Review Essay: *Advancing Folkloristics*

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Advancing Folkloristics. Edited by Jesse A. Fivecoate, Kristina Downs, and Meredith A. E. McGriff. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021. xi + 228 pp. Bibliography, index.

Advancing Folkloristics is a volume of fourteen chapters drawn from or stimulated by presentations at the "Conference on the Future of American Folkloristics" held in Bloomington, Indiana in May 2017 and organized, in the main, by the editors of this volume. The chapters are sandwiched between a Foreword by Margaret A. Mills, Professor Emerita at Ohio State University, Columbus, and an Afterword by Norma E. Cantú, Distinguished Professor of the Humanities at Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas. There is also an introduction by the editors (1-8). The overarching concerns of the volume are the advancement of the careers of folklorists, increasing the visibility of folklore as a field, strengthening the position of folkloristics with the academy, and the development of folklore theory (which, presumably, will serve to contribute to all the other enumerated endeavors).

The bulk of the chapters describe or meditate on practical and situational problems that academic and public-sector folklorists encounter, and some offer advice as to their resolution. Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby ("Expanding the Territory," 48-58) would like to see more folkloric work in Russia, particularly in Siberia. The field has always welcomed the expansion of the range and variety of cultural groups that are the objects of study. Part of the problem, as she notes, is the language training of undergraduate students. Few students emerge from college having acquired the requisite skills to conduct field or library research in another language. Students who do have the skills do not, for the most part, learn them at university. They are raised in families and communities in which the language is spoken, and cultural knowledge is an everyday affair. In other words, the study of folklore in graduate school is often the culmination of a personal identity project. Swedish-Americans study Swedes in Sweden or, more likely, other Swedish Americans. (An exception here might be those who acquired their language skills in the Peace Corps or in NGOs and who then return to the university to acquire their disciplinary training before returning to the field.) What is rarely seen in folkloristics, however, is the choice of a cultural group or site for study because it is particularly suited to address a theoretical question. For example, Milman Parry and Albert Lord took themselves to Yugoslavia not because they identified with Croatians, Serbs, Bosnians, or Albanians, but because epic singing could still be found there; its study, they thought, might contribute to resolving questions about the nature and composition of the Homeric epics. I think that choosing groups, field sites, and field situations because they are suited to answering theoretical questions would be conducive to advancing the field of folkloristics in a way that identity projects will not.

Betty J. Belanus, in "Folklorists as Curators: Exploring the Four Cs" (125-140), describes the strategies basic to the successful curation of a public folklore event such as the annual Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, D.C. The four Cs are *collaboration* with the members of the communities featured; putting the objects and performances in some kind of cultural or historical *context*; making a meaningful *connection* with the intended audience; and *connoisseurship*, basically deciding what and how the objects are to be presented. Some folklorists, but not Belanus, would rather distance themselves from this task—leaving it entirely for the individual communities to decide—although one wonders how that responsibility can be entirely ignored. After all, it is the folklorist who understands the nature of the festival and something of the audiences to whom the objects and performances are directed. That, in part, is what collaboration and communication is about.

Starting from Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's essay "Mistaken Dichotomies," which asks folklorists to transcend the distinction between academic and public-sector folklore, Gregory Hansen ("Infusing Public Folklore Work into Academe: Experiencing the In-Between," 111-123) goes on to

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register finer differences between public-sector folklore, public folklore, applied folklore, and heritage studies. He has infused all these kinds of folklore work into his own academic curricula as a university professor (112). How much this work will benefit a folklorist's career and establish a positive standing for the field will depend on how much an academic department and university administration value community outreach. While I know that much has changed in the university since I was teaching, I would think that it has not changed so much as to make university service and community outreach the sine qua non for tenure, promotion, and salary augmentation. Published scholarship, I suspect, still counts—mightily.

I have never been convinced by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's "Mistaken Dichotomies" essay (Oring 2012 [2006]:284-305). I maintain that there are serious differences between the work that academic and public folklorists of all stripes do. This is not to say that public folklore cannot be brought into a university class, curriculum, or environment. The difference between the two approaches, however, revolves around the difference between the following questions: "What do the folk have to say about their practices and beliefs," and "Why do the folk say what they do about their practices and beliefs"? The folk, whoever they may be, may have a lot of interesting things to say in response to the first question; they may have little or nothing to say about the second. The second is a question directed to the academic, the student of folklore, not its practitioners. As effortlessly as we may behave in the everyday world, we seldom can give an in-depth and analytic account of the what and the why of what we are doing. A fish may spend its entire life in water but does not know that water is made up of molecules that are one part oxygen and two parts hydrogen.

The tasks of the academic and the various public folklorists do significantly overlap, however. A good part of the efforts of both are invested in pedagogy. The academic teaches in a university classroom and writes for a community of scholars. The public folklorist teaches in museums, from festival stages, at awards programs, on radio and in television productions, through public lectures, and in designing enrichments for K-12 classrooms. The audiences are different and, hopefully, the level, breadth, depth, and emphases of the presentations differ as well. The public folklorist is often oriented toward artistic demonstration and performance in the hope of stimulating appreciation. The academic folklorist is more focused on comparison, analysis, interpretation, and explanation. Naturally, there are areas of crossover between the two, but it is the rare public folklorist who is called on to expound on the differences between the structuralism of Vladimir Propp and Claude Lévi-Strauss. (Not that they couldn't, but that is not what they are called on to do.) They are called on to present traditions and display them in the best possible light. The academic folklorist has no such mandate (despite the fact that many may do just that).

Andrea Kitta, Lynne S. McNeil, and Trevor Blank ("Talking Folklore: Getting Others to Take the Discipline of Folklore Seriously while Remaining a Serious Folklorist," 202-215) want to "reconcile public and lay understandings of folklore with professional ones." While they have some reasonable suggestions for communicating with the public, the question is whether advancing folkloristics depends on such communication. (For some reason, the authors never found their way to the essays by Robin Evanchuk and Judith Haut in "Taking Stock: Current Problems and Future Prospects in American Folklore Studies," which address the same subject [Georges 1991].) Most academic folklorists have had the experience of a newspaper, radio, or television interview about Christmas, Halloween, or Valentine's Day. Many have participated in television programs on urban legends, jokes, and superstitions. But is this the area in which folklorists wish to invest their limited capital? In fact, over the years, folklorists have educated tens of thousands of students in what the field is really about. Has that training redounded to the benefit of the field? I believe that there will not be a serious field of folkloristics unless graduate education in folklore endures. Some major programs have already died, and those that remain may be at their last gasps. If there are no Ph.D. degrees in folklore, there will be no folklorists and no folkloristics. Anyone who wants to will be able to call themselves a folklorist (as already happens and, amazingly, often with the encouragement of degreed folklorists). Reaching out to the public will in no way change this trajectory. Unless the field can gain the respect of other fields in the academy, unless folklore works

prove to be *influential*, and not merely occasionally cited by scholars in other fields, unless the intellectual power of the discipline is recognized by university administrators, folkloristics has no future. *Folklore* as a word and as a field—even if poorly understood—already possesses a certain cachet for the general public. But that attractiveness has not translated into any improvement in the status of folklore in the academy. Nor do the authors identify any mechanisms by which that translation could likely be effected.

These authors suggest that every folklorist should have a one-sentence definition of the field like "artistic communication in small groups" or "vernacular expression in everyday life" (207). I would think such definitions are more likely to baffle than illuminate. The first is too dissonant with what the public thinks they know, and the term *vernacular* is more recondite than *folklore* itself. Curiously, the authors don't provide a simple definition, possibly because they do not want to legislate to folklorists how they should define the field. But isn't that the problem? Do folklorists define and characterize the field so differently from one another that they cannot abide a single and concise definition? If so, the inability to characterize the field and define its goals succinctly may be symptomatic of folklore's greater problem. The work that chemists do is vastly more complicated and at least as varied as folkloristics, but a one-sentence characterization of chemistry would be relatively easy. The reason the public and our colleagues in other disciplines do not grasp what folkloristics is about is that we do not seem to entirely grasp it ourselves.

Anika Wilson ("The Folkloristic Diaspora: On Being a Folklorist in a Black Studies Department," 165-178) describes the experience of a lone folklorist trained in a marginalized discipline and employed in a marginalized area of study. (I would think that all area studies departments and programs are probably marginalized in universities to some degree—not least because they are not disciplines.) But area studies departments, whether Black Studies, American Studies, Middle Eastern Studies, Asian Studies, East European Studies, or whatever, would seem an ideal location for any solitary folklorist with the requisite grounding in that specific cultural area. The folklorist can round out the course offerings in history, sociology, literature, and politics with both broad surveys and close considerations of the beliefs, arts, and traditional practices of those folk who compose the greatest part of the population of said study areas. It seems to me that the main danger for the solitary folklorist is in an area studies *program* rather than a *department*. In a program, one's future often depends on evaluation, not by other faculty in the program, but by faculty in history, literature, or sociology—that is, the department to which the folklorist was officially appointed. Those faculty may prefer, when the time comes, to replace a folklorist with another historian, literary critic, or sociologist. Another problem is that programs are easier for administrators to dissolve than departments.

Wanda G. Addison ("Standing with Others: Folklorists in the Midst of Home," 179-187) also reflects on being a solitary folklorist (in her case, in a Department of English) and the perennial difficulties in communicating the field of folklore to fellow faculty. She is certainly right that the best way to communicate is to "foreground … [her] folkloristic scholarship" (181). Assuming that folklorists can actually get their colleagues to read their scholarship, something over which they have little control without making utter nuisances of themselves, they must be sure that they foreground their most well-crafted and insightful scholarship, something over which they do have some control. She recognizes the advantages that folklorists have (over scholars of nineteenth-century English literature, let's say) in promoting university engagement with local communities. She also encourages folklorists to think about pursuing administrative positions in order to pave the way for others (181), something long proclaimed by folklorist Ronald Baker, who chaired the English department at Indiana State University for a quarter of a century. During his tenure, he was able to establish a folklore minor, an archive, host an annual folklore meeting, and employ three folklorists with Ph.D.'s. The problem is that these were largely individual and not structural accomplishments.

Phyllis M. May-Machunda ("Culturally Conscious Collaborations at the Nexus of Folklore, Education, and Social Justice: Lessons and Questions for Folkloristic Praxis," 141-153) reports on a workshop she facilitated for Minnesota schoolteachers. The critical lesson presented to the teachers was that to serve their students well, they would have to "learn about their experiences and traditions" (142). While knowing one's students better might be expected to have a beneficial effect on educational outcomes, when the population to be educated includes Native Americans, African Americans, Latinx, immigrants, refugees, as well as descendants of the Nordic immigrants who settled the area in the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century, one wonders where the time could be found to teach reading, writing, mathematics, history, civics (if that is still taught anywhere), music, art, and physical education. The further expectation that schools pick up the slack for language and cultural loss in some of these communities seems too much to ask. Cultural components can be injected into research and writing assignments, perhaps even in music and art assignments, and into some history lessons, although a good deal of this may look like tokenism. Native languages and cultures will not be restored by anything done in the public-school classroom. If languages and cultural practices are not maintained at home and in home communities, and assiduously maintained, they will be lost (except perhaps in certain "survivals"). What percentage of American students today can speak the languages of their great grandparents of whatever origin (unless that language was English, or perhaps, Spanish)? Furthermore, May-Machunda notes that all these communities insist that the children's languages and knowledge must be respected and validated in the school environment. While I can imagine no occasions in the classroom for disrespecting languages or traditions, I cannot see how meaningful validation is likely to be possible for all groups. And if it is not possible for all, should it be attempted for any?

May-Machunda faults schools for inculcating Western knowledge and its sense of superiority in relation to other knowledge systems (143). The question of whether Western knowledge is superior in some absolute sense is best left to another day and is largely beside the point in this discussion. Students being educated in U.S. public schools are going to grow up to live and find work in a Western society. Not being able to speak, read, and write English effectively; do math; be exposed to the principles and products of scientific inquiry; know something of history and literature; and understand some of the workings of American government and the rights and obligations of citizenship would prove to be a social, economic, political, and even legal liability.

Too much is already demanded of teachers in the K-12 classroom. They are not financially compensated for the work they do, and they often lack the support needed to do their work effectively. Of course, there are no grounds for disdaining or degrading the cultures of school children, but insisting they be actively affirmed seems like a step too far. There are good reasons that K-12 teachers are leaving the profession in droves. Should another responsibility be added to the pile? Those who would recommend educational policy should probably do a year of fieldwork teaching in a K-12 classroom. Then they might be in a position to show whether "more equitable [cultural] content and perspectives … and knowledge about other ways of knowing" (144) significantly improved the English reading, writing, and mathematics scores (yes, scores) of their charges.

There is something that I might call the "Folklorist's Paradox" about which many folklorists are oblivious. (Or perhaps they have simply repressed it.) Any alert sociologist could easily point out that the forces that work most effectively in the maintenance of a community's language, beliefs, and traditional practices are neglect, isolation, stigmatization, and outright discrimination. All these serve to strengthen a community's solidarity and the preservation of its way of life. No folklorist would or could recommend these as a course of action. Folklorists who want to aid in the maintenance of a community's culture can only single out pieces of that culture, excise them, frame them, and exhibit them—in museums, in journal articles, on festival stages, or in teaching modules—and then return those pieces to the community and to onlookers, not as a mode of life, but as symbols of group identity. (As the witty and acerbic Viennese critic Karl Krauss observed more than a century ago, "*Das gegenteil von 'gut' ist 'gut gemeint.*'" ["The

opposite of 'good' is 'good intentions'"].) There is no escaping the paradox except by refusing to engage; that is, by not doing the job that the folklorist has signed up to do.

Anthony Guest-Scott ("The Power of Folkloristics at the Intersection of Affect, Narrative and Performance in the College Classroom," 154-164) is an Academic Coordinator for the Student Academic Learning Center at Indiana University, Bloomington. He received his Ph.D. in Folklore and Ethnomusicology from IU. His chapter is concerned with student learning, and consequently, university teaching. His interests are not directed to the teaching of folklore, but to what trained folklorists can bring to the effective teaching of any and everything. He proposes that meaning is not the product of texts; it is a product of texts *in experience*" (155). What students should get in a class is not a bunch of texts or even a list of ideas, but an experience. Learning demands engagement and teachers need to find out what matters to students. I am not quite sure exactly how this is to be accomplished, short of doing in-depth interviewing with each student. Folklorists will readily recognize some of the strategies for successful learning that Guest-Scott recommends because they play so much a part in their own research and writing: the use of narrative, the arousal of emotion, and performance. For example, he proposes that reading should be a conversation. For this reason, I always encouraged students to react to what they were reading by writing in the margins of their books (if the copy of the book was their own and not the library's). Questions, disagreements, references to other books, imprecations, and witty retorts were all welcome. Folklorists do often tell stories, stories about how they got into the field of folklore, stories of their own fieldwork successes and failures, and of course, stories told by the people they study. Allowing students to be experts some of the time, which Guest-Scott recommends, is realized in fieldwork-based projects that folklorists almost always assign. While I would hope that all folklorists would recognize that classroom teaching is a performance (whether they like it or not), I am unsure that even the most performance-centered folklorists would know how to translate their ethnographic studies into effective pedagogical techniques. To observe and interview good storytellers does not necessarily make one a good storyteller. The narratives of various people that we present in class can certainly arouse emotion. But the key pedagogical lesson, it seems to me, is to analyze how they arouse emotion, to intellectualize it, and at some important level, to become wary of it.

Perhaps the most immediately practical chapter in the volume is by Debra Shutika ("Disruptive Folklore," 188-201). The title does not adequately convey what the chapter is actually about. It is an effort to direct graduate students and newly hired faculty to think proactively about their futures in higher education. Everyone should read this chapter, including senior faculty who inevitably are called on to mentor graduate students and new hires. Recognizing changes to the university environment over the past twenty-odd years, Shutika writes about networking, leadership, professionalization, and communication. Sometimes these terms can sound abstract and empty, but her discussion is clear, concrete, and valuable.

Soilmar Otero's "Yamayá's Fury: Residual Flows, Ecological Disaster, and Folklore Futures" (98-110) is the only chapter rooted in any kind of ethnographic work. It begins with a report of a convocation of Ifa priests in Havana at the end of 2016 to divine the sign for the coming year. This divination indicated that Ôgun and Yemayá would be overseeing that year's events. Yemayá is a guardian of the sea, and the wife of the war god Ôgun. (She also has been adopted as a patron by LBGTQIA+ communities.) These deities, it seems, were not happy with the way things were going, and the environment itself was registering their displeasure through flooding. They also issued warnings and directives about attention to the environment and interpersonal moral behavior (101). (Afro-Latinx communities in the United States registered Yemayá's anger as provoked "by the silencing of their experiences of racial, sexual, and environmental violence" [100]). That deities might be angry and wreak their vengeance on humankind in a specific environmental response is an old idea. Otero regards rituals and their transcriptions as permeated with implicit and explicit suggestions for understanding ecological phenomena, gender, and temporality. (Would she see interpretations of biblical texts, whether inspired or pedantic, in the same way?) My ability to follow the discussion wanes, however, as Otero refers to stories as "residual flows"

(100), references Donna Haraways's notions of "multi-species storytelling" and "odd-kin" (101), and Édouard Glissant's "transphysical poetics" (103) to help navigate the stories of "Yemayá's angry and healing waters" (103-104). These references are not explained. She assumes that the reader has previous access to and understanding of them. I did not. If, as Otero claims, academic study invariably renders the lessons of the spirits illegible and unintelligible (105), I do not see how this kind of discourse renders the lessons of the spirits legible and intelligible to academic study.

Andrea Kitta's chapter ("'An Epidemic of Meanings': The Tenuous Nature of Public Intellectualism, Reflexivity, and Belief Scholarship," 35-47) is not rooted in fieldwork description but is a personal (and not so personal) meditation on the doing of fieldwork. Her central question is a fieldworkers' own beliefs, and what happens when they "run counter to the beliefs of their participants" (35). In many cases, this is not a big problem. Kitta did not have trouble in her studies of supernatural beliefs because they "caused very little harm" (38). But in her studies of anti-vaccination beliefs, outcomes could be serious. What happens when you are in a conversation with someone whose beliefs engender behaviors that may kill them or imperil the lives of others? (Clinical psychologists are forbidden by law to divulge patient information *unless* it specifically indicates a patient's likelihood to do harm to themselves or to others, in which case they are required to report the information.) Should the folklorist's own beliefs remain hidden so as not to terminate the conversation before it starts? How much can and should the folklorist's beliefs intrude into the discussion? Although Kitta is in favor of vaccination, she is fully aware of the downside of reflexive acquiescence to directives emanating from the medical system and its personnel. The opioid epidemic has been one of those downsides. Kitta further meditates on the problem of doing fieldwork with one's family and in one's home community, where those beliefs may no longer align with the folklorist's own. These are all good questions, although folklorists are unlikely to answer them the same way.

Jesse A. Fivecoate, Kristina Downs, and Meredith A. E. McGriff—the editors of the volume—offer their own take on advancing the field ("The Politics of Trivialization," 59-76). I was pleased to see reference to my own rarely cited "Theorizing Trivia: A Thought Experiment" (Oring 2012 [1996]:317-321), although I wish they had read that piece to its very end. I posited that the view of folklore as a collection of trivia was a conceptual problem rooted in the history of the field that potentially could be ameliorated by sound intellectual and practical moves. They prefer instead to see the trivialization of folklore as a political act to which the response should be counter-trivialization, a reciprocal political act. I suppose that the trivialization of folklore is political in the sense that something deemed trivial is diminished in its claims for attention, in the acknowledgment of its power to explain, and, consequently, in its intellectual capital. But efforts at counter-trivialization seem entirely rhetorical. Citing Diane Goldstein and John Roberts, the authors assert that folklorists have not made the case for their unique identity or their "unique" skills in the study of the human condition (I have been a folklorist for some sixty years, and I would like to see a list of what those unique skills are). Folklorists, they claim, also have an "intimate understanding" of genre, transmission, and tradition. I would suggest that folklorists are "sensitive" to genre, transmission, and tradition, although I have questioned their concept of tradition elsewhere [Oring 2012:220-239].They also assert that folklorists have a "keen understanding" of the relationship between lay and expert knowledge. (What is that understanding?) All these claims of the "keenness," "uniqueness," and "intimacy" of folkloristic understandings should be delineated and discussed. The idea that the study of performance "opens our eyes to *meaning* and *significance*" (66) would be news to the likes of Alan Dundes, who urged folklorists to interpret the meaning of folklore back in 1965 before there was a performance perspective, and Dundes, in any event, never studied a performance in his life. And the notion that we study individuals as individuals is news to me. Stressed repeatedly in the volume is the notion that folklorists focus on marginalized *communities*. How would a study of individuals prove productive without a firm grounding in the literature of psychology? Of what value is the notion of agency (68) if it serves only to explain that people will do whatever it is that they want to do? In any event, a performance perspective does not stem from an encounter with an individual

but with someone enacting a role—the role of performer. Audience studies, which I would presume to be critical to the study of performance, are almost entirely absent in the folklore literature.

The editors state that folkloristics should work to dismantle "detrimental theories and structures" that are the products of nationalism, colonialism, racism, and the Enlightenment's emphasis on rationality. Furthermore, folklorists must acknowledge the racial bias of our forebears and acknowledge those people of color excluded from the folklore canon. I am not sure what the folklore canon is, whose work is in it, or who might have canonized those works, but the examples of those they claim to have been excluded—Zora Neale Hurston, Jovita González, Américo Paredes, Gladys-Marie Fry, John W, Roberts—are all people, except for González, whose work I, and many of my classmates, read and assigned in the course of our folklore training and careers. Zora Neal Hurston's novels are, of course, better known than all the rest of folkloristic work put together. Américo Paredes was editor of *JAF*, the most consequential position in the American Folklore Society. In fact, he solicited my first publication in that journal. I don't even know what it means to say, as the authors do, that Asian-American folklorists have been excluded from the "definition of American folklore" (68). Who exactly has been included in the "definition" of American folklore, how, and why? I don't know of any group whose folklore has been *excluded* from publication in our books and journals because of prejudice against said group. Where are the examples? Tajik folklore does not seem to have made its way into American folklore journals until fairly recently, but is that to say Tajiks were excluded?

More to the point is whether dismantling past theories and structures is really what the field of folklore is or should be all about. Absent in any of these directives is the description, analysis, and elucidation of actual folklore. The editors point instead to the study of folklorists, folklore institutions, and the theories of folklore study. It is hard to see how these will advance the field. There is no sense of inquiry. Nothing is to be discovered. The only question is what in particular is to be dismantled or who is to be purged. I sense the oncoming folkloristic equivalent of Mao's cadres during the Cultural Revolution.

If there is a political question that should be addressed somewhere along the way, it is not trivialization, but who gets to be an "oppressed" or "marginalized" community, and how. Who applies these terms and who claims them? Is it the folklorist who employs them? Are these the terms that community members use to present themselves to the outside world or to themselves? Does some benefit accrue to the folklorist in applying such terms; is there some material or moral advantage in claiming to study and represent the "oppressed" or the "marginalized?"

Cory W. Thorne and Guillermo De Los Reyes ("The Folklorization of Queer Theory: Public Spaces, Pride, and Gay Neoliberalism," 77-97) ask folkloristics to adopt queer theory. Queer theory is a radically constructivist theory that holds categories of sex, sexuality, and gender to be entirely social and cultural constructions (78). Heteronormativity is the social and psychological conditioning of individuals to identify with and act according to the roles attached to a single gender (80). The marginalization and persecution of those who do not accept or accede to this absolute categorization is the result. Implicit in this theory is the notion that the gender fluid somehow managed to escape enclosure within one of these constructed and oppressive categories (although there is no discussion of how they managed it). The upshot would seem to be that it is the gender fluid who are truly liberated, while the cisgendered are slaves to the social and cultural system and waiting, perhaps, for the opportunity to breathe free.

To demonstrate that the category of gender is constructed, Thorne and De Los Reyes cite Margaret Mead's book *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (1963), which describes three New Guinea peoples among whom she did fieldwork: the Arapesh, Tchambuli, and Mundugamor. Among the Arapesh, the behaviors and dispositions of both men and women might be characterized in our terms as "maternal," while both Mundugamor men and women are aggressive and fierce. Tchambuli men are preoccupied with their hairdos and costumes, the beauty of the masks in their possession, their skill in

flute playing, and the elegant style of their ritual performances. Tchambuli women enjoy the performances of the men who act in ways we might describe as feminine. Gender-role behavior and the temperament associated with those roles are clearly variable and differ significantly from those we expect from men and women in our own society. But Mead is only addressing gender roles. She does not suggest that sexual orientation and gender identity are culturally conditioned. The book does not speak to that issue. As far as we know from Mead's research, the men in all three societies think of themselves as men, the women as women, and the men are attracted to women and the women to men.

Queer theory, it seems, rules out a priori genetics, fetal environment, endocrinology, or brain physiology and chemistry in considerations of sexual orientation and gender identity. Consequently, what queer theory offers are not statements about how the world works which are to be tested with empirical evidence, but queer axioms: statements about the world that need no test because they are self-evidently true. Queer theory is not so much a search for understanding as it is an ideological program crafted to create a world as its adherents wish it to be.

Queer theorists want to recruit folkloristics and researchers in other disciplines to the critique of heteronormativity. Queer theory "needs to be better guided by ethnography" (81), although it is not clear why. Some folklorists will undoubtedly enlist. But folkloristics as a field needs to be wary of *any* theory or activist agenda that directs its inquiries to a single problem and to a problem with an end result that has already been determined.

Kay Turner ("Deep Folklore/Queer Folkloristics," 11-34) suggests that we recognize and pursue *deep folklore*, a folklore that is (quoted here with elisions) "a riff, a refrain, a gut feeling and reaction; a folklore that is fierce, takes pride in being esoteric, evasive, prefers its own meanings [although I am not sure what that means], mines mysteries, feeds on excesses and enchantments, and dances late into the night [I am not sure what that means either]." It sounds like heady stuff. But is it a conception of a field that is likely to go anywhere within an academic framework? Will such a folkloristics be able to communicate to sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, economists, political scientists, and policymakers, or is it a conception that might resonate only with some creative artists, a few novelists, and those in the field of Dionysian studies?

Turner, like Thorne and De Los Reyes, would welcome queer theory into folkloristics (13), but she is reaching for more—a queer folkloristics: a folkloristics that rejects essentialism, purity, and boundaries, and embraces difference, messiness, danger, desire, intersectionality, and transgression. Folklorists "study and analyze, worship and adore … the bricoleur, the folk saint, the orisha, the ghost, the trickster, and the witch" (15). Folklorists have long studied such figures. I don't know that they have ever worshiped or adored them or that they should. *Witch* was a term employed by anthropologists to label those who were believed to stand in opposition to society and all those in it. The emotion the figure aroused was not wonder but fear and revulsion, much like the emotion aroused in us today by the word *serial killer*. If folkloristics proceeds on the basis of identification with the trickster (a conceit that might lose some of its attraction were it substituted with the word *clown*), they may ultimately find themselves, like the *wakdjunkaga*, the Winnebago trickster, sitting on top of a pile of their own shit (Radin 1956:24-27). I am all for a folkloristics of disruption and opposition (9). I would like to see folklorists use their own carefully acquired and detailed ethnographic descriptions and analyses arrayed against the theories that come washing over them from other disciplines (Oring 2012 [1996]:320-321). They should then make a concerted effort to publish these oppositions in the journals of the disciplines they are critiquing. That might make some difference in advancing the field. I don't see advance coming about by transforming a centuries-old intellectual tradition into a strain of performance art.

A couple of the contributions call into question Western epistemologies for excluding or disdaining "other ways of knowing" (e.g., 144, 170). The phrase perplexes me. What is meant by "ways

of knowing." What are the *ways* of knowing? Off the top of my head, ways of knowing might include observation, experience, conditioning, oral and written tradition, inspiration (whether by deities or intoxicants), revelation, introspection, association, debate, inference, and experiment. Some of these undoubtedly overlap, but they seem to me to be ways of knowing, and they do not seem on the face of it to be peculiar to any particular cultural tradition. They are likely to be found in a great number of traditions, although they may be employed to differing extents. All are basic to Western epistemologies.

If there are no differences in the ways of knowing, there are certainly differences in what comes to be known. It would be difficult to corral all that is claimed as knowledge in manageable categories. What should we do with local knowledge that is not congruent with our own? In the midst of an AIDS epidemic in Africa, what should be the folklorist's response when told that sexual intercourse with the woman on top protects against disease transmission (Yankah 2004:185)? Silence? Assent? Is everything and anything to be accepted and respected as *knowledge*? With what epistemologies do folklorists expect to approach their work? Where do they think their descriptive, interpretive, and explanatory categories and methods come from? Unless folklorists see themselves only as stenographers and publicists for the folk, what do they envision their job to be?

The editors' introduction to the volume ("Envisioning a Future Folkloristics," 1-8) suggests that we need to engage in a constant "examination of what constitutes our imagined community of scholars." Folklorists, they say, "will not be shy in advocating for historically marginalized people" and "will defer to their decision-making power" (1). The self-righteousness of the first declamation is somewhat embarrassing; the presumption underlying the second even more so. Ultimately, the field will thrive, they go on, if folklorists develop "critical and productive narratives about ourselves" (4). In other words, the field will advance by talking to ourselves about ourselves.

Folklorists will not counter trivialization or advance the field of folklore simply by claiming that they do work that matters. It takes only a few seconds to imagine work that matters more. One could be a doctor, nurse, dentist, high-school teacher, lawyer, mental-health worker, or policeman and live and work in the marginalized communities that folklorists claim to champion. Let's face it: few people in these communities wake up in the morning to confront the looming challenges of the day and think, "I need a folklorist."

There is a definite utopian strain in current folklore work. Sometimes that strain is even explicit (9, 92). If only all can be made to come and truly hear the voices of others (but only those filtered by the folklorist) and hear in each their truly human value, the world can be redeemed. The lion will lie down with the lamb–although, as Woody Allen notes, that lamb isn't going to get much sleep. (In *Isaiah* 11:6, it is the wolf and the lamb; the lion is lying with something else.) Utopian projects make me uneasy. I sense that the firing squads can't be all that far behind.

Advancing Folkloristics is an interesting book, not because it lays out a program for successfully advancing the field, but for what it reveals about how folklorists see themselves and the field at the close of the first quarter of the twenty-first century. With fourteen essays, an introduction, and an Afterword and Foreword (which are necessarily laudatory), one finds no criticisms, no controversies, and no dissenting opinions. A number of chapters radiate an unmistakable self-congratulatory tone. The editors approvingly restate the position that "we are too small a discipline to disrespect each other's work" (67). Criticism, however, is not disrespect, controversy is what gives life to a field of study and spurs inquiry, and dissenting opinions create the diversity that folklorists repeatedly insist the field requires.

And so, folkloristics proceeds along its road, steeped in identity politics without ever analyzing what identity is, investigating how it is formed, or when and why it changes; grasping at every supposed theoretical term or proposition from everywhere, yet challenging none of them; generating little or no

theory from its close researches; favoring empathy over reason, analysis, and empirical evidence; and loving each and every cultural tradition but its own. O folkloristics, "Whither goest thou?"

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