

WOLFGANG MIEDER

*Dictionary of American Regional English*. Volume V, SI-Z. Ed. by Joan Houston Hall. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012. Pp. 1244 (with 2 columns).

It took fifty years from start to finish to complete the unsurpassed *Dictionary of American Regional English* or *DARE*, with the renowned philologist Frederic G. Cassidy (1907-2000) as the Chief Editor and Joan Houston Hall as the Associate Editor for the first three volumes (I, A-C, 903 pages, 1985; II, D-H, 1175 pages, 1991; III, I-O, 927 pages, 1996). After the death of the untiringly working Cassidy at the age of ninety-three, Hall naturally became the Chief Editor for the final two volumes (IV, P-Sk, 1014 pages, 2002; V, SI-Z, 1244 pages, 2012). Now that the *magnum opus* of 5263 pages printed in two columns is finished, the five massive volumes represent a unique compendium of the amazingly rich treasure trove of American regional English. The volumes appeared in sequences of about six years, with the last and largest volume having taken about ten years to produce. As Hall explains, this was primarily due to the fact that she and her co-workers decided to make extensive use of electronic sources for historical references of individual words, word pairs, and entire phrases. Be that as it may, it took not quite thirty years to make this dictionary available to the scholarly world, and during this time it has become a classic in the lexicographical registration of American regional English. The study of the American language is simply unthinkable without this invaluable resource, and scholars and students of many disciplines owe much gratitude to all the diligent and dedicated people who were involved in the creation of this unique dictionary.

As one would expect, the fifth and final volume under review contains a most impressive list of hundreds of “*DARE* Staff, Students, and Volunteers, 1965-2011” (pp. xii-xxx). Of interest is also the list of “Financial Contributors to *DARE*, 1965-2011” (xxxix-xxxix), and there is also a “Bibliography” (pp. 1147-1244) of about 13000 references, making this the volume with the largest page

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count. As can be imagined, users of the dictionary had very much looked forward to this comprehensive bibliography that includes all abbreviated references throughout the five volumes! It represents the incredibly extensive research on all aspects of the American language, and I am certain that I will not be the only scholar who intends to read it from beginning to end. It should be noted here as well that persons interested in the history of the entire project can inform themselves by way of Cassidy's fascinating "Introduction" (pp. xi-xxii) to the first volume. Speaking of all five volumes, permit me as someone who purchased the first four volumes for my personal library over the years to register two small quibbles. It is my feeling that while Joan Houston Hall without any doubt deserves to be listed as the Chief Editor for the last two volumes, I wish that the name of Frederic G. Cassidy would not have been dropped from the title page. He could and should have been referenced as Founding Editor or something similar to this without in any way infringing on the magisterial work of Joan Houston Hall who was his equal co-worker throughout the project. In any case, whoever cites this exemplary dictionary will most certainly cite both Cassidy and Hall as its pair of chief editors. Finally, as I look at the fifth volume standing next to the four previously published volumes, I can't but wonder why the production managers at Harvard University Press completely changed the design of the dust cover of the fifth volume. That simply makes no sense, but I hasten to add that the appearance of the actual binding with US map on the front and the attractive gold lettering on the spine has remained the same for all volumes.

Having spent many hours or actually several days with the pure scholarly pleasure of reading hundreds of entries of this fifth volume, I am inclined to write many pages of praise regarding the work of the many people involved in bringing *DARE* to its much anticipated conclusion. There is no space allotted for such a laudation, and consequently I shall restrict myself to just a few observations from the point of view of a linguistically interested folklorist in general and a paremiologist in particular. Let it be said at the outset that *DARE* with all of its merits certainly also includes a multitude of textual materials that are of great interest and special value to folklore and proverb scholars and students. It is utterly amazing what one finds under such inclusive lemmas as "Spanish" (pp. 150-

154), “stink” (pp. 288-294), “sugar” (pp. 367-379), “swamp” (pp. 407-435), “Texas” (pp. 546-551), “three” (pp. 576-581), “turkey” (pp. 745-751), “water” (pp. 866-885), “white” (pp. 933-966), and “wild” (pp. 987-1019). Dozens of single words, two-word compounds, and various phrasal units are covered in much detail, including the geographical distribution (often with a map), the meaning, numerous historical and contextual references, and at times bibliographical information. As I read individual entries under these keywords, I noted in particular such words and terms as “Spanish hamburger” (p. 152) as a regional alternate for “sloppy joe” (pp. 33-34), “slushburger” (p. 42), and “spoonburger” (p. 195), of which I knew only the more generic term “sloppy joe” for “a dish consisting of crumbled ground beef in a sauce, often served on a bun” (p. 33). Folklorists interested in foodways would do well to read through these volumes. In the fifth volume they would, of course, come across the term “submarine” (pp. 359-360) with cross-references to such variant terminologies as “Cuban sandwich, grinder, hero, hoagie, Italian sandwich, muffaletta, poor boy, spucky, torpedo sandwich, wedge, zep” for “a large sandwich made with Italian or French bread or a long bun, and a variety of meats, cheeses, and vegetables” (p. 359). As a Vermonter, I was pleased to find the terms “sugar bush”, “sugar camp”, and “sugar grove” (pp. 370-372) with two distributive maps and references showing their relationship to the maple syrup production in this state and elsewhere. Among the many terms relating to “syrup” (pp. 472-474) – how could it be otherwise – is an entry for “syrup on snow” (p. 474) referring to the delicious winter treat of pouring hot maple syrup on snow. But while I know about syrup matters, I certainly had never come across “supper on the ground” (p. 397) for having a picnic!

From foodways we could go on to innumerable entries dealing with names of fauna and flora that are current in folk speech in various regions of the country. References like “snake peter [*sic*]” (dragonfly, p. 68), “Swedish clover” (white clover, p. 443), and “telegraph weed” (golden aster, p. 533) must suffice as examples of intriguing names for certain plants. As expected, references to animals abound throughout these volumes as well, among them “stink turtle” (mud turtle, p. 293), “tiger frog” (pickerel frog, p. 606), and “turkey gull” (great black-backed gull, p. 748), the latter bringing to mind the phrasal unit “turkey trot” (pp. 750-751, with map) to designate a rapid walk or trot, used ironically for a rather slow walk

after a filling Thanksgiving Day meal. While one might have expected a large yield of words and phrases referring to plants and animals, I was indeed happily surprised to find quite a few terms to various children's games, among them "squat where you may be" (p. 226), "swing Josie" (p. 465), "hide the switch" (p. 467, with map), "tap the icebox (rabbit)" (pp. 506-507), and "throw the stick" (p. 589). Not having grown up in the United States, all of this was utterly unknown to me. So again, for folklorists interested in games, there is a goldmine of material in them hills!

Let me take the children's game "get one's tag (to tag someone)" (p. 482) as a name and a proverbial phrase to turn to the numerous proverbial references in all five volumes of *DARE*. It should be noted that *bona fide* proverbs are not included in the dictionary, especially since the thousands of texts that were collected by the American Dialect Society between 1945 and 1985 have been published as *A Dictionary of American Proverbs* (Mieder et al. 1992). There is, however, a most welcome and valuable plethora of proverbial expressions and proverbial comparisons to be found in *DARE* that goes far beyond *A Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles* (Mathews 1951), the two-volume *Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang* (Lighter 1994-1997), and *The Facts on File Dictionary of American Regionalisms. Local Expressions from Coast to Coast* (Hendrickson 2000), to name but three large compilations with at least similar goals as *DARE*. As someone who has tilled this proverbial field for more than four decades, I made discoveries in this fifth volume (previously in the other four volumes, of course), that I would never have dreamt off. And, due to the truly regional orientation of *DARE*, I discovered many proverbial phrases that I had never come across before. There is no space here to go into great detail, but let me at least present this small florilegium of proverbial references, intentionally leaving out any explanatory comments so not to spoil the element of discovery for users of *DARE* as a large compendium of proverbial materials:

poor (skinny, thin) as a snake (pp. 59-60, with map)  
 meaner than a snake (p. 60, with map)  
 throw up one's socks (p. 107)  
 something dead up the creek (p. 121)  
 south end of a horse going north (p. 142)

spit image, spitting image (pp. 182-183, with map)  
 split the blanket (p. 188)  
 step off the carpet (p. 272)  
 stew the dishrag (p. 274)  
 look like a storm hit it (pp. 313-314)  
 make a straight wake (p. 322)  
 stretch the blanket (p. 335)  
 stuck in the cork (p. 349)  
 forty ways till Sunday (p. 390)  
 tall hog at the trough (p. 496)  
 not to take tea for the fever (p. 521)  
 Texas time (p. 550)  
 thick as three in a bed (pp. 561-562, with map)  
 have another thought coming (p. 573, with map)  
 throw a brick and hide one's hand(s) (p. 587)  
 tie one's mouth (p. 604)  
 vomit up one's toenails (p. 643)  
 from truck to keelson (p. 724)  
 twice out of sight (p. 765)  
 walk and hide (p. 842)  
 where it doesn't snow (p. 915)  
 who laid the chunk (rail) (pp. 968-969)  
 word with the bark on (it) (p. 1073)  
 X-Y-Z (eXamine Your Zipper) (p. 1088)  
 Yankee dime (nickel) (p. 1092, with map)

For an explanation of the proverbial phrase "to give someone a Yankee dime" with the meaning of offering a kiss as a reward, i.e., something of little or no value, I might draw attention to Helen Johnson's 1968 note in the *Journal of American Folklore*. But this is a rather insignificant oversight by the bibliographically extremely well informed staff of *DARE*. From a paremiologist's point of view, I have a heartfelt wish at this point. Realizing that the five volumes of *DARE* include such a wealth of regional proverbial materials unregistered in proverb dictionaries, might it not be possible to publish those texts with their semantic explanations, variants, and contextualized references as a separate volume to add to those major reference works on proverbial phrases mentioned above? I would most certainly encourage such an undertaking, being certain that there

would be much interest in such a volume here in the United States and elsewhere.

It is indeed mind-boggling what Frederic G. Cassidy, Joan Houston Hall, and their staff and volunteers have achieved during five decades of relentless work and admirable dedication. Their five massive volumes are proof positive of what lexicographical work is possible when scholars, staff, field research volunteers, students, sponsors, and a superb publisher work together to accomplish a Gargantuan and Herculean lexicographical task. The now completed *Dictionary of American Regional English* deserves the highest accolades worldwide, and it is to be hoped that Joan Houston Hall and her super-team will receive a number of prizes recognizing their dictionary of the century as a unique and lasting scholarly achievement.

**Works Cited**

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