



PROJECT MUSE®

Meaning of Folklore

Alan Dundes, Simon J. Bronner

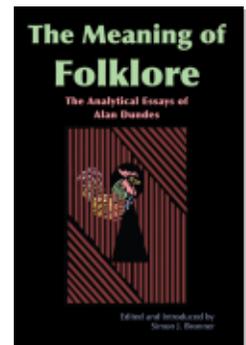
Published by Utah State University Press

Dundes, Alan & Bronner, J.,

Meaning of Folklore: The Analytical Essays of Alan Dundes.

Logan: Utah State University Press, 2007.

Project MUSE., <https://muse.jhu.edu/>.



➔ For additional information about this book

<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/9407>

FOLKLORE AS A MIRROR OF CULTURE

Introduction

Alan Dundes was considered a master teacher as well as a scholar. His study of folklore offers insight into instruction, since folklore is an essential way that cultural knowledge and wisdom is passed down from generation to generation and from peer to peer. He practiced what he preached, for in 1994 he received a distinguished teaching award from the University of California at Berkeley, an accolade he greatly cherished. In his own education, he received a graduate degree in teaching of English from Yale University in 1955. In this 1969 essay, originally appearing in an English education journal, he urged K–12 teachers to use folklore as an instructional tool to develop tolerance, and to use the students' own cultural traditions to enhance learning. Unlike many educational approaches encouraging adults to concoct, and often sanitize, literary materials for children to digest, he called on teachers to rely on raw oral lore “performed by children for other children.” He was famous, in fact, for requiring his own college students to collect fifty items of folklore that they would then describe and interpret. In this essay, he provided sociopsychological perspectives that can be used to decipher folk material.

Dundes pointed to children's folklore, not as something to be repressed, but rather to be brought out into the open. As he showed, it reflects, as only folklore can, issues of sibling rivalry, puberty, and parent/child relations. He distinguished folklore—as evidence—from the use of other materials, because it is “autobiographical ethnography, a people's own description of themselves.” He evaluated what children typically relate in folklore to “areas of special concern,” or anxieties that are expressed more readily in folklore than in everyday conversation.

Dundes's concern for the plight of African Americans and Vietnamese was voiced in his writings during the Civil Rights movement and the Vietnam War. He referred to the presence of the Cold War in relating alternative answers to the riddle joke of “what's black and white and red all over?” Other conflicts mentioned in the essay have outlasted the Cold War, such as ethnic and international tension grounded in cultural misunderstanding. Folklore, as a mirror of culture, reveals differences and similarities in ways of thinking, and he hoped that its study could therefore be a tool for teaching cultural understanding.

This essay encapsulates, at an early stage in Dundes's career, many of the principles of a “modern” concept of folklore that became influential in folkloristics. He distanced himself from the Grimm brothers' legacy of romantic nationalism, and advocated folklore as an adaptive strategy of modern life. He also expanded the scope of folk materials from oral

to written and material items. His advocacy of the idea that folklore is constantly being created anew in contemporary life was especially important. It is not a relic of the past, as many people believe, but an expression of present-day issues.

Dundes's title invokes the "mirror" concept of Franz Boas, considered the father of modern anthropology, that folklore is invaluable as a reflection of a particular culture's conditions and values. He expanded Boas's inquiry by suggesting that the interpretation of symbols lodged within folkloric performances were a result of folklore serving the function of a socially sanctioned outlet for suppressed wishes and anxieties. He also inferred the strategic use of folklore to upset power relations, as his examples of child/parent communication demonstrate. Characteristically—given his fondness throughout his writing career for reflexively turning the analyst's cultural mirror back on the analyst as a way to disrupt the hierarchies of observer and observed—he examined the folklore that teachers possess, after spending time showing the value of understanding children's folklore. In the process, he identified the common cognitive pattern of trichotomy as a Western scholarly, as well as cultural, bias, a point he later expanded in "The Number Three in American Culture" in *Interpreting Folklore* (1980b). This essay is also significant for separating the hierarchical view of folk as a lower stratum, which he associated with the nineteenth-century approach of the Brothers Grimm, from the *modern* concept, which contains the key social definition of folk as "any group of people whatsoever who share at least one linking factor." Thus, he concluded that "we all are folk"—whether urban or rural, young or old, religious or secular.

In folkloristic writing, the "mirror" concept is still applied to relate historical and cultural information about a group, with the presumption that it is also a marker of a particularistic social identity. (See, for instance, Clements 1996; Rey-Henningsen 1994; Wilson 1995, 2006; and Georges and Jones 1995.) It is also referenced when the details of folklore appear *not* to reflect culture, suggesting the psychological possibility of folklore distorting or inverting reality (see chapter 14, "Getting the Folk and the Lore Together"). In Dundes's words, "It was not understood [in Boas's mirror concept] that an item of folklore can serve as a vehicle which *requires* an individual to do what he may not be permitted to do in everyday reality (e.g., in courtship games, complete strangers may kiss, in games of chase, acts of physical aggression are mandatory)" (Dundes 1966a, 243; see also chapters 15 and 17 in this volume).

Alan Dundes continued his interest in children's folklore throughout his career, connecting folklore to human development and infantile anxieties. He also drew on children's humor, such as dead baby jokes, to underscore the emergent nature of folk humor, which he typically analyzed psychoanalytically (1987c). He wrote the foreword to Martha Wolfenstein's *Children's Humor* (1978), and the title essays of his anthologies *From Game to War* (1997b) and *Bloody Mary in the Mirror* (2002a) delve into children's rituals and games. For more interpretative sources on the folklore of children and their teachers, see Bishop and Curtis 2001; Bronner 1988, 1995; Factor 1989; Knapp and Knapp 1976; McDowell 1979; Opie and Opie 1969, 1972; Sutton-Smith 1972; and Sutton-Smith et al. 1999.

Folklore as a Mirror of Culture

THE VARIOUS FORMS OF FOLKLORE: myths, folktales, legends, folksongs, proverbs, riddles, games, dances and many others can provide a vital resource for a teacher who seriously wishes to (1) understand his students better, and (2) teach those students more effectively about the world and about the human condition. For folklore is autobiographical ethnography—that is, it is a people’s own description of themselves. This is in contrast to other descriptions of that people, descriptions made by social workers, sociologists, political scientists or anthropologists. It may be that there is distortion in a people’s self image as it is expressed in that people’s songs, proverbs, and the like, but one must admit that there is often as much, if not more, distortion in the supposedly objective descriptions made by professional social scientists who in fact see the culture under study through the culturally relative and culturally determined categories of their own culture. Moreover, even the distortion in a people’s self image can tell the trained observer something about that people’s values. Out of all the elements of culture, which ones are singled out for distortion, for special emphasis?

Folklore as a mirror of culture frequently reveals the areas of special concern. It is for this reason that analyses of collections of folklore can provide the individual who takes advantage of the opportunities afforded by the study of folklore a way of seeing another culture *from the inside out* instead of *from the outside in*, the usual position of a social scientist or teacher. Whether the “other culture” is far from the borders of our country or whether the “other culture” is lodged within these borders, a world shrunk by modern technological advances in transportation and communications demands that education keep pace. We need to know more about Vietnamese worldview; we need to know more about African American values.

One of the greatest obstacles impeding a better understanding of Vietnamese, African American or any other culture is what anthropologists term “ethnocentrism.” This is the notion, apparently held in some form by all the peoples of the earth, that the way *we* do things is “natural” and “right” whereas the way *others* do them is “strange,” perhaps “unnatural” and maybe even “wrong.” The Greek historian Herodotus described ethnocentrism, without, of course, using the term, as follows:

If one were to offer men to choose out of all the customs in the world such as seemed to them the best, they would examine the whole number, and end by preferring their own; so convinced are they that their own usages surpass those of all others.

One of the purposes of studying folklore is to realize the hypothetical premise. Man cannot choose out of all the customs in the world until he knows what these customs are. Traditional customs are part of folklore. Obviously the point in collecting, classifying, and analyzing the customs and other forms of folklore is not necessarily to allow the investigator to choose a way of life other than his own. Rather by identifying the similarities, the actual historical cognates such as hundreds of versions of Cinderella, a tale

which folklorists label as Aarne-Thompson tale type 510 in the internationally known index of Indo-European folktales first published in 1910, or by identifying the near-similarities, the probably noncognate folkloristic parallels which seem to depend upon universal or quasi-universal human experiences (such as the introduction of death into the world because of some unthinking or foolish action on the part of a culture hero or trickster figure), one has convincing data which can effectively be used to promote international understanding. If only the Turks and Greeks realized that they had the same folktales and the same lovable wise fool of a Hodja figure in many of these tales. The same holds for the Arabs and the Jews. In this light, it is sad to think that folklore, instead of being used as a constructive force for internationalism, has all too frequently been the tool of excessive nationalism.

The history of folklore studies reveals that folklorists in many different countries have often been inspired by the desire to preserve their national heritage. The Grimms, for example, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, imbued with nationalism and romanticism, and armed with the fashionable methodology of historical reconstruction, collected folktales and legends with the hope of rescuing something ur-German, that is, something truly Teutonic, before it faded from the scene altogether. The Grimms were surprised and probably more than a little disappointed when they discovered that many of their "Teutonic" tales had almost exact analogues in other European countries. The Grimms incidentally, like most nineteenth century collectors, rewrote the folklore they collected. This retouching of oral tales continues today in the children's literature field where reconstructed, reconstituted stories written in accordance with *written not oral conventions* are palmed off as genuine folktales.

One can see that the basic mistrust of folk materials is part of a general ambivalence about the materials of oral tradition, the materials of the folk. On the one hand, the folk and their products were celebrated as a national treasure of the past; on the other hand, the folk were wrongly identified with the illiterate in a literate society and thus the folk as a concept was identified exclusively with the vulgar and the uneducated. (The folk to a modern folklorist is any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common linking factor, e.g., religion, occupation, ethnicity, geographical location, etc., which leads to: Jewish folklore, lumberjack folklore, African American folklore, and California folklore. As an American I know American folklore; as a professor I know campus folklore; as a member of a family, I know my own family folklore.) The equation of folklore with ignorance has continued. The word folklore itself considered as an item of folk speech means fallacy, untruth, error. Think of the phrase "That's folklore." It is similar to the meaning of "myth in such phrases as "the myth of race." This is *not*, however, what folklore and myth mean to the professional folklorist. A myth is but one form or genre of folklore, a form which consists of a sacred narrative explaining how the world and man came to be in their present form. Folklore consists of a variety of genres most of which are found among all peoples of the earth. Nevertheless, the association of folklore with error (consider "folk" medicine as opposed to "scientific" medicine) has made it difficult for the study of folklore as a discipline to gain academic respectability and has generally discouraged the use and study of folklore by educators.

It is still mistakenly thought that the only people who study folklore are antiquarian types, devotees of ballads which are no longer sung and collectors of quaint customs which are no longer practiced. Folklore in this false view is equated with survivals from an age past, survivals which are doomed not to survive. Folklore is gradually dying out, we are

told. Moreover, since folklore is defined as error, it is thought by some educators to be a good thing that folklore is dying out. In fact, it has been argued that one of the purposes of education is to help stamp out folklore. As humans evolve, they leave folklore behind such that the truly civilized human is conceived to be folkloreless. From this kind of thinking, one can understand why education and folklore have been on opposite sides and also why when well meaning educators move into other cultures, e. g., in Africa or in a ghetto school, they actually believe they are doing their students a service by helping to suppress local customs, superstitions, folk speech, and other folkloristic traditions. So it is that African students are taught Shakespeare and Chaucer as great literature while their own superb oral literature is not deemed worthy of classroom treatment, assuming that the western educated teacher even knows of its existence. How many teachers of literature, of the epic in particular, are aware of the fact that the epic is a living oral form and that epics up to 13,000 lines are now being sung in Yugoslavia, among other places? How many teachers of African American children have ever heard of the “dozens” (or “rapping and capping” or “sounding” etc.) or of the “toast,” an important African American folklore genre in rhyme reminiscent of epic form? Yet, the technique of verbal dueling known as the “dozens” and the epic toast are extremely viable forms of African American folklore and they encapsulate the critical points and problems in African American family structure and in black-white relations. One could teach both literature and social studies from such folkloristic texts (were they not “obscene” by our standards) with the advantage that these texts would be known by the students from their own lives and experience.

Why not teach children about the nature of poetry by examining their own folk poetry: nursery rhymes, jump rope rhymes, hand clap rhymes, ball bouncing rhymes, dandling rhymes, and autograph book verse among others? There is almost no method or approach found in the study of literature which could not also be applied to folk materials. One could discuss formal features such as metrics, rhyme, alliteration; one could discuss content features such as characterization, motivation, themes. By using the materials of folklore as a point of departure, the educational process may be comprehended as dealing with the real world rather than with a world apart from the world in which the students live. With folklore, the classroom becomes a laboratory or forum for a consideration of “real life” as it is experienced and perceived by those being educated. Let me briefly provide just a few examples of folklore and try to illustrate how they might be used to enliven and stimulate classroom discussions.

One technique which can immediately show children something important about the nature of oral tradition is to select one item of folklore and ask each child to tell the other members of the class his or her *version* of the item. It doesn't matter what the item is: when Christmas presents are opened (Christmas Eve, Christmas morning, one on Christmas Eve and the rest on Christmas day, etc.) or what one says near the end of *Hide and Seek* to summon all the other players: Olly, olly oxen free, Olly Olly Ocean free, (All ye, all ye “outs” in free?????), Home free all, etc. After a number of versions have been elicited, the students should be able to see that although there is considerable diversity, there is also considerable uniformity. If there are differences—such as how many candles are placed on the birthday cake (some have the number of candles equal to the number of years old while others have that number plus one with the extra grow on, etc.), even these differences are traditional. How many children believe that the number of candles left burning after the attempt to blow them out signifies the number of children one will have? How many believe the number left burning signifies the number of years to pass before one's wish

(made right before the blowing attempt) comes true? Through such devices, the children can learn that there are frequently subtraditions within traditions. Then the teacher may ask the children “Which version is correct?” “Which version is the right one?” Normally, there will be extended debate on this, individual students championing their own individual versions, perhaps pointing to the statistical evidence available within the classroom to support one version over another. Gradually, the children will come to realize that in folklore as in life, there is often no one correct or right version. One traditional version is just as traditional as another version. A’s way of observing Christmas or birthday rituals is no better and no worse than B’s. Isn’t this a marvelous way of showing what ethnocentrism is: people insisting that the way they know is best and proper while the strange unfamiliar way is wrong? And isn’t this a marvelous way of teaching tolerance? If children can learn that their fellows’ ways are not “wrong” but “alternative, equally traditional” ways of doing things, this could be one of the most important lessons they are ever likely to learn.

Having illustrated the nature of variation in folklore, the teacher might wish to discuss why there is variation. Here the difference between oral and written (or printed) traditions is crucial. Folklore is passed on by means of person to person contact. And an item of folklore may be changed by different individuals in accordance with their own individual needs, the demands of a particular social context—the make-up of the audience—is it boys and girls, just boys, children and grown-ups, etc. or the requirements of a new age. So it is that each item of folklore is passed on through time, sometimes remaining the same, sometimes changing. This is why the task of collecting and analyzing folklore can never be completed. Tomorrow’s version of a folksong may or may not be the same as the one we know today which in turn may or may not be the same as the one which was known in the past. This is in marked contrast to the products of written tradition. If one reads a play of Shakespeare or a novel of James Joyce today, one can be reasonably sure that one hundred years from now, the identical text will be read by others.

There is a tendency to underestimate the differences between a visual/written record and an aural/oral record. It has only recently been suggested that the mass media, radio, television, motion pictures, etc. have, by discouraging or impinging upon time formerly spent in reading, made us an oral rather than a written culture. Actually, one should say, has made us an oral culture *again*. In evolutionary terms, pre-literate society which was orally oriented became literate, but now we have “post-literate” man who is influenced by oral communication once more. Yet the education system has not always kept pace. The traditional emphasis has been upon “reading and writing.” What about “speaking?” Oratory, valued so much by oral cultures around the world, has become almost a lost art in literate societies. Interestingly enough, in African American culture there is tremendous value placed upon rhetoric as one aspect of style. The “man of words” is highly esteemed and anyone who has heard African American preachers use their voices surely recognizes the eloquent power of that oral style.

It is a pity that our educational philosophy continues to worship the written word. Note that “literacy” is still thought by some to be a *sine qua non* for an individual to be able to vote. The fact that intelligent peoples all over the world are capable of reaching decisions without anything more than oral communication seems to be overlooked. We tend to trust what is “down in black and white.” “Put it in writing” we say; we tend to distrust oral testimony, regarding it as unreliable. We forget that much of what is written down—in newspapers, in books, circulated as oral communication first. Even the Bible was in oral tradition before it was committed to written form! With such bias in favor of written tradition, it is easy to

see why there has been relatively little interest in the study of oral tradition. But by failing to recognize the differences between oral and written traditions, we do a disservice to ourselves as well as our students. Who has never heard someone give orally an address which was written out in advance? Yet relatively few written works read well aloud. Similarly, students taking written notes from an instructor's free-flowing oral classroom delivery are often dismayed by the sentence fragments, the agreement errors, etc. There are major lexical and stylistic differences between oral and written tradition. "Indeed, Moreover, One cannot escape the conclusion . . ." are acceptable written conventions, when *seen* on a printed page, but they may *sound* stilted when heard in speech. A word or phrase may *look* right, but *sound* wrong. But by the same token, a word or phrase which sounds fine, may look terrible in print. In oral speech, one can use slang, folk similes (as cool as a cucumber) and folk metaphors (to fly off the handle). In written tradition, these are branded as "clichés" by diligent teachers of English composition. Such teachers are wont to warn their students to "avoid clichés." The folklorist would urge that children *not* be told never to use clichés but rather that they be taught the difference between oral and written traditions and *not* to confuse the conventions of each. In oral tradition, originality is neither desired or expected. The more traditional (= unoriginal) the better. However, in our written tradition, originality is essential. But children can not avoid clichés. Do they not learn to speak before they learn to read and write? The point is simply that children should not be taught to write as they speak and they should not be taught to speak as they write. The unfortunate confusion of oral and written conventions is one reason why most printed collections of folklore are spurious. They have been edited and rewritten to conform to written rather than oral style. The expletives, meaningful pauses, the stammers, not to mention the eye expressions, the hand movements and all the other body gestural signals are totally lost in the translation from oral to written tradition. This is why it is impossible to learn what folklore is by reading books. If one is interested in learning about folklore, one must elicit oral tradition. A useful class exercise might be to have a child tell a joke or legend to his classmates whose task it becomes to write it down. One could then discuss at length just what was "left out" in the written version that had been in the oral version.

In order to more fully understand and utilize folklore, one must have some idea of the functions of folklore. Folklore reflects (and thereby reinforces) the value configurations of the folk, but at the same time folklore provides a sanctioned form of escape from these very same values. In fairy tales, the hero or heroine is inevitably told not to do something; don't look in the secret chamber, don't answer the door, etc. Of course, the protagonist violates the interdiction. He may be punished for his disobedience, but usually he comes out ahead in the end. For example, the hero marries the princess. The escape mechanism is equally obvious in traditional games. On the one hand, educators urge that games be played to teach "teamwork," "cooperation," and "fair play." On the other hand, once in the game, children can compete and they can compete aggressively. One can "steal" the bacon or "capture" the flag of the opposing team. In "King of the Mountain," boys can push rivals off the raft. In adolescent games such as "Spin the Bottle," "Post Office," or "Paddle," the rules *require* the participants to do that which they would very much like to do but which they might not otherwise do. Folklore provides socially sanctioned forms of behavior in which a person may do what can't be done in "real life." One is not supposed to push anyone around in real life—at least if one believes the "Golden Rule," but in games one is supposed to take a chair and leave someone else without one to sit on (in "Musical Chairs"). As a young adolescent, one cannot kiss a casual acquaintance

without feelings of guilt or hearing cries of derision. Yet in kissing games, one must do so. The folkloristic frame not only permits, but *requires* the taboo action and it also thereby relieves the individual from assuming the responsibility (and guilt) for his or her actions. The individual has no choice; it is a mere spin of the bottle or some other act of chance (such as seeing a car with only one headlight working) which dictates the sexual behavior. In children's games, the drama of real (adult) life is often enacted. Yet neither teacher nor student may be fully aware of just what is involved in a particular game. In much the same way, folk—and social—dances allow for heterosexual body contact in a society which true to its Puritan heritage has consistently condemned the body and its domain. The fact that boys can dance with girls, girls can dance with girls, but boys cannot dance with boys in American culture reflects our great fear of homosexuality. This is striking when one recalls that most societies even have men's dances from which women are excluded. Americans remain slaves to a tradition in which the body is seen as dirty, as something to be denied or repressed. Note that we still insist on *physical* (corporal) punishments for intellectual/mental lapses. The body is punished, not the mind, every time a child is struck or spanked!

As a specific example of how folklore functions, let me cite one riddle text. A child comes home from school and at the dinner table asks his parents: "What is black and white and red all over?" The parent, if he or she is alert and has a good memory, replies: "A newspaper" which in fact is one of the older traditional answers to this riddle. But there are other modern traditional answers. Some of these are: a sunburned zebra, an embarrassed zebra, a zebra with measles, a wounded nun, a bloody integration march, and for the sophisticate: *Pravda*, the *Daily Worker*, or the *New York Times* which involves an interesting play on the original "newspaper" answer. Now what precisely is going on? What function, if any, does this riddle or the hundreds like it serve? I believe that this kind of riddle provides an effective mechanism for reversing the normal adult-child relationship in our society. In our society, it is the parent or teacher who knows all the answers and who insists upon proposing difficult if not "impossible" questions to children. However, in the riddle context, either the parent doesn't know the answer to the elephant or little moron joking question—in which case the child can have the great pleasure of telling him or her what the answer is *or* the parent gives the "wrong" answer (e.g., "newspaper" would be considered "wrong" by the child who has *another* answer in mind—and aren't there plenty of instances where the child answers an adult's question perfectly well but fails because his answer was not the particular answer the adult desired? This is also what happens whenever an unthinking adult asks the kind of questions which can be labeled as being "Guess what's in my mind" questions. In this instance where the parent has given the "wrong" answer, the child has the even more exquisite pleasure of *correcting* rather than merely informing the parent.) Children also use riddles with their peers where a similar function is evident. A child goes one up if he or she has a riddle which stumps a friend. I should perhaps mention that riddles or joking questions are by no means confined to children's usage. Many adults use such devices in daily interpersonal rituals. Some of these riddling questions provide serious reflections of our culture. Do you remember the "knock-knock" cycle? Well, have you heard the World War II knock-knock joke? No? Okay, "Knock-knock" (audience): "Who's there?"—(long silent pause—signifying that no one would be left to answer in the event of total nuclear world war).

Literature for Children or Literature of Children

The analysis of the content of children's folklore could help anyone seriously interested in understanding children. I refer specifically to that portion of children's folklore which is performed by children for other children. This is distinct from that portion of children's folklore which consists of materials imposed upon children by parents and teachers. The analysis of the latter kind of children's folklore would probably give more of an insight into parents and teachers' worldview than the worldview of children. I suspect that in courses dealing with children's literature, it is this latter category which receives most of the attention. In other words, the emphasis is on "literature for children" rather than "literature of children"! (By "literature of children" I mean their oral literature, their folklore, their traditions, not their little individual written compositions or poems.) This is, in my opinion, the same kind of thinking that makes Peace Corps teachers teach Shakespeare and Chaucer to African students instead of utilizing African folktales and proverbs, that is, using some of the "native" literature as the basis for an understanding of the nature of prose and poetry. Educational, as well as foreign, policy is invariably made in accordance with the value system of us, the teacher or the American. Such decisions may be rational from our point of view; they may even prove to be "correct," but in the majority of cases, these decisions are probably all too often made without sufficient knowledge of the groups we honestly want to help. We tend to think of the "other" people be they inhabitants of villages in Asia or children in our classroom as poor little sponges who need to soak up as much of our material as they possibly can.

The phrase "culturally deprived" is a prime example of this faulty kind of thinking. From an anthropological perspective, of course, there can be no such thing as culturally deprived. Culture in anthropological usage refers to the total way of life of a people, and not to a very select group of elitist materials such as opera, the great books, etc. All human beings have culture in general; some people share one culture rather than another. Hopi culture is different from Vietnamese culture. So it is impossible in this sense for any individual to be "culturally deprived"; our minority groups have just as much culture as anybody else. The point is simply that it is another culture, a different culture. To call a minority group "culturally deprived" is a kind of survival of nineteenth century "white man's burden" thinking. The real question is: Do we want "them"—and "them" could be African Americans, South Vietnamese, children in our classrooms, etc.—to give up their culture and accept our culture in its place or do we not insist on a melting pot metaphor with the pot to take on the consistency of the dominant ethos? In my opinion, the "unmelting pot" might be a more apt metaphor. If so, then perhaps we should allow or better yet, encourage "them" to enjoy, understand, and take pride in their own culture. Obviously, the culture of our children is closer to our adult culture than the culture of a distinct ethnic minority or some foreign population to our culture in general. Nevertheless, the principle in terms of educational philosophy is the same.

What kinds of things do we see in our children's own folklore?

Teacher, teacher, I declare
I see so and so's underwear.

Charlie Chaplin went to France
To see the ladies' underpants . . .

I see London; I see France
I see so and so's underpants.

We see the child's curiosity about the body and the immediate body covering. The child finds it difficult to accept the adult's apparent rejection of the body and its natural functions. Consider the following jump rope rhyme:

Cinderella, dressed in yellow
Went downtown to see her fellow.
On the way her girdle busted.
How many people were disgusted? 1, 2, 3, etc.

Clearly, children, in this instance little girls, are fascinated by a particular undergarment, the girdle. Note that the girdle busts while Cinderella is on the way to see, or in some versions to kiss, her fellow. Do children really know what they are saying?

Folklore and Sibling Rivalry

Less symbolic, but equally important are the sentiments underlying these familiar jump rope verses:

Fudge, fudge, tell the judge
Mama's got a new born baby.
It ain't no girl, it ain't no boy
Just a newborn (or "common" or "plain ol'" or "ordinary") baby
Wrap it up in tissue paper
Throw (send) it down the elevator.
First floor, miss
Second floor, miss, etc. (until the jumper misses)

This is really an extraordinarily revealing rhyme. First of all, why is the judge informed about the newborn baby? Is the judge the person who can take away children from parents or the person who has the power to punish parents for mistreating children? In any case, here is explicit sibling rivalry. What child does not resent the arrival upon the scene of the new born child who threatens the previously existing relationship between the older children and the mother? Notice how the poor baby is demeaned. It is sexless. It's not a girl, not a boy, in other words, it's *nothing*. It's just—and that word "just" tells all—an ordinary baby, nothing exceptional, nothing to make a fuss about. And what does the jumper-reciter recommend should be done with the baby? *Throw* it down the elevator. The jumper then jumps as many floors as she can without missing. Thus by being a skillful jumper, a girl can send her baby sibling far away. The more jumps without misses, the further the baby is sent away. Thus through jumping rope, a young girl is able to do something "constructive" about getting rid of her inevitable aggression against the new sibling rival. This inter-sibling hostility, I submit, is an integral part of American children's world-view. Look at the following jump rope rhyme:

I had a baby brother
His name was Tiny Tim.
I put him in the bathtub
To teach him how to swim.

He drank up all the water;
 He ate up all the soap.
 He tried to eat the bathtub
 But it wouldn't go down his throat.
 He died last night
 With a bubble in his throat.

This is an equally blatant example of an expression of sibling rivalry. Note the tense of the verb in the first line. I "had" a baby brother. Here is wishful thinking, a common element in all folklore. The baby rival is gone, and before the rhyme really gets started. What of the rest of the rhyme's content? Precisely where is it that the newborn baby gets so much obvious physical attention? In American culture, it is the bath. It is during and after bathing that the baby is fondled, powdered, played with, etc. So the older child takes things into his own hands. He puts the baby into the tub pretending to teach him how to swim. What does the baby do in the tub? He tries to eat everything. Babies are in fact orally inclined as it is this body zone which provides the initial point of contact with the world, a body zone which operates by incorporating what is needed, i.e., mother's milk. From the older child's point of view, the baby is always being fed—hence it appears to have an insatiable appetite. What then is more appropriate from the older child's perspective than to have his baby brother choke to death from eating something he shouldn't be eating, from trying to eat too much, that is, symbolically speaking, from trying to take too much, more than his share of their common parent's bounty. Of course, children hate their parents too:

Step on a crack (line)
 Break your mother's back (spine)

Symbolism in Folklore

No doubt many people who are unsympathetic to psychology and symbolism may doubt the validity of the above interpretations of children's folklore. Such interpretations, they would argue, are being *read into* innocent folklore rather than being *read out* of the folklore. Yet the astonishing thing is that much the same symbolism is contained in the folklore for children as communicated by parents and teachers. It has long been wrongly assumed that folktales—e.g., Grimms' *Kinder und Hausmärchen* and nursery rhymes are strictly children's *fac e*. This is not true. These materials were related by adults to other adults as well as children. If adult males have Oedipus complexes, then it is clear why it is they who relate the story of Jack and the Beanstalk. A boy lives alone with his mother, throws beans out of a window at his mother's request, climbs a tall magic beanstalk, hides from the threatening giant in the friendly giant's wife's oven, kills the giant by cutting the giant stalk with an axe which is often helpfully provided by his mother waiting at the foot of the stalk, and finally lives happily ever after with his mother! (Parents, of course, to the infant's eye view or the world appear to be giants!) For women with Electra complexes, it is normally a girl versus a wicked stepmother or witch. Whereas the donor figure in male folktales may be a female (cf. Jack's mother, the giant's wife), in female folktales, the helper may be a male (cf. the woodsman in "Little Red Riding Hood"), although to be sure sometimes kind father figures help boys and kind mother figures (e.g., fairy god-mothers) help girls. In Hansel and Gretel, the children are tempted orally and they nibble at the witch's house. (The children were not given food by their parents.) The witch, like so many cannibalistic villains in fairy tales, intends to employ

the infant's first weapon (eating, sucking, biting) by devouring the children. In this tale, the heroine, Gretel, succeeds in duping the witch into being burned up in her own oven. The female-oven symbolism is consistent. In Jack and the Beanstalk, the boy hides in the giant's wife's oven to escape the giant; in Hansel and Gretel, a tale featuring a girl's point of view, the heroine eliminates the female villain by making her enter her own hot oven! And what of Cinderella who we noticed in jump rope rhymes? What is the significance of the story of a girl who marries a prince because of a perfect fit between a foot and a glass slipper? What has the ideal marriage to do with a foot fitting into a slipper? And why do we still tie old shoes on the bumpers of cars carrying newlyweds off on their honeymoon?

One clue to the symbolism of slippers and shoes comes right from Mother Goose. One of the rhymes which parents read to children is:

There was an old woman who lived in a shoe.
She had so many children she didn't know what to do.

A literal, historical interpretation would have to locate a place where women once lived in actual shoes. But how would one explain the stated connection between "living in a shoe" and "having lots of children." Fortunately, another verse to this rhyme reported in the Ozarks in the 1890's makes the symbolism even more overt:

There was another old woman who lived in a shoe.
She didn't have any children; she knew what to do.

With symbolic systems, it is never a matter of one isolated instance. Within a given culture, there are whole consistent patterns of symbolism. The symbolism of a culture will be manifested in the folklore of that culture. So we should not be surprised to find other nursery rhymes:

Cock a doodle doo
My dame has lost her shoe
Her master's lost his fiddling stick
They don't know what to do.

Remember these are part of the children's folklore which is transmitted to children by parents and teachers. I do not necessarily believe that parents are aware of the symbolic content of folklore any more than I believe that children are consciously aware of all the symbolism. Clearly, folklore could not function successfully as an outlet if there were conscious awareness of its being so used. Folklore is collective fantasy and as fantasy, it depends upon the symbolic system of a given culture. I should be remiss if I did not state my conviction that the communication of collective fantasy and symbols is a healthy thing and I would strongly oppose those educators who advocate placing Mother Goose and fairy tales on a high shelf or locked case in the library. Folklore is one way for both adults and children to deal with the crucial problems in their lives. If our folklore sometimes deals with sexuality and the interrelationships between members of a family, then this is obviously something of a problem area in our daily lives. We know that folklore in all cultures tends to cluster around the critical points in the life cycle of the individual (e.g., birth, initiation, marriage, death) and the calendrical cycle of the community (e.g., sowing, harvesting, etc.) In fact, if one collects the folklore of a people and then does a content analysis of that folklore, one is very likely to be able to delineate the principal topics of crisis and anxiety among that people. So if American folklore, both adult and children's folklore,

has a sexual element, then we must face the problem which is reflected in the folklore. Squelching folklore as if such a thing were really possible—it is impossible to censor oral tradition as opposed to print—would not help in solving the original problems which generated the collective fantasies in the first place.

Folklore About Teachers

There can be no doubt that folklore reflects culture and as a final example, I will briefly mention teacher folklore. The folklore of and about teachers reflects both teachers' attitudes about themselves and students' attitudes about teachers. There is the resentment of administrators as illustrated in the numerous dean stories, e.g., "Old deans never die; they just lose their faculties." There are the parodies of teaching methods. An English teacher is explaining to her class how to write a short story: It should have religion, high society, sex, and mystery. Within a few moments, a little boy says, "OK. I'm finished." The teacher, surprised at the speed of the boy's composition, asks him to read his short story aloud to the class. "My God," said the duchess, "I'm pregnant! Who did it?" There are also commentaries on teachers who run their classes without any regard for what their students might like or think. A professor gives an advanced seminar in algebraic functions. Only one student shows up. However, he strides to the lectern and reads his hour-long lecture. Each day, the professor does the same thing. He sets up his notes and reads his lecture. One day, while at the blackboard writing a long series of equations and formulas, the professor sees the one student's hand raised. "Excuse me, professor, but I don't see why x cubed equals y cubed. Why wouldn't x cubed equal y cubed plus z cubed?" The professor replied, "That's a very interesting question but I don't want to take up valuable class time with it. See me at the end of the hour." In a variant of this joke, it is a professor of art history who offers a seminar in advanced Burmese vase painting. Again there is one student and again the professor reads his lecture. This time, the professor is at the faculty club talking to his colleagues. When they discover that he has only one student for the seminar, they ask him what he is doing in the class. He tells them that he reads his lecture just as he always has. "Good heavens," one colleague exclaims, "with just one student why don't you run the class as a discussion?" whereupon the professor replied, "What is there to discuss?" Of course, I don't have to say how distasteful modern students find this philosophy of education.

The folklore of teaching includes elementary school teachers too. For example, there's the story of the elementary school teacher who taught look-say reading. One day in backing her car out of a parking place on the street, she banged into the car parked behind her. She immediately got out to survey the possible damage and looking at her rear fender she said, "Oh, oh, oh, look, look, look, Damn, Damn, Damn!" Notice the threefold repetition in the punchline. There are three words each of which is repeated three times. Is this unusual? Certainly not. Three is the ritual number in American folklore. Whether it's three brothers in folktales, three wishes, a minister, a priest, and a rabbi, or the fact that there are frequently three action sequences in jokes and three repetitions of lines in folksongs: John Brown's body lies a moulderin' in the grave, Polly put the kettle on, Lost my partner what'll I do? etc., the pattern is the same. This pattern is *not* universal; most American Indian peoples have the ritual number *four*. Here is yet another illustration of how by analyzing the folklore we gain insight into the culture which it mirrors. Three is a ritual number not just in American folklore, but in all aspects of American culture: time—past, present, future; space—length, width, depth; and language—good, better, best, etc.

This is why we have the three R's (Reading, 'Riting and 'Rithmetic), Primary, Secondary, and Higher Education, the latter with its three degrees B.A., M. A., and PhD., the first of which can be cum laude, magna cum laude, and summa cum laude. This is why we have such pedagogical principles as: "Preview, Teach, and Review" which retains its tripartite form in the folk translation: tell 'em what you're going to tell 'em, tell 'em, and tell 'em what you told 'em.

Folklore as a subject of study can be a most rewarding one. It does serve as a mirror of culture and it is a mirror well worth looking into. The teacher who encourages his or her class to examine their own folklore or better yet sends them out with collecting projects, such as collecting the folklore of a group from another "culture" can give students as well as him or herself an educational experience of immeasurable value. We need to use every available means to better understand ourselves and our fellow men and women. Folklore is one such means, one available for the asking. We are all folk. All one needs to begin such work is people, people to ask and people to listen. Whether individuals ask about their own folklore or ask others about their folklore, if they listen, they will learn.