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## Meaning of Folklore

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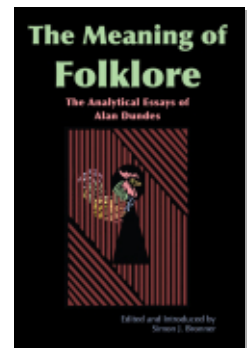
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## Introduction

# THE ANALYTICS OF ALAN DUNDES

IN A REFLECTIVE MOMENT UPON reaching forty years of age, Alan Dundes introduced his first collection of essays with the declaration, “My principal research interests focus upon the analysis of folklore” (1975g, xi). His emphasis of analysis signaled an unusual take on intellectual purpose. Most scholars respond to the question of interests with a genre, period, or location. Dundes, however, committed himself to the broad mission of uncovering and understanding meaning. Folklore is crucial to a knowledge of human experience, he observed, because “as autobiographical ethnography,” it permits a view “from the inside-out rather than from the outside-in.” That is, the advantage of folklore is that it conveys what people think in their own words and actions, and what they say or sing in folklore expresses what they might not be able to in everyday conversation. Dundes argued that in folklore, more than in other forms of human evidence, “one finds a people’s own unselfconscious picture of themselves” (xi). That picture is not always pretty, as Dundes exposed in studies of anti-Semitic folklore, ethnic slurs, and abusive initiations. He insisted that uncensored, untethered scholarship was necessary to get beyond the popular urge to romanticize lore. His cause was to confront the harsh realities in expressive traditions, toward the twin goals of knowing ourselves internally (that is, psychologically) and externally (or socially and politically), and of righting wrongs in the world.

Dundes did not think of traditions as a relic of the past, and often took to the lectern to show that folklore was very much part of the modern technological world. When asked to speak, he gave a generic title of “Folklore in the Modern World” to cover contemporary joke fads, customs, and speech that reflected current issues and conditions. In this concern for the emergent nature of folklore, Dundes was a champion of the modern view that folklore is an artistic process rather than a dusty artifact, since, in his words, it is “something alive and dynamic” rather than “dead and static.” It is not something relegated to primitivized others—historically or socially—but rather a behavioral pattern that everyone exhibits. Lashing out at the Victorian elitist characterization of folklore as “meaningless survivals,” he emphasized that “folklore is a rich and meaningful source for the study of cognition and values” (1975g, xi–xii). Rhetorically, he then linked analysis to the uncovering of that which people cannot see—mind and belief—so as to find a *meaningful* understanding of “ourselves.” Stated succinctly in his first collection of essays, his goal was to “bring unconscious content into consciousness” (xi).

Thirty years later, he was still promoting analysis and raising consciousness. During that time he gained a horde of students, colleagues, and followers—and a good number of detractors. But one thing for sure, he could not be ignored. His provocative analyses forced scholars from a wide spectrum of fields to think *with* as well as *about* folklore. That is, Dundes time and again pointed out that in addition to folklore being distinctive

as evidence, its study critically engaged issues of the day. To comprehend folklore, he preached, one needed to not only know the materials of tradition, but also to grasp the long distinguished intellectual heritage of international folklore scholarship. For his effort, he held the distinction of attracting an astounding number of festschriften, or volumes by associates honoring him (Boyer, Boyer, and Sonnenberg 1993; Mieder 1994b; Bendix and Zumwalt 1995; Lawless 2005; Gürel, 2007). In those heartfelt tributes, one inevitably finds assessments of his career and contributions to genre (proverb, humor, custom, legend, and myth), method (structuralism and psychoanalysis), and group studies (American, Native American, South Asian, African American, Jewish, and German).

This introduction contains its share of biographical assessment, but I propose to go beyond recounting his accolades to explicating his ideas in the context of folklorists' intellectual heritage and the issues of his day. I am therefore concerned not only for a reading of his work, but also for covering responses to his ideas as signs of a longstanding intellectual discourse on tradition and modernity. As an overview for the essays in this volume, I give attention to his distinctive rhetoric—drawing on psychological and anthropological theories, communication of structural and symbolic concepts, philosophical foundations, and, to borrow one of his favorite terms, his worldview. My narrative is guided chronologically from his first contributions during the 1960s to his final projects at the time of his death in 2005. I begin with the early development of his binary rhetoric, which I see as the hallmark of the “Dundesian perspective” on finding hidden or deep meanings through structural and symbolic analysis. I follow this section, in “That Can’t Be Alan Dundes!,” with the question of why Dundes, while still a young scholar, came to be mythologized, celebrated, and at times demonized for this perspective. In the section on “Folk and Folklorist,” I turn to Dundes’s lasting contribution of a “modern” definition of folk and his influential conception of the folklorist’s significance in cultural work. Inspired by emergent lore of WWDS (What Would Dundes Say?) circulating about Dundes late in his career, I reflect on the culmination of his hermeneutic mission and the religious devotion he aroused. In sum, I analyze Dundes’s sense of analysis to illuminate his, and our, quest for meaning in folklore.

## Binarism and Deep Meaning

One way Dundes designated his analytical goal was to differentiate between folklore as the materials of folklore, and folkloristics as its theoretical study. Historically, he pointed to precedents in this usage in nineteenth-century folklore scholarship, and rhetorically, to the dichotomy between language as the material and linguistics as its study (2002a, vii; 2005c, 385–86). The appeal of folkloristics, which he had to insist was not another of his neologisms, was its analytical bent (1965d, 3; 1970, 324; 2005c, 385–86).

Dichotomies between inside and outside, material and its study, folk and lore, and conscious and unconscious pervade Dundes’s work, to the point that binarism merits recognition as a Dundesian perspective. Introducing his first collection of essays, Dundes’s mentor Richard Dorson sketched this intellectual framework, but did not signify it. He wrote, “To the lexicon of the folklorist he has added linguistic terms such as ‘etic’ and ‘emic’ unit, morphological concepts such as ‘lack’ and ‘lack liquidated,’ typologies of collectors such as ‘anal retentive’ and ‘anal ejective.’ In one scintillating article after another he has shown, or suggested, the ways in which folklore reflects our conscious and unconscious thoughts” (Dorson 1975, vii). To this list I would add “identification and interpretation” (in “The Study of Folklore in Literature and Culture” [1965c]), “deep and shallow play” (in “Gallus

as Phallus" [1994]), "folklore and metafolklore" (in "Metafolklore and Oral Literary Criticism" [1966c]), "oral and literary" (in "Folklore as a Mirror of Culture" [1969a]), and "literal and symbolic" (in "Getting the Folk and the Lore Together" [1976a]), which are highlighted in the present volume to exemplify his dichotomous rhetoric. Often one oppositional category is in tension with the other, although unity or resolution may be possible. Dundes's ultimate example was folkloristics, which he described as a unity that arose out of the nineteenth-century struggle between anthropological and literary folklore "camps" (1975a, 10; 1988b, ix).

Dundes explained his preoccupation with analysis as necessary to overcome the "tendency to treat 'lore' as though it were totally separate from 'folk,'" which could be resolved by emphasizing the "fact that it is told by one human being to another" (1980e, viii). He contended that "getting the folk and the lore together," a phrase he used in the title of an article in this volume, meant a linkage of the behavioral act and social setting (folk) of the telling to content (lore). Thus in his view, deriving the meaning of folklore requires more than a literal reading of the text; it calls for contextualizing the expression in behavioral and social conditions. He emphasized this by referring to folklore as a form of sublimation: "Folklore offers a socially sanctioned outlet for the expression of taboo and anxiety-provoking behavior. One can do or say in folkloric form things otherwise interdicted in everyday life" (2005a, 359). To grasp why folklore is needed as an expressive outlet, one therefore needs to know the cultural values, taboos, anxieties, and beliefs of the society in which individual tradition-bearers operate in everyday life.

"By analyzing folklore," Dundes wrote, the scholar discovers "general patterns of culture" and raises "levels of consciousness" (2005a, 359). The assumption in this statement is not just that folklore can be ordered according to form, but that it is cognitively patterned (for example, through linear, circular, or binary thinking). Another presupposition is the existence of an unconscious—a part of the mind containing repressed instincts and their representative wishes, ideas, and images which are not accessible to direct examination. Although some critics would posit that mental activity can only be conscious, Freudian theory holds that unconscious ideas can be recognized when resistance and repression, processes of internalizing disturbing thoughts, are overcome, so that the ideas become conscious, that is, externalized.

Folklore holds psychological and cultural significance because, as an often momentary and a socially sanctioned outlet of expression, it uses symbols in elaborated narratives and in rituals to encapsulate (or intensify) experience and provide a release from reality. Folkloric evidence is different from historical documentation because it often constitutes fantasy, but that does not detract from its truthfulness or significance. "The apparent irrationality of much folklore," Dundes pointed out, "poses problems for literal-minded, historically oriented folklorists. It is not easy to find a rationale for the irrational, to make sense of 'non-sense,' but that is what folklorists seriously interested in interpretation must try to do" (1980e, viii). This statement smacks of a Hegelian process of contradiction and negation leading to rational unity, and one might go further to see a connection between Dundes's construction of symbols in the mind as the ultimate source of expression and Hegel's emphasis on the binary in mental operations to represent the mind's process of comprehension. Although scholars have made comparisons between Hegel's and Freud's conceptions of consciousness and human development, Dundes invoked Freud rather than Hegel because of the central concern in Freud's work—a folkloristic concern, Dundes said—for explaining the irrational and fantastic in expressive behavior (Dundes 1987i, 4–5; Butler 1976; Eecke 2006).

Freud extended the concept of negation to a connection between verbalized expression and consciousness (Freud 1961; Eecke 2006). In this view, the danger of repressed material becoming conscious through talk is mitigated by the talker's denial. Tension exists, then, between the unconscious and conscious, and between repressed and verbalized thought. Analysis resolves the conflict, and may be confirmed to the analyst by the teller's response of "I never thought of that." Folklore is especially important in making the unconscious conscious, Dundes affirmed, because it appears to be a "safe" fictive or ritual space in which to symbolize, and thereby control, anxiety or ambiguity, but if the realistic basis of the symbolism is exposed, repression recurs in another form. This transformation accounts for Dundes's emphasizing the observer's "analytical" rather than native posture in assessing meaning, although he urged analysts to collect "metafolklore," tradition-bearers' comments on their own traditions. These comments are in themselves part of belief, he observed, or else rationalizations for the need for expression (1966c, 1975d). The analyst is essential in the Dundesian process of deriving meaning; an outside eye is necessary to discern the inside, or hidden, codes of meaning. Some folklorists, Dundes understood, would have the tradition-bearers' explanation of an event be sufficient, viewing the role of the folklorist as facilitating self-reflection by natives. But in a Dundesian perspective, the analyst needs to maintain a detached vantage rather than a position of advocacy, precisely because folk material involves personal and societal anxieties that are repressed or avoided and, when expressed, typically disguised. Discussing photocopy lore full of scatological and sexual references, for example, Dundes found that "humor is a *veil* barely concealing an expression of most of the major problems facing contemporary American society" (Dundes and Pagter 1978, xviii, emphasis added). Therefore, meaning lodges outside the awareness of the self, requiring an analyst to recognize it. That is not to say that folklorists, even more than other kinds of analysts, cannot rely on experience or participation to gain an "inside-out" view of the material. Dundes, for instance, referred to his specific Navy duty, homeported in Italy in 1955, when he analyzed the taboo on sailors whistling on ship. Using the principle of "like produces like" from James Frazer's law of homeopathic magic, he concluded that whistling represented a "windstorm." And he drew on his participation in all-male groups for his interpretation of the roots of war in competitive phallogocentric display that feminizes an opponent (2005c, 389; 1997e, 27). He also referred to his experience as a folklorist, and analyzed folklorists' folklore, as demonstrated in the last chapter of this volume, in which he finds a relation between collecting items and anal retention.

Despite the desire to be objective observers, folklorists are subject to the biases of the society in which they work and their traditions as a subgroup, Dundes iterated (1966a, 227, 245). For example, he pointed out the devolutionary thinking underlying Dorson's comment that "the idea that folklore is dying out is itself a kind of folklore" (Dundes 2005c, 406). The negation of the related pronouncement by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett that the discipline of folklore is "predicated on a vanishing subject" is that folklore is constantly emerging, which Dundes averred in the statement, "folklore continues to be alive and well in the modern world, due in part to increased transmission via e-mail and the Internet" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1996, 249; Dundes 2005c, 406). Belief in a vanishing subject results in an obsession with collection and classification as an end in itself, a recovery project that justifies rushing into the field to gather folklore before lore and field both disappear. Dundes decried, in natural history terms, the antiquarian "quest for the quaint or... curious" as "butterfly collecting": "Items of folklore are treated as rare exotica, metaphorically speaking, to have a pin stuck through them and mounted in a display archival case

such that it is almost impossible to imagine the folklore items were ever alive (that is, performed). Context is typically ignored, and it is the text only that is prized by the local collector" (2005c, 388).

A connotation of the devolutionary impulse to "get the lore before it disappears" is the need to witness lore for oneself, an empiricist assumption that leads to the glorification of knowledge *discovery* via the recording of lore rather than to the interpretation of aggregate data or individual texts/contexts. The implication is that a struggling or declining discipline may project its fear into a collecting praxis and the observation of a "devolving" subject. Denying folklore's persistence as a natural process of culture affirms the anxiety of "falling." Or the devolutionary belief may disguise a deeper fear involving the folklorist's motivation for interest in the material, linked, according to Dundes, with anal retention in the obsessive behavior of gathering, ordering, and piling (1975c; 1975e). The inference is that a way to deal with a problem of self is to attribute the problem to someone else or to something outside the self.

An alternative to devolution and the collecting obsession, one promoted by Dundes so as to "modernize" the subject, is recognizing that the study of folklore is itself emergent in nineteenth-century Europe, arising out of the perceived conflicts between rural life and industrialization, culture-based nationalism and imperial monarchies, and colonialism and cultural relativism (1965c, 1982b). For Dundes, folklore demanded an analytical project to explain its emergence and ubiquity. The binary matters to be resolved derive from its definitive characteristics of multiplicity and variation, leading to its quality of constantly changing yet staying the same, being specifically situated and universal, old and yet new (Dundes 1989c, 193–94). Rather than being dragged down by a narrow insistence on oral tradition, in the twenty-first century the science of tradition flourishes, expands, and spreads because it has to, if sense is to be made of mass-mediated culture and, further, so that this knowledge may be applied to address social problems in the world (1965c, 1980h).

Dundes linked dualism (particularly the importance of "double meaning") in psychoanalysis with the binary basis of structuralism. The pivotal structuralist approaches of Vladimir Propp (syntagmatic, relating to a sequential pattern of plot functions) and Claude Lévi-Strauss (paradigmatic, relating to a thematic set of contrasting relations), while often set in opposition to one another in surveys of structuralist approaches, are unified by Dundes to reveal mental processes underlying the structural patterns of fantastical expressions. For example, in the article "Binary Opposition in Myth," reproduced in this volume, Dundes concluded, "To the extent that the debate between Propp and Lévi-Strauss itself constitutes a kind of academic binary opposition, we earnestly trust that this essay will be understood as a form of constructive mediation" (1997a, 48). The point is that binary structure is basic, whether as the basis of a story (lack to lack liquidated), method (identification and interpretation), formation of a group (requiring at least two persons), authenticity of an item (confirmed by two or more versions), or indeed in the concept of folklore (uniting the social "folk" and the expressive "lore"). The binary is significant in this perspective not just as a framework, but as a representation of the way the mind works—as a psychological concept—and also as the social basis of transmitting, or sharing, folklore. Therefore, dualism constitutes the cognitive grammar of the expression itself, and the binary construction of a story or event comprises the drama or tension that draws attention to the expression, as apart from other forms of communication. Analysis is thus a discernment of this source—in the mind, group, and expression.

Binarism as a philosophy, even more than a method, that is connected to structural analysis is often attributed to Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss-born contemporary of Freud. The tie between the two is their shared interest in mental processes that are revealed in language. Saussure was concerned less with the laws of a particular language than with the rules governing all languages, which get at how humans cognitively order reality and create culture. Saussure's structuralism, which was adopted by notable scholars concerned with folklore such as Lévi-Strauss, Roman Jakobson, Petr Bogatyrev, and Dell Hymes, is the distinction of *parole* (translated from the French as both "word" and "speech") and *langue* ("language" or "tongue"; summarized by folklorists following Noam Chomsky as "competence") wherein the former represents the utterances of members of a language community (in speech acts, or "performance"), which manifest an underlying structure, and the latter is the generative structure (Hymes 1972, 47). Of importance to Dundes's semiotic theory of meaning was the resulting conclusion that words do not necessarily possess an intrinsic or a historically emergent significance. If *langue* is the totality of language, then parts of that structure have relationships to one another that can be independent of utterances with natural associations in the external world. Such relationships are ones of difference, because they refer to, indeed create, categories that distinguish signs from others, such as a dog not being a cat, horse, or pig. Dundes's scorn for literal-minded folklorists was rooted in their tendency to treat the utterances as reality, rather than analyzing the relationships that *underlie and generate* those utterances and order reality. In this model, language is always changing, but it is dependent on the social conventions established in a community of speakers as opposed to individual speakers' wills.

In "Proverbs and the Ethnography of Speaking," Dundes used the distinction between *parole* and *langue* to assert that an ethnographic goal of folklore research is geared toward communication or context. According to Dundes, folkloristics "is not simply the delineation of the structure of language as an isolated symbolic system or code, but rather the attempt to discover exactly how language is used in specific situations. . . . In this type of study, one is interested in not only the rules of a language, but also the rules for the use of the language" (Arewa and Dundes 1964, 71; see also Dundes 1966a. 242; 1976b, 1504; Ben-Amos 1972). This methodological statement led to his assertion of the importance of the social or contextual basis of folklore at the end of the essay: "Let's put the folk back in folklore!" (adapted linguistically from the structure of "Let's put the Christ back in Christmas," he said). Separating himself from other contextualists, however, Dundes warned against confusing surface *use* and disguised *meaning*. He inferred meaning from symbolic clues that might be outside the awareness of the speaker, and not apparent from the context. "Use is observed or collected from natives, while the interpretation" of meaning, he mused, is inevitably made from the analyst's viewpoint (Dundes 1975c, 52).

If Dundes implied that Saussure's dualism, which foregrounds the analytical use of cultural context and communication, is liberating, many post-structuralists have been uncomfortable with the "value hierarchy" in the binary constructions of either/or statements. The unavoidable domination of one pole over another, critics claim, results from the assumption that one side of the dichotomy, as linguist Katharina Barbe has written, "is seen as purer, more positive, and more basic than the other side" (2001, 89). Judging from his disapproval of elitism and his mediation of the objective/subjective dichotomy, Dundes might have agreed to an extent, but his interpretations suggest that he remained committed to the idea that the binary is fundamental because it represents the cognitive process. Saussure's semiotic distinction between "signifier" (an acoustic image) and "signified" (a

concept) is evident in the Dundesian difference between use and meaning. In Dundes's writing, I do not find the post-structuralist view that binary distinctions are necessarily motivated by a desire to dominate, although Dundes, in his exposure of the construction of "othering" and "chauvinism" in narrative and speech, was well aware of the logic of imperialism in the intellectual constructions of West/East, civilized/primitive, white/black, mainstream/ethnic, men/women, and indeed scientific/folk (Dundes 1980h, 2; Dundes 1980a; Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2000, 24–25). Dundes brought into consciousness the unconscious predilection for binaries to comment on unequal power relations.

Dundes is often credited with pointing out the predominant cognitive pattern of trichotomy in American culture, which raises the question of the more universal role of the binary. His oft-cited essay, "The Number Three in American Culture" [1980d], drew meaning from a pattern that is prevalent but is not recognized; indeed, his lead-in is a quotation from Bronislaw Malinowski's *A Scientific Theory of Culture* (1944): "Nothing is as difficult to see as the obvious" (Dundes 1980d, 134). "Folklore," Dundes asserted in this essay, "is prime data for investigations of cognitive patterning" (137). As was his style, Dundes gave a broad array of evidence, such as: "In folk speech, one can give three cheers for someone, but not two or four. (And each cheer may consist of 'Hip, Hip, Hooray.') The starter for a race will say 'One, two, three, go.' He will not count to two or four. (Cf. The three commands 'On your mark, get set, go.') The alphabet is referred to as the ABCs and in the common folk simile, something is as easy as ABC; one does not speak of learning his ABs or his ABCDs" (136). His essential point was that three appears to be culture-specific, especially when compared to the "obsessive character" of the Native American use of four as a ritual or sacred number (135).

Although Dundes went no further in explaining the contrastive use of four in many Native American groups, I propose following this analytical approach to demonstrate that the significance of four in relation to the cosmology of space is natural; four represents a sacred circle, or the state of being symbolically complete, because it represents the four cardinal points forming the diameter and radius of circular space. Four stands for *everywhere*, that is, as far as the eye can see. From this standpoint, the Asian use of five as a pattern number in rituals and narratives adds the inner self, or center, as a point where the directions cross in the circle, suggesting the importance of introspection. Trichotomy, in my analysis, implies a bodily representation, apart from the binary mind, especially in the triangular importance of the head (as a source of wisdom and humanness) and shoulders (representing bodily support and strength) (Bronner 1986b, 15–16; see also Lease 1919, 72). Exploring the variety of possible meanings, Dundes suggested that trichotomy relates to the union that is the basis of society—the mother, father, and resulting child—before giving a psychoanalytic interpretation. Dundes used Freud in drawing the symbolic equivalence of three as "a masculine symbol, the *phallus cum testiculis*" and provocatively added that its prevalence in male-dominated Western civilization signifies "compensatory activity for not being able to give birth to children as females do." "This type of explanation," he mused, "would also make clear why aspects of American culture which are exclusively masculine, e.g., the military, the Boy Scouts, baseball, are especially three-ridden. (Note also that the Christian Trinity is all masculine. This would be further evidence that three is male creativity denying or replacing female creativity.)" (1980d, 158).

Dualism, Dundes observed, "is probably worldwide" and "assumed to have objective universal validity" (1965a, 186). Common "polarities," he philosophized, "include: life/death, body/soul, and male/female." He pointed out that the social extension of cognitive



dichotomy was indicated by the concepts of “self/other” and “us/them,” suggesting that the singular requires a pair for a sense of identity, to not only affirm what one is, but also what one is not (Dundes 1980d, 135). He also maintained the dyad as the basic unit of “sharing” and “transmitting” folklore. As linguistic evidence, he could have mentioned the colloquial expression of the base concept of the social in the folk saying, “Two is company and three’s a crowd.” Although Dundes did not go further with this line of reasoning, it is possible to extend the relation of the binary to the singular. Related to the “two is company” folk saying is the symbolic equating of one with emptiness in sayings such as “One is none, two is some, three is a sort, four is a mort,” “One body is no body,” and “One’s as good as none” (Stevenson 1948, 1717–18). To be alone is to be *anti-social*, or unethical, since “only caring for oneself” implies an extreme egotism or selfishness (as in “looking out for number one”). To be single is to be unattached—marginally a “loner,” or odd (which is implied in “being reclusive” or “a hermit”), or jocularly in the wellerism, “Every one to his own taste, said the old woman as she kissed her cow”;—and *nontraditional*, anti-social, or unique, expressed in the phrase “going it alone.” Dundes connected an exclusive scientific or elitist way of thinking with the singular notion of monolithism when he wrote, “inasmuch as folklorists, despite the fact that they are accustomed to thinking of variation in the texts of folklore, often wrongly assume that there is only one correct meaning or interpretation. There is no one right interpretation of an item of folklore any more than there is but one right version of a game or song. (We must overcome our penchant for monolithic perspectives as exemplified in monotheism, monogamy, and the like)” (1975d, 51–52).

The self, I would add, is a reference point from which historical as well as social connections are made, especially in references to someone being “original” (first), in the sense of being responsible for a creation (with Adamic overtones of Genesis) that is unprecedented and was copied thereafter. This cognitive association with the creative “*ur-form*” carries over into the frequent assumption that a single source of creation can be found for folklore, rather than a trans-cultural or psychological explanation of traditional expressions as “responses.” Dundes was not unconcerned about origins, but he tended to locate expressions cross-culturally, often in far-flung environments, and suggested psychological responses rather than diffusion to explain the similarities.

Binary segmentation of the self (such as in the psychoanalytic concepts of id and ego), is shown in the dichotomous vernacular expressions of “being alone with one’s thoughts” or “talking to oneself,” which sociolinguistically implies an agent and a receiver of the message, and suggests a conversation between an “outer” and an “inner voice” (see Mechling 2006). A binary structure differs from other structural concepts in that it tends to signify psychological and social processes, while singularism and trichotomy typically have corporeal associations.<sup>1</sup>

Taking a cue from the dualism between manifest and latent meanings in “depth” psychology, Dundesian analysis uncovers “deep” meaning in the sense of something being about something that turns out to be something else. This point is probably the greatest barrier to acceptance of Dundes’s interpretations, since there is frequently an assumption in his interpretations that the message the folklorist hears or sees is a disguise or distortion of meaning rather than truth taken at face value (see Dundes 1976b; Cohen 1980, 47–50; Oring 1975b; Oring 2003; Koven 2005). Even the rhetoric of “informant,” used in collecting, suggests that something is revealed rather than in need of “interpretation” (i.e., as if the message was coded). The way to get to the “underlying” structure, the “hidden” meaning, or the “unstated” reason—to cite some rhetoric of depth analysis—is

through identification and comparison of ciphers. Rather than being revealed in observable behavior (what Dundes called “descriptive data”) in the field, symbolic meaning is discerned “beneath” the surface and traced to the mind. A critical question in this approach is whether the meaning can be “proven.” Dundes addressed this issue by underscoring the value of interpretation, which presupposes that the subject or text of analysis is polysemous, rather than being misconstrued as having a singularly correct meaning that is, in his words, “monolithic” (1975d, 52; 1980e, ix).

Dundes used “interpretation” much as Freud used it in *Interpretation of Dreams* ([1900] 1999), to denote the results of an analytical process, that is, possibilities suggested by the analyst from attention to talked texts, and which are outside the awareness of the patient. Freud studied both dreams and folklore, and in fact related the two (Freud and Oppenheim 1958). Both are often viewed as “unintelligible and absurd,” and as carrying little significance, although Freud ventured to show that they are important psychologically (Freud [1900] 1999, 128). In his essay “The Method of Interpreting Dreams: An Analysis of a Specimen Dream,” Freud called for a “scientific treatment of the subject” involving the materialization of the content of a dream into comparable texts (132). Freud warned that “the object of our attention is not the dream as a whole but the separate portions of its content” (136). He described the analysis of the portions as a “decoding method, since it treats dreams as a kind of cryptography in which each sign can be translated into another sign” (130). The interpretation posits “hidden” meanings that the actor is not aware of. They are deduced from general principles, such as “a dream is the fulfilment of a wish” (154). Freud outlined a manifest content (*manifestes Trauminhalt*), or “objects, actions, settings, and words that appear in the dream and are retained in memory,” and latent content (*latenter Trauminhalt*), the “unconscious referents of the manifest content” (Oring 1993, 279). Tests can be applied to validate the symbolic conclusion about the unconscious thoughts, motivations, or patterns (*Traumgedanken*)—through corroboration in other “cases,” and a reading of the analyzed texts for consistency (see Sherwood 1969, 196–202; Fine 1992; Oring 2003, 58–70).

But what if the patient or tradition-bearer denies the analytical meaning, even if the goal of making the unconscious content conscious is to “gain insight” and, ultimately, the reintegration of (or rationale for) personality or culture? Dundes took negation as confirmation, for, as he wrote, “if the participants consciously realized what they were doing, they would in all probability not be willing to participate. It is precisely the symbolic facade that makes it possible for people to participate in an activity without consciously understanding the significance of that participation” (2005a, 357). In other words, if the tradition-bearers were aware of the “deep” meaning, then they would not need the tradition.

Dundesian analysis identifies basic patterns or concepts, and consequently arrives at interpretations of their associations through symbolic equivalences (allomotifs) and social outlooks (worldviews). My thesis regarding Dundes’s analytics is that his project to uncover “meaning” depended structurally on binary presumptions, and contextually on the “modern” reconstruction of folkloristics to “interpret.” His goals were to centralize folklore studies as an academic discipline, and disrupt social hierarchy by conceptualizing tradition as human necessity. Meaning and interpretation in Dundesian analysis are typically doubled. Meaning divides into literal (manifest) and figurative (latent) layers, while interpretation has literary (textual/contextual) and religious (hermeneutic/mythological) as well as psychological and social connotations. With this in mind, in the sections that follow I will examine examples of his analysis to answer the doubled question of what folklore means, and what Dundes meant.

## “That Can’t Be Alan Dundes!”

In 1974, Richard Reuss drew attention to the “folklore of folklorists” by titling his article “That Can’t Be Alan Dundes! Alan Dundes Is Taller Than That!” The exclamatory phrase was suggested by students at an American Folklore Society meeting, who traded narratives of their special awe for Dundes among the giants of the field. Reuss noted the “niagara of Alan Dundes lore washing over American academe,” but in a bait-and-switch tactic, informed the reader that the essay was not about Dundes at all. The phrase signified, though, that even before Dundes turned forty, he had achieved mythological status and had come to represent folklore study as a disciplinary enterprise. The point of the exclamation, according to Reuss, was that “Alan Dundes in reality is taller than average, five feet eleven and one-half inches to be precise. Even so, it seems fair to say that were he seven feet tall he still would be hard put to measure up physically to the larger-than-life image of Alan Dundes created in the minds of many students through reading and discussion of his wide-ranging and prolific publications, his expansive writing style, and the constant references made to him and his work in the classroom of a local university” (1974, 308). This negation of reality by expectation and image raises the question of the real life of Alan Dundes, and how he came to be mythologized. If this is how others view Dundes, then how has he narrated himself in symbolic autobiography?

At the time that Reuss wrote his essay, much about the rising star was ambiguous. He revealed little of himself, although Richard Dorson (1975) gave a heroic cast to Dundes’s character when he introduced *Analytic Essays in Folklore*, describing the author as a “brilliant” prodigy with an uncanny mental “gift,” because he obtained his doctorate in folklore at Indiana University while still in his twenties and rose precociously to full professor by the age of thirty-three at the highly regarded University of California at Berkeley. Dorson told the following story: “While in my classes in folklore I insisted on the student documenting each textual item of folklore with informant data. Dundes, once a student in those classes, went one better on becoming the instructor and required that his student collectors in addition interpret the meaning of the recorded text. His quest for meanings has led him to seek context along with text, metafolklore as well as folklore, and thereby to reorient the conception of fieldwork; interpretations of tradition bearers should carry at least as much weight as those of investigators” (1975, vii). The junior Dundes, Dorson intimated, had bested the doctoral father and risen triumphantly to take his place among the pantheon of the discipline’s gods (perhaps to replace the father). While proud of his boy, Dorson, like a disapproving dad, had questioned the rebellious spirit of his gang of “young Turks,” and took junior to task for embracing a “school of interpretation most abhorrent to orthodox folklorists” (1972a, 25, 45). Perhaps that was the reference that motivated Dundes to subtitle a work on Jewish folklore “an unorthodox essay,” playing on the double meaning of orthodox with respect to religion and convention as he applied a psychoanalytic approach to modern-day customs of circumventing restrictive Sabbath rules (2002c; see also Koven 2005).

Psychoanalytic inquiry into folklore was hardly new during the 1960s, when Dundes raised its banner as a “grand theory” for folkloristics (Dundes 1987i). Freud, beginning in the late nineteenth century, devoted much of his symbolist theory to the analysis of jokes, taboos, and myths, and among his followers and critics—Ernest Jones, Géza Róheim, Bruno Bettelheim, Karl Abraham, Otto Rank, Carl Jung, and Theodor Reik—extended the query of folklore as a form of fantasy and projection that related to human development

and mental processes. Yet it was unusual for folklorists to apply psychoanalytic theory; both Freud and psychoanalysis were absent from the major mid-twentieth-century reference work of the field, *Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend*, although “anthropological school” and “historic-geographic method” (literary) were featured entries (Leach 1949; see also Boas 1920, 318–21; Taylor 1940, 17). Despite psychiatrists’ ubiquitous attention to folklore for inquiries into the human psyche, the main intellectual project of folklorists in the mid-twentieth-century was to trace the origin and distribution of folk material. Some of their concern was for showing folklore as an ancient source of literature, and for Dundes, that was driven by a devolutionary premise. The landmark works of the *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* ([1932–36] 1975) and *The Types of the Folktale* (commonly referred to as the tale-type index [1928] 1961), prepared by Stith Thompson at Indiana University, and other classificatory compendia for riddles, ballads, proverbs, and songs influenced by the Finnish “historic-geographic” school, served notice, in Dundes’s words, that “folklorists as a group tend to be biased in favor of literal, not symbolic, interpretations of folklore. They seek historical rather than psychological explanations of folkloristic phenomena” (1972, 9). Even among his fellow “young Turks,” who were developing ethnographies of performance and communication during the 1960s, Dundes stood out. He complained that they had a reductionist tendency to treat folklore as “situated events” representing social relations, rather than as symbolic texts of psychological signification. He derided the favor of his colleagues for Clifford Geertz’s influential performative concept of reading events as texts of “deep play” (1972, 1994), which Dundes slighted as “shallow play” because it did not posit psychological motivations for enacting the play, and remained at the level of social “reflection” (1994). He accused his seniors of dehumanizing folklore “by treating *lore* as though it had nothing whatever to do with *folk*,” and of prudishly suppressing or ignoring the obscene materials that flourish in oral tradition and resound with sexual symbolism. Dundes liked to point out that Thompson left out material under “X” in the *Motif-Index* that he felt was obscene, even though it was this content that was most vibrantly oral in culture (Dundes 1972, 9–10). Dundes argued that humanizing folklore, or emphasizing the folk, would lead to psychological and social interpretations of people rather than a superficial “literal” (and therefore literary/historical) emphasis on *lore*.

From what mysterious roots had Dundes come out of the horizon, as either heretic or prophet? I cannot document a miraculous birth, but by his account, there were formative experiences (usually described in pairs of events and characters) and a moment of conversion that led him to take a career path of folklore study. His early life was filled with both city and country. He was born on September 8, 1934, in New York City, to a lawyer father and musician mother. When Dundes was still an infant, the couple moved the family sixty-five miles north of the city to a farm located near Patterson, New York, and there, in 1936, a sibling was added—his sister Marna. Being close in age, she was likely a factor in his later observations about the significance of sibling rivalry in the content of children’s folklore. His father died in 1952, leaving the teenager in difficult emotional and financial straits as he pursued his education. Dundes recalled, many years later, “I lost my father when I was a sophomore, in 1952, and I have never completely gotten over it. . . . I have a picture of him on my dresser in the little room off our bedroom and so I see him every morning of my life” (Mieder 2006, 215). He recollected his father as an influence on his folklore interest because of his talents as a raconteur, and his early exit from Dundes’s life may have influenced the folklorist’s thinking about the father figure, as well his reputation for taking a

paternalistic role toward students (Dundes 1962c; Dundes 1976d; Dundes and Edmunds 1995; Dundes 1987c; see also Bendix 1995, 58–62).

Reflecting on his family's ethnic background, Dundes acknowledged that while his parents were both Jewish, he was raised in a secular environment. In fact, he attributed their move to the farm as an escape from religious piety. He recalled, "I gathered from numerous conversations that both my parents had felt somewhat suffocated by the close Jewish atmosphere in which they lived in New York City and so when I was just one year old, they fled to a rural area near Patterson, New York, about sixty miles north of the city. . . . Although almost all of our family friends were Jewish, I did not have much exposure to formal religious practices. As a result, although I was always proud of my heritage, I felt quite ignorant of the religious elements in Judaism" (xii). Still, he absorbed reformist values expressed in *tikkun olam*, literally translated as "repairing the world," which is often invoked to connote a Jewish commitment to social justice, with the implication that learning can effect change. He said that he certainly related to Freud so strongly later because of the power of his ideas, but also because Freud, as a secular Jew, was seeking to explain issues of identity and anti-Semitism, which connected with what Dundes faced in life.<sup>2</sup> In his own analytics, Dundes considered Freud's use of exemplary Jewish jokes in the light of the Vienna's scholar's secular Jewish background. Dundes also recognized the linkage of cultural relativity espoused by another influential scholar with a Jewish background, Franz Boas, the father of modern anthropology (Dundes 1987i, 23–24).

Reflective of his ambivalent feelings about his ethnicity, Dundes's analytics tended to emphasize gender, rather than religious difference, as primary (1997c, 155–57). Dundes's experience with anti-Semitism and his emotional response to the horrors of the Holocaust were nonetheless significant factors in his later writing on German national character, ethnic slurs, blood libel and wandering Jew legends, and JAP (Jewish-American Princess) and Auschwitz jokes (Dundes 1984a, Dundes and Hauschild 1987, 1987e).<sup>3</sup> He held misgivings about regulation in organized religion, perhaps as a result of his parents' conversations about the "suffocation" of the synagogue, and he knew that some of his writing on religion was taken as irreverent, if not sacrilegious (2005c, 405). Nonetheless, in his book *Holy Writ as Oral Lit*, Dundes avowed that he held "a lifelong love of the Bible"; his "family Bible," he wrote, was the King James version (1999, vii). Rather than being a believer in one creed, however, he claimed to be interested in the nature of religion, especially to test Freud's comment that "a large portion of the mythological conception of the world which reaches far into the most modern religions is *nothing but psychology projected to the outer world*" (Dundes 1976b, 1505, emphasis in original).<sup>4</sup>

I see a connection between the ambiguity of his religious affiliation and his later assertion that a crucial consequence of folkloric transmission was a person holding simultaneous identities (1980h, 9; see also 1989c). He did not want to be essentialized into one monolithic stereotype; he had many other traits by which he socially identified himself at different times (folklorist, musician, father, professor). Although his father had been the president of a Jewish fraternity at City College of New York, the son did not associate with Jewish communal organizations in the same way. He reflected that when he became a folklorist, it was not to find his roots, although there are hints of a concern for social justice. He was preoccupied with groups outside his heritage that had suffered discrimination or colonialism: "Native Americans, African Americans, and the peoples of India, among others," according to his memoirs. It was not until a fateful trip to Israel in 1999, he acknowledged, that he "set about learning about Jewish religious ritual in earnest," although he did not become



*Alan Dundes's library in his home, with cultural artifacts.*

*Photo by Simon Bronner*

religious (2002c, xii). Even when he began writing on Jewish customs, he wanted to show that they were not exclusive, and he identified trans-cultural sources, a strategy that he also applied to the Christian Bible and Muslim Qur'an (1999, 2002c, 2003a). He also raised eyebrows by explaining customs of kashrut and Sabbath laws in relation to an anal-erotic cultural personality, and finding homoeroticism in Islam's position of prayer (2002c; 2004c).

When Dundes "set about learning," he read everything he could get his hands on, and at times referred to himself as more of a "library scholar" than a fieldworker. His voracious appetite for reading owed to a childhood regimen. His parents gave him an incentive to read as a young boy; they offered him a dollar for every hundred books he read, and he was free to choose the subjects. To earn the money, he had to keep a record of the books he finished. Standing out in number and memory in his accounting were anthologies of fairy tales. His parents' home was filled with books, and he remembered that "there was a multi-volume series called *Journeys Through Bookland* . . . [in which] were interspersed fairy tales, and I recall thumbing through the pages of the various volumes in search of these tales" (2002a, xi). If his eyes were already set on folk literature, his ears perked up for orally told jokes, and he developed a lively repertoire of his own. He recalled, "from grade school on, I became avidly interested in jokes, frequently repeating favorites to anyone who would listen to me. I recall with nostalgia how my father, despite his fatigue after a day of work sixty miles from home, would often share a 'new' joke he had heard during the day." As would occur so often later in life, an interest in oral material led him to scour the library. He added: "During my high school years, I eagerly devoured the few compilations of published jokes available in local libraries. . . . In college, as an English major, I learned to appreciate humor in more literary terms" (1987c, v).

A childhood passion for music, often overlooked in intellectual biographies of Dundes, deserves mention (Zumwalt 1995; Georges 2004; Mieder 2004; Hansen 2005; Gürel 2006; Nader and Brandes 2006). Influenced by his piano-playing mother, he was accomplished in music, studying the clarinet for many years and attending the Manhattan School of Music to take up music theory. Dundes recognized musical notation as a structural and symbolic system. He had a trained eye and ear for rendering performances in readable form, and seeing the relations of multiple parts. In "The Number Three in American Culture," he offered musical systems as a prime example of the principle that trichotomy consists of positions located in reference to some initial point. "In music," he authoritatively wrote, "the point of reference may be 'middle C,' which serves, for example as a mid-point between the [bass] and treble clefs in addition to functioning as a point of reference from which to describe voice ranges (e.g., 'two octaves above middle C')" (1980d, 136). He used music, too, to contrast Western and "primitive" music, in which "ternary time is not common . . . and thus its presence in Western and American music is all the more striking" (148). He also criticized ballad scholars for excising music from discussions of the text, and pointed out the nominal connection of the ballad to linguistic roots of "dance." If scholars made this connection, Dundes opined, they would realize that the ballad was not universal, as it tended to appear when they equated it with the folk-narrative text, but was culturally limited to Indo-European areas (1996b, ix-x).

When Dundes entered Yale, he declared music as his major. But a job in the library, working with the fiction collection, piqued his interest in literary classics, and he switched to English literature, to his mother's chagrin. His entrée into psychoanalytic theory occurred in a Yale classroom, through the reading of Otto Rank's *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* ([1909] 2004) during his sophomore year. Rank had been a student of Freud's, and Dundes was mesmerized by his interpretation of the structural similarity in the hero cycles of different cultures. It provided a stark contrast to the dehumanized rhetoric of stimuli and reinforcement he heard in an elective course on behavioral psychology the previous semester. He recalled feeling disappointed in the material on behavioral psychology, because "it dealt only with explaining how homing pigeons managed to find their way and how white mice succeeded in running through mazes" (2002a, xii). Thus, Dundes's later equation of psychology with psychoanalysis was not out of a lack of awareness of other approaches; his conversion experience came from viewing the mind, rather than the body, as source (Dundes 1991a). Reflecting on what he called his "Aha!" response, he wrote, "perhaps it was my early attraction to fairy tales that made me check out the book, but in any event, I can still recall the thrill of discovery as I read Rank's remarkable essay" (2002a, xii). Even before he encountered the professional study of folklore, he had immersed himself in reading Freud. The later influence of Rank's analysis of traditional narrative can be discerned specifically in Dundes's writing on the hero cycle, and more generally in a concern for the psychological impact of birth and the mother's role in development, matters that forced a parting of the ways between Rank and Freud (Dundes 1990). Rank challenged Freud's assertion that myth and religion were rooted in the Oedipal complex by positing a pre-Oedipal phase, involving a separation anxiety ([1924] 1993; [1909] 2004; see also Lieberman 1998). Dundes referred to this phase, absent from Freud's theories, in his interpretations of flood and creation myths as male fantasies of female birth (1987b; 1988a).

Dundes's Yale classroom experience was one of two events that he called life-changing. He connected Rank's and Freud's studies of myths and jokes with his literary studies when

he asked Paul Pickrel, his instructor for a course on the nineteenth-century English novel, whether he could investigate allusions to rural customs in the novels of Thomas Hardy. Uncertain of his ability to guide the young Dundes down this route, Pickrel referred him to faculty who could at Indiana University. Dundes completed his master of arts in teaching of English at Yale, and prepared for doctoral study at Indiana that would allow him, he said, “to combine my earlier interest in Freud with my chosen field of study: folklore” (2002a, xiii). In light of his writings—on the representation of the Civil Rights movement in folklore, and on conditions in the Soviet bloc—I believe that his attraction to folklore was also driven by what he perceived as its social relevance at a time of rising racial conflict nationally and Cold War political tension internationally. This is evident in pleas early in his writing career for cross-cultural attention to folklore as a way to bridge social and political differences (1969a; 1971b; 1973; Dundes and Abrahams 1969).

Another factor in his turn to folklore study was his talent as a joke teller. Psychoanalytic literature broached jokes together with folk and fairy tales because of their apparent symbolism of anxiety and aggression, but folklore studies, oriented toward literary and anthropological concerns for the purity of ancient texts and the sanctity of pre-modern cultures, respectively, rarely interpreted them psychologically. Dundes also was drawn to psychoanalysts’ consideration of folk narrative, finding meaning in his childhood immersion in fairy tales as an alternative to the political uses of *Märchen* in the cause of romantic nationalism, including the Grimm Brothers in the nineteenth century and the Nazis and Soviets in the twentieth century (1966a, 233–34; 1969a, 472–73; 1970, 337; Oinas 1978; Dow and Lixfeld 1994; Bronner 1998, 184–236).

Reacting negatively to romantic nationalism and the conventional division of folklore studies by nation, Dundes’s philosophical inclination was toward a global view of culture as well as politics (Dundes 1969a, 472–73). He believed that a fuller international awareness of folklore taught tolerance and social unity. One can read this sentiment in his complaint, published in a *Britannica* yearbook, that “folklore has too long been the tool of regionalism and nationalism.” Lamenting that “folklore has more often been a divisive than a unifying influence in the world,” he philosophized that “surely it is difficult to consider as an enemy someone who shares the same folktales and customs,” and gave as examples the common traditions of peoples of Europe, Arabs and Jews, and Turks and Greeks. “If the world is ever to be truly united,” he mused, “then the world’s peoples as a ‘folk’ must have a world folklore. Some of this may come from the identification of old traditions held in common and some from newly generated ones” (1970, 337).

Dundes spent a year in France before he ventured out to the Midwest for doctoral study, and the tutelage of eminent folklorists Richard Dorson (known for historical approaches to American folklore), Erminie Wheeler-Voegelin (a specialist on Native American lore), Felix Oinas (an Estonian scholar from whom he learned of Russian formalist Vladimir Propp), David Bidney (a philosophical scholar of mythology and humanistic anthropology who was also accused of bucking scholarly orthodoxy), and Warren Roberts (a disciple of folktale scholar Stith Thompson’s historic-geographic school). He traveled there with his bride Carolyn M. Browne, a graduate student of playwrighting in Yale’s Drama School, whom he married in September 1958. He taught conversational English and managed to collect folklore in French, resulting in his first publication on tongue twisters in the *French Review* of 1960. Even in this early note, he demonstrated his attention to structure by noting a discernible pattern in the prevalence of word sequences containing the /s/ and /ʃ/ phonemes (giving the English example of “She sells sea shells by the sea shore”). After this



identification, he offered a functional interpretation involving the psychological effect of “the sense of power” children feel upon mastering the twisters (1960, 604–5).

The following year, while still a graduate student, Dundes published a note in the top-rank *Journal of American Folklore*, brashly suggesting that contemporary folklorists move from “worldwide collecting” of texts to considerations of the ultimate origins of folklore in individual development. Dundes applied Freudian theory in asserting that with increased parental discipline, the infant suppressed desires, which came out in dreams. “With maturity, however,” Dundes wrote, “comes the ability to express these dreams in the form of folktales dealing with fictitious characters who are able, unlike the raconteur, to gratify their obscene wishes, at least temporarily” (Dundes and Schmaier 1961, 142). An example he gave was the role of humor “as an intrinsic quality of civilized manifestations of socially obstructed scatologic tendencies,” that is, the symbolic reference by adults in obscene jokes of the pleasure of excrement in childhood (143–44).

Dundes gave an idea of the negative reception of his teachers to the psychoanalytic interpretation of scatologic tendencies in his reminiscence of Professor Wheeler-Voeglin’s course on North American Indian folklore. A memorable class took up the creation myth of the Earth-Diver, in which an animal brings up a tiny bit of mud from floodwaters, and the mud consequently expands magically to form the earth. A classmate gave a presentation on the myth that drew the professor’s extra attention, since she had published commentary on it (Dundes 2002a, xiii–xiv). Dundes remembered, “When I heard the oral report, I could see immediately that it was a classic case of male anal-erotic creativity (in which males attempt to compete with females by creating from a substance produced by their bodies). I said as much in the seminar and was ridiculed by all assembled for this seemingly bizarre interpretation. I was sufficiently annoyed by this total rejection of my idea that I was inspired to write a paper on the subject that was later published in the *American Anthropologist* in 1962 [and reproduced in this volume]” (xiv). Dundes did not get much support for psychoanalytic interpretation from his adviser Richard Dorson, either. Dundes had thought that Dorson might be an advocate when he requested sources from Dundes, on psychoanalytic theory, for a survey of current folkloristic theories he was preparing for publication (Dorson 1963). Dundes felt betrayed by the published result, and told a revealing coming-of-age story, with himself shifting roles from naive seeker to hero-warrior: “Dorson did ably summarize all the sources I had so carefully given him, but only for the purpose of making fun of them. Instead of helping my cause, I had unwittingly aided and abetted the enemy. I had foolishly thought my professor had an open mind and that he sincerely wanted to learn something about the approach. Far from contributing to a greater understanding of the psychoanalytic approach to folklore, I had provided much of the ammunition used by Dorson to demean and ridicule it” (2002a, xv).

David Bidney, according to Dundes, had a more open mind toward psychoanalytic approaches to myth and folklore, but he criticized them for being reductionist (Bidney 1967, 8). Contributing an essay giving a psychoanalytic consideration of American football for Bidney’s *festschrift* in 1979, Dundes wrote, “It is a pleasure to dedicate this essay to Professor David Bidney who taught me that there is no cultural data which cannot be illuminated by a judicious application of theory” (1979b, 237). Bidney questioned Freudian claims for the universality of symbols, and was attracted to Géza Róheim’s revision of Freud’s notion of the innateness of the content of the unconscious (Bidney 1967, 6–7). Róheim posited a situational understanding of folklore in which the content of tradition in different cultures expresses various dispositions to react emotionally to a

common human experience. Bidney gave the example of a snake as a symbol of the penis. He explained Róheim's position that the snake as penis "is articulated by some individuals in a wide variety of cultures and is then accepted by others, who in turn utilize this symbol in their dreams as a means of expressing their psychological conflicts" (7). From this discussion with Bidney, Dundes was moved to edit for publication a volume of Róheim's essays, which he introduced with the remark, "His bold and sometimes startling interpretations of folklore have been an inspiration in my own research in the psychoanalytic study of folklore" (Dundes 1992, xxii). Although Dundes disagreed with Róheim's theory that folk narratives have their origin in dreams, and that the roots of these dreams are necessarily found in infancy, a significant lesson Dundes drew from Róheim and Bidney was that "there are *no* universals in folklore; not one single myth or folktale is found among every single people on the face of the earth, past and present" (xxiii).

Dundes completed his dissertation on a structural approach more acceptable to his teachers than psychoanalytic theory (1964b). A class project on a local collection of beliefs turned into an exercise in definition; it would be followed by many others that showed the structural characteristics of folklore genres, often ordered around a fundamental binary (Dundes 1961; Dundes and Georges 1963; Dundes 1975f). Writing on "The Binary Structure of 'Unsuccessful Repetition,'" Dundes extended his application of Vladimir Propp's morphology to Native American tales that begin with a "lack" and end with a "lack liquidated" (1962a). In an early challenge to the literary foundation of the tale-type index (Thompson [1928] 1961), Dundes identified a common binary of folk tales with "two moves, 'one of which ends positively and the other negatively,'" crossing Aarne-Thompson lines. The basis of his proposal to replace Thompson's *etic* (from phonetic) to *emic* (from phonemic) units of analysis that same year derived from his observation that "form is transcultural, content monocultural" (38). Therefore, tale types tended to overemphasize literal details associated with a single culture, rather than the cognitive patterning indicated by underlying structures. He concluded boldly with the declaration of a "*new science* of folklore which includes the structural study of folk tales" (174; emphasis added).

For beliefs, Dundes proposed a fundamental duality of condition and result. This led him to think about the belief in wishing wells, consisting of the condition "if you drop a coin in the well and make a wish," and the result "your wish will come true." And he came up with a Freudian alternative to the "literal" reading of magic: "Essentially there are two material objects involved in the action of an individual engaging in the custom: the well and the offering, which is usually a penny. Part of the key to the puzzle is provided by the very materials of folklore. The well is a frequent womb or maternal symbol" (1962f, 29). He drew the significance of the penny from its symbolic equivalence with feces, and therefore the custom involved "a fecal offering in return for either the good will of the mother or the avoidance of punishment" (31).

Having announced that he would not be deterred by naysaying folklorists, he landed an enviable post in anthropology at the University of California at Berkeley in 1963, and two years later helped create, with William Bascom, the M.A. folklore program there. From anthropology, he added another concept to the theoretical package that composed a Dundesian perspective. It drew from anthropological roots in Franz Boas's use of folklore texts to find reflections of a culture's distinctiveness (Boas 1916, 1935, 1938; see also Bascom 1954, 337–41). Dundes noticed two levels at which folklore acts as a reflective "mirror" of culture (1969a). First is the social commentary that folklore provides when tellers adapt old forms to new conditions, such as relating elephant jokes to the Civil

Rights movement (the dark African elephant is ignored even though it is hard to miss) or dead baby jokes to the abortion debate during the 1960s (Dundes and Abrahams 1969; Dundes 1979a). At an ideational level, the aggregate of folk wisdom in speech, proverbs, and riddles signifies “folk ideas” that constitute a “worldview,” or cultural outlook (Dundes 1971a). Examples are future orientation and lineal thinking in the progressive American worldview, which Dundes contrasted with past orientation and circular representation in Chinese culture (1969b, 2004a).

Dundes worried that his demonstration of folklore’s disquieting reflections of society would be taken by some reformers as an invitation to quash folklore. He sounded defensive, for instance, when publishing his interpretation of German concentration camp jokes as psychological mechanisms to “come to terms with the unimaginable and unthinkable horrors that occurred at Auschwitz” (Dundes and Hauschild 1987, 28). He explained that “we are reporting these jokes not because we think they are amusing or funny, but because we believe that *all* aspects of the human experience must be documented, even those that most reflect the darker side of humanity. Unless or until the causes and extent of prejudice are recognized, that prejudice will persist.” He asked, “If the mirror image is unattractive, does it serve any purpose to break the mirror?” His answer was, “The ugly reality of society is what needs to be altered, not the folklore that reflects that reality” (38).

Dundes used the mirror concept to emphasize that the distinctive social historical conditions of a group make cultures relative to one another, rather than being arranged in evolutionary or universal hierarchies (1966a, 241–45). This cultural relativism was especially important to his adaptation of Freudian theory. He challenged the psychoanalytic assumption that Freudian mechanisms are cross-culturally valid. He took psychoanalysts to task for a “cavalier disregard of cultural relativism, the notion that each human culture is to some extent a unique, noncomparable entity” (Dundes 1987i, 23). Yet he was also critical of anthropologists who extended historical particularism to what he considered an “absurd” extreme. He wrote, “In applying the concept of cultural relativism to Freudian theory, one comes up with the still all too often heard comment that psychoanalytic theory applies only to Viennese Jewish culture. Any theory of culture developed in any particular cultural context may or may not apply to other cultures. It should and must be tested in other cultural contexts in order to determine whether or not it has cross-cultural validity” (23–24). In this critique of relativism, he was influenced by his teacher David Bidney’s comparativist plaint that cultural relativism had obviated the evils of national ethnocentrism by establishing another type of ethnocentrism, one he called “*serial*.” By this term he meant the parochial attitude of viewing each culture from its own perspective only (Bidney 1967, 427). Dundes set up his Freudian folkloristics, then, as a new comparative approach to finding the psychological sources of culture, resulting from the mediation of the seemingly polar opposites of psychoanalysts’ classical Freudianism and anthropologists’ cultural relativism.

Whereas Boas’s use of “reflection” emphasized the unique historical conditions which are embedded as collective memory in texts, and therefore construct a “particular” culture, Dundes often found representations of *trans*-cultural connections in texts, which called for psychological as well as historical readings, such as his frequent reference to Western ideological beliefs. Considering that expressions often distorted reality in the process of reflecting culture, folklore, in Dundes’s view, could be more accurately described as a *key* to unlock puzzles (Dundes 1962e). The concept of worldview in this unlocking process is structural, because worldview ideas are underlying themes that drive expression. It relates

to psychoanalytic perspectives by assuming that there is a projective mechanism by which values are symbolically embedded and encoded in folk material, often outside the awareness of tellers. With these reflective and projective concerns organized into the binary of identification and interpretation, the Dundesian perspective became generalized as method (Dundes 1989e, 194–95).

If the Dundesian quest for meaning became regularized, if not normalized, how did the leading proponent of folkloristic interpretation become *mythologized*? One answer is that, unlike many of his cohorts who were characterized as noble “seekers,” Dundes came to be narrated as an adventurer/warrior. He had a brash style that in reviewers’ rhetoric epitomized “heroic,” “visionary,” “ambitious,” and “unparalleled” action (Oring 1983, 88). His uncanny ability drew recognition, characterized this way in one review: “Alan Dundes probably knows more about folklore and folklore studies than any other living human being,” and his mythological pluck elicited the description, “no matter how much his critics try to muddy the waters or thunder and rail, Alan Dundes will always come from behind and win the Grail” (Oring 1998, 64; Carroll 1993, 20). Students knew him as “The Master,” “God,” and “Himself”; colleagues referred to him as “the giant, our hero, the truly big man” and “sacred guide” (Bendix 1995, 50–51; Mieder 2004, 290; Bendix 2005, 487). Regina Bendix, who studied under him, remembered, “The capitalized ‘He’ . . . remains most prominent, for to those studying folklore at Berkeley, he is indeed the high priest of what he makes appear the most desirable discipline to work in: folkloristics” (1995, 51).

His hero story took the form of the young “gifted” prophet denied; undeterred, he ventured out on a crusading mission in which he shared insight with any audience that would listen, and implied the corruption of the elders. His proselytizing orations were delivered with *extraordinary* speed, giving him an aura of superhuman physical as well as cerebral ability (Bendix 1995, 51–52). Known for his polemics, Dundes read his essays like homiletic jeremiads, warning of the wrong path taken by the flock, stirring dedication to the cause, and impelling believers to “carry the torch” (see Bercovitch 1980; Bendix 2005, 488; Dow 2005, 335). He thus attracted admirers outside the temple, who assigned him a priestly or seer status (in the unconventional dream land of California), despite his depiction of himself as a “leader without followers” (Nader and Brandes 2006, 269). Even after becoming firmly established in academe, Dundes constructed a self-description in which he skirted the mainstream of his field, and reveled in doing battle as well as breaking ground. Untethered to a specialized area, genre, or group, the world was his domain, the sky the apparent limit of subjects open to investigation. His pronouncements toward the end of his life sounded like pleas as well as prophecies (when not heeded, he could invoke the proverbial wisdom that “a prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house” [Matthew 13:57]). His death in the classroom, preceded by a surprising one-million-dollar gift to endow a chair for folklore studies in his honor, only added to his mystique (Hansen 2005, 247).

Although reminiscences focused internally on battles he had with foes in the realm, narratives about Dundes could also be read as a projection of desires to spread folkloristic inquiry externally. The intimation was that folklore study is a repressed or belittled field struggling to achieve a wide intellectual priority (Nader and Brandes 2006, 270). Dundes was fond of referring to the goal of academic respectability accorded by analysis, and legendary depictions of his pugnacity against the disciplinary dragons guarding the ivory tower suggest a transference from “us” (folklorists) to “them” (the power elite of the academy). Dundes’s fight for mainstreaming “deep” interpretation became emblematic of the

cause to instill a consciousness of folklore, and to establish the authority of the folklorist universally. The negation of “That can’t be Alan Dundes” became confirmation, in his own words, that “the promise of . . . folkloristics may yet be fulfilled,” a variation of “the wish (dream) of folklorists may yet be fulfilled” (2002a, xvii).

## Folk and Folklorist

The irony in Dundes’s self-description of marginalization is that many of his ideas about folklore in fact became integrally linked with central modern concepts of folklore. One foundational example is the definition of folklore most folklorists have used since the 1960s. As a result of his widely used textbook, *The Study of Folklore* (1965b), Dundes largely succeeded in undoing the prevalent view that folklore is restricted to oral transmission. First, he pointed out that some orally learned items, such as driving a tractor or brushing one’s teeth, are not ordinarily considered folklore. An orally transmitted item may be folklore, but Dundes logically concluded that “*by itself* [oral transmission] is not sufficient to distinguish folklore from non-folklore” (Dundes 1965d, 1; emphasis in original). Arguing that many forms of folklore such as autograph-album verse, epitaphs, and chain letters are exclusively written, Dundes further insisted that the criterion of oral transmission does not apply to many expressions considered traditional. He gave a long list of folkloric forms to suggest that folklore can take material forms, as well as oral ones. Lore did not mean only the spoken word, he insisted. But as Elliott Oring complained in his later textbook, *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres*, Dundes did not state a principle that connects all of these genres under the heading of “folklore” (1986, 15).

Dundes’s answer to Oring was to avow that folklore repeats and varies (1989e, 193; 1998, 160). This characterization allowed for visual humor produced by photocopiers and, later, word processors, to be viewed as folklore, along with other non-oral forms. In *Work Hard and You Shall Be Rewarded*, Dundes demonstrated that “the materials contained in this study are traditional: they manifest multiple existence in space and time, and they exist in variant forms” (Dundes and Pagter 1978, xvii). Lore is “authentic,” he averred, if it contains two or more versions, and change leading to the creation of variants is inevitable. Using his logic, one could construct the syllogism, “folklore is tradition and tradition is variation, so therefore variation is folklore.”

Dundes recognized that the above characterization put the burden of proof on the lore, and he sought to contextualize its production socially in “folk.” This modern folk differed from the Eurocentric idea of folk as a lower stratum of society. In an expansive definition, a folk group was, according to Dundes, “*any group of people whatsoever* who share at least one common factor” (Dundes 1965d, 2; emphasis in original). The pre-modern representation of folklore, coming from the soil/soul of the peasantry, influenced the perception of lore as artistry of the unlettered and survivals of the remote past (Dundes 1980h, 1–6; Bronner 1998, 184–236). Taking away a connection to the land, or to a lack of learning, emphasized that all people, by the nature of social interaction, use folklore as an instrumental, communicative device.<sup>5</sup> It can therefore emerge anew, or adapt old forms with different social associations, whether in conventional ethnic, occupational, and regional categories, among a group of friends, or in an organization. Much as Dundes’s elastic folk has now been adopted as a given, a potential problem for folkloristics as a field is that it takes away the need for “folk” as a special modifier, for if all groups are by definition folk, then folk as a social category is potentially unnecessary (Oring 1986, 4). Jay Mechling

questioned, in fact, whether one needed two persons to generate folklore, since expressive culture can be produced between a person and a pet, an imaginary object, or even oneself (Mechling 1989a, 2006). From a Dundesian perspective, the binary social premise still holds, even in “solo folklore,” since an entity outside the self is created to share a tradition (Mechling 2006).

Implicit in Dundes’s apparently structural definition was a criterion of bonding that merits evaluation. Dundes collapsed hierarchies by asserting that the folk “are us” (suggesting that every group produces some folklore), but atomized folk as well in contending that “there are an infinitude of folk groups” (1980h, 10). By describing what folk is, Dundes invited contemplation on what it is not, even though he was more interested in demonstrating its “rich variety” (9). It is possible to think of a group sharing a factor, but which does not traditionalize, or bond, through folklore (people on a bus, shopping at a store, driving the same car). The key test for the “folk group” is whether folklore is produced out of the social experience. Often overlooked, therefore, as Dundes’s definition became standardized within folkloristics, is his qualification that “what is important is that a group formed for whatever reason will have some traditions which it calls its own.” Thus the unstated part of the definition is that two or more persons who share a linking factor use *traditions* to bond, so to gain, in Dundes’s words, “a sense of group identity” (1965d, 2). In other words, folklore is produced by groups who use folklore for the purpose of creating groupness. Despite the circularity of this logic, it has an instrumental purpose. It extends and democratizes the concept of folklore by affirming what Dundes called a “flexible” notion of tradition, and thereby negates folk as “monolithic” and “homogeneous” (1980h, 8).

In large measure, Dundes’s “modern” definition reflects an American worldview, and in fact, in an early presentation, Dundes called it a characteristically “American concept of folklore” because of its differences from European models, geared toward the study of peasants and primitives (1966a). Unlike European class-based hierarchy, his social heterogeneity and simultaneity were democratic, in the sense of allowing mobile, “code-switching” participants to “choose” rather than inherit their identities (see Bronner 1986a, 94–129). “Part-time folk,” as Dundes called typical “code-switching” moderns, have multiple, overlapping identities and “locate” their lore variously in city and country, street and home, profession and trade (1980h, 8–9). Instead of isolating tradition-centered groups, he proposed that all people have access to traditions; everyone creates them. Appearing integrative by sketching a variegated social landscape with a multiplicity of groups, he avoided racializing lore, and removed the devolutionary criteria of historical lineage, isolation, or illiteracy. Dundes implied agency in the groups’ production of folklore, rather than the groups passively following or blindly receiving tradition, which he criticized as a “superorganic” model of culture, referring to the neologism of early Berkeley anthropologist A. L. Kroeber (Kroeber 1917; Dundes 1962g, 97; Dundes 1989a, 71–72; Dundes 1991a, 100; see also the critique of the superorganic by his teacher, David Bidney, in Bidney 1967, 329–33). If extended too far, though, Dundes’s “flexible” definition could render everything as folklore, raising the specter that nothing is categorically folklore. Dundes, though, maintained a binary interpretation that the construction of folklore depended on something that folklore is not, ultimately turning to structural rather than social characteristics.

An example is his comparison of games to narratives in “On Game Morphology,” reproduced in this volume. Although games and narratives are typically separated into social and oral genres, respectively, Dundes found a similar binary pattern of “lack to lack liquidated”

prevalent in both (1964a). The implication for Dundes, therefore, was that they could and should be studied together as related traditions. In a consideration of culture-specific examples of trichotomy, he compared a scholarly article with a tale type because they both expressed such cognitive patterning. He related organized football to backyard games, Disney movies with orally transmitted tales, and television commercials and old sayings. This relying on folklore for treatment of all things cultural again raised the question of authenticity, that is, how to differentiate folk from popular materials. Dundes's structural answer was that a production *based upon* a folk model can be compared with, but distinguished from, "the folk model itself" (1965d, 1–2). The folk model, unlike the popular production, is more variable; the production tends toward fixed form. Variations characterizing different groups and individuals invite analysis of folklore's sociopsychological uses to explain diversity. Dundes editorialized that in contrast, "Literature and mass culture seem hopelessly rigid. . . . In studying them one must either seek to reconstruct the intellectual Zeitgeist or governing world-view paradigm present when the literary effort or popular/mass cultural product was created, or else abandon such a historical approach in favor of 'new criticism' or its successors in an attempt to investigate how an old literary favorite is understood by yet one more set of readers" (1998, 193).

Variation could define both folklore and the folklorist. Thinking about what differentiated the folklorist from the anthropologist, historian, literary scholar, or linguist—all occupations concerned with expressive culture—Dundes underscored the ability of the folklorist to deal with variations and continuities. He did not spare psychoanalysts from his criticism, because he pointed out mistakes caused by ignorance of textual variations, generic differences, and cross-cultural examples. He was especially critical of psychoanalysts, who based interpretations of fairy tales on the corpus of the Grimm brothers; such tales were not typical of tradition, since they were "fixed" by the brothers as composites of different versions (Dundes 1989e, 195–97; Dundes 1989f, 117–22; see also Carroll 1993, 6–7). He also sharply criticized Joseph Campbell and his Jungian followers for the universalist assumption that "all peoples share the same stories," leading to an unfounded conclusion of psychic unity that confused myths and folktales, which have different functions and variant structures (2005c, 394–98).

Variation is not only a prime characteristic of folklore, according to Dundes, but it is also one of folkloristics, which allows for theoretical diversity. Pointing this out was a way to justify incorporating psychoanalytic perspectives into a range of theories. Discussing the ballad of the "Walled-Up Wife," for instance, Dundes insisted, "just as literary criticism reveals genuine and legitimate differences of opinion about the meaning(s) of a short story or novel, so folkloristics must similarly encourage diversity in seeking to understand some of the finest specimens of human creativity, namely folklore" (1996b, xi). Dundes explained the resistance of folklorists and other cultural workers to psychoanalytic approaches as an avoidance of the traumas and taboo subjects raised by "plumbing the depths to explore the latent (as opposed to the manifest) content of folklore." "Folklorists, like other academics," he observed, "often choose an intellectual speciality as a form of escape from neurotic tendencies," and finding unconscious meanings in others's traditions would expose personal problems in their own (1992, xxii).

What, then, were the essential issues Dundes proposed for folkloristics in a modern, untethered analysis of folklore? The answer is evident in Dundes's outline of *The Study of Folklore* (1965b), roughly proceeding from the oldest concerns to the newest: origin, form, transmission, and function. He thereby suggested a historical progression, from where

folklore came from in the past to what it does in the present. He then boiled folkloristic inquiry down to dual issues when he stated that “the two traits of folklore which most troubled folklorists were (1) the multiple existence of folklore, and (2) its apparent irrationality” (1987i, 4). It is possible to unfold these two characteristics into four concerns after examining Dundes’s body of work:

1. *Multiple Existence across Space.* It is one thing to say that folklore spreads because it is appealing, but why does it pop up in the places it does, sometimes not connected by a social link? With the assumption that variation is inevitable as a result of multiple existence, why do certain patterns of variation emerge?
2. *Persistence through Time.* Frequently folklore is epitomized as being passed from generation to generation, as if it mindlessly survives. But what gets selected and what does not in the transmission and learning process? Related to this question is the role of modernization, since it is assumed in many Western industrial countries that modernization displaces, rather than creates, folklore. Yet new technologies associated with modernization foster folkloric creation, typically using “traditional” forms.
3. *Poetics and Projections.* Folklore draws attention to itself through both its content and style. It contains symbols and metaphors that raise questions about their sources and effects. Considering the social basis of lore, how does this lore reflect, distort, or project the values, feelings, and ideas of the groups that possess and perform the material?
4. *Rationale of Fantasy.* Folklore is frequently described as being fantastical, odd, or bizarre. Is there a rationale for this behavior that is given license as play, narrative, drama, and tradition? This problem involves the role of context and situation in the perception of lore by asking why something is appropriate in one instance but not in another. How do members inside a group (esoteric function) symbolize a group and its lore in contrast to non-members (exoteric function)?

In addition to delineating the problems of folklore that drive analysis, Dundes outlined a method of interpretation. Although he wanted to differentiate folklorists from other scholars concerned with cultural expression, he saw continuity in some of their methods of inquiry. Dundes suggested that the basic underlying structure of folkloristic research is *identification and interpretation*. The terms came from Archer Taylor’s comparison of mid-twentieth-century literary and folkloristic methods, but Dundes did not limit interpretation, as Taylor did, to manifest readings using historical and formalistic background as the source of meaning (Taylor [1948] 1965). Interpreted meaning, according to Dundes, involved “plumbing the depths to explore the latent (as opposed to the manifest) content of folklore” (Dundes 1992, xxii). Dundes’s use of identification and interpretation normalized a folkloristic division between description and analysis, although he often complained that what was presented as interpretation was too “literal” to provide insight or render analytical meaning (Dundes 1976d; Dundes 1998; Zolkover 2006, 45–48). A closer look at Dundes’s polemical essay style, however, reveals a more multi-phased method than he acknowledged in asserting this basic binary.



Before identification, he often had a *problem statement*, involving an extended survey of bibliographic sources on the subject and the variations of the material under consideration. This opening section established the significance of his query, and, on many occasions, his dispute. He strove to break new ground in each essay by either reconsidering a previous interpretation (for example, in essays in this volume on the cockfight and earth-diver myth); complaining of a monocultural limitation, which he addressed with cross-cultural comparison or contrast (as in his writing in this volume on the ballad of the “Walled-Up Wife,” and phrases using “bugger”); pointing out an action that had not been considered as a subject for inquiry (such as collecting as a praxis by folklorists); showing that an unlikely, usually learned or elite group was folk (among them scientists, mathematicians, trained musicians, and medical professionals); noting the effects of changing units of analysis (for example, etic to emic units); or correcting a nonfolkloristic treatment of folkloric material (such as Lévi-Strauss or Campbell on myth).

Dundes followed with an *identification*, predicated on the description of an item and the genre or genres to which it belonged. For Dundes, identification often involved material that had been neglected in previous collections, especially the extent of an item’s variations, its various cultural contexts, behaviors associated with it, or the available metafolklore. Dundes constantly pointed out that previous scholars stopped short of analyzing the descriptive data, or analyzed the wrong thing. He thus moved to the *analysis*, which he defined as operating on the data to signify cultural patterns. This involved exposing underlying structures, or extracting symbols from a text for closer examination (“read out of” rather than “in” the data, he insisted); presenting contextual descriptions of an item’s use (as in the invocation of proverbs in child rearing within Nigerian culture); using cross-cultural examples to draw comparisons and contrasts (such as “bugger,” found in British speech, not being used as a derisive term in the United States); finding significance in etymologies and names as signs (for example, noting “testes” is the root of “contest,” or the double meaning of “bull” as male genitals and “blowing,” or commenting on the selection of Apollo as a name for a space program, when Apollo’s sister Diana, the moon, is associated with virginity); or constructing the developmental chronology of an item or culture (such as the sources—in historic German farm practices, where display of manure piles represented prosperity—of feces as status symbols).

To Dundes, interpretation provided the critical leap from identifying patterns to recognizing cognition. It typically involved discerning meaning by reference to grand theory, and deducing generalizations that can serve to solve intellectual enigmas, resolve apparent paradoxes, and uncover hidden motivations (Dundes 2005c, 387–91). Dundes frequently turned to psychoanalytic theory because of his special concern for symbolic and developmental questions, but he also used suppositions from feminism (Karen Horney’s idea of “womb envy”), linguistics (the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, Kenneth Pike’s emic and etic units, and Saussure’s *langue* and *parole*), comparative ethnology (James Frazer’s idea of homeopathic magic and Arnold Van Gennep’s *rites de passage*), and cognitive anthropology (Dorothy Lee’s premise of a lineal worldview). In its attention to functional causes, his interpretation frequently took as a given, following Malinowski, that folklore persisted because it served social and psychological functions that benefit people as individuals and members of groups, often as a response to ambiguity or anxiety.

Dundes typically did not stop at the point of interpretation. Frequently his conclusion constituted a final phase of what I call *implication*, and there I find his most original, and controversial, contributions. As others have pointed out, he did not introduce new

paradigms as much as adapt social and psychological theories, so as to present provocative possibilities of folkloristic meaning, many of which had not been previously considered (Oring 1983; Carroll 1993, 7–8; Georges 2004). In his conclusions, though, he extended his analysis in often novel ways. His implications differed from many folklorists' *application* (the basis of applied or public folklore), because he usually did not propose programming to edify the public or procedures for professionals (1962g; 1980e, x; 2005a, 359–61; for the praxis of application, see M. O. Jones 1994). Instead, Dundes used his analysis and interpretation to consider either the social and political significance of the outlooks he uncovered, or the symbolic relationships among apparently diverse forms and traditions. He was not the first, for example, to claim that a German obsession with cleanliness and order has an anal-erotic character. Besides using folklore as a mirror of culture, however, he pointed to the implication of political uses of “elaborate purges,” including the Holocaust, by comparing enemies to feces, and suggested that such purges could happen again (1984a, 141).

An implication he particularly touted came out of his interpretation of male competitive traditions such as football, cockfighting, and verbal dueling. In those studies, he argued that the aggressive behavior in these games represented attempts to demonstrate masculinity by feminizing one's opponent. He contended that this pattern was a reaction to the “female-centered conditional experience from birth through early childhood until adolescence” (1997e, 42). His implication was that such a behavior pattern constituted a cause of war. Claiming this as a “new argument,” he wrote: “Those who may be skeptical of my attempt to offer a plausible rationale underlying male behavior in such activities apparently as diverse as games, hunting, and warfare will probably be pleased to hear that in none of the vast literature devoted to the psychology or sociology of sport—or for that matter in the even vaster scholarship devoted to seeking to articulate the causes of war—will they find anything like the theoretical argument I have proposed in this essay” (1997e, 42).

In making the argument for the sources of war, religion, male chauvinism, or folktales, Dundes used two key concepts that deserve discussion. The first was the idea of “projection,” and the second was that of “symbolic equivalence.” Both built on previous scholarship, psychoanalytic and linguistic, respectively, but Dundes revised them to apply his own stamp. Both also involved binary relationships between characters and representations, categorically referred to as A and B within the frame of a narrative or ritual.

The term *projection* has entered popular discourse through Freud. Dundes cited Freud's idea of projection from a 1911 paper, “Psycho-Analytic Notes upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia,” in which Freud posited that the repression of “I hate him” becomes transposed to “He hates me” (Dundes 1987i, 37). It was Otto Rank, however, who in *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* ([1909] 2004) described the transposition in folktales using Oedipal wish-fulfillment. Dundes argued that the label “projective inversion” is more appropriate than “transposition,” since desires are not only inverted, but externalized. In a Dundesian perspective, Freud's projection can be read as symbolizing “I hate him,” using slurs or stories in which the object of hate is victimized. Dundes defined projective inversion this way: “a psychological process in which A accuses B of carrying out an action which A really wishes to carry out him or herself” (1991b, 353). Dundes distinguished this kind of transposition from the transference of feelings onto an external object, which he called “projection.” Dundes's projection is a way to deal with anxieties or pent-up emotions, and involves disguising the object in the external expression. Dundes especially discussed examples of projection in rituals and jokes such as “dead baby jokes,” which expressed anxiety over abortion; “light bulb jokes,” which showed the importance

of social organization through the double entendre of technology and sex expressed by “screwing in a light bulb”; Jewish-American Princess jokes, which projected unease over the independence of women generally through the stereotype of the self-centered Jewish daughter; and “Bloody Mary rituals,” with representations of blood both in the name of the girl and the act of drawing blood, expressing fear of menstruation among pre-adolescent girls (1987c, 2002a).

Dundes found that projective inversion is especially prevalent in folktales and legends, suggesting that their narrative elaboration signifies a heightened level of taboo. Examples include the themes of incest and infanticide, evident in a classic Oedipal plot in which a father-king attempts to kill his newborn son, a projective inversion of the son’s wish to kill his father. Dundes’s contribution was to view such a tale according to female projection, and take early psychoanalysts to task for their male-centeredness because they missed the significance of a father-king’s act of locking up his daughter to protect her. Dundes proclaimed that early Freudians were mistaken in assuming that this merely reflected a father’s wish to marry his own daughter. He asserted instead that the daughter would like to marry her own father. Examining the folktale plot underlying Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, Dundes concluded that “the daughter’s wish to marry her father is transformed through projective inversion into the father’s wish to marry his daughter, just as the son’s wish to kill his father is similarly transformed into the father’s wish to kill his own son. Both transformations leave sons and daughters guilt free. Fairy tales, after all, are always told from the child’s point of view, not the parents’ I concluded that *King Lear* was essentially a girl’s fairy tale told from the father’s point of view” (1987i, 37; see also 1976d).

Dundes frequently presented projective inversion as a way to explain enigmatic features of the world’s best-known traditions and themes. He was concerned, for instance, that approaches to the widely (but not universally) known vampire legend focused on either the repulsion or seduction of the figure. Building on the folkloric variations of the legend featuring attacks on younger family members and efforts of the vampire to drink milk rather than blood, Dundes hypothesized that the vampire is an incarnate expression of a child’s ambivalence toward his or her parent of the opposite sex. The inversion is that instead of infants sucking from adult breasts, adults thrive on children’s bodies. The life-giving liquid can be water, blood, or milk. Vampires according to this theory are blood-thirsty because death is rebirth, represented by sucking, but as the dead are angry, they suck their victims to death (Dundes 1998).

Another of Dundes’s provocative reinterpretations used projective inversion to analyze the “blood libel” or “ritual murder” legend, a source of European anti-Semitism. In the legend, a Christian child is killed to furnish blood for consumption during Jewish rites (Aarne-Thompson motif V361). The story has been recognized as one of the most persistent anti-Semitic narratives among European Christians since the twelfth century. As a legend, it is frequently told as a true event, in spite of its implausibility, since the consumption of blood by humans is forbidden in Jewish law (Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 3:17, 17:12). Dundes purports to solve this puzzle, noting especially its coincidence with the Easter/Passover season, by pointing out the *projection* of guilt to another group through the *projective inversion* of Christians committing murder.

For the commission of an aggressively cannibalistic act, participants in the Eucharist would normally feel guilt, but so far as I am aware, no one has ever suggested that a Catholic should ever feel any guilt for partaking of the Host. Where

is the guilt for such an act displaced? I submit it is projected wholesale to another group, an ideal group for scapegoating. By means of this projective inversion, it is not we Christians who are guilty of murdering an individual in order to use his blood for ritual religious purposes (the Eucharist), but rather it is you Jews who are guilty of murdering an individual in order to use his or her blood for ritual religious purposes, making matzah. The fact that Jesus was Jewish makes the projective inversion all the more appropriate. It is a perfect transformation: Instead of Christians killing a Jew, we have Jews killing a Christian!" (1991b, 354).

As the above example demonstrates, Dundesian interpretations were derived from content analysis, conceptualized as a "systematic, objective description of the content of communication" (Dundes 1962h, 32; see also Pool 1959). Dundes's approach was heavily dependent on the assumption that wishes and feelings were disguised in the form of textual symbols, and expressed through the "safe" outlet of narrative.

Aware of the criticism that symbolist interpretations of texts are difficult to empirically verify, Dundes responded with the concept of "symbolic equivalence," using units of analysis he called *allomotif*s and *motifemes*. Dundes asked, "How do we know, in short, that A is a symbol of B (or B of A)? Is it only a matter of accepting a proposed symbolic equation on faith, or is there in fact a methodology which would permit a measure of certitude in determining the meaning(s) of symbols?" (1987j, 167). Heading off the objection that the discernment of symbols is impressionistic, he arranged functions within a structural system that could replace the prevalent non-structural classification of motifs as minimal units in narrative. His structural system was the sequence of functions for dramatic personae outlined by Vladimir Propp's "morphology" (Dundes 1968b; Propp [1928] 1968). The motif is based on plot features which Propp asserted were "vague and diffuse," while the function relies on "exact structural features" (Dundes 1962g, 101; see also Ben-Amos 1980). Dundes highlighted the distinction between functions and motifs by applying linguist Kenneth Pike's distinction between *etic* units, constructs created by the analyst to handle comparative cross-cultural data, and *emic* ones that deal with particular events as parts of larger wholes, to which they are related and from which they obtain their ultimate significance (1962g, 101–2). A function is an *emic* unit because, in Dundes's words, it stays "closer to the tale as it exists when told by a raconteur to an audience" (1987j, 168). Dundes proposed that Propp's function in Pike's scheme of analysis would be called a "motifeme," while "allomotif" would designate a motif that occurs in any given motifemic context. Applying a linguistic analogy, Dundes offered that *allomotif*s are to *motifemes* as allophones (any of various acoustically different forms of the same phoneme) are to phonemes (speech sounds designated by speakers of a particular language), and *allomorphs* (variant phonological representations of a morpheme) are to morphemes (minimal meaningful language units) (1962g, 101).

Dundes's goal in establishing this structural system was to gain access to implicit native formulations of symbolic equivalences (Dundes 1984c; Dundes 1987j; Carroll 1992b). This could be done, he asserted, by "empirically reviewing the content of field-collected versions of a tale type." The explanatory logic, Dundes pointed out, was, "If A and B both fulfill the same motifeme, then in some sense it is not reasonable to assume that the folk are equating A and B. In other words, *allomotif*s are both functionally and symbolically equivalent." Thus he disavowed that the interpretation came from "some biased folklorist wrongly imbued with a particular mindset belonging to one symbolic school or another" (1987j,

168). Dundes insisted that instead of an analyst “reading in” an idea to the text, the symbolic equation is “read out” of it. Thus, Dundes concluded his controversial interpretation of German national character with the disclaimer, “It is not I who is claiming that the German love of order may stem from a love of ordure—it is in the folklore” (Dundes 1984a, 153).

To make the case for the symbolic equivalence of nose and phallus, for instance, Dundes cited field-recorded texts from apparently different traditions: one is an anti-Jewish joke, while the other is a Texas blason populaire.

Two Jews were walking beside a lake. One of them struck his finger in the water and said, “Wow, the water’s cold!” The other one stuck his nose in and said, “Yes, and deep, too.”

Two Texans are walking across the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. In the middle of the bridge, they decide to take a leak [to urinate]. One says, “Boy, this water’s cold”; the other comments, “But not very deep.” (1987j, 169)

Dundes realized that the placement of the nose and phallus within the telling of the text had similar “functions,” but that did not conclusively prove symbolic equivalence. He explained, “It is perfectly true that examining the allomotif gamut within a particular motifemic slot shows only functional equivalence. We can tell that A and B are functional or symbolic equivalents, but not necessarily that A is a symbol of B or that B is a symbol of A. On the other hand, if we find evidence in a given culture that either A or B is a tabooed subject, then we might well expect that the non-tabooed subject might be substituted for the tabooed subject rather than vice versa” (1987j, 170). Dundes corroborated the nose/phallus equation by finding additional instances in a variety of genres, or by establishing the cultural contexts in which it occurred. He modified the frequent psychoanalytic assumption that symbolism is universal, though, with cultural relativism, and echoed the “sometimes a cigar is just a cigar” quote attributed to Freud: “Please keep in mind that I am not arguing that a nose always stands for a phallus—even just within Western cultures, the provenience of the above-mentioned materials. Sometimes a nose is a nose!” (171). In the other examples I cited of traditions symbolically involving blood, for instance, the liquid has culturally based meanings. Dundes found evidence in the vampire legend of a parental link in the equivalence of blood and milk in a motifemic slot. In the religious context of the European-Christian blood-libel legend, Dundes saw evidence of blood’s representation of the Eucharist, but in the American context, in which rituals for menarche are rare, blood as expressed by pre-adolescent girls symbolized menses.

Dundes’s method of using emic units raises a number of questions about identifying symbols in one context with references to symbols in another. Besides the nose/phallus connection, one should ask about the substitution of Texans for Jews, *if* the Jewish joke indeed preceded the Texan narrative; and its concluding negation of “deep,” if in fact that is a representative ending. Dundes warned that several variants need to be examined, since he is himself a critic of choosing one form of the text as emblematic of a type. Elliott Oring, a frequent reviewer of Dundes’s work, called the methodology of symbolic equivalence “the surrogate symbolic nexus syndrome,” and worried that “the soundness of this operation should to some extent prove inversely proportional to the ‘distance’ the interpreter must travel from his primary symbolic context to establish the symbol-referent nexus.” Although purportedly an objective process, allomotif analysis, according to Oring, still appears subjective because the selection of symbol-referent nexes may exclude “a number of possible

and perhaps contradictory nexes for a single symbol." In considerations of cultural relativism, one needs to ask why a trait in society A informs the meaning of an item in societies B and C. The question remains, then, as Oring put it, "Why should the key to the meaning of folklore in one cultural and geographical context be found only in another?" (1983, 86).

One answer from Dundes was to separate, as levels of analysis, the transcultural structural interpretation and the culturally specific textual one. In Dundes's approach, formal analysis precedes content analysis. On this formal level, the structure survived translation, independent of language. Dundes gave the proverb, which he formally defined as combining a topic and a comment, as an example of this (1962h, 37). The simplest form of proverb could be rendered in English with the example "money talks"; it can be extended by filling structural slots, as in the examples "Barking dogs seldom bite" or "Still waters run deep." But the structure presumably could be identified in any language, Dundes proposed (36–37). The content tended to be variable, as opposed to the constancy of the form. One can also identify a linguistic level dependent on the particular language in question. Borrowing the term "textural" from linguist Thomas Sebeok, Dundes pointed out that textural elements, or stylistic features, ordinarily cannot survive translation. In the proverb, equational forms ( $A = B$ ) such as "Time is money" or "Seeing is believing" are independent of language or code. But "A friend in need is a friend indeed" has the textural feature of rhyme, which "reinforces the structural pattern in that the two sides of the equation rhyme" (1962h, 37; see also Sebeok 1962; Dundes 1975f; Dundes 1980g; Sein and Dundes 1964).

When Dundes interpreted the content of the " $A = B$ " proverbial form "seeing is believing" as *meaning*, he found the American context of dependence on sight for judgments to be symbolically equivalent to the active eye taking precedence over the passive agent of the ear (1980f, 90). The source of action in the mind is even expressed visually in the phrase "the mind's eye." The priority of seeing over touch also established an expansive, outer-directed worldview ("looking as far as the eye can see"), in contrast to the inner or tradition-directed outlook of an intimate community (expressed by "stay in touch") (89; see also Bronner 1982; Bronner 1986b, 1–4). The American hierarchy of senses he identified also suggested, for him, the priority of written language that must be seen in a future-oriented society. The *implication*, according to Dundes, was that "much of the study of 'natural history' often turns out to be 'cultural history' in disguise. Theories and ideas about the natural world are invariably couched in terms of a specific human language and are based upon data obtained from human observation. With human observation expressed in human language, one simply cannot avoid cultural bias." This insight allowed him to comment, too, on why so many social theorists fail to notice folklore, to their detriment, despite the fact that it can reveal so much: "We do not see the lens through which we look" (1980f, 92). Dundes held up folklore as crucial evidence of human thought and action, but pointed out that many scholars miss it because it is too close to their own experience. It is viewed as ordinary, although for Dundes that made it especially important to reflect everyday life, or to serve as an outlet for anxieties not communicated by other means.

## WWDS

A simple lapel button crafted with Dundes in mind, and containing several layers of significance, encapsulates some of his impact on the intellectual heritage of folkloristics. One of Dundes's students placed it in my hand at a folklorists' conference in 2005, and beamed with the message, "I guess I don't have to explain to you what it means." I looked down and



*Photo by Simon Bronner*

*WWDS button.*

saw the crisp black letters WWDS against a plain white background. Her comment made me think that she must have received some puzzled reactions to the initialism, but the process of figuring it out forced the viewer to engage in a Dundesian enterprise of digging beneath the textual surface for meaning. It was an invitation to talk, and break into folklore. The initialism, as verbal lore, had floated around Berkeley for years before the button commodified the message for a wider audience.<sup>6</sup>

WWDS immediately signals it is an initialism not only because of the succession of capital letters, but also because of the two Ws in a row, not found in English. The capitalization indicates that the combination of letters is important, a signifier for something larger and longer. The four letters recall the popular initialism WWJS used in Christian circles. It stands for “What Would Jesus Say?” and reminds listeners of an ethical message amid today’s hectic, acronym-filled, modern world.<sup>7</sup> Its form is reinforced by the popularity of text-messaging initialisms (such as WTMI for Way Too Much Information), and indeed WWJS circulates widely in electronic communication.<sup>8</sup> By recognizing the initialism, religious believers created a social bond through esoteric knowledge. Among some Christian believers, such initialisms are common as mottos or devotional meeting starters. For instance, one can also hear or see the initialisms JCLU (Jesus Christ Loves You) and CTR (Choose the Right, popular among Mormons), or acronyms such as ACTS (Adoration, Contrition, Thanksgiving, Supplication), FROG (Fully Rely on God), and PUSH (Pray Until Something Happens). One might even get variations of WWJS as WWJD (Walking With Jesus Daily or What Would Jesus Do?) and WWYD (What Would You Do?).<sup>9</sup> Folklore collections from Catholic school students include the practice of inscribing initialisms on examinations to summon aid: JPFM (Jesus Pray For Me) or SJOC (Saint Joseph of Cupertino, colloquially known as the patron saint of the stupid) (Huguenin 1962). Some Christian initialisms use negation by substituting new meanings to worldly initials, such as turning TGIF, “Thank God It’s Friday,” to “Thank God I’m Forgiven” or “Thank God I’m Free.” Rather than the proverbial topic and comment, these phrases have an interrogative structure of an agent/sender, and action with an implied receiver. In other words, the ritual of figuring out the button’s message implies a communication model in which the message draws attention to itself, and meaning is produced or perceived.

The ubiquity, or righteousness, of WWJS has also led to many parodies in talk and written prose, suggesting the repression or resentment of the sentiment or commenting on the modern irreligious/existential state of the world:

- WWJS—Who would Jesus shoot?
- WWJS—What would Jesus smoke?
- WWJS—Who would Jesus spank?
- WWJS—Where would Jesus surf?
- WWJS—Where would Jesus shop?
- WWJB—Who would Jesus bomb?
- WWJD—Who wants jelly donuts?
- WWJD—What would Jesus drive?
- WWJD—What would Jerry [Garcia] do?
- WWJD—What would [Michael] Jordan do?

Low approval ratings for WWJCD (What would Jackie Chan do?) and WWSWJS (What Web site would Jesus surf?), in online discussion threads with the metafolkloristic online feature of ranking variants, suggest the importance of the four-letter form. I suspect that Dundes might have commented on the double-binary form and the Western cultural bias for four, signifying an abundant quantity (four corners of the world, four seasons, four quarters in sports) (see Dundes 1980d; Brandes 1985).<sup>10</sup> He also might have pointed to the nominal suggestion of double meaning in the linguistic clue of WW, spoken as “double-u, double-u,” which also denotes “world wide” (e.g., World War, World Watch, World Wide Web, and indeed WWDS for World Wide Day in Science) and trouble (as in WWW for What Went Wrong and Wet, Wild, and Wicked).

Dundes might have compared analysis of this form to his exegesis of light bulb jokes (“Many Hands Make Light Work” [1987g]) that feature the question “How many  $x$  does it take to screw in a light bulb?” The answers are based on social stereotypes: Californians—ten, one to screw it in and nine others to share the experience; New Yorkers—three, one to screw it in and two to criticize; psychiatrists—only one, but the light bulb has to really want to change; Iranians—one hundred, one to screw it in and ninety-nine to hold the house hostage; Jewish mothers—I would rather sit in the dark. There he read, out of the many variant forms, a future-oriented worldview in which groups, not individuals, were agents of change. That orientation created anxiety in individuals to keep up with change, from a fear of falling behind. The joke, with all its variants assigned for different groups, grades and mocks social inadequacy, as demonstrated by technological failure. The symbolic significance of technological energy (a light bulb) is heightened by an implied meaning of sex, as in the alternative answer for Californians: “they don’t screw in light bulbs, they screw in hot tubs.” Therefore, in the American context where the jokes arose, the acutely felt, repressed fear of sexual inadequacy is wrapped up with constant striving for social success, political power, and national progress. Dundes concluded that “when we joke about the impotence of others, we are joking about our own potential lack of power” (1987g, 149).

Following the line of reasoning in “Many Hands Make Light Work,” WWDS might imply spiritual failure, coupled with the anxiety over intellectual inadequacy. The symbolic action in WWDS of putting Dundes on an iconic pedestal is to turn the question “Is



Dundes smarter than us all?” into “Am I smart enough?” Yet the acronym is also ambiguous enough to create the possibility of distance; it can be perceived as meaning he is not holier or smarter but marginal or different, indeed *far-fetched* and *outlandish*. If there is a double meaning, it is an extension from the self to the folklorist group that turns “What would Dundes say about us or our world?” into “Are we significant/spirited/global enough?” The text connotes a binary opposition of Dundes’s *meaning* to our *meaningless* scholarship. This opposition has a value hierarchy according superiority to the Dundesian first pole, shown in couplets such as deep/surface, latent/manifest, emergent/vanishing, symbolic/literal, and mind/body. Rather than finding strength in the support of a mainstream majority, the text glorifies the defiant, pietistic few who follow the introspective, interpretative path.

At a structural level, the multiplicity of the form WWJS reflects the essentializing of folklore as textual repetition and variation, but perhaps less obvious is the contextual idea of folklore as creation—emerging constantly in modern settings and with new media (Dundes 1980h, 17–19; see also Jakobson and Bogatyrev 1980; Abrahams 1977; Ben-Amos 1977). Pursuing the esoteric Dundes connection to the button further, one can detect biographical references to Dundes’s scholarly investment in folk speech, including his first publications on mnemonic devices and interrogative replies; belief and religion, especially his study of the Jesus hero cycle, suggesting a transference from subject to author; and of course the communicative frame of humor and play (including the initialisms and acronyms in Dundes 1980d, 140–41). One might argue that the legitimacy of WWDS as a variant comes from both the maintenance of the four-letter form with WW as the first function, and the inclusion of both D and S from the tradition of asking what Jesus would *do* as well as *say*.

As a representation of a community of believers, the button obviously equates Dundes with Jesus. However, the frame of play that usually accompanies the presentation of the button denies a genuine sacrilegious intention. But there is clearly an assignment of savior/prophet status to Dundes, and the implication that he, too, had a gospel to spread. I can imagine Dundes might recognize a response to anxiety as well, since here folklore emerges from the impulse to explain his prodigious output as somehow supernatural, and to express a fear of inadequacy in those unable to match his standards. Produced in Dundes’s end days and coming from students known for devotion to his causes as well as pursuit of his support, the button also represents the fear of losing Dundes as a father figure and mentor (see Bendix 1995, 50–51). Personal fear of loss is projected to a disciplinary “lack.” The message is, at another level, a reminder of the power of communication generally and words specifically. In concluding with “say,” the button highlights the significance of speech, and perhaps equates the D of what Jesus would *do* with the D of Dundes as a hero figure. Dundes is singled out, not just as a Freudian folklorist, structuralist, or functionalist preaching to the masses to change their ways, but as *Dundes*, a unique persona who cast a long, if often not fully appreciated, shadow. Most of all, it suggests the distinctiveness of Dundes’s structural and psychoanalytic commentary on what scholars do, imparting that they might be enlightened by taking his perspective into account. There is also a jeremiad implicit in the question of what he would say, since his rhetoric often carried polemical disapproval of the worldly or disciplinary state of things. In sum, Dundes has been mythologized because his representation offers revelation, and thereby serves a redemptive function for those on a cultural quest for meaning. Even if one does not agree with his interpretations, his confidence in having found the truth gives hope that the goal can be reached.



Photo by Simon Bronner

*Alan Dundes's desk in his basement workshop.*

Set in hermeneutic terms, Dundes's analytics was about finding *sources*—in mind, in society, in the past, in scholarship. Folklore is itself a source for genesis and for modern existence, from culture, tradition, and belief. Folklore is the scripture, Dundes suggested, that can be read for meaning here (within the local) and there (out in the world). Folklore can be parsed for both the immediate and the ultimate, for the particular and the universal, and the innovative and the traditional (Dundes 1987b). Dundes indeed referred to the metaphor of folklore as cultural scripture when he pointed out that those documents known as scripture, such as the Hebrew and Christian Bibles and the Qur'an, incorporate folklore. To show his logic in connecting the sacredness of religion with the spirituality of tradition, he provided the following syllogism in *Holy Writ as Oral Lit*:

1. Folklore is characterized by multiple existence and variation.
2. The Bible is permeated by multiple existence and variation.
3. The Bible is folklore! (1999, 111)

He then stated that Jesus would have understood his argument, because when asked for a sign from heaven, Jesus cited a belief from tradition, a variant of the widely known saying "Red sky in the morning, sailors (shepherds) take warning." (Matthew 16:2–3; Dundes 1999, 112). Dundes saw himself finding meaning, as Jesus did, out of the signs of folklore, "the signs of the times." I am not suggesting that Dundes's essays are holy chapter and verse. But they arguably can be read as scholarly homilies that seek folkloristic meaning. He addressed fundamental questions of existence by pointing to folklore as an expression of the human condition. He asked, historically, how and why our ideas of culture got started; socially, how and why they are transmitted and shared; and psychologically, how and why they are conceived and perceived. In his analytics, Dundes collapsed the social/artistic binary of folk and lore to locate cultural identity, comprehend thought, and capture the human spirit.

## Notes

1. Dundes was not consistent in connecting mind to the binary and body to the trinary. In "The Number Three in American Culture," he cited the precedent of Emory Lease who proposed that "the primary divisions of the human arm and leg, not to mention the finger, tend to support trichotomic thinking," but reflected that "anatomical datum would appear to reinforce 'two' rather than 'three.'" He argued, "There are two sexes, two ears, eyes, nostrils, arms, legs, and so forth. These universally recognized pairs would help to explain why dualism is probably worldwide." Yet he then goes on to present dualism as a cognitively based concept by referring to the fundamental dichotomies of "self/other" and "us/them" to underscore that "there seems little doubt that 'two' is more widely distributed in the world than 'three'" (1980c, 135).
2. Dundes shared these reflections with me when we were invited guests at the Hoosier Folklore Society meeting, Terre Haute, Indiana, in 1997. Dundes was hardly alone in his attraction, attributed to both Jewish and scholarly background, to Freud's subversion of biological determinism, which was used to justify racist attitudes toward Jews (Gilman 1993a, 6–10; Gilman 1993b, 3–48). Yet as Elliott Oring points out in *The Jokes of Sigmund Freud*, there is also an implied ambivalence toward Jewish identity in Freud's analysis of Jewish jokes, and the thesis could be extended to Dundes (Oring 1984, 102–18). Indeed, Oring's book is dedicated to Dundes. Indicative of Dundes's concern for drawing more attention to Freud's Jewish background is the first English translation of Isidor Sadger's *Recollecting Freud* ([1930] 2005), edited and introduced by Dundes, with a chapter on "Freud and Judaism" (90–100).
3. His "strong outrage" at the Holocaust was related to me by Carolyn Dundes at the Western States Folklore Society meeting in Berkeley, April 2006. Another indication is Dundes's correspondence to Wolfgang Mieder (July 3, 2001), in which he singled out the Holocaust as "a great human tragedy" (see Mieder 2006a, 174).
4. The way his wife, Carolyn Dundes, expressed his attitude toward religion to me was that "he was interested in *all* religions" (conversation, Western States Folklore Society meeting, Berkeley, California, April 2005).
5. Gary Alan Fine has pointed out the precedent of what he calls a "sociological" view in Joseph Jacobs's "The Folk" (Jacobs 1893; Fine 1987). Dundes was aware of Jacobs's view, since he reprinted his essay in *Folklore: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, edited by Dundes (2005b). My discussion of the influence of Jacobs's Jewish background and consciousness of diasporization on his view, in 1893, of folklore created in contemporary situations, could be applied to Dundes's situation when he proposed his "modern" concept of folklore in 1962 (Bronner 1998, 135–37). Although Jacobs (1854–1916) was a diffusionist, while Dundes called himself a structuralist and psychoanalytic folklorist, they arguably also shared a protest against prevalent trends promoted by the senior guard of their fields. For Jacobs, evolutionary doctrine was his target, whereas for Dundes it was historic-geographic methodology. For Jacobs's contrary position in British folklore studies, see Dorson (1968, 266–73). Dorson did not give Dundes the same kind of biographical treatment, but he did write the foreword to Dundes's *Analytic Essays*, in which he compared him more to another British folklorist, Andrew Lang, for "the gift" of an "inquiring mind" (1975).
6. September 17, 2006 correspondence from folklorist Maria Teresa Aggozino, a long-time associate of Dundes at Berkeley. "WWDS" also shows up in a discussion thread on the Hebrew song *Had Gadya* (Little Goat) at the website LiveJournal (<http://rymenhild.livejournal.com/42896.html>, accessed September 22, 2006). Shuduri\_sour posted a message labeled "WWDS" on April 14, 2005, and wrote, "after seven classes with the late Professor Alan Dundes, I can confidently say that this song is indicative of some oral aggressive tendencies." Charles Clay Doyle, in his 2006 Archer Taylor Lecture, "Is the Pope Catholic? Some Unfinished Business about Proverbs," at the Western States Folklore Society meeting, Berkeley, California, April 21, 2006, prefaced the lecture with a reminiscence of hearing WWDS at Berkeley.

7. A Google search of the Internet on September 22, 2006, revealed other meanings of WWDS, including World Wide Day in Science, What Would Dad Say, Watson Wyatt Data Services, and What Would the Democrats be Screaming. But for most receivers of the button, there is an awareness of WWDS as an adaptation of WWJS for “What Would Jesus Say?” It uses the form of the initialism to replace the usual association of such worldly signifiers as corporate or media representations (e.g., WWDS in Muncie, Indiana, for a radio station or WWE for World Wrestling Entertainment) and self-actualization messages (e.g., SALT for Self Actualization for Leadership Training).
8. WWJS is listed on the online Urban Dictionary, a reference list for contemporary slang, at <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=wwjs>, accessed September 22, 2006. It lists an example of conversational usage as, “Hey, should I abort this baby? WWJS?”
9. Lists of variations can be found at a webpage for “Christian Acronyms” at the website managed by the Creative Ladies Ministry, <http://www.creativeladiesministry.com/acronyms.html>, accessed September 22, 2006.
10. Dundes discussed acronyms as expressions of cognitive patterns in “The Number Three in American Culture” (1980d, 140). Although he emphasized the ubiquity of three names for organizational names, he implied that four is a symbol of “more than enough” when he delineated “general statements about the nature of trichotomy.” His second statement was, “If there are more than three terms, the additional ones will not infrequently be defined primarily in terms of one of the extremes. For example, in shirt sizes, one finds small, medium, and large. The size ‘extra-large’ is certainly linguistically and very probably conceptually derived from ‘large,’ rather than possessing separate individual status” (136). The symbolic meaning of four as a quantity of abundance was explored more by Dundes’s Berkeley colleague, Stanley Brandes, in *Forty* (1985).