

Folklore Matters: The Folklore Scholarship of Alan Dundes and the New American Studies

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For Alan Dundes (1934-2005), teacher, mentor, folklorist.

In 1989, Professor Alan Dundes wrote, “Most of my adult life as a professional folklorist has been devoted to explaining to undergraduates, graduate students, and interested members of the general public what folklore is, how we study it, and why folklore matters” (Preface, *Folklore Matters* vii). That folklore matters, and specifically that the folklore scholarship of Alan Dundes matters for “New Americanists,” is also the theme of this short review in honor of Professor Dundes, whom we lost on March 30th, 2005.

According to folklorist Rosemary Lévy Zumwalt, Dundes’s position in the field of folklore can be compared to that of Franz Boas in Anthropology (“Alan Dundes” 24). With his research, publications and mentoring, Dundes shaped the study of folkloristics in the United States, and remained one of the field’s most influential minds, “the charismatic heart and center of the discipline” (Zumwalt, Tribute). Dundes was the first American ever to win the Pitré prize, an international lifetime achievement award in folklore, the first folklorist to be elected a member of the American Academy of Arts and

Sciences, and the author of more than 250 trailblazing articles, author, co-author or editor of nearly 40 books, and the teacher of many distinguished folklorists. He has also been recognized as a leader in bridging the gap between an exclusively literary and an exclusively anthropological approach to folklore, bringing folkloristics to a new phase as a discipline (*American Folklore* 144). His 1972 *Mother Wit From the Laughing Barrel* was the first anthology of academic articles on African-American folklore. Dundes was also well known for his psychoanalytic contributions to folklore study; in fact, as Gary Alan Fine remarked in 1984, “in a real sense, Alan Dundes is psychoanalytic folklore” (qtd. in Zumwalt, “Alan Dundes” 23).¹ Dundes had been teaching at UC Berkeley since 1963, and he created and administered a Master of Arts Degree Program in Folklore and single-handedly founded a world-famous folklore archive at the University.

Given Alan Dundes’s prolific and influential career, I have no illusions of being able to summarize his work in this paper. However, I hope to at least familiarize or re-familiarize the American studies community with his work and to identify some central elements, which I believe should be essential to the ways in which we conceive of the new, post-national American studies in relation to folkloristics. For the purposes of this essay, my definition of “New American Studies,” is based primarily on two of the criteria Donald Pease outlined in his influential “New Americanists: Revisionist Interventions into the Canon”: the active intellectual self-positioning of New Americanists against an earlier, “hegemonic” American studies and their shared goal of recovering “the relationship between the cultural and political sphere” in textual analysis (32). To these, I

This article developed out of a short tribute read at the UC Berkeley American studies colloquium of April 29th, 2005. I would like to thank Christine Palmer, Ron Loewinsohn and Kelly Revak for their valuable comments and suggestions.

¹ For a sampling of Dundes’s contributions to the psychoanalytic study of folklore, see his *Parsing Through Customs: Essays by a Freudian Folklorist*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987.

add the recent interest in post-national scholarship, which developed as a logical offshoot of the two axioms and is, therefore, clearly New Americanist.² I must also point out here that I am not interested in discrediting the New American studies, of which I consider myself a part, but merely in pointing out through an analysis of Alan Dundes's work, how its current folklore-blindness may thwart the possibilities for precisely the kind of anti-hegemonic and transnational work which characterizes our vision of the field's future(s).

Defining Folk, Folklore and Folkloristics

Alan Dundes's 1965 *Study of Folklore*, which has since undergone 26 printings and still remains a central text of folkloristics, was "one of the first modern textbooks in folklore" (Bauman, Abrahams and Kalcik 374). In this collection of seminal essays, Dundes described folk as "any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is – it could be a common occupation, language, or religion – but what is important is that a group formed for whatever reason will have some traditions which it calls its own" ("What is Folklore" 2). This formulation was significant at a time when many scholars still held on to the 19th century perception of the folk as peasants, the illiterate in a literate society. In fact, according to Bauman, Abrahams and Kalcik, as late as 1968, folklorists were unable to answer the question "is there a folk in the city?" because of this agrarian bias (372). In his 1965 article "Devolutionary Premise in Folklore Theory," Dundes aligned this

² For an inspiring account of contemporary post-national American studies, see Shelley Fisher Fishkin's 2004 Presidential Address to the American Studies Association (ASA), "Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies."

limited definition of folk with the misconception among scholars that folklore is being rooted out by modernity and noted, “the majority of folklorists in Europe and Asia continue to restrict the concept of folk this way” (21-22). Much of Dundes’s subsequent work focused on contemporary and non-oral forms of folklore, in part, to fight this patronizing and nostalgic tendency. Dundes’s expansion of the definition of “folk” was liberating, as it allowed future folklorists to study the cultural texts of groups of all socio-economic backgrounds. His emphasis on “group” should also be of note to us, since, according to folklorist Sandra K. Dolby, a study of microcosms would correct the generalizing tendency of some forms of American and cultural studies (59).³

Until 1975, when Dundes published *Urban Folklore from the Paperwork Empire*, the first in a series of books on urban Xerox folklore co-authored with Carl Pagter, orality was a main criterion in defining what texts constitute folklore. In the preface to the book, by differentiating folklore from high art and mass culture by two basic tenets (that of multiple existence and variation), Dundes divorced the study of folklore from its obsession with oral transmission and pre-modernity, and initiated the study of urban American folklore (xix). Arguing that machines and industrialization do not destroy folklore, but instead become subjects of folklore and aid in its transmission, Dundes further challenged the wide-spread assumption that modernity spelled the end of folklore and, by extension, folkloristics (222).

Cultural Studies without Folklore?

³ Simon Bronner, in his *American Folklore Studies*, also cites Dundes’s role in cementing the emphasis on “group” in the definition of “folk” and notes that many folklorists “retain the concept of group, since it gives the basis of shared tradition” (111).

Alan Dundes's edict "folklore matters," also the title of one of his essay collections, was not just an empty catch phrase designed to exult the folklorist and to encourage more fieldwork and data collection. While he recognized the importance of thoroughly and accurately reported data, for Dundes, folklore mattered primary because, as he emphasized in an essay, it "*means something*" ("Projection" 33). In the words of Robert Georges, Dundes "believed deeply that folklore is a pervasive, integral, and significant aspect of social existence and that its documentation and study can provide important insights into the essence and dynamics of culture and human behavior." Dundes wrote, "I believe the folklorist can, by analyzing folklore, discover general patterns of culture," and argued that folklore, as a form of "ethnographic autobiography" provides "a mirror for the rest of the culture" and functions as "a kind of popular pulse" (Preface, *Analytic Essays* xi; "Folklore" 2).

While Dundes acknowledged the influence of Franz Boas's culture reflector theory on this description, he also modified Boas's methodology by noting that the rest of culture did not readily parallel the irrational or taboo contents of many folkloric texts. Noting that it is impossible to read such fantastic items literally, Dundes, instead, championed a symbolic interpretation of folklore ("American Concept" 14.) In *The Study of Folklore*, Dundes identified several functions of folklore including "serving as a vehicle for social protest," and allowing counter-hegemonic thoughts and actions and unconscious anxieties to be expressed through symbolism ("Functions" 277). In his work, thorough insightful close readings of "text, texture and context," Dundes aimed to uncover what may be called the cultural work of folklore and made conscious ethnic, gendered and sexualized power relations. His analyses of misogyny and future orientation

in Anglo-American folklore, his 1991 article on the folklore of the Gulf War, and his articles on U.S. election and judicial humor serve as great examples of his socially engaged scholarship.⁴

Comparative in his method of analysis, Alan Dundes was interested in the “why” question; in tracing the changes an item of folklore undergoes and studying how such transformations can reflect “local, oicotypical worldview and value systems” (“Office Folklore” 120). In “The Anthropologist and the Comparative Method in Folklore,” Dundes identified the folkloric “oicotype,” as a version exhibiting variation specific to a singular cultural context, as a key tool in the comparative study of folklore, and argued it can help the anthropologist “study how folklore is modified to fit local ideological or worldview tendencies” (73). Dundes provided an exemplary use of this theory with his article “Pecking Chickens: A Folk Toy as a Source for the Study of Worldview,” in which he meticulously analyzed regional and national variations, that is oicotypes, of a common hand-held toy made up of several wooden chickens, which peck when triggered by a simple mechanism. Studying the local variations in the placement of the chickens and the representation of food by region and nationality, Prof. Dundes suggested one could reach an understanding of the perceived availability of food and personal space in respective cultures. Among his many examples is a toy made in the United States, the only version that contains real corn instead of painted specks for the wooden chickens to peck at. This is also the only version that assigns each chicken its individual piece of food (88).

⁴ I am referring respectively to Dundes’s articles “The Crowing Hen and the Easter Bunny,” “Thinking Ahead,” “The Mobile SCUD Missile Launcher,” “Six Inches from the Presidency” and “From Jock to Joke.”

I find in this article an effective, if not fully-developed, model for the utilization of a comparativist perspective in theorizing cultural “difference,” without which it becomes harder to avoid the constant slippages into the Exceptionalism that has plagued American studies since its founding. Another reason why I chose this specific work among Dundes’s many other, perhaps more famous, comparativist essays is a recent commentary published in the March 2005 *ASA Newsletter* which called for more analysis of “play” in American studies, a category which, of course, includes the pecking chickens folk toy (Kloppenberg 12). In this article, titled “Transnational and Multi-disciplinarity: The New Goals of American Studies Programs,” Professor James T. Kloppenberg of Harvard University asked for more emphasis to be placed on “play” as an archive of clues to the behavior of different individuals and groups; however, he didn’t even mention the name of the discipline “Folkloristics,” which includes among the many genres it studies, games, pastimes, festivals and folk toys.⁵

Decades after Gene Wise lauded the “concern for anthropological definitions of culture” in American studies and predicted a lasting connection with “the new ethnography” of scholars such as Jay Mechling, American studies seems to have entered a phase of disconnect with folklore as a source of textual data and folkloristics as a set of analytical tools (204, 322). Despite the excellent exemplary work on American studies and folklore by Richard Dorson, Roger Abrahams, Henry Glassie, Simon Bronner, Jay Mechling, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and several other Americanist-folklorists, many of whom are associated with joint degree programs in Folklore and American Studies, there is a remaining tendency among many Americanists to see folklore as “quaint

⁵ Other examples of Dundes’s work in this area include his essays on Christmas, the American game of “Smear the Queer,” and several other articles on pranks, game morphology and Native American pastimes.

customs and artifacts collected by folklorists,” thus irrelevant to the political focus of contemporary American studies scholarship (Denning 1).

The historical training of many Americanists probably contributes to the devaluation of folklore as the study of survivals, the study of “shards of pottery,” as Steven Hoelscher put it in a book review (171). After all, until the mid 20th century, there was general consensus, even among folklorists, that the golden age of folklore was in the distant past, and that folklore was dying out. Focusing mainly on artistic primitivism and ethnic and racial enclaves when in conversation with folkloristics, the American studies of our day tends to strangely reproduce the past, misguided folkloristic obsession with illiteracy, subalternity, and pre-modernity. As argued, Dundes was a big critic of this “devolutionary premise” in early folklore studies and much of his work focused on showing how new folklore is being generated in response to current social and political events. He pointed out in his essay on the subject that “folklore in general is not devolving or dying out, but only some genres or some examples of some genres are decreasing in popularity or usage, e.g. the true riddle or ballad in American urban society” (“Devolutionary” 25). And, in contrast, other folklore genres are revived and new examples generated in rapid response to socio-economic and political shifts. Folklorists now agree with Dundes that far from dying out, folklore adapts to contemporary circumstances, be they the terrorist attacks of 9/11, current debates on immigration, the 2004 presidential elections, or the wars in the Middle East.

Dundes emphasized the importance of such contemporary forms of folklore in much of his work. In his article on the proliferation of “Polish Pope Jokes” following Pope John Paul the Second’s ordination, for example, Dundes asked folklorists to take

this opportunity to observe “the interplay between historical events and folklore” (142). Asking folklorists to recognize the importance of non-oral genres of folklore, he wrote, “new paperwork items are being created in response to current political, economic, social and other crises in modern society” (“Office Folklore” 116.) His call to trace the spread of folklore through new communications technologies in order to study “folklore as it forms and as it adapts to the demands of different cultures” is just as relevant today as it was when he first issued it (120).⁶ Following Dundes’s lead by studying forms of folklore that thrive in our postmodern and increasingly global world and bear relevance to our respective foci, would make folkloristics essential to the New American studies; accepting the outdated definition of folklore as the study of peasant quilts and antique customs salvaged from modernity risks making it, at best, a peripheral enterprise.

I do not pretend to be the only Americanist pointing out the folklore-blindness of contemporary American studies. In *The New American Studies*, for example, John Carlos Rowe argues for the expansion of our archive to include, along with new medias, “non-print forms as orality, architecture, iconography (including painting and photography), music, dance, religious ritual, everyday performative and symbolic actions,” many of which form the archive of folklorists (xxiii). That Rowe reproduces the print/non-print dualism Dundes challenged is balanced, in my opinion, by his recognition of the importance of folkloric forms to the study of globalization and modernity.⁷ Similarly, in

⁶ Dundes’s theories have been applied to email-lore and are currently being appropriated to the study of pop culture items such as bumper stickers and T-shirts by his students. See for example, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett “From the Paperwork Empire to the Paperless Office: Testing the Limits of the Science of Tradition” and Kelly Revak, “‘Your Problem is Obvious’: A Heads Up on Commodified Transmission of Folklore.”

⁷ We must also ask ourselves, however, why this interest in orality coincided with our equally current interest in globalization and postcoloniality. There is a “double-edge” to this kind of enterprise, stemming from the long-standing equation of the folk with the uneducated, unsophisticated strata of a society,

From Walden Pond to Jurassic Park, Paul Lauter anticipates an ethnographic turn in the future of American studies; given our fields' shared interest in textuality and culture, an additional, folkloristic turn is bound to be equally useful (17).⁸ That myth, symbol and image scholars of the 1950s and 1960s borrowed "heavily and somewhat problematically" from folkloristics, should not be a deterrent (as I suspect it has been for many New Americanists, who have actively positioned themselves against the intellectual paradigms of previous Americanists) but a motivating challenge (Bronner, "Exploring" 40).⁹ After all, folklore not only mythologizes constructions such as American Exceptionalism and Innocence, which in itself makes its study essential, but also questions and satirizes them, sometimes simultaneously, as this post-Vietnam War joke quoted by Dundes shows: "Do you know how Poland would have handled the Viet Nam war? Same way we did" ("Polish" 142). While clearly building up on the nativist stereotype of the inept "Polack," this item is also a snide negation of American Exceptionalism and embodies the healthy comparativist shift Walter Hölbling recently observed in the context of European American studies of the Vietnam war era (15). Alan Dundes's work on the cultural politics of folkloric texts, especially his theories regarding

folklore with the non-scientific oral traditions of subalterns and the development of folkloristics out of the "modern interest in objectifying cultural otherness – often regarded as nonmodernity [...]." (Anttonen 17). As Bauman, Abrahams and Kalcik point out, "if folklore pertains to the rude, unsophisticated backward – even primitive – peoples of the world, then attributing folk traditions to 'ethnics' becomes patronizing and pejorative" (364). Folklorists and Americanists, like all academics, risk replicating and reifying the power divide between the producer of knowledge and its "subject." Taking into account historical and economically motivated changes in the folklore of all cultures and even studying emergent, technologically guided forms of folklore would mitigate this problem, as eliminating it seems near impossible.

⁸ In "Interpreting Folklore Ethnographically and Sociologically," Roger D. Abrahams outlines the methodological differences between ethnography and folklore studies and notes the productive interchange between folklorists and ethnographers focusing on "communication" (347-8).

⁹ It should be noted, however, that Bronner himself, writing in 1993, did not note any resistance to folklore or ethnography in American studies, and instead cited the increase in folklore courses taught in American studies departments between 1971 and 1986 as the beginning of a favorable trend (40).

worldview, multi-national slurs, and folklore as coded autobiographical ethnography are vital for a healthy New American studies, which developed primarily out of a relatively recent emphasis in American studies on the connections between text and power and “the relations between cultural and political materials” (Pease 32).

Transnationalism without Folklore?

Alan Dundes’s enthusiasm for transnational work, reflected in his unflinching support of folklorists in developing countries and his attempts to bolster international cooperation by inviting visiting scholars from all over the world to UC Berkeley, made the University “the mecca of international folklore scholarship” (Mieder, Tribute). Dundes strongly believed that “the study of folklore is nothing if it is not an international discipline,” and edited a collection of essays titled *International Folkloristics* in 1999 in order to foreground the multi-national roots of the field and to urge students of folklore to learn more languages (qtd. in Zumwalt, “Alan Dundes” 26; Preface, *International* ix). Dundes also consistently emphasized the transnational nature of folkloric data; he noted to his students that it takes only one bilingual person for an item of folklore to cross national and linguistic borders, and he criticized anthropologists for basing their theories of cultural specificity on folklore that exists simultaneously in multiple cultures (“Alan Dundes” 12).

With the spread of Internet access and foreign language education, folklore travels even faster in the 21st century and may get modified in meaning according to time and place. At a time when the international turn in American studies is being cemented and

when many of us are studying the effects of globalization or Americanization on world cultures, the truly international study of folklore, as conceived by Dundes, gives us a useful set of tools in identifying connections and tensions that would otherwise go unnoticed. In fact, while what R.J. Ellis calls “globalization from above” can be monitored through readily available print documents such as *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Economist*, “globalization from below” can be more easily traced through the study of folklore (131).

In an article on the folklore of the Gulf War, after providing examples of print folklore and jokes that comment on the war, Dundes stated, “the Gulf War of 1991 did produce new folklore, as well as stimulating the revival and updating of old folklore” (129-20). While this article only examined data that was gathered in the United States, I would like focus on a single joke and two of its international variations, to clarify how folklore can be essential to exploring the rhetoric of nationalism and militarism in a globalizing world. A racist and nativist Euro-American joke in many of its versions, this following item was changed into an anti-Western, pro-Iraqi joke by the time it was forwarded to me by a friend in Turkey.

Here is the first version, which I reached online at a website titled “Strange Cosmos,” submitted by an Internet user, who posted it under the name “Pat P”:

An American, a Mexican and an Iraqi are in a bar one night having a beer. The Mexican drinks his beer and suddenly throws his glass in the air, pulls out a gun and shoots the glass to pieces. He says "In Mexico our glasses are so cheap we don't need to drink from the same one twice."

The Iraqi drinks his beer, throws his glass into the air, pulls out his gun and shoots the glass to pieces. He says "In Iraq we have so much sand to make the glasses that we don't need to drink out of the same glass twice either."

The American, cool as a cucumber, picks up his beer and drinks it, throws his glass into the air, pulls out his gun and shoots the Mexican and the Iraqi and catches his glass. He says "In America we have so many Mexicans and Iraqis that we don't need to drink with the same ones twice, Amen!"

There are many versions of this particular Euro-American joke and its cognates in circulation but, in most cases, a "Mexican" is thrown out of a boat, a train, or a plane by an "American," who claims "we have too many of these in our country." Here's the second version, forwarded to me on the heels of "Operation Iraqi Freedom" from a multilingual friend in Istanbul:

An American, a Brit and an Iraqi are in a bar one night having a beer. The Yankee, drinks his beer and suddenly throws his glass in the air, pulls out a gun and shoots the glass to pieces. He says, "In the States our glasses are so cheap that we don't need to drink from the same one twice."

The Brit, obviously impressed by this, drinks his beer, throws his glass into the air, pulls out his gun and shoots the glass to pieces. He says, "In Britain we have so much sand to make the glasses that we don't need to drink out of the same glass twice either."

The Iraqi, cool as a cucumber, picks up his beer and drinks it, throws his glass into the air, pulls out his gun and shoots the American and the Brit. He says "In Baghdad we have so many Americans and British that we don't need to drink with the same ones twice."

These texts belong to the subgenre of *Blason populaire* identified by Dundes as "slot-filler jokes," in which the three character slots can be filled by any three national or ethnic groups, depending on the performer's inclination ("Slurs" 100). They can also be seen as a metafolkloric twist on the common "boasting" joke, in which members of different ethnic or national groups boast about the assets of their homeland (Roth 43). Dundes found slot-filler jokes ineffective in providing a clear picture of national stereotypes due to their lack of detail, but he noted, "it is always of interest to see which particular groups the tale-teller chooses to fill the three slots." Of course, such active transformations are not simple curiosities (as Dundes himself argued, "no piece of folklore continues to be transmitted *unless* it means something"), but instead warrant deeper contextual analysis (Preface, *Cracking Jokes* vii). What does the first joke mean when it's posted on a U.S. based website called "Strange Cosmos" by a "Pat P"? And why does this version end with an "Amen"?¹⁰ What does the second version mean, now that it is in an email from a Western-educated Turk to another Turkish citizen living in America? Does it not matter that the depiction of "coolness" in both versions is very American, based on the sort of machismo we associate with Country Western films and

¹⁰ Jay Mechling notes in his "American Cultural Grid" that, while culture is made up of "stories," certain stories are more likely to become official than others (4). In the United States, after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the official story, promoted by George W. Bush was that the United States' subsequent attack on the Middle East was not motivated by religious fervor. It seems to me that this piece of folklore represents the unofficial but commonly expressed view that religion had much to do with the invasions. I should also note here that I find Mechling's grid an excellent tool in beginning to think of folklore in connection to other cultural texts, while maintaining a comparative and transnational outlook.

“the strong, silent type”? And more importantly, can American studies, now firmly in its transnational and “anti-hegemonic” phase, afford to ignore such intriguing data?

Such folkloric transferences and transformations, when traced and analyzed, have the potential to give us a far more accurate picture of the negotiation of power dynamics at national, cultural and linguistic contact-zones than we can hope to reach by focusing solely on official, printed and authored texts. A great believer in the innovativeness of the folk, Alan Dundes credited the generators and disseminators of folklore (i.e. the folk in its largest sense) for drawing a more accurate analysis of current events than many scholars, who approach similar problems of nationality, race and gender armed with, and in a way limited by, theories du jour. In his article “Metafolklore and Oral Literary Criticism,” Dundes championed oral literary criticism collected from informants and coined the term “metafolklore” as “folkloristic commentaries about folklore” (52). He also noted that folklore, transmitted from person to person, often orally, is impossible to censor and that the transmission of folklore is difficult to police, “in this respect folklore differs from printed material, which can be subjected to various types and degrees of censorship. Folklore always tells it like it is or at least as some people think it is or as they would like it to be” (“Folklore” 2). I do not mean to romanticize folklore as the source of authenticity; the work of poststructuralist theorists have taught us well that there is no pure and unmediated language which exists untouched by discourse. Postmodern folklore studies also acknowledges the ways in which the field of folkloristics guides the construction of many of its primary sources.¹¹ I would, however,

¹¹ In fact, instead of being fixed in an authentic and timeless “Tradition,” items of folklore are always already in-flux. See Dundes’s depiction of the folkloristic significance of non-authentic folklore in “Nationalistic Inferiority Complexes and the Fabrication of Feklore” (18), Gerald E.

suggest, with Alan Dundes, that the unique circumstances that define the generation and dissemination of folklore (mainly the means of its transference, multiple existence and variation) give us a somewhat different, and therefore indispensable, view into discourse and culture in a globalizing world.

Coda

As I re-read several of Alan Dundes's publications for this review, I was struck once again with what may be the most amazing aspect of his work: its thoroughness, despite a vast interdisciplinary and international range of academic interests. Dundes reflected this devotion to scholarship and what John Lindow calls his "passion for bibliography" readily to his students; we learned quickly that his standards were high and that he was against "re-inventing the wheel" (Bendix, "Dundesiana" 57). Despite focusing on every single genre of folklore and exploring diverse ethnic, national and religious groups, such as African Americans, Turks, Romanians, Italians, Asians, Germans, Jews and Muslims, Alan Dundes's scholarship remained original and well grounded in multi-lingual scholarship – as thorough in its depth as it was sweeping in its breadth. His 4-volume edited contribution to the Routledge series on Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies, titled *Folklore* and released a few weeks before his untimely death, stands as a final monument to Professor Alan Dundes's exhaustive knowledge of Folkloristics and his commitment to interdisciplinary and international scholarship.

Warshaver's depiction of "third level folklore" (225) and Regina Bendix's excellent article, "Folklorism: The Challenge of a Concept."

I do not point this out merely for sentimental reasons: In a recent article published in the *American Quarterly*, Heinz Ickstadt of Freie Universität in Berlin warned New Americanists of the impending dangers of “academic dilettantism” due to a possible overextension of the boundaries of the field, brought on by calls for transnational and multidisciplinary scholarship, such as my own (544). I am somewhat hesitant to heed this warning. Dundes steadily negotiated the borders of folkloristics with every single publication and speech; yet, his scholarly rigor not only put folkloristics on the intellectual map throughout the second half of the 20th century, but also contributed to the full internationalization of the discipline. I believe the New American studies stands to benefit from his example and from a renewed engagement with folklore, as long we remember that we are scholars, and that our work *matters*.

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