

• *Editor's Introduction* •

JOHN E. PRICE
Pennsylvania State University

"Push the envelope; watch it bend."
M. J. Keenan, *Lateralus* (2001)

Among the larger world of folklore scholars and enthusiasts, *New Directions in Folklore* serves a distinct role. We are, if you'll forgive the conceit, tasked with representing the leading edge of the field. Our community of editors, contributors, and readers actively seek out and engage with research topics in new ways, from new angles, and often bring to the forefront questions and methodologies that have yet to be explored by the field at-large. Proudly, *New Directions in Folklore* has been an outlet for innovative studies on topics ranging from dark humor in the wake of terrorism, to performative popular culture. In addition, *NDiF* continues to serve as a home for the study of digital folklife and, over the years, has featured some of the more influential voices in that emerging genre. The journal's history may be shorter than others, but it has been spent pushing the field of folk studies forward. I am happy to report to you that this issue continues that legacy.

In many ways, Volume 16.1 represents the best of what a venue like *New Directions in Folklore* can offer the field. The authors are a diverse array of professors, scholars, and students, tackling topics that show the spectrum of what makes folkloristics a valuable and fun discipline. In his research note, "Alleviating Folkloristics' Theory Anxiety: What Can

Folklorists Learn from Conceptualizations of Tradition in Anthropology of Islam?," Ehsan Estiri addresses the concept of "traditionalization" and how it can be modernized and reconceptualized through an interdisciplinary dialogue. Vanessa Stevens and Jeffrey A. Tolbert have authored a remarkable analysis, "Beyond Metaphorical Spectrality: For New Paranormal Geographies," that approaches the study of paranormal phenomenon in a way that will undoubtedly have a lasting impact on the field. "Across the Star Wars Universe: A Journey into the World of the Italian Star Wars Fandom" is an enlightening look at the performance of self in this fan community, and the authors, Giada Bastanzi and Andrea Franceschetti, have wrangled with the complicated dynamic between corporate authority and vernacular identity. Both Stevens and Tolbert, and Bastanzi and Franceschetti have made indelible contributions to the field of folk studies, and speaking for myself, I cannot wait for you to read their articles.

Adding to our library of book reviews is Jared L. Schmidt's review of *If You Don't Laugh You'll Cry: The Occupational Humor of White Wisconsin Prison Workers*, by Claire Schmidt, and Annamarie O'Brien's review of Ian Brodie's *A Vulgar Art: A New Approach to Stand-Up Comedy*. Both books embrace the dynamic approaches to the field that we celebrate and encourage at *New Directions in Folklore*. Additionally, for the benefit of our journal readers and section members, I have included a "State of the Section" report that highlights the hard work of our section members and leadership, and outlines the projects and initiatives that will take us into the coming year.

This is my first volume of NDiF as editor-in-chief, and in many ways I have it the easiest of all my predecessors. I am inheriting a journal that is established, respected, and popular. Our pool of contributors grows with each issue and our community is a healthy, vibrant one. I want to express my thanks to David Puglia and Trevor Blank for their leadership and wisdom over the past years (including last-minute texts and phone calls when I can't access the online publishing system). I also want to express my thanks to Review Editor Jared Schmidt, who is possibly the most enthusiastic and tireless person on the team. The talent and intelligence of our contributors continues to impress me on a regular basis, as does the professionalism of the entire editorial board. Of course, all of these efforts are ultimately for you, the reader, and it is to you that we are beholden. The articles and notes published in *New Directions in Folklore* are only one part of the larger conversation, so let's, all of us, keep talking, thinking, and writing. Who knows, we may just go where no one's been.

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