

# OPEN FORUM

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In the past *Folklore Forum* has been a site where current issues, ideologies, theories, and methodologies in Folkloristics were deliberated, debated, and discussed. It is our intent in this issue of *Forum* to re-establish such a dialogue in “Open Forum.” As mentioned in this issue’s “Letter from the Editors,” the editors of the first issue of *Forum* pointed out that this discussion could most effectively take place over a cup of coffee, but that the written medium enables a broader audience to participate. In the same spirit of the founding editors we sincerely hope to encourage the type of intimate, critical, and passionate conversation that occurs among friends and colleagues sharing a drink, in which the folklore community at large will participate.

The two essays in this issue address the appeal of Folkloristics from opposing perspectives. Gregory Hansen suggests a rethinking of the “lore” of folklore while Natalie Underberg celebrates the diversity of the discipline. Hansen argues that the decentering of Folkloristics is precisely what has led to the current crisis. The end of Folkloristics began, he claims, with the broadening of the stuff we study. Underberg, on the other hand, lauds the diversity and lack of a distinguishable center in Folkloristics. It is the diversity of folklore materials and scholarship that she believes gives Folkloristics its power and appeal.

While in this respect Underberg’s and Hansen’s essays stand in direct opposition to each other, they agree ultimately on what Folkloristics concerns: human creativity and expression. Hansen asserts that Folkloristics’ center is based on humane inquiry into the merger of community, creativity, and traditions. Underberg also associates folklore with a “humane” way to think about humans and their “creative,” “intentional,” and “intelligent” traditions. Ultimately, even Stephen Olbrys’s essay concludes, after a long, winding walk through the woods that is perhaps more reminiscent of forty years in the desert—someone remind me, did Moses ever make it to the Promised Land?—with a mission statement by Dell Hymes. Hymes states that the discipline of Folkloristics prizes the recognition that beauty, form, and meaningful expression may arise wherever people have a chance to share what they enjoy or must endure. We, as folklorists, see that recognition as the way to understand a fundamental aspect of human nature and human life.

We hope the discussions of Hansen and Underberg and the conversation between Olbrys and Troy Boyer mark the renewal of a serious, informal, and friendly dialogue. We encourage your responses to the essays published in this issue, as well as your ideas and perspectives on other pertinent issues in Folkloristics.

*Matt Bradley*