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## Meaning of Folklore

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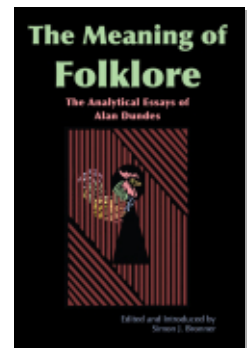
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## ON THE PSYCHOLOGY OF COLLECTING FOLKLORE

(*Postscript*) Chain Letter: A Folk Geometric Progression

### Introduction

The question that drives this provocative essay is from Dundes's senior mentor at Indiana University, Richard Dorson: "Why does the collector gather and publish tales?" Known for being a productive writer, Dorson answered the question with three motivating goals: Money, Art, and Truth. Dorson coined the term "fakelore"—used by Dundes in the present essay to negatively describe commercial, cleverly packaged, uncritical, and random collections of stories presented as genuine folklore—and he accused compilers of folklore anthologies, often titled "treasuries" (e.g., the American best-seller *Treasury of American Folklore* by B. A. Botkin in 1944), of being pseudo-collectors. Dorson implied that the gratification they provided was short lived or deceiving, and the money they made was tainted, drawing Dundes's attention to a money/feces equivalence.

Dorson credited some highly regarded collectors, such as Vance Randolph from the Ozarks or Zora Neale Hurston in the African-American South, for using their artistic skills to render the work of folk narrators as literature to a reading public. While satisfying to their readers, Art, in Dorson's view, concealed the raw power of the original source. He favored the natural material in its original context, which, aesthetically, raised images of folkloristic fascination with its "rough," tactile-like stimulation. The true, "pure" folklorist, Dorson declared, was after Truth, in his or her protection of the sanctity of the text performed in the style of the narrator. According to Dorson, this goal offered a spiritual reward, the intellectual honesty of preserving a natural state. His concluding comment about a model folkloristic publication probably drew Dundes's psychoanalytic attention: "The electric *excitement* of fieldwork and chance encounters with memorable folk can enliven the work, and save it from being a *lifeless* parade of texts. Such an ideal book will employ enough Art to make Truth more visible, and perhaps even a little Money will follow" (Dorson 1957). I have added emphasis to underscore the binary of life and death as the equivalent of varied, liberated stimulation (encounters) and uniform discipline (parade). Besides the priority of the vital natural body—apparent in his statement of folkloristic practice in which money, a fecal substitute, "follows" in excretory fashion rather than coming first—Dorson's essay begged the question of how literally to take the

identity-forming metaphor of folklorists' "working," indeed "digging," in the field outside the self, and bringing material back to examine and manipulate.

Dorson's answer of "Money, Art, Truth" can be rephrased as collecting, organizing, and publishing data as human products. That instrumental result raised the additional, more probing question that Dundes focused on: "Why collect?" The condensed question has, on its surface, an epistemological implication of the kind of truth gained from the accretion of variants from oral sources. On a psychological level, it provides an appeal to, or motivation of, workers sustaining this kind of effort. Indeed, collecting takes as its root the Latin *collectus*, for "gathering." According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it is related to words of pleasure-deriving agency, such as attract, protect, and correct. The collecting praxis is not unique to folklorists, but it has distinguished them, as Dorson's following comment attested: "What the state paper is to the historian and creative work to the literary scholar, the oral traditional text is—or should be—to the student of folklore" (1964). This point has been reaffirmed in folkloristic reference works extending into the twenty-first century (see the entries for "fieldwork" and "ethnography and fieldwork," respectively, in Brunvard 1996 and Bronner 2006b). In previous essays in the present volume, Dundes problematized several assumptions implicit in this statement: the criterion of orality, the separation of literature and folklore, the reliance on text as a unit of analysis, and a historical or devolutionary bias in recovering texts. To turn the analytical lens from the traditional externalized, creative teller to the folklore collector (as a kind of creator who skillfully "draws out" expressions and crafts products from them), Dundes asked for much of the same kind of life-history taking that is called for in contextualizing narrators in modern folkloristics, in order to answer the question "why tell?" (See, for instance, the chapter "Why Do They Tell?" [MacDonald 2006]).

Dundes's essay drew attention to the need for fieldworkers to take a reflexive position, a point later developed in self-reflective studies such as Jackson and Ives 1996; Georges and Jones 1980; and Clifford and Marcus 1986. Since Dundes's essay appeared, there have been fewer psychobiographies of individual folklorists than experiential accounts, but readers can still consult several examples: Bronner 2005b, 2005c; and Mechling 1989b.

Dundes contended that even if more fieldworkers shared more biographical material about themselves in the research process, they probably would not be able to interpret their own motivations, because of repressed desires and anxieties developed early in infancy. The analyst, aware of the personality characteristics of collectors and the symbolic equivalences of the gathering and ordering praxis, might be able to present, in Dundes's words, a "hypothetical framework" for underlying motivations, and, in the process of analysis, bring into consciousness the significance of folklore as allurement and stimulus, in addition to "truth." Dundes viewed folklore as a constructed object in the folklorist's work of rendering oral expression into visible, and usually fixed, readable form. The background for this objectification was Freud's idea of "anal eroticism," based on postulated infantile stages of psychosexual development in which sensuous pleasure was derived from stimulation of the anus. According to this theory, in the anal stage (from about two to three years old), the child builds object-relationships that have meanings associated with what to them are desirable, feces and defecation. Freud suggested, for example, the symbolic equivalences of feces/gifts ( $A = B$ ) and gifts/money ( $B = C$ ), leading to the conclusion that money connotes feces ( $A = C$ , represented in the phrase "filthy rich").

Other Freudian analysts, such as Karl Abraham and Ernest Jones, elaborated on anal character traits that could develop from the infantile stage, once as the child got older

adults repressed these into coprophilic activities. Dundes, especially, linked anal retention to collectors who “sit on” or “hold back” their accreting material, ordering and classifying it, in order to gain narcissistic pleasure in the act of possession. Another character trait relevant to folklorists, and a hint of Dundes’s own attitude, was anal ejection, a process of molding and manipulating material, equivalent to the professional who “feels compelled to publish.” The anal-ejective personality is more tolerant of dirt, and generally relaxed and sharing, according to this theory. One of the folkloristic implications was the methods and materials that attracted the field’s workers. Dundes suggested that the anal-retentive character was drawn to classificatory systems, such as tale-type and motif indexes (often containing uncontaminated ideal forms and rare specimens), while the anal-ejective (or expulsive) personality was enticed by the abundance of earthy or “dirty” materials in jokes (as Dundes was) and possibly in legends, rituals, and speech. The classificatory praxis, to Dundes, was inward-directed, since it was intended for one’s own organization or for those separating themselves as folklorists, in contradistinction to the anal-ejective personality, who reproduced and expanded the material to share it with others. Dundes made the anal-ejective argument that folklore is everywhere, and that the folk are us. Rather than following the convention of separating folk into layers of self and other, literate and non-literate, and civilized and peasant, Dundes defined folk as “*any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor.*” Hence, in an ejective mode, different *overlapping* folk identities can be held simultaneously.

Dundes pointed to the popular association of folklore with childhood (e.g., nursery rhymes, playground games, taunts, and beliefs) as a source of the connection between anality and collecting. Thus, the materials of folklore correlated with the anal stage of development, even though Dundes, the analyst, had made a case for a “modern,” expulsive-sounding definition of folklore as something constantly being adapted, and emerging anew, in all stages and groups of life. Indeed, to establish his symbolist position, Dundes expressed *dissatisfaction* for, and the *limitation* of, collection and classification as *an end in itself*. Collection tended to preserve old materials as precious antiques (he referred to the pre-modern concept pejoratively as antiquarianism), while his “modern” definition brought the “folk” and “lore” together as a living, renewable resource.

Dundes understood that readers might be skeptical of his interpretation of the collecting praxis as an expression of anality, or that they might be able to come up with alternative readings. It could be pointed out, for example, that in the thrill attributed to fieldwork by Dorson and others, there are frequently hints of intimacy with one’s subject and informants. Further, it is possible to sketch an active, perhaps phallogocentric, position of “getting into” communities, finding human “tradition-bearers” through a process of social intercourse, and using intrusive technology to distinguish folklorists from the allegedly “passive” historians and literary scholars, who are trapped in the confines of the library with “lifeless” documents and texts (see Jackson 1987 and Goldstein 1964). Folklorists are often in the fertile field (with its generative rhetoric in the literature, such as “harvesting,” “gathering,” and “hunting” lore), and they may shed the trappings of the “ivory tower” while engaging in a “hands-on” participant-observation approach Dorson claimed he did, in his classic account of fieldwork after leaving the confines of Michigan State University for the “wilds” of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula (1952). However, folklorists share with other scholars the anal-retentive traits of education—as a learned enterprise involving the accretion of books and knowledge—expressed in the lore of a B.S., M.S. (More of the Same), and Ph.D. (Piled Higher and

Deeper). Again, there may be infantilization suggested by the taunt that scholars have never left school! (See Bronner 1995.)

The postscript to “On the Psychology of Collecting Folklore” took a different kind of reflexive strategy, by pointing to the folklore of folklorists as a reflection of their cognition and values (for an elaboration of the idea of the folklore of folklorists, see Reuss 1974). In this essay, Dundes discussed chain letters he received, as they gave him an opportunity to show the stability and change of a folk item. They also attested that folklore, in this case in the form of a printed letter (more recently adapted to e-mails), was not restricted to oral tradition. The chain letter, as a wish-fulfillment fantasy, reflected men’s folklore. Related to the previous essay, it also suggested the appeal of accretion, particularly in a capitalistic society, and, arguably, the objectification of women in a phallogentric culture. For discussions after Dundes’s essay on chain letters, see Duncan 1976, Boles and Myers 1988, and Fine and Boles 2006.

Lest folklorists think that the folk are always others, Dundes provided a second example of a chain letter as folk letter, this time one transmitted by folklorists. He implied that to be successful, the chain should involve anal-ejective scholars who felt compelled to produce articles. It also represented what Dundes called “literalization of a metaphor,” for in setting up the chain, folklorists were linked by their discipline. Receiving scores of reprints, the reward for producing, made one’s piles accrete. As a reflection of values, it also expressed folklore’s relation, as a productive field, to other “traditional” disciplines. (For a related chain letter in the folklore of folklorists, see Jan Harold Brunvand 1977.) For Dundes, the example of folklorists’ folklore underlined essential points about the folk process: it provided a socially sanctioned outlet for desires, feelings, and taboos; and it was renewable, purposeful, and functional, adapting old forms to new or different conditions and transmitting media. Consequently, Dundes asserted, “there will always be folklore.” In his exemplification, society needs folklore—and folklorists to make sense of it all.

## On the Psychology of Collecting Folklore

WITHIN RECENT DECADES, PROFESSIONAL FOLKLORISTS have placed more and more emphasis upon obtaining biographical and other background information about informants. A collector of folklore is expected to do more than merely indicate his or her sources. He or she is encouraged to provide just as much pertinent data describing his or her informants as possible. The purpose is presumably to aid in relating folklore to individual bearers of tradition and more especially to cultural context. In contrast to the previous practice of studying folklore materials in the abstract, the sociological and psychological study of folklore is facilitated by this new interest in particular informants. Nevertheless, one aspect of the collecting situation remains singularly untouched. While folklorists may be coming closer to an answer to the perennial question of why individuals tell tales, sing folksongs, etc., the motivation of folklorists in collecting folklore in the first place is rarely considered. Richard Dorson, however, does ask, in an important article on collecting folktales, "Why does the collector gather and publish tales?"<sup>1</sup>

In order to answer this question satisfactorily, it will probably be necessary to study background information on the collectors of folklore. Unfortunately, most of the famous collectors, although they do occasionally give numerous details about their various informants, fail to give relevant biographical material about themselves. In the absence of such material, the psychology of collecting folklore must of necessity remain largely a matter of conjecture. The following consideration of this question is admittedly speculative, but it is sincerely hoped that the hypothetical framework suggested will be supported or refuted by forthcoming data provided by honest self-critical collectors of the future. No attempt is made here to discuss the scientific value of folkloric materials collected nor are the various uses to which folklore may be put considered. *Only the underlying psychological motivation for the collecting of folklore is the subject of the present inquiry.*

It has long been recognized that collecting folklore is akin to collecting other objects. W. W. Newell in the very first issue of the *Journal of American Folklore* quotes Charles G. Leland on the popular opinion of the collection of folklore, "that it amounts to gathering mere literary bric-a-brac and collecting traditionary postage-stamps and buttons."<sup>2</sup> More recently, Louise Pound expressed a similar view, but with the additional remark that folklore was a more worthwhile object for collection than many other materials diligently collected.

Teachers, clergymen, attorneys, writers, and others often feel prompted to hunt out the traditions, legends, songs, and tales of their own region. Why not? Such persons are of much the same type as those who search for antique furniture, old glassware, and the like. Some may call them dilettantes, but surely their hobbies are acceptable enough; and often, too, their activities are helpful to specialists. Indeed, popular traditions seem to me more laudable for collection than do many of the objects now often gathered ardently, such as match covers, pictures of ball players and cinema stars, and among children, of back of playing cards and even of colored milk bottle tops.<sup>3</sup>

Dorson, however, suggests that the aimless collection of folklore is really not so different from collecting less laudable materials when he states that "A collector guided by no larger purpose than the desire to accumulate new species of texts might as well collect buttons or butterflies."<sup>4</sup> If collecting folklore is one aspect of the collecting tradition in general, then perhaps the motivation for collecting folklore is related to the motivation for collecting objects in general.

At the beginning of this century, it was assumed that there was a collecting instinct and that this instinct was manifested in the diverse collecting activities of children.<sup>5</sup> Later studies of children's collecting sought to avoid raising the question of the instinctive character of collecting, although by and large the feeling was that the assumption of a collecting instinct was premature and that collecting was attributable not to a hereditary predisposition so much as to environmental conditioning.<sup>6</sup> The collecting instinct, therefore, became the collecting tendency. However, the environmentalists had difficulty in explaining why frequently the object collected was of little apparent value (e.g., bottle tops, match covers, etc.).

Probably the most comprehensive attempt to elucidate the rationale underlying collecting activities is that formulated by psychoanalysts. According to psychoanalytic theory, the etiological basis of collecting was anal eroticism. Briefly, Freud suggested that individuals from infancy onward find genuine physical pleasure in the act of defecation. However, at least in Western society, the individual is soon made aware of adult demands that this activity should be strictly regulated. Toilet training consists largely of conditioning an infant to control his excretory activity. Psychoanalysts further claim that this controlling or holding back becomes in itself a source of pleasure. According to Ferenczi, "The excrementa thus held back are really the first 'savings' of the growing being, and as such remain in a constant, unconscious inter-relationship with every bodily activity or mental striving that has anything to do with collecting, hoarding, and saving."<sup>7</sup> Moreover, from the Freudian point of view, the infant has a natural curiosity concerning the fecal material he or she produces. But the infant's attempts to explore and play with this material are almost inevitably discouraged by adults and the child is gradually introduced to a succession of less undesirable substances ranging from mud pies to sand piles to modeling clay and finger paints.<sup>8</sup> From this perspective, "Collecting is a sublimation of anal-retentive desires, and the collector's pleasure in it is a continuation of his infantile narcissistic pleasure in his own feces."<sup>9</sup> Actually, there appear to be two separate contributing factors to the genesis of collecting activity and Karl Abraham makes an important distinction between, on the one hand, the act of excretion which provides pleasure, and on the other hand, the products of the excretory process in which an individual may find pleasure.<sup>10</sup>

Although Freud in his paper, "Character and Anal Erotism," did speak of three characteristics of anal character: orderliness, parsimony, and obstinacy, he did not mention collecting specifically.<sup>11</sup> Rather it was Ernest Jones who referred to collecting when he developed Freud's insights in greater detail in his paper "Anal-Erotic Character Traits." Jones noted that there were basically two opposing tendencies resulting from anal conditioning: "the tendencies to keep and postpone production and to produce feverishly." He suggested that the two tendencies might be termed the "retaining" and the "ejecting" tendencies.<sup>12</sup> Combining these two contrasting tendencies with the possibilities of sublimation and reaction formation, Jones delineated a fourfold typology of anal characterology. He was, of course, careful to say that these four classifications are by no means mutually exclusive.

The first classification is retaining-sublimation and its two aspects are "the refusal to give and the desire to gather." In discussing this classification, Jones makes the categorical



statement that all collectors are anal-erotics. The second classification is retaining-reaction formation. Reaction formation, in contrast to sublimation which consists of selecting a socially acceptable substitute for a tabooed object or activity, is basically a total rejection of the original pleasure-seeking tendency. Thus pleasure is found, not in dirtiness, but in cleanliness. Cleanliness is often extended into orderliness. Individuals of this disposition are prone to systematize and organize so that objects may be neatly placed in their proper place. The third classification is ejection-sublimation. Individuals in this category are generous and apt to "give out" material. Sublimation may be evidenced by the desire to manipulate the material and to mould it or create out of it. The fourth classification, namely ejection-reaction formation is somewhat similar to the second classification in that it is characterized by a denial of an interest in dirt. Individuals of this type take little interest in their material or mental productions and often seek to discard or get rid of them.

Although the Freudian notion of anal character is by no means universally accepted, even critics admit that it is "the most clearly-drawn picture in Freud's album of characterology."<sup>13</sup> The relevance of the Freudian hypothesis to the psychology of collecting folklore is somewhat dependent upon the idea of occupational determinism. Among psychoanalysts, there are those who insist that people choose vocations (usually unconsciously) on the basis of particular individual infantile conditioning. In fact, it has even been suggested that anal erotica would do well in occupations involving collecting and systematic indexing, as in positions as museum curators or archivists.<sup>14</sup> An example of an anally conditioned occupation choice might be found in the life of Benvenuto Cellini who, in addition to collecting pebbles, shells, and eventually gems, decided at the age of fifteen to become a goldsmith. Gold is a common symbolic equivalent of feces as numerous folklore motifs testify, and the aesthetic pleasure obtained from beating and moulding gold is derived from an early activity, namely the infantile real or fantasied play with excrement.

Though most folklorists are skeptical of psychoanalysis, to say the least, perhaps some may see the application of Freudian theory to the psychology of the collecting of folklore as well as to the specific methods employed in the treatment and study of folklore. In addition, considerable light may be shed upon the personalities of various well-known folklorists.

First of all, folklore as an object of collection is often regarded as a useless product of human activity. Just as cancelled stamps, empty beer bottles, etc., in one sense represent waste products, folklore has historically also been regarded in much the same way. For example, when the indefatigable Danish collector, E. Tang Kristensen, obtained a new teaching position he had sought, a member of the parish council concerned said to him, "We won't have you, you take up so much of your time with rubbish. . . ."<sup>15</sup> In fact, folklorists are still trying to convince both the public and the foundations that folkloric materials are valuable and worth collecting.

Another curious fact is the professional folklore collector's insistence that the material be entirely oral. It must come from the mouths of informants, and preferably not from printed sources. In other words, the collector stands ready to gather the precious material as it falls from a body aperture, namely the oral cavity. In Freudian parlance, this might be construed as displacement from below upward. Strangely enough there is often the feeling that as soon as the material is put on paper, it is somehow less authentic. It is also of interest that if folklore is considered as survivals or if it is remembered that folkloric material is often first encountered in early childhood, then collecting folklore is, in part,



collecting materials of the past and possibly in particular the materials of childhood. (No doubt many non-folklorists consider the study of folklore as something of a regression to childhood.)

It is somewhat of a surprise to discover that part of the accepted methodology of folklore scholarship may be related to the psychology of collecting folklore. Collecting usually implies some order, namely that the objects collected are subject to some kind of classification. Bearing in mind Jones' second classification of anal character (retaining-reaction formation) with its emphasis upon orderly, systematic arrangement, one can appreciate the following statement, written not with reference to folklore, but about collecting in general: "The striving for form also manifests itself in the tendency of modern collectors to follow a specific sequence in forming and arranging collections, as well as in the desire to complete definite 'sets' or series of exhibits. The nature of these sequences will vary according to the subject of the collection itself, They may be historical or geographical. . . ."<sup>16</sup> The historical-geographical method is, of course, a highly organized and systematic form of collecting! This may be seen by noting the representational or relational aspects of collections in general. W. N. Durost, in giving a basic definition of a collection stresses this very point. He suggests that the use or the value of the object collected is of secondary importance for purposes of definition. A collection may or may not be of practical use or of culturally recognized value. What is important, according to Durost, are the representational or relational criteria. He points out that if an object or idea is valued chiefly for the relation it bears to some other object or idea, or objects, or ideas, such as being one of a series, part of a whole, a specimen of a class, then it is the subject of a collection.<sup>17</sup> One can see that the historical-geographical method entails collecting specimens of a class: for example, versions of a single tale type. The more specimens or versions one can amass, presumably the better the study. The idea of considering an object in terms of its being one of a series calls to mind the ballad collector who specializes in collecting numbers in Child's closed canon. A ballad collector obtaining a Child ballad is like a stamp collector obtaining an important stamp in a certain series. D. K. Wilgus mentions the penchant of American ballad collectors for collecting Child numbers and refers, for example, to Reed Smith's score sheets showing which collectors in which states had collected the most Child ballads.<sup>18</sup>

Another aspect of folklore scholarship relating to the classificatory aspect of collecting may be seen by recalling the elaborate book classification scheme of Samuel Pepys. Pepys collected books (and also ballads) but later shifted his interest to arranging his collection. In a letter of August 10, 1663, he remarked that his chief delight was in the neatness of everything and that he could not be pleased with anything unless it was very neat, which he admitted was a strange folly. He had all his books bound alike and he arranged them symmetrically according to size. In order still to be able to use his library Pepys devised a complex cataloging system which provided for the numbering and lettering of shelves and books. According to one account of Pepys' system, a key catalogue was prepared and "by consulting this for the title desired one could locate the volume's position on the shelves by number: i.e., the first book on the front row on the shelf fourth from the top in Press One would be marked '1.4a.1'"<sup>19</sup> Had Pepys lived several centuries later, he might have compiled a motif index!

One can now see how Jones' classifications may be used to distinguish different emphases among folklorists. Some folklorists are primarily interested in collecting (retaining-sublimation) while others are specialists in a classificatory kind of collection (retaining-reaction formation). It might be noted that the latter's reaction formation is clearly revealed by

their opposition to discussing so-called “dirty” folklore, or even acknowledging its existence. For example, classification schemes might very well simply omit portions which have to do with obscene materials. The anal retentive nature of some collectors is manifested by their putting their manuscripts or tapes in a secret or locked place, often denying others access to their materials. Frequently, they refuse to publish. By a curious verbal coincidence (which is probably no accident), one often hears such collectors described as “sitting on” their material. (“Sitting tight” has somewhat the same connotation. “Tight” commonly means stingy in the sense of being reluctant to part with something.<sup>20</sup>) Here is the significance of Abraham’s distinction between the pleasure of the act of excretion and the pleasure in possessing the products of excretion. To illustrate this type of folklorist, i.e., one who loves to collect but who hates to publish, is not difficult. (Cf. the two aspects of Jones’ first classification: the desire to gather and refusal to give.) One example should suffice. It should not be necessary to state that no disrespect is intended nor is there any attempt to minimize, the efforts of one of the most important collectors of American folklore in the following consideration of Frank C. Brown.<sup>21</sup>

Frank C. Brown was an enthusiastic and tireless collector, but he simply could not bring himself to publish. Though a volume of folklore was scheduled to appear by Christmas of 1914, the first volume of Brown’s material did not appear until 1952, years after his death. Members of the North Carolina Folklore Society, not understanding Brown’s personality pattern, began dropping their memberships in protest over Brown’s failure to publish his wealth of materials. (Incidentally, one of the purposes of this study is to make folklorists more tolerant of the foibles of some collectors and at same time to urge those who have material to make it available to others.) The anal retentive nature of Brown’s behavior is apparent in a statement opposing the suggestions made by members of the Society. He said, “I am quite, sure that I am not going to give up my own materials to anybody.” Brown obviously felt that the materials, though *taken from others*, were his personal possessions. He is a prime example of the collector described in the following passage written by a non-Freudian:

All the desires and interests which contribute toward making any sort of individual into a collector are given focus by the fact of personal possession. From the small boy to the great connoisseur; the joy of standing before one’s accumulated pile and being able to say, “This belongs to me!” is the culmination of that feeling which begins with the ownership of the first item.<sup>22</sup>

Newman I. White observes that Brown was “tenacious of his manuscripts” and that “he allowed nothing to stop him,” a personality trait in accord with the third of Freud’s characteristics of anal character, obstinacy. Brown was especially interested in ballads and he took great pride in building up the number of Child ballads discovered in North Carolina. He was very pleased that he had been able to gather more than fifty numbers of the canonical series. However, his pleasure was confined to collecting. His own statement of his attempts to publish confirm his personality pattern. “When I try to write an article, I almost invariably lose interest in it before I get my notes copied. My interest is at fever heat in making an outline and in making a rough draft, but as soon as this has been made, somehow my interest lags and I almost become sick when I feel that it is necessary to tear the thing to pieces and rewrite it.” Apparently Brown could not bear to touch anything that he produced. Here also is clearly indicated his inability to part with or destroy anything he amassed or created. This is in marked contrast to Jones’ fourth classification in which individuals take

little interest in their materials and, in fact, seek to get rid of them. Brown gave only two papers at the North Carolina Folklore Society meetings and in view of his unmistakable anal character traits, it is noteworthy that one of them was entitled: "Treasure Hunting in North Carolina."<sup>23</sup> Treasure is a common coprophilic symbol, particularly when it is removed from the "bowels" of the earth in buried form.

While the anal retentive folklore collector is loath to publish, the anal ejective collector is, on the contrary, often feels compelled to publish. Frequently the publication is extremely "regular." Ferenczi refers to the latter type of anal personality as "tolerant on the matter of dirt, extravagant, and easy-going."<sup>24</sup> However, sometimes the anal ejective seeks to mould or manipulate his material. Here may be found one possible reason for the production of fakelore.<sup>25</sup> The material is reshaped according to the aesthetic standards of the anal ejective. Consequently, coarse or dirty elements are fastidiously "eliminated." If this kind of reaction formation and sublimation is combined with the general anal ejective tendency, then such individuals would be quite likely to publish regularly "treasuries" of doctored or re-worked texts. This is in contrast to the anal ejective who is tolerant of, if not attracted by "dirty" materials (e.g. jokes). The latter would also publish regularly, but the materials would be left pretty much as collected, that is, with the crude elements remaining.<sup>26</sup> This practice would undoubtedly annoy the fakelore collector who goes to great lengths to eliminate such details in his or her attempt to deny any anal basis to the collection and study of oral tradition. One fakelore collector, several years ago, wrote a letter to the officers of the American Folklore Society protesting the work of a collector who insisted upon presenting texts as they were related by the folk. The true nature of the anal-oral quarrel was unwittingly suggested when the author of the letter asked indignantly if the officers of the Society wanted a toilet in their dining room. Of course, to anyone who felt impelled to reshape or mould material, nothing could be more shocking than to be confronted with the anal reality so scrupulously avoided.

Although, as has been mentioned previously, biographical data on collectors is rarely available, one might, nevertheless, suggest certain possible personality characteristics of collectors of folklore. For one thing, it is very likely that they collect other items, such as books (some of which may be in languages they cannot really read), musical instruments (some of which they may be unable to play), records, bibliography, stamps, etc. Walter Anderson, for example, is a bibliographer and numismatist. Some folklore collectors may have the habit of reading in the bathroom. (According to psychoanalysts, such reading is an act of incorporation intended to balance the material which is lost through defecation.<sup>28</sup> If they are anal ejective and enjoy seeing their material in print, they may very well have the habit of looking at their feces after producing it. (The relationship between publishing and bowel habits was supported by the case of one collector who, soon after he started publishing scattered articles in various journals, began to suffer from repeated diarrhea. It would be interesting to know whether those folklorists who have difficulty in publishing ever suffer from constipation. Unfortunately, there are no data available on this point and it is doubtful if those in a position to provide data would be self-sacrificing enough to furnish it.) If they are anal retentive, they may have the habit of never being able to throw anything out. It has been noted that "An unwillingness ever to throw anything away, while in itself not enough to make a collector, is certainly a characteristic directly related to collecting."<sup>29</sup> Thus it is no surprise to learn that the celebrated Norwegian collector Asbjørnsen is described as being "virtually incapable of destroying a scrap of paper if anything was written on it."<sup>30</sup>

While this by no means exhausts the possible anal personality characteristics of collectors of folklore, it is at least an indication of some possible ones. It is to be hoped that someday there will be enough data to explain more fully the psychology of collecting folklore as well as numerous other forms of collecting activity. It may well turn out that the reasons why folklorists collect folklore are related to the reasons why certain members of the folk collect folklore, the latter in some cases becoming prize informants for the professional folklorist.<sup>31</sup>

## Notes

1. Richard Dorson, "Standards for Collecting and Publishing American Folktales," *Journal of American Folklore*, LXX (1957), 54.
2. W. W. Newell, "Gypsy Lore Society," *Journal of American Folklore*, I (1883), 235.
3. Louise Pound, "The Scholarly Study of Folklore," *Western Folklore*, XI, (1952), 100. Harold Laurence Leisure's autobiographical account of his change from an "incorrigible collector of such bulky objects as books, old glass antiques," to an enthusiastic collector of folklore, also attests to the affinity of various collecting activities. See his "American Legends in the Making," *Southern Literary Messenger*, 2 (1940), 334.
4. Dorson, op. cit., 55.
5. G. Stanley Hall in a short communication, "Children's Collections," *Pedagogical Seminary*, I (1891), 234-37, referred to the collecting instinct as an "almost universal force in human nature." He suggested that this instinct be studied inasmuch as it was the basis of much of scientific research, pointing out that even the gathering of data about collecting depended upon this very instinct. The first important study of children's collections was Caroline Frear Burk's "The Collecting Instinct," *Pedagogical Seminary* VII (1900), 179-207. This study as well as subsequent ones are surveyed by Walter Nelson Durost in his *Children's Collecting Activity Related to Social Factors*, Teachers College, Columbia University Contributions to Education No. 535 (New York, 1932), pp. 1-4.
6. Paul A. Witty and Harvey C. Lehman, "Further Studies of Children's Interest in Collecting," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, XXI (1930), 113, 124. For an enlightening discussion of the interrelationship between instinctual drives and cultural environment with regard to collecting activity, see Otto Fenichel, "The Drive to Amass Wealth," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, VII (1938), 69-95.
7. Sandor Ferenczi, "The Ontogenesis of the Interest in Money," in *Sex in Psycho-Analysis* (New York: Dover, 1956), p. 271.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 272-74.
9. Otto Fenichel, "Trophy and Triumph," in *The Collected Papers of Otto Fenichel*, Second Series (New York, 1954), p. 148.
10. Karl Abraham, "Contributions to the Theory of the Anal Character," in *Selected Papers of Karl Abraham* (London, 1948), p. 373.
11. *Collected Papers*, Vol. II (London, 1949), p. 45.
12. *Papers on Psycho-Analysis*, 5th ed. (London, 1950), p. 428, n. 6.
13. Harold Orlansky, "Infant Care and Personality," *Psychological Bulletin*, XLVI (1949), 17. A survey of the Freudian position may be found in Ben D. Karpman, "Coprophilia: A Collective Review," *Psychoanalytic Review*, XXXV (1948), 243-72. For a lucid account of the limitations involved in the application of even a modified form of Freudian theory to a non-Western society, see S. H. Posinsky, "The Problem of Yurok Analinity," *American Imago* XIV (1957), 3-31.
14. Géza Róheim has repeatedly maintained that occupation choice is determined by infantile conditioning. See "The Evolution of Culture," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, XV (1934), 394, or *The Origin and Function of Culture*, Nervous and Mental Disease Monograph Series No. 69 (New York, 1943), p. 72. The specific suggestion of vocations ideally suited for anal

- erotica is made by William A. White in his article, "Psychoanalysis and Vocational Guidance," *Psychoanalytic Review*, X (1923), 254–55.
15. W. A. Craigie, "Evald Tang Kristensen, A Danish Folklorist," *Folk-Lore*, (1898), 200.
  16. Douglas Rigby and Elizabeth Rigby, *Lock, Stock and Barrel: The Story of Collecting* (Philadelphia, New York, London, 1944), pp. 75–76.
  17. Nelson Durost, *Children's Collecting Activity Related to Social Factors*, Teachers College, Columbia University Contributions to Education No. 535 (New York, 1932), p. 10.
  18. *Anglo-American Folksong Scholarship Since 1898* (New Brunswick, 1859), pp. 247–48. Somewhat analogous to the collecting of Aarne-Thompson tale types by folktale specialists. Archer Taylor in his review of Waldemar Liungman's *Sveriges Samtliga Folksagor i Ord Och Bild*, *Western Folklore*, X (1951), 185–86, mentions Anders Allardt who printed in full one example of each Aarne-Thompson tale type.
  19. Rigby and Rigby, op. cit., p. 240.
  20. Jones, *Papers on Psycho-Analysis*, p. 429, n. 1.
  21. I am indebted to Jan Brunvand for suggesting Frank C. Brown as a possible example of a folklore collector with some of the personality traits described in this study. All of the data on Brown cited comes from Newman I. White's "The Frank C. Brown Collection: Its History, Nature, and Growth," in *The Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore*, Vol. I (Durham, 1952), pp. 12–28.
  22. Rigby and Rigby, op. cit., p. 35.
  23. The identification of folklore and treasure is not uncommon. For example, the first paragraph of T. M. Pearce's "Tracing a New Mexican Folk Play," *New Mexico Folklore Record*, IX (1954–55), 20, makes extensive use of the equation: A folklore hunt is like a search for buried treasure: all the clues are present in both, but the secret is illusive no matter how earnest the pursuit. Perhaps with folk treasure the yield is more often productive. My experience in searching for the author of the Las Palomas-Pastores play had all the elements of a treasure hunt. Unlike many a chase after hidden gold, this mystery was solved, and the solution may open the way to solving other mysteries and uncovering more folklore treasure."
  24. Ferenczi, op. cit., p. 277, n. 1. In view of the hypothetical partial anal erotic basis of the prejudice against African Americans—African Americans are commonly considered as being black, smelly, and dirty—it is noteworthy that the few eminent American folklorists who have recently collected African American material are "tolerant on the matter of dirt" and have even collected and published obscene, i.e., "dirty" folklore. For the suggestion that there may be an anal erotic reason for African American prejudice, see Lawrence S. Kubie, "The Fantasy of Dirt," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 6 (1937), 404.
  25. See Richard Dorson, "Folklore and Fake Lore," *American Mercury*, LXX (March 1950), 335–43, for a discussion of his term "fakelore."
  26. It should, of course, be obvious, that for the scientific study of folklore, it is imperative that texts should not be altered or changed in any way by the professional folklorist for purposes of publication. Even the most careful minimal editing risks destroy potential data.
  27. Emma Emily Kiefer, *Albert Wesselski and Recent Folktale Theories*, Indiana University Publications Folklore Series No. 3 (Bloomington, 1947), p. 30.
  28. Otto Fenichel, "The Scopophilic Instinct and Identification," in *The Collected Papers of Otto Fenichel*, First Series (New York, 1953), p. 374; Abraham, p. 385, no. 1.
  29. Rigby and Rigby, op. cit., p. 97.
  30. Reidar Th. Christiansen, "Knut Liestøl in memoriam," *Norveg*, III (1953), 14.
  31. The striking similarity between informants with large repertoires and professional folklore collectors has recently been noted by Charles Seeger. See his "Who Owns Folklore?—A Rejoinder," *Western Folklore*, XXI (1962), 97.

## *Postscript*

### Chain Letter: A Folk Geometric Progression

THE APPEAL OF GEOMETRIC PROGRESSIONS is at least as old as the tale of the origin of chess (Motif Z 21.1) in which the inventor asks one grain of wheat for the first square, two for the second, four for the third and so forth. Part of the interest undoubtedly stems from the unexpected “magical” change from an insignificant initial number, namely, one, to an astronomical figure in a relatively short space of time. In the folktale, the effect of the magical incremental increase is the overwhelming of the king for whom the game of chess was invented. Another obvious source of pleasure derives from the fact that the inventor of the game and presumably of the clever mathematical stratagem receives an extraordinary amount of material reward. These same characteristics of overwhelming an antagonist and of “getting rich quick” are also found in a more contemporary traditional form based upon a geometric progression: the chain letter.

The chain letter, probably one of the best known types of a number of equally traditional letters, has been noted by several folklorists. Halpert showed that the chain letter is popular in the United States and England while an earlier note by Deonna revealed the form's existence in Europe (e.g., France, Italy, and Switzerland).<sup>1</sup> In chain letters, there is a definite structural pattern, a pattern which appears to prevail regardless of the particular content of any one individual chain letter. First, there is a statement proclaiming that the letter is a chain letter. This enunciation may perhaps be analogous to the opening formula found at the beginning of other forms of folklore: “Once upon a time,” “Riddle me, riddle me right,” “Ready or not, here I come.” The formula serves to indicate either the nature of the traditional form which is to follow or the formal moment at which an example of a traditional form begins or both. The second important feature in chain letters is the injunction or order to send copies of the letter to a specific number of friends or acquaintances, sometimes within a definite period of time. The third item consists of a description, usually detailed, of the desirable consequences which will occur if the receiver of the letter complies with the terms of the injunction. Sometimes, a case history of a previous “winner” is cited, which functions as an explanatory motif sometimes does in the sense of providing the requisite “ocular proof” that the procedure is a bona fide one. The fourth part of the sequential structure is a warning. Typically it is in the form of a statement of the one or more undesirable consequences which will result if the injunction is ignored or disobeyed. This portion of the chain letter is often illustrated by a case history, but whereas the case history for the third segment was a positive one, the case history for the warning is definitely negative. Usually it is related how an unwise individual scorned the injunction and how by so doing he became a “loser.” The structural pattern of chain letters is thus not dissimilar to sequential patterns found in other folkloric forms. In superstitions, one can obtain good luck by complying with an injunction just as one can incur bad luck by violating an interdiction.<sup>2</sup>



The following examples of chain letters should serve to illustrate the nature of this form of non-oral tradition and to attest to its continued popularity in American culture. In addition, these examples show how folklore can both reflect cultural values and institutions and offer an outlet or escape from these same values and institutions.

In the first text, which is very similar to one reported by Halpert from Murray, Kentucky, bearing a 1955 date, the case history exemplification of the desirable consequence is appended as a postscript.<sup>3</sup>

I

June 20, 1957

Dear Friend :

This chain letter was started by a man like yourself in the hope it will bring relief to tired business men.

This does not cost you anything. Kindly send a copy of this letter to five of your friends who seem equally tired and discouraged.

Bundle up your wife and send her to the man whose name appears at the top of the list and then add your name to the bottom of it.

When your name comes to the top of the list, you will receive 16,740 women. Some of them will be dandies.

You must always have faith. Do not break this chain. One man broke the chain and he got *HIS OLD LADY* back again.

Sincerely yours,

P.S. At the date of this writing, a friend of mine received 556 women. They buried him yesterday. It took three undertakers 35 hours to get the smile off his face.

The content of the letter is similar to the content of many jokes. The traditional ingredients of male impotence (“tired business men”), dissatisfaction with one’s wife, and the common male dream of having an infinite variety and number of women available as sexual partners are present. G. Legman has observed that this dream of being “husband of all the women in the world” is particularly prevalent among those who are of an age when they are least able physically to indulge in repeated or strenuous sexual activities.<sup>4</sup> The final postscript confirms the fact that men too tired to conduct business affairs may be killed by excess. It is noteworthy that the fantasy is externally initiated. Within the chain letter context, one does not necessarily himself decide to send his wife away while he awaits scores of other women. Rather, the receiver of the letter is ordered to send away his wife and he is thus free from the guilt and responsibility of making a decision of this kind. Similarly, he does not himself seek other women. Rather other women are automatically sent to him. Presumably the “logic” is: how can anyone be responsible for what others send him in the mail? This function of the chain letter in projecting individual desires to an impersonal, mechanical process which requires the individual to fulfill his desires is also manifest in the following example.



## II

March 19, 1962

Dear Alan,

Please send a reprint of your latest paper on ethnology and/or cultural anthropology, folklore, linguistics, archaeology, etc., to the first named person on the list below, and copies of this letter to four folklorists, anthropologists, etc., whom you know, within three days.

In about 26 days—if you answer promptly—you should receive 272 reprints from some amazing people.

Please don't spoil this game, which has been going since 1956!

In your four letters copy the following list, leaving out the top name, and adding your own name at the bottom.

Yours sincerely,  
Butler Waugh  
Assistant Professor of English

1. Prof. Wayland D. Hand, University of California, Los Angeles 24, California, U.S.A.
2. Prof. Francis Lee Utley, Dept. of English, Ohio State University, Columbus 14, Ohio, U.S.A.
3. Prof. Holger Olof Nygard, Dept. of English, Duke University, Durham, N.C., U.S.A.
4. Prof. Butler Waugh, Dept. of English, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, U.S.A.

This chain letter is one which circulated recently among folklorists.<sup>5</sup> One reason for noting this particular specimen is that it demonstrates that professional folklorists are folk themselves. There is not only the folklore of folklore; there is the folklore of folklorists! Folklorists do not simply study tradition; they enjoy and participate in it as well, an occupational characteristic which does not necessarily put folklorists in a favorable scholarly light—at least when viewed by suspicious colleagues in other disciplines. However, if students of folksong sing folksongs, if students of jokes like to tell jokes, then it should really come as no surprise to learn that folklorists send chain letters. Of greater import is the evidence supporting the notion that a group will shape a particular folkloric form to fit their own peculiar needs. Folklorists, as a folk group, have transmuted the chain letter into a device for advertising their scholarly accomplishments. The folklorists' chain letter like the "publish or perish" oikotype of the "do or die" proverb is a reflector of culture and of values, in this instance the culture and values of American folklorists. By means of the chain letter, folklorists ask their friends to send a reprint of their last paper to colleagues. (Heaven help the poor soul whose "last" reprint is dated several years back and of course breaking the chain might be construed as a tacit admission that one either had no recent reprint at all or had no recent reprint he or she felt worthy of circulating to professional peers.) Appropriately enough, the material reward consists of scores of reprints. One of the principal functions of folklore is the reinforcement of traditional values. Among the folk of academe, one of the unwritten laws is that one must not only publish, but one must

let others know that one is publishing. One of the conventional means of accomplishing this is by sending offprints of articles to colleagues and department chairs. One can see then that the folklorists' chain letter makes mandatory what the folklorist wishes, but the motivation is externalized and removed from the individual, just as was the case in the first chain letter example. In folklore, the unpermitted or the unstated is permitted and stated. Heterosexual body contact might be taboo under ordinary circumstances to those performing folk dances, but by participating in folk dances, the order for body contact is dictated from without (e.g., from a "caller"). Thus in the present instance, folklorists as members of an academic community might not like to admit that sending out reprints is a mechanical procedure done for personal and material gain. However, the chain letter, like other forms of folklore, provides a socially sanctioned outlet or excuse for the overt expression of an actual wish. By using the chain letter, the individual folklorist is free to feel that he or she is sending out a reprint, not because he or she wants to, but because he or she has to. Clearly the fact that folklore so often "obliges" us to do what we really want to do is one reason why there will always be folklore. . . .

## Notes

1. Herbert Halpert, "Chain Letters," *Western Folklore*, XV (1956), 287–289. Halpert cites texts from Wright's *English Folklore* and Hyatt's *Folklore from Adams County, Illinois*, but neglects to mention W. Deonna's account of the "Chaine de bonheur" in his "Superstitions actuelles," *Revue d'Ethnographie et des Traditions Populaires*, IX (1928), 213–216.
2. For further discussion of this pattern, see my "Structural Typology of North American Indian Folktales," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, XIX (1963), 121–130.
3. I am indebted to Geraldine Gosche of Oakland, California, for this text. She collected it in 1958 in Berkeley, California.
4. G. Legman, *The Horn Book: Studies in Erotic Folklore and Bibliography* (New Hyde Park, New York, 1964), p. 110.
5. In view of the pattern analysis discussed previously, it is of interest that Professor Waugh felt impelled to add the following comment to the typewritten carbon copy he sent me: "This business is absurd—but pass it on under threat of the folklorist's curse." The principal feature lacking in the letter was the warning and thus Professor Waugh was quite right, in terms of structure, to supplement the letter as he did. I received similar letters from folklorists Jan Brunvand and Paula de Carvalho-Neto. The names in the latter's letter: Carmen Roy, Marius Barbeau, and Roger Pinon indicate that the letter had considerable international circulation.

