

INTRODUCTION

In Volume 4, numbers 1-2, the Folklore Forum ran a brief article about the May 22-23, 1971 meeting on applied folklore held at Point Park College in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. At that time the Forum stated that it hoped to be able to publish some of the papers from that conference. At last, after some delay, selected papers are now ready for publication.

It should be noted, first of all, that with the exception of Professor Richard M. Dorson's article, none of the included papers were originally intended to be published. The editors of the Forum approached Professor Robert Byington, chairman and organizer of the Pittsburgh conference, asking permission to publish some papers. With his approval, Professor Kenneth Clarke made available to us transcripts of tape recordings made the first day of the meeting. Copies of the transcribed statement of each speaker's paper we elected to publish were then forwarded to the speakers for their approval. Each corrected their statements and returned them to us. Professor Henry Glassie chose to substantially re-write his original statement, and to get some outside help -- thus the co-authorship. We print these final papers, then, not as articles, but as a part of a dialogue, a thinking aloud, about applied folklore.*

In order to present a more balanced picture of the position of applied folklore in academic circles, the editors gladly accepted an article especially written for this special issue of the Folklore Forum. It was Professor Dorson who was most vocal in his opposition to applied folklore at the Pittsburgh conference, and with him, the opposing forces have a firm voice.

Since the Pittsburgh meeting in May, the American Folklore Society met in Washington, in November. At the business meeting, the proposal for a center for applied folklore was read at the Saturday business meeting. With a vote of 38-45 (of that I stand to be corrected), the proposal was tabled and no action was taken on it by the AFS. However, the proponents of applied folklore will have a session dealing with the subject at the next AFS meeting in November, in Austin, Texas.

The problem of applied folklore had been alluded to before in the Folklore Forum. Thomas A. Green ["One Mile in Another Man's Moccasins," Perspectives on Folklore and Education, Folklore Forum, Bibliographic and Special Studies, No. 2 (May 1969), pp. 50-53] spoke about the fact that education "has attempted little or no correlation with life outside of the classroom." He concluded: "The flexibility of items of folk culture is proven by its continued existence. Folklore, then, may be just the tool that is needed for connecting the world of the book to the world of the student." Folklore is very relevant; it studies the folk now, the lore found even in the urban centers. Witness the recent symposium on urban folklore, The Urban Experience and Folk Tradition, JAF 83 (1970): ix, 115-270.

It is easy for the folklorist to say that his study is relevant. Relevancy suggests that the matter under study should reflect an interest in the present state of affairs. In the same way, however, sociology, linguistics, geography, computer work, or courses in criminal forensics may all quite correctly be labeled relevant. In fact there are probably few

academicians who would be willing to write off their special interests as being irrelevant.

There is, it seems to me, a more important meaning to the word "relevant." It's the involvement connotation of the word. Such a nuance was suggested in Ellen Stekert's foreword to the JAF symposium. The meetings were "attended by a number of scholars interested in the ways the urban experience affects folk tradition and in avenues through which folklore studies might contribute to the understanding and solution of urban problems." (P. iii.).

That "folklore studies might contribute to the understanding...of urban problems" is in itself a form of applied folklore. Traditionally one of the goals of education has been to affect behavior, hopefully for the better. This may be what Alan Dundes was referring to when he wrote in a recent article of ethnic slurs: "I would maintain therefore that an open discussion of the slurs and an objective analysis of the stereotypes contained therein could do no harm and might possibly do a great deal of good in fighting bigotry and prejudice. Only by knowing and recognizing folk stereotypes can children be taught to guard against them so that they may have a better chance of succeeding in judging individuals on an individual basis." [Alan Dundes, "A Study of Ethnic Slurs: The Jew and the Polack in the United States," JAF 84 (1971): 203.]

This is applied folklore in the classroom. What about in the field, in the area where the folklorist probes for his material? The question is simply: Does the folklorist have the responsibility, if he chooses to assume it, to use his full resources as a folklorist to aid his fellow men? The folklorist often finds himself in unique situations in which his knowledge of folklore and the operations of traditions within the community can be used for the benefit of society. The papers in this Folklore Forum special study present proof of that.

The question is, then, how far should the folklorist become "involved." There is no answer for this, since the folklorist may choose to move entirely out of folklore, remain within the paradigm and become involved with social improvement, or simply to remain only academically concerned in the folk and folklore. The choice is his to make.

There is a movement within the American Folklore Society to obtain the Society's support for a Center for Applied Folklore. The first article by Professor Richard Bauman explains the purpose of the center. If one reads it carefully, it is obvious that the supporters of the center are not radicals within the AFS. Their aims are modest and humane. They are simply asking that the Society support the Center for Applied Folklore as a place where folklorists interested in applying folklore might have contact with other folklorists and persons or organizations in other fields who are working towards solutions of common problems.

Here, then, is the first published collection of ideas by folklorists solely concerned with ramifications of applied folklore. It is hoped that the papers included in this special issue of the Forum will help bring into focus what applied folklore is all about, how it might function in real situations, and what the opposing views of it are.

Dick Sweterlitsch
Indiana University

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