

## From the Editors

The editors did not consciously set out to publish a special issue devoted to feminist writings; however, the articles in this issue (with the exception of the essays in the "Open Forum" section) each deal with a consciously feminist perspective. We use the word "feminism" to suggest a critical exploration of the ways that people are empowered or disempowered solely by virtue of the sex to which they were born. Close examination of the way gender-power issues are manifested in folklore can provide the disempowered with ways to renegotiate their statuses in the cultural systems under which they operate. This theme emerges in all the articles.

We open this issue with an important bibliographic tool, Patricia Sawin's annotated bibliography on ethnicity and women's status. She focuses on "dual consciousness—the awareness of operating in two cultural systems at once" and particularly on how perceptions of these dualities affect women's lives, especially during times of cultural upheaval. The work should be especially useful to anyone studying ethnic groups from gender-related angles, as well as to anyone just beginning studies of ethnicity and gender. The works listed in Sawin's bibliography are representative, not comprehensive; but many trails can be picked up from this basic list.

Elisabeth Panttaja, in her article, examines the apparent passivity of female protagonists in fairy tales and concludes that the passivity has more to do with genre than gender. She writes, "The lack of assertiveness that feminist critics decry in the folktale heroine is often nothing more than an expression of the genre's quasi-religious attitude toward human experience." She examines the ways female protagonists are disempowered and reempowered in the texts. Interestingly, she finds that anonymity itself can be a source of power.

Jennifer Livesay challenges the traditional readings of Icelandic sagas in her article on women and narrative structure in *Eyrbyggja saga*. Whereas the roles of women in the saga have often been seen as merely supporting the primary focus on male heroism, Livesay argues that much more sense can be made of the *Eyrbyggja saga* by looking at the roles women play as major structuring devices. She

further asserts that the saga's author *intended* the saga to be an exploration of women's power.

Marianne Barnett's article, "The Southern Belle: Personal Narratives in the Negotiation of Identity," represents a departure from the assumed objectivity manifested in most scholarly writings. It is an intensely personal examination of personal narratives told by the author's mother. Although the article might be criticized as being too personal and perhaps too emotionally loaded, we believe it contributes to current discussions on personal narrative as well as feminism by showing new ways of self-understanding. "To begin to understand ourselves," Barnett states in her article, "we must begin to understand our inherited stories, the connective fibers which link generations and network our social and private existences. If we wish to influence the present, we must unwind the stories of our past, reexamine our possibilities and, in doing so, open the present and future with added options, opportunities that we might otherwise have overlooked."

The "Open Forum" section of this issue offers two currently controversial subjects for thought. One is a conversation between John Dorst and Henry Glassie on the nature of "postmodernism." The conversation began in Philadelphia at the 1989 meeting of the American Folklore Society, when Glassie, during his presidential address, received thunderous applause after recommending that folklorists "jettison the foppish, neodecadent word 'postmodern.'" After hearing several people discuss this statement, the editors of *Folklore Forum* invited John Dorst of the University of Wyoming to address Glassie's comments. He provided the essay which is printed herein. We then invited Glassie to respond to Dorst's comments; he very graciously responded almost immediately so that we might include his remarks alongside Dorst's. We believe the discussion from these two scholars helps to clarify the issues of postmodernism and postmodernity.

Another significant contribution to the "Open Forum" section is an essay by Gregory Schrempp, in which he analyzes the "conflict between historically particularist vs. generalizing approaches to social phenomena." He asks that one approach not be judged in terms of the other, i.e., that theoretical works not be judged by the same standards that particularistic historiography is judged. He asks that reviewers be more sensitive to the nature of the works they are judging when writing their critiques.

We remind our readers that the "Open Forum" section, which we launched in issue Number 1 of this volume, is designed to encourage an informal, ongoing conversation about the nature of our

discipline. We encourage and invite essays on current issues in folkloristics.

Finally, we have good news to report on the financial future of *Folklore Forum*, which, with Trickster Press, falls under the auspices of the Folklore Publications Group, Inc. Trickster Press has this spring published a new fieldguide, *The Emergence of Folklore in Everyday Life: A Fieldguide and Sourcebook*, edited by George Schoemaker. Some of the proceeds from the sale of this textbook help fund the journal, and early indications are that the *Forum* will not be going bankrupt anytime soon. Schoemaker is once again to be commended for his hard work in guaranteeing the continued financial solvency of the journal.

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