lifted from me like a heavy burden I had carried without being fully aware of it.* (257-258)

With this significant watershed behind him, "Life goes on" (145-148), as the title of an earlier chapter expresses it proverbially. Thus, his account of having found a basement abode in a bombed-out building for him and his mother gets the uplifting proverb title "Home, Sweet Home" even though it is infested with fleas and does in no way represent the tender claim of the song from 1823 with that title by J.H. Payne (1791-1852). Massaquoi might also have cited the proverb "Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home" that has its origin from that very song (Mieder et al. 1992: 304). And finally, when Massaquoi, the "confirmed Americophile" (308), deals in the third part of his autobiography in but thirty pages with his life in the United

States, he uses the partial line of "The land of the free and the home of the brave" from Francis Scott Key's (1779-1843) "The Star-Spangled Banner" (1814, see Shapiro 2006: 424)) as the title: "In the 'Home of the Brave'" (411). There is some bitter disappointment as he experiences racism and discrimination as he states later in that chapter by quoting the entire line from the national anthem: "I no longer felt the need to idealize the United States. For the moment, I felt terribly disappointed and betrayed regarding my view of 'the land of the free and the home of the brave'" (421). Earlier in his autobiography, he had made a similar observation: "It took me a while to psychologically digest my introduction to the American dilemma – America's inability, or unwillingness, to live up to its creed of 'liberty and justice for all'" (318-319) And yet, Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi did eventually find a positive identity:

> (44) *After several years of paying dues, including journalism studies at two universities, things started to look up and fall into place. Ever so slowly, I began to see the light at the end of the long, long tunnel. I knew I had not only survived but succeeded when I went on my first major assignment for Ebony, to interview President Sekpou Touré of newly independent Guinea at the Libertyville, Illinois, home of UN Ambassador Adlai Stevenson. When the two world figures sat down for an animated chat with me, the "racially inferior" dead-end black kid from Nazi Germany, it seemed to me that my coming to America had not been such a bad idea after all.* (430)

In fact, as thousands of immigrants before and after him, he learned to make his peace with his new homeland: "After scuffling and 'paying dues,' […] I had found my American dream" (431) as a top-notch journalist with a wife and two sons in a nice neighborhood of Chicago.

The last two quotations from Massaquoi's autobiography reveal his proverbial style! The proverbial phrase "to pay one's dues" appears twice, but there are also three more such phrases: "to fall into place," "to be a light at the end of the tunnel," and "to be a at a dead end." Such proverbial groupings are no rarity. In a chapter with the proverbial title "Head Start" (28-30) Massaquoi tells about the unexpected event of his childhood-playmate Erika

(they are but four years old) having exposed herself to him that gets the youngsters into obvious trouble: "Literally caught with her panties down by her nonplussed grandmother, Erika shifted into reverse and started to cry" (29). After this playful use of the proverbial phrase "to be caught with one's pants down," he ends his account with three additional proverbial phrases:

> (45) *The lessons I gleaned from this traumatic interlude were (1) that there was a distinct anatomical difference between boys and girls, (2) that there was something about that difference that for some unfathomable reason made grown-ups uptight, and (3) that a girl could get a fellow into a whole lot of trouble. Having had my share, I decided to leave well enough alone and in the future to avoid girls like the plague. But the best-laid plans of men and mice sometimes go awry, so eventually did mine.* (29-30)

Not only are the three proverbial phrases "to have one's share," "to leave well enough alone," and "To avoid like the plague" strung together here, but he adds the proverb "The best-laid plans of men and mice often go astray" to boot, assuring his readers with an ironic smile that he later learned to deal plenty well with the opposite sex.

Massaquoi's descriptions of his terrible experiences at school having to listen to racial slurs that at times became physical are especially disturbing, but these stereotypical insults are lessened by the comradery that existed among the school children who could not deny that their black outsider had plenty of intelligence:

> (46) *Even though I breezed through most subjects with customary ease, there were two subjects that gave me a run for my money – English and math. In math, I at least managed – by hook or by crook – to get a passing grade, mainly by convincing Tom Shark that I really tried. In English, on the other hand, I was completely over my head. Since I had joined the class of Frau Dr. Fink, the only teacher in the entire grade school with a doctorate, my progress in English had ground to a complete halt.* (133)

Clearly Massaquoi enjoyed writing this passage, especially in light of the fact that English became a second "mother tongue" to him in due time. And, of course, he knows all the right five

colloquial phrases to add expressiveness to his prose: "to breeze through something," "To give someone a run for his money," "by hook or by crook," "To be over one's head," and "to grind to a halt." The popular twin formula "by hook or by crook" (Gallacher 1970) reappears at the beginning of the proverbially entitled chapter "The Razor's Edge" (262-264) where Massaquoi once again interweaves several proverbial phrases:

> (47) *Nothing could convince me that things would not get better for me now that the Nazis were gone and the war was over. The latest setback was simply a reminder that nothing would be handed to me on a [silver] platter. But I was quite willing to do whatever it took to make things happen, although at the moment, I hadn't the foggiest idea what my options were. All I knew was that, if I could help it, I would never work in anybody's machine shop again. I was grateful to my mother, who had sacrificed to give me the opportunity of learning a trade, but after four years of growing calluses while risking life and limb with backbreaking labor amid lung-blistering stench and ear-shattering noise, I was more than ready for a change. By hook or by crook, I was determined to make the transition to the white-collar class; in what capacity, I wasn't quite sure.* (262)

It is a bit surprising that Massaquoi does not include the word "silver" in his use of the proverbial expression "To be handed on a silver platter." In any case, he adds the phrases "to not have the foggiest idea," "to risk life and limb", and "by hook or by crook" to express the vicissitudes of his precarious situation that he is determined to change to a meaningful existence.

The following example may well serve as a final example of such phraseological run-on comments. It is of special interest since it shows once and for all that Massaquoi is keenly aware of language as he is confronted with new American-English idiomatic phrases:

> (48) *I had begun to notice that Americans – especially the black Americans I had met – spoke a language that bore little resemblance to the one taught by my English teachers Herr Harden, Herr Neumann, and Frau Dr. Fink. When, at the urging of Smitty, I filled his colleague in on my life under Hitler, Slim was moved to interrupt from time to time with "I dig," "Can you beat that?,"*

> *"Get a load of that," and "Ain't that a bitch?," none of which made a great deal of sense to me.* (297)

There is no doubt that Massaquoi steadily relies on metaphorical expressions throughout his spell-binding account of survival as a biracial person in three countries in which he cannot escape the unfortunate reality to be a misfit no matter how hard he tries to fit into the social fabric riddled by racial prejudices. The following contextualized examples are representative of this stylistic *modus operandi* with many more to be found in the attached index of proverbial texts that can unfortunately only list them without contexts due to space restrains:

> (49) *As a dyed-in-the-wool arch-Nazi, [the school principal Heinrich] Wriede was on a constant alert to weed out anything that conflicted with his deeply entrenched conviction of German superiority.* (71)

> (50) *There were a few [teachers], who – sensitive to my particular plight [harassment] – went out of their way to make my life a little easier. Among the latter was Herr Schneider, a goateed man with erect, military bearing who taught us zoology, biology, botany, and, in a roundabout way, about the birds and the bees.* (73)

> (51) *When all of us agreed that at least five minutes had elapsed and there was still no sign of him [teacher Harden], we dispersed like rats leaving the sinking ship.* (77)

> (52) *Now the cat was out of the bag and I realized how [principal] Wriede had been setting me up.* (103)

> (53) *This relatively quick disillusionment with the HJ – which, as a matter of sour grapes, I welcomed from the bottom of my heart – did not occur in my class alone but was manifest throughout my school and, I suspect, throughout the city and beyond.* (104)

> (54) *By the time I had reached my second apprenticeship year, I no longer considered working as hard and as long as a full-grown man such a harsh reality. It had simply become reality. Yet, even under those conditions, my life was not all work and no play.* (159)

(55) *It had been drummed into our heads by our teachers that, in the Führer's National Socialist state, men ran the show with women as their helpmates.* (171)

(56) *I always made sure to bring a buddy along as a decoy [on a date with his girl-friend Gretchen]. I reasoned that a threesome appeared like a more ambiguous, therefore less suspicious, relationship than a twosome. To make the deception work, I would always position myself in such a way as to lead the uninitiated observer to believe that I, not the decoy, was our trio's "fifth wheel."* (172)

(57) *Looking at several dozen pairs of hostile eyes and realizing too late that he had opened the wrong can of worms, the soldier let go of my lapel. Thoroughly humiliated, he awkwardly moved to the exit.* (227)

(58) *Nazi Germany had clearly and incontrovertibly reached the point when it desperately needed "the likes of me," not to win the war, but merely to buy itself a few days of time before it would be crushed by the Allied juggernaut. The shoe, I decided, was clearly on the other foot.* (232)

(59) *"I'll cross that bridge when I get to it," I told myself. Fortunately, my luck held out again and the bridge remained uncrossed.* (233)

(60) *Having been totally isolated from other non-Aryans, I had developed a false sense of security. Egon [a Jewish friend] made me realize that we were all in the same boat, and that at any moment the boat could be sinking.* (239, Mieder 2005: 187-209)

(61) *Trying not to look like cats that swallowed the canary, we busied ourselves with furiously sweeping the garage floor.* (249)

(62) *I was confident that in the new era of Allied occupation, my color would be less of an obstacle than it had been so far and that, one way or another, I would find a way to put bread on the table for my mother and myself.* (272)

(63) *As a victim of Nazi racial hate, I, too, favored the approach of the Soviet troops, who, it was widely known, purged the Nazis in their zone of occupation with an unforgiving head-for-an-eye policy. But my orientation was too Western and my knowledge of and interest in dialectic materialism too vague for me to throw out the baby with the bathwater and abandon my American dream.* (286, Mieder 1993: 193-224)

(64) *This "little white lie" [that his father was an American and not a Liberian], I had discovered, could make the difference between cordial acceptance as a brother and cold rejection as an unwelcome stranger.* (316)

(65) *Cautioning us to hang on, he [an American army captain] floored the gas pedal and, to our great delight, the vehicle took off like a bat out of hell.* (318)

(66) *My father promised to help me make up my educational deficiencies by having me attend college, perhaps in the United States. His words were music to my ears, and I intended to do everything I could to earn his continued support and trust.* (357)

(67) *They [some young people] made me realize how much of my own youth I had lost struggling merely to survive. I also envied the way their careers, and often their future marriages, had been carefully arranged by their families while I had to keep flying by the seat of my pants.* (363)

(68) *Eventually, I realized that perhaps I should be the one to extend the olive branch [to his father who had neglected him].* (390)

(69) *For me, however, it was utterly ludicrous that a nation that prided itself on its democratic traditions and looked down on the Nazis for their racial attitudes would segregate soldiers who served in the army and who were expected to fight the same enemy. Despite my misgivings, I learned to take the bitter with the sweet.* (428)

Massaquoi had been warned by a friend that he "might never get used to that side of the 'American Way'" (412), but as his second

autobiography about his successful personal and professional life in the United States shows, he did not acquiesce and joined the civil rights movement with word and deed as an engaged and responsible citizen. Reflecting on the two-thirds of his life spent in the United States he writes at the end of his first autobiography with justified pride and measured humility:

> (70) *There was no better way I could have repaid my mother for all she had done for me than to "make something of myself" and to present her with two grandsons, Steve Gordon and Hans Jürgen, Jr., who likewise have made something of themselves. Following Steve's graduation from Harvard Medical School and the enrollment of Hans at the University of Michigan Law School, nothing gave her more pleasure than to brag about "my grandson, the doctor, and my other grandson, the soon-to-be lawyer." As she always used to say,* ***"Ende gut, alles gut."*** (443)

As the good son that he was, he gives his dear mother the last word by quoting one of her favorite German proverbs who, once Hamburg was in the hands of the British occupational forces, had put her life into the hands of her dear son:

> (71) *She surprised me by formally turning the reins of our small "family" over to me. "You are in charge now," she told me. "With this new British occupation, I don't know my way around anymore. So from now on, you make the decisions for us both." I was deeply touched and honored, and resolved to skipper our little boat as best I could. The question was, where could we go"* (264)

Indeed, they were together in the same familial boat, to cite the proverbial expression that appears some twenty-five pages earlier with its metaphor standing for the common fate of Massaquoi and other persecuted victims of Nazi Germany.

To a certain degree, Massaquoi's autobiography is also the biography of his mother who is depicted as a gifted proverbialist throughout the book. Her proverbial prowess, more than the proverbs her son might have gleaned from reading Cervantes, Dickens, and Twain, appears on many pages of this lively account, with her last proverb "Ende gut, alles gut" being only the crescendo of it all. As the following pages with numerous proverb examples will show by way of German and English proverbs,

Massaquoi's mother has had a major influence on his magnificent book with its many actual proverbs in addition to the multitude of proverbial phrases. It all starts early in the book in the chapter "The New Kid on the Block" (17-23) with its proverbial title. Having found "a tiny, one-room, cold-water, attic flat on the third floor of a tenement building" (17) for them, his working mother tries her best to raise her little boy :

> (72) *She was a kind and soft-hearted woman, who, although somewhat gruff in demeanor, never spanked me or in any way became physical when I stepped over the line. She didn't have to. For those not altogether rare occasions, she had a handy deterrent that never failed to do the trick. Intoning the old German proverb "He who doesn't listen must feel" [Wer nicht hören will, muß fühlen], she'd reach into her broom closet and fetch her notorious* ***Rute****, consisting of a bundle of thin twigs tied together at one end, which, she claimed, Santa Claus had left behind for precisely such occurrences. Just waving this vaunted instrument of mayhem in my face was all she needed to do to make me return in a hurry to the straight and narrow path of righteousness.* (22-23)

Not only does this short paragraph include the three phrases "to step over the line," "to do the trick," and "to be a straight and narrow path," but it also contains the first example of his mother's rich repertoire of German proverbs that Massaquoi cites in English. But he does not shy away from confronting his English readers with quoting proverbs in German to which he adds the English translation in parentheses to assure proper understanding. This is the case in a scene where his mother, who had lost her job, is asking for support from an administrator who desires favors in return:

> (73) *"I am positive that I can arrange for you to get your job back," he added with an encouraging smile. "You do understand, however, that I can't go out on a limb for a person with your – let's say – past without you showing me some cooperation.* ***Eine Hand wäscht die Andere.*** (One hand washes the other)." (56)

Here it is a despicable man who is using the internationally disseminated proverb from ancient Rome (Paczolay 1997: 174-178) to coerce his mother into a quid pro quo relationship but she,

"beginning to smell a rat about the size of the administrator" (56) will have no part of it. The proverbial expression "to smell a rat" is fittingly expanded here to a metaphor describing the manipulative bureaucrat.

Doubtlessly Massaquoi had learned the proverb from his mother and that is also the case for the proverb "Man muß gute Miene zum bösen Spiel machen" ("You have to grin and bear it") that also exists in the form of the proverbial phrase "gute Miene zum bösen Spiel machen" that appears in this next reference: "I made *gute Miene zum bösen Spiel* (smiled in the face of adversity), to quote Mutti, and resigned myself to the inevitable" (75). It is clear that Massaquoi recalled his mother's proverbial speech throughout the many years that he was working on his autobiography. This brings to mind observations that the psychoanalyst Theodor Reik (1888-1969), a student of Sigmund Freud, has made in his article on "The Echo of the Proverb" (1939). Just like Massaquoi, he remembers how he heard proverbs during his childhood and how they are recalled in later life:

> (74) *In recalling those proverbs and phrases heard in early youth, the memory of the people who used them is easily evoked. Many beloved phantoms rise up from the shadowy past, and many hated ones as well. These proverbs were uttered on various occasions by our parents, relations, friends, and acquaintances, but most of them, by far, came from our grandfather. […] Something said in passing often reappears after many years as an echo. The hoard of proverbs and idiomatic phrases overheard by us children […] will return more and more frequently the older we grow. They demand that we should listen to them and obey them. What is their purport? To remind us of our childhood, or our parents and grandparents, who once upon a time pronounced them.* (Reik 1940: 233-234, 238, 241)

There is no doubt that his mother's proverbs were deeply engrained in Massaquoi's mind. This comes to the fore in a truly remarkable chapter "Words of Wisdom" (81-83) that might just as well have been entitled as "My Mother's Proverbs" or "Mutti's Proverbs." It includes eight German proverbs cited in English translation to which I have added the texts in their original language. They represent a testimony to Massaquoi's mother whose

proverbial wisdom helped shape her son's personality and appear to have been guideposts during his impressive life's journey:

(75) *Words of Wisdom*

Of the many characteristics that defined my mother, one of the more pronounced ones was her incurable optimism. This was most apparent in her high expectations for me in spite of the dim outlook imposed by Nazi racial laws. Nothing could shake her conviction that, quite apart from race, I had exceptional potential and that some day – Nazis or no Nazis – I would make something of myself. […] She convinced me that an engineering career would be within my reach, if only I reached hard enough. To encourage me to do just that, she would say, "If you want to become a hook, you'll have to start bending early" [Was ein Häkchen werden will, krümmt sich beizeiten].

[…] Instead of religious dogma, she had at her command an inexhaustible supply of proverbs, rhymes, and maxims to which she adhered. There was one for every occasion a person might possibly encounter in a lifetime – advice of how to manage money, how to treat friends, why it pays to be punctual, and on and on. It was a legacy from her mother, one she was determined to pass on to me. By the time I started first grade, I already knew that "lies have short legs" [Lügen haben kurze Beine], especially after having been caught in a lie. When she tried to teach me the benefits of a righteous life, she'd say, "A good conscience is a soothing pillow" [Ein gutes Gewissen ist ein sanftes Ruhekissen]. To instill modesty and politeness in me, she'd say, "With hat in hand, you can travel through the entire land" [Mit dem Hut in der Hand kommt man durchs ganze Land]. To keep me from treating a school chum meanly, she'd warn, "If you dig a hole for others, you'll fall into it yourself" [Wer andern eine Grube gräbt, fällt selbst hinein]. When I seemed unappreciative of a money gift because it was smaller than I expected, she would remind me that "he who doesn't honor the penny doesn't deserve the dollar" [Wer den Pfennig nicht ehrt, ist des Talers nicht wert]. Although, unlike the Ten Commandments, they lacked divine endorsement, these little morsels of German folk wisdom have lost nothing of their validity since I became a man, something I've tried to impress upon my two sons. Today, nothing pleases me more than to hear them quote their Omi (granny) or me when making a point. […]

> *Mutti loved to sing – anything from operatic arias to tunes from movies and operettas, folk songs and hit tunes from her youth. One of her frequent laments was that she didn't have a beautiful voice. That realization, while perhaps true, did not make her any less inclined to fill our apartment with songs, whether she was knitting, crocheting, or doing the laundry. "Where there's music, settle down," she would say, "for evil people have no songs" [Wo man singt, da laß dich nieder, böse Menschen haben keine Lieder].*
>
> *Generous to a fault, Mutti would spare no effort to help a needy friend in distress. […] She was a courageous, stubborn, and combative woman who didn't mind confronting anyone, high or low, who she felt had done her or me wrong. But if ever someone she had trusted crossed her in a major way, she would put that person out of her life for good with no possibility of reconciliation. She was of the opinion that "trash fights and trash makes up" [Pack schlägt sich, Pack verträgt sich].*
>
> *Unbounded resiliency enabled her to get through the many ups and downs of her long life. Strong and determined, she used to quip, "Weeds don't perish" [Unkraut vergeht nicht]. whenever someone noted her remarkable ability to bounce back from adversity.*
>
> *Despite her outspokenness that spared no one, Mutti was well liked and, in turn, liked people. Frequently on weekends, our tiny attic was packed with her friends, mostly fellow hospital and factory workers, who gathered for a* ***gemütlichen Abend*** *(cozy evening) of talking, singing, laughing, eating, and coffee drinking, all of which were her favorite pastimes.* […] (81-82, in the German translation with the title "Worte der Weisheit" on pp. 100-103)

In addition to this unique proverbial collage Massaquoi lets his mother expound proverbs throughout his book as he recalls her wise words of behavioral advice. There are a few paremiological studies that have looked at such proverbial traditions in American (Lindahl 2004, Newall 1994, Robinson 1991, Wienker-Piepho 1991), French (Chiche 1983), Jewish (Ben-Amos 1995, Lévy and Zumwalt 1990), Italian (Bornstein 1991, Filippini 1999), Portuguese (Marbot-Benedetti 1989), Russian (Fomina 2006), and Spanish (Chahin et al. 1999) family settings, usually attesting that the wisdom is handed down from grandparents or parents to children (Mieder and Holmes 2000, Mieder 2017).

Just as is evident from Massaquoi's recollection of his mother's frequent use of proverbs, these studies deal with family relationships, didacticism, ethics, socialization, tradition, transmission, values, and worldview (Mieder 2009). Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi with his African American wife and his two sons might have been especially interested in Dennis Folly's "'Getting the Butter from the Duck': Proverbs and Proverbial Expressions in an Afro-American Family" (1982), Mary Page and Nancy Washington's "Family Proverbs and Value Transmission of Single Black Mothers" (1987), and Linda McWright's *African-American Mothers' Perceptions of Grandparents' Use of Proverbs in Value Socialization of Grandchildren (Intergenerational)* (1998). Finally mention must also be made of Derek Williams' study "'Everything that Shine Ain't Gold': A Preliminary Ethnography of a Proverb in an African American Family" (2003) that looks at but one proverb with a particular dominance in a family. As is obvious, the proverb under discussion is an African American variant of the medieval European proverb "All that glitters is not gold" (Paczolay 1997: 125-130).

In any case, here are a few more contextualized references that show the effective use of proverbial language by Massaquoi's amazing mother who as a single mother coped through years of hardship and raised her biracial son to be an exemplary person who respected, admired, and loved her to the end. In the first reference his Mutti remembers her mother, Massaquoi's grandmother, having employed the proverb as family wisdom:

> (76) *Like most German women of her generation, she avoided going into debt, convinced like her mother that* ***borgen macht Sorgen*** *(to borrow makes sorrow). Consequently, she categorically never bought anything on credit.* (88)

> (77) *Even the corroborating testimony of my story by several of the perpetrators [the boys had shot paper gliders from the balcony during a church service] could not sway him [Pastor Ottmer] to let me off the hook. I remembered my mother's dictum,* ***Mitgefangen, mitgehangen*** *(caught together, hanged together). With 20/20 hindsight, I could see that she had been right. Even though I had not participated in the glider caper, I had put myself in the company of goof-offs on the balcony and thus gotten myself into a mess.* (147)

(78) *Morris's [his Liberian brother] shack made our basement refuge in bombed-out Hamburg look inviting. I had trouble concealing my shock at the squalid conditions in which my brother had been living and shuddered at the thought of having to call this hovel my home. But I decided not to sound too negative. Besides, I had long ago learned from my mother that "in a pinch, the devil eats flies" [In der Not frißt der Teufel Fliegen].* (380)

(79) *Although I hadn't touched a lathe since I worked for Lindner A.G. in Nazi Germany, it took only a short while to feel at home behind the cranks and levers of the machine in front of me. My mother was right,* ***gelernt ist gelernt*** *(learned is learned).* (417)

Massaquoi does not always mention his mother when citing a German proverb, but he almost definitely learned them from her. Here is a telling example in which he applies a well-known proverb to himself:

(80) *That evening I scrubbed and dressed with extra care in preparation of the adventure ahead. Whatever second thoughts cropped up in my mind, they were quickly dispelled by my hopeless state of anticipation. With near-fatalistic resignation, I invoked the old popular German proverb that holds – quite illogically, I think – that* ***Wer A sagt muss auch B sagen*** *(he who says A must also say B). I certainly had taken step A, and nothing could stop me from taking a crack at step B. If everything worked out according to my plan, today – July 31, 1941 – would go down in history as the day when I learned the true meaning of making love. Much later I discovered that it was also the day on which* ***Reichsmarschall*** *Hermann Göring issued the first known written order for the murder of all Jews living under Nazi rule, an action he referred to as the* ***Endlösung*** *(Final Solution).* (190)

Having been brought up with a barrage of German proverbs, Massaquoi developed his own fondness of proverbial wisdom and incorporates it repeatedly in his autobiographical narrative. But as an adult journalist living in the United States communicating in excellent oral and written English, he obviously built up his own repertoire of proverbs in that language. One is inclined to change the old proverb "Like father, like son" to the befitting anti-proverb "Like mother, like son." Right at the beginning

Massaquoi talks about his German grandfather and includes the proverbs "Charity begins at home" and "Last hired, first fired" with the latter being a modern American proverb having originated in 1918 (Doyle et al. 2012: 121; Mieder 2019: 129):

> (81) *While he [Hermann Baetz, his mother's father] felt no animosity toward the foreigners [Italian laborers], he was a patriotic German of simple principles, which included the firm conviction that charity begins at home. For years, several Italians had worked at the quarry when jobs were plentiful. But the unwritten rule had always been that they were the last to be hired and, if there was a shortage of jobs, the first to be fired.* (6)

The proverb "Absence makes the heart grow fonder" appears quite differently twice in the autobiography, with the second text negating the proverb to describe his troubled relationship with his father who had abandoned him and his mother. Together these two proverb instantiations show clearly that proverbs exhibit polysituativity, polyfunctionality, and polysemanticity and that they are not necessarily cited in their traditional wording (Mieder 2004: 9):

> (82) *Although I had become extremely sensitive about displaying affection and emotions in public since I entered school, I made an exception when I let my mother hug and kiss me to her heart's content. It was at that point that I discovered the old verity that absence makes the heart grow fonder.* (66-67)

> (83) *A flood of conflicting emotions took hold of me as I prepared to open the letter [from his father], the first tangible link in almost eighteen years with the man my mother had taught me to call* ***father*** *despite the fact that from the time he left us, while I was still a little boy, he had been largely a stranger to me. Time and absence had not made my heart grow fonder of him. If I felt anything about him, it was detached curiosity.* (333)

But here are a few more examples of Massaquoi's effective and expressive integration of proverbs that underscore his trials and tribulations as a biracial youngster in Nazi Germany, as a young adult in Liberia, and eventually as an immigrant in America:

(84) *Herr Harden [his English teacher] was a fanatic practitioner of the "spare the rod and spoil the child" philosophy, and – backed by a system that condoned, if not encouraged, corporal punishment – literally made the rod the centerpiece of his pedagogy. As a result, he was the most despised and feared teacher on the Kätnerkamp faculty. He was also the first teacher who got a piece of my hide during my eventful eight-year elementary school career.* (75-76)

(85) *Sometimes her [his mother] methods of instilling values in me and indelibly impressing on my young mind that crime doesn't pay were as creative as they were effective. It didn't take me long to realize that her wheels of justice turned swiftly and inexorably.* (87)

(86) *When a pupil referred to my scholastic and athletic abilities to refute [teacher] Dutke's contention that people of other than "Aryan blood" were both intellectually and physically inferior, Dutke dressed down the pupil for daring to disagree with him. He then lectured the class that my case was merely the exception that proved the rule, and suggested that whatever "normal characteristics" I displayed I had definitely inherited from my Aryan parent.* (110)

(87) *Then, after suggesting that in every barrel of apples, there are a few rotten ones, he [school principal Wriede] continued, with a withering stare in my direction, that there would be some boys who, for one reason or another, would be found unworthy of the honor of wearing the uniform of a German soldier. For them, he said, he had only one piece of advice: to get out of Germany while they could.* (129-130)

(88) *By an odd coincidence, shortly after I joined the boxing club, Hitler made boxing lessons an integral part of all schools' athletic curricula, since he was convinced that boxing built character and bolstered self-confidence. By the time the first boxing classes were taught in my class by a teacher who had to take a crash course in the sport's fundamentals, I was already an accomplished amateur boxer. Since in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king, I was hailed immediately as a boxing phenom.* (137-138)

(89) *On the wall above the workbench was a large poster with an illustration of a blond Siegfried-type worker with rolled-up sleeves and bulging muscles, holding a heavy hammer in his right hand.* ARBEIT ADELT *(Work ennobles)! the poster claimed in large letters against the backdrop of a swastika flag. If the poster's intent was to inspire us, it had totally missed its purpose with me. All I could see in my immediate future was a lot of toil and drudgery and very little, if any nobility.* (151-152; This is actually an anti-proverb of "Tugend adelt" ("Virtue ennobles") and a clear sign of proverb manipulations by Nazi propaganda; see Mieder 1993: 225-255)

(90) *From the few times I had met Hans's parents, I had always assumed that they were just an ordinary working couple whose biggest adventure in life was watching their only child achieve victories in the boxing ring. But I soon learned never to judge a book by its cover.* (157)

(91) *But since we had no role models by which to judge our performance, we "jitterbugged" to our hearts' content behind Herr Lucas's [dance instructor] back, and in the process proved beyond a shadow of doubt that ignorance is truly bliss.* (180)

(92) *Following a brief "short-arm inspection and rubdown with a dry towel [in a Hamburg brothel], she pulled out a fresh condom and, before I could say* ***Danke schön****, had me all suited up and ready to go. Without further ado she flung herself backward on the bed, spread her ample thighs, and reminded me in a querulous voice that time was money and that five marks didn't entitle me to spend all night.* (187)

(93) *I decided to play hooky from my gig [as a musician] at the Alkazar the following day and instead return to the* ***Appleton Victory****. Hard times had long taught me to not pass up an opportunity to make hay while the sun shines.* (302)

(94) *I now understood what he [his father] meant when he told me about the advantages of being a big frog in a little pond, like Liberia, versus the other way around.* (369-370)

(95) *The wheels [of a demolished car], it appeared, had already been picked clean of tires by "salvagers," as was the interior of the van, which showed no trace that it had been loaded with rice. It reminded me of the old saying, "One man's meat is another man's poison." For the hungry bellies of the poor villagers of Ganta [in Liberia], my father's accident and several thousand pounds of rice must have been a welcome windfall.* (392)

(96) *At least Karl [a childhood friend] was spared the indignity suffered by many German POWs who, upon their return home, found their wives had replaced them with an English or American soldier – true to the saying, "To the winner go the spoils."* (442)

These selected references are ample proof of Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi's virtuosic employment of proverbs that he integrates in their traditional wording or in innovative alterations. At times he only cites them partially or merely alludes to them as in "being a big frog in a little pond" cited above. *The Dictionary of Modern Proverbs* (Doyle et al. 2012: 78 and 64) lists two complete variants: "Better a big fish in a little pond (puddle, pool) than a little fish in a big pond (mighty ocean)" from 1903, and "It is better to be a big duck in a little puddle (pond) than a little duck in a big puddle(pond)" from 1934 (Mieder 2020: 199-200). To this can now be added Massaquoi's third variant that in its entirety must be "It is better to be big frog in a little pond than a little frog in a big pond." In any case, as the attached index of proverbial texts shows, his autobiography, in addition to its intrinsic value as a personal account of survival and struggle for identity, is also a paremiological and paremiographical treasure trove.

Finally, then, it comes as no surprise that Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi, who "stuck it out in the United States and became a leading journalist after graduating from the University of Illinois" (Barkin 2009: 263) very appropriately cites the proverb "You can't go home again" that has become a modern proverb with its start as the title of Thomas Wolfe's (1900-1938) novel published posthumously in 1940 (Doyle et al. 2012: 123). It appears in pretty much the last chapter on "Germany Revisited" (430-436) that relates his visit to his original homeland in 1966 that resulted in the two already mentioned descriptive and reflective essays published in that year in *Ebony*. Having forged a new existence

for sixteen years by then, it must have been a heart-wrenching experience for him to fly to Frankfurt and then travel on to his native Hamburg. Here is but one lengthy paragraph of his moving account with the proverb at its end:

> (97) *Visiting my former neighborhood on the north side of town, I stood stunned before a crate-littered vacant lot where on that memorable summer night twenty-three years earlier my home had been razed in an air attack. It seemed that the "[new economic] miracle" hadn't quite reached this point. Briefly, I paused at the site of the air-raid shelter where I had survived the crucial attack that had turned my neighborhood into an inferno. I remembered the charred corpses of the unfortunate people who had been unable to reach the shelter in time. On that site there now stood a spanking-new housing development with green play lots and children playing the same old games I had played as a little boy. As I watched them, I wished, somehow, that at least one of them would give me once again the old* ***Neger, Neger, Schornsteinfeger*** *routine, just for old time's sake. But either German children had changed, or I no longer rated. Like a latter-day Rip van Winkle, I walked the vaguely familiar-looking streets where once I had known just about every lamppost, every tree,, and every face, unrecognized by the people I met and recognizing none of them. For me, who had once been a celebrity of sorts in Barmbek [suburb of Hamburg], whom everybody had known, if not by name, certainly as der* ***Negerjunge****, it was an unfamiliar feeling. At that moment the full truth of Thomas Wolfe's famous assertion hit me: you can't go home again.* (432-433)

Amazing, how Massaquoi experiences a strange longing to hear that children's rhyme "Neger, Neger, Schornsteinfeger" in a bizarre nostalgic moment, perhaps forgetting for an instant what a terrible stereotype it was. Surely, he had no intention to return to Germany, but one senses some love for it despite the horrors that had been brought to thousands of innocent people by way of the Holocaust and otherwise. By the mid-sixties he had found his identity as "an African American with deep German ethnic roots" as he described it in a letter from 2005 (Lindhout 2006: 4). America had been his dream and it became the new homeland for him as a former Afro-German and his mother. Thus, indeed,

there is plenty of truth in the proverb that "You can't go home again," but the old German proverbs appeared in Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi's life as echoes of the past and wisdom for the future.

Nota bene

I thank my colleague and friend Helga Schreckenberger from the University of Vermont for giving me Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi's autobiography as a Christmas present in 2020. The book means more to me as a German immigrant to the United States in 1960 than words can express. As far as my life as a paremiologist (proverb scholar) is concerned, *Destined to Witness* represents the best there is regarding proverbs as meaningful wisdom and worldview.

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Index of Proverbial Texts

The following list of phraseologisms (proverbs, proverbial expressions, proverbial comparisons, twin formulas, idioms, and a few quotations), alphabetically arranged according to keywords, registers all 509 proverbial texts (645 counting 136 duplicates) with their page numbers from Hans J. Massaquoi's autobiography *Destined to Witness. Growing up Black in Nazi Germany*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1999. 443 pp. An asterisk * identifies actual proverbs.

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(Zarah Leander in the film *Die Grosse Liebe*)

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