

From the Guest Editor

The articles in this special issue of *Folklore Forum* were originally submitted for a book-length publication focused on folklore and theory. We intended this book to be a resource for students, instructors, and researchers in folklore and related disciplines seeking a brief overview or introduction to particular theoretical perspectives. Our initial call for abstracts generated 30 submissions ranging in topic from the historic-geographic method, structuralism, nationalism, semiotics, performance studies, class, cultural studies, feminism, globalization, to issues concerning folklore and the world wide web. Unfortunately, logistics got the best of us, and we have condensed the book-length publication into a double journal issue. The change in format limited the number of articles that could be included, and ultimately the scope covered. The ten articles featured still cover a range of theoretical topics and should serve as a useful resource. In addition, this issue is statement of folklorists' active engagement with theories, both those formulated within the discipline and those introduced from without.

In seeking submissions, we wanted contributions from graduate students or people who recently finished their degrees. We were responding to the rhetoric of crisis surrounding our discipline: not only do folklore Ph.D.s have little hope of finding fulfilling employment, but the materials studied by folklorists have expanded to the point that the word "folklore" is problematic for describing either the discipline or the stuff. At conferences and in publications, it has been primarily scholars long established in the field who voice their cynicism about the current and future state of folklore. Like many of my colleagues who are graduate students, this rhetoric about crisis caused my mood to sink as I wondered why we bothered to continue with our studies if our future was to be one of disappointment and unemployment. At the same time that I felt bleak, I continued to be excited about my classes and research. My fellow colleagues likewise energetically engaged in their studies, benefiting from their positions as folklore students to study a wide range of topics and approach these topics from theoretical and methodological perspectives.

This disjuncture between the mood about the state of the discipline and the intellectual activities of those that would make its future, inspired me to take part in this publishing project. Rather than merely providing a

resource of theoretical perspectives relevant to folklore studies, I saw this publication as an opportunity for a younger generation of scholars to express the potential of folklore studies to continue actively engaging with and contributing to cross-disciplinary explorations of human existence. And while we initially conceived of this book project in early 1998, at the annual meeting of the American Folklore Society in Memphis, Tennessee in October 1999 (almost two years later) I noted that the general mood within the discipline has taken a positive turn. More folklorists are getting jobs in the academy. Several university folklore programs are rising in prominence, even as other long-established folklore programs in the country are losing their position as strong centers of the discipline. Folklorists head both the National Endowment for the Arts and for the Humanities. And finally, public sector programming across the continent continues to be strong, providing numerous job opportunities for emerging Ph.D.s. I am happy then that this issue is not just an attempt to be a glimmer of hope in a vast pool of despair, but is instead one more indication that the discipline of folklore is vibrantly alive.

This issue is also a response to a criticism sometimes levied against folklorists that we are not theoretical, or that we merely adopt theory from other disciplines and simply apply it to our materials. The articles in this issue should make it evident that we are theoretical; we not only have theories emerged from within our discipline, but in drawing from those originally formulated by non-folklorists; we engage the tenets of theoretical perspectives, using what is useful, challenging weaknesses, building upon concepts, ultimately contributing to further development and use across disciplines. In fact, I think that one of folklore's greatest strengths is the willingness of many folklorists to cross disciplinary boundaries. If scholars are interested to learn how humans exist in their social and physical worlds, they should necessarily use all resources available to them. A folklorist studying how the arts feature strategically in a nationalist movement can only gain through reading what political scientists say about the organization of that same movement. Conversely, the political scientist would gain from learning about the complexities of artistic expressions and the ways they can be manipulated in political movements. By engaging in ideas and theories generated by scholars in related fields, folklorists can analyze the materials we study with more depth, producing greater understanding than we would if we ignored what others have previously posited.

Each article in this issue covers one theoretical perspective. Authors were asked to introduce some of the main tenets of the theory, discuss folklorists' engagement with it, provide some critique, and give key bibliographic information. The theoretical areas covered are structuralism,

feminism, public folklore, event analysis, globalization, Peircean semiotic, ethnopoetics, cultural studies, behavioral approaches to the study of folklore, and Bakhtinian dialogism. Though this is only a smattering of the original submissions, each article provides a solid introduction to a theory along with a useful bibliography for the reader who wants to know more.

In this issue of *Folklore Forum*, we also remember the passing of Dr. Warren E. Roberts, a person of vital importance here at the Folklore Institute. We will all miss him.

Lisa M. Gilman