

BOOK REVIEWS

Analytic Essays in Folklore. By Alan Dundes.
Pp. xxii + 265, Bibliography, index. Foreword by Richard M. Dorson.
The Hague: Mouton, 1975.

Reviewed by Roger D. Abrahams

Alan Dundes and the State and Fate of our Discipline

A year and half ago I was asked to review Alan Dundes' book of kleine schriften, Analytic Essays in Folklore (Mouton, 1975, price predictably outrageous). Hot off the press, as were a number of his other books that vintage year, it seemed to provide the ideal opportunity to write his critical obituary. (He and I have a long-standing agreement that we will publish each other's obituaries before we die so that each can make a rejoinder--in Alan's case he promises something between earth-diving and bull-roaring.) The articles in this collection are a kind of summation not only of Alan's oeuvres but of our generation of scholarship (of which he has always been the acknowledged leader, even before he got his degree!).

The very strengths of the collection, however, have proved my undoing. Not only could I not engage in obit composition, I felt the need to attempt to come to grips with some of the lines of force which have enabled folklorists to achieve a more central place in academic and public affairs. If I may, then, I want to present a retrospective (if personal) view of the folkloristics of our generation, a kind of review and overview at mid-career.* Let me review the state of the art when Alan and the rest of the "generation of the fifties" came into the field, and in the process I promise to attempt to put Alan's work (seriously now) in the place it deserves.

Folklore, as we all know, was primarily antiquarian, certainly a cultural-historical discipline--in the main, at least, until the cultural aftershock of the Second World War. The importance of the social placement of the leading folklorists cannot be overlooked; the American Folklore Society was founded predominantly by northeastern men-of-letters who were concerned with discovering and giving voice to American traditions. From a disciplinary point of view it was a heterogenous bunch, cultural historians (John Fiske, Francis Parkman), ethnographers (John Wesley Powell, Thomas Dorsey, a young immigrant named Franz Boas), regional writers (Joel Chandler Harris, Samuel Langhorne Clemens), as well as figures like William Wells Newell (the real founder of the society) and Francis James Child, who were in touch with European scholars and scholarship. Their common purpose was to celebrate the diversity of American history and culture by collecting and presenting the relics of the traditions of the many Americans. To guarantee the maintenance of this social and academic pluralism (and to keep the Society going in spite of increasing disciplinary diversity), a tradition developed that the main posts (especially the

*As there will be those scandal-mongering readers with a sensationalistic and journalistic cast of mind who will be reading this just to find where I'm going to throw brickbats at Alan, let me spell out our deep differences here so they won't have to look any further. There are, as all observant folklorists know, two kinds of punsters: those who slip a play on words into a conversation slyly (any conversation) and then look very hard at you to see if you get it (they grow hard and glazed of eye, thus cuing the message "This is play."); and those who begin to chuckle at their own joke before they come out with it, continuing to chuckle during the delivery (no mean feat) and long afterward to make sure that you get it. Alan is of the ranks of the former, I the latter.

editorship of the Journal) would alternate between the literary and the anthropologically-oriented folklorist. (The assumption, I suppose, was that they were all cultural historians in some dimension, but not until Dorson's editorship was this a reality from our contemporary perspective.) Whether concerned with Native-, Euro- or Afro-American lore the project of folklore was conceived as a kind of mopping-up operation. Furthermore, these various histories were conceived as being closed chapters, thus susceptible to historical (especially distributional) analysis.

A number of pariah figures emerge in the late thirties and forties, sullyng the discipline mightily: folklorists who are convinced that they are not involved in an enterprise of cultural archeology but rather are charged with exploring living and vital traditions--the Lomaxes, Vance Randolph, Herskovits, Botkin, Korson, Halpert, and (a little later) Dorson, Boatright, Parédes (among others) all insisting that "the folk" are indeed alive and doing well in Upper Michigan or Lower Patagonia. The search for the authentic had come to be a personal matter, one involving experience as well as observation. To be sure, there was little sense of common cause in this assemblage--could there ever be with mavericks? The controversies between them still are there--between those who see the pursuit of knowledge in academic terms in which the purity of the folk (and especially their expression) has to be defended, and those who see the lore as evidence of larger cultural questions, ones which engender issues of public policy as well.

When Alan and the others of our generation entered the field, the effects of this incursion from the outside had already manifested itself in the way in which both folklorics and folkloristics were viewed (a Dundes coinage, I believe, one of many). Most important, the demonstrated vitality of the tradition and, by extension, of the tradition bearers--had manifested itself in an alteration of focus from the items and their distribution to the way in which the items are transmitted. Tradition, always the basic term of the discipline, now came to refer primarily to oral transmission. This was the clear message that Fran Utley discovered in his survey of the definitions of folklore compiled after the war for the Funk & Wagnall's Dictionary. This focus on the process of transmission, to be sure, had been a major theme in ballad and folktale scholarship for some time. But in that literature it was employed as a way of getting at the textual problems of variation. Now, in the post-war scholarship, it begins to place as much emphasis on the bearers of lore as on the texts, the lore itself.

One of the offshoots of this perspective is that folklorists perforce go beyond the boundaries of the discipline; inter alia the concerns of the psychologist involved in cognition, perception, and memory were obviously central to an understanding of this process of transmission. We began talking about disruptions of the cognitive and perceptual process, relating such failures to alteration within textual traditions. Between this opening to the social sciences and the growing recognition of the importance of proper ethnographic field methodology, folklorists were encouraged to explore alternative modes and models of collection and analysis. This shift meant that by focussing away from a definition of the folk as sesile agrarians and pastoralists to the modes of passing on knowledge orally (even while entertaining and playing), the folklore teacher could use all kinds of everyday phenomena familiar to the students as ways of dramatizing their discussions of transmission. For some time already, students had been encouraged to do fieldwork for their term reports if they had access to a "folk" group. Now, with the emphasis on cognition and communication processes, any group which has a sense of its own groupness becomes available for the analysis of the patterns of emerging traditions. Field reports as term papers become the sine qua non of even the introductory course, and operationally, the concept of folk is totally altered. Now all are folk if they have developed or adopted traditional items in their expressive repertoire. Add to this the

identification by the students of the folk with the people and the growing desire in an egalitarian culture to identify with the folk, and you have the situation which obtains today: everyone is a "folk" at least in some segment of his life. Collections could then be made not only at home with kinfolk but among one's friends; thus folkloristics can react to the emphasis on peer grouping in opposition to the family, a social concern self-consciously central in the sixties. To be sure, the tying together of group isolation with the functionality and intensity of group traditions continues to make the term paper on the isolated agrarian community (or some other full-time occupation still most attractive to do. But now self-isolated groups are as attractive a resource of expressive behavior as backwater communities; various kinds of fringe (or freak) communities come to provide materials for study.

There are two directions in which folklorists go in defining the important parameters of the discipline. Functionalist ethnography is drawn upon, and lore is explored in terms of where and how it fits into group life, how it is engendered, and what situations and factors encourage or discourage the maintenance of the group through its traditions. This is an extension of the process-orientation arising from our interest in transmission, and our experience in working "in the field" with a contained group.

The alternative strategy for teaching is to circumscribe the field in terms of the materials which, arising out of such communities, are commonly studied by folklorists. This has, of course, been the pedagogical approach championed by Alan Dundes, and a productive direction it has been. This perspective has been the motivating force in his scholarly concerns as well, and has led him into some strange and often fertile fields. He has pursued a kind of functionalism in his fascinating exercises in Freudian analysis (many of them reprinted here), though the analytic terms do not arise from the folk themselves. As these collected essays demonstrate, however, he has more generally identified folklore as a scholarly field by the lore rather than by the folk. He has forcefully led us to contend with those pursuing other disciplines who have used lore as data in their own modes of special pleading. His footnotes tell the message of this outward-looking strategy: exhaustive, prodding, suggestive of an infinitude of resources, they seldom refer to the work of other American folklorists. If folklore is defined by the materials generally studied by folklorists, then anyone else who studies this matter is also, by extension, a folklorist.

This approach has produced a kind of opening-up of the field which some call creatively eclectic, others a failure of focus leading too far away from the folkloric data themselves. The argument, if sometimes overly-dramatized in its presentation, has been a useful one at least from the point of view of the amount of focussed interest it seems to have created, as well as the ways in which it underscores differences in research and presentational strategies.

Alan implicitly seems to be rejecting the performance-centered strategies of discussing and defining folkloristics. Though sharing many of the concerns of those of us who would emphasize the situating factors of traditional items within an interactional context, Alan is more interested in the socio-psychological place out of which the items are generated. Thus, rather than pursuing the socio-cultural determinants of the patterns of expressively heightened group activities, he explores the mentalistic "deep structures" which engender textual "surface" manifestations. Only such a desire to uncover the hidden repository of metaphoric and metonymic vocabularies can account for the otherwise disparate methodologies of Freudian and Proppian structural analysis. His piercing intelligence and immense wit emerges repeatedly in his grinning disrobing of those special corpses of narratives, proverbs, games, and so on.

Because of the special glee and fervor he brings to these subjects, he has done what few other folklorists have managed to do--forced intellectuals from all disciplines to contend with his work, and thus to consider the materials and perspectives of other folklorists. If we have become more respectable in the academy, Alan is more responsible than any other folklorist.

Yet, because he maintains that the study of folklore must ultimately focus primarily on the lore has made him somewhat less central in folkloristic activity within the profession. His unwillingness to address the place of lore in the socio-cultural dynamic means that the very forces of philistinism directed at folklore (through the invasions of spurious imitations) against which he has toiled may now be reified. The burden of Alan's work has been to show the centrality of folkloric materials in the study of man; but by foregoing (for the most part) analysis of the process by which folklore is employed in our quotidian lives, he calls forth accusations of model-building for its own sake. His mission--to elevate the study of folklore and folkloristics to intellectual respectability--is, then, somewhat undercut by his unwillingness to contend with a new folkloristics, one which underscores the importance of the folk rather than the lore, and which seeks to distinguish folklore from literary processes (through its inherent orality and face-to-face milieu) and from other more institutional representations of culture.

This is more than an intellectual and academic matter. We are in the midst of a world-wide social movement in which groups are seeking to understand sources of their own "ethnic" identification more fully. This means that these ethnic groups, as well as governmental and private agencies, are looking to the students of expressive culture for guidelines by which the authentic may be distinguished from the spurious. Any definition of folklore which emphasizes product rather than process, lore rather than folk, is not going to provide insights needed to engage in this dialogue. Furthermore, the profession now finds itself called upon to speak with one voice to the outside world, and in tones decipherable to everyone. To continue to define what folklore is solely in terms of the lore is to invite those interested in obtaining advice about developing publication programs to go to almost anyone who has collected or analyzed traditional matters and materials. This, of course, would simply encourage the fakeloric takeover--a very real and constant threat, as anyone who has worked in folk festivals knows.

This is not in any way to gainsay the Dundes achievement. That we continue to be swept up by the enthusiasm and integrity of his arguments testifies to his importance in our intellectual lives. His virtuosity even more than his models themselves, will continue to be the model by which we judge our continuing folkloristic products.

Folk Housing in Middle Virginia: A Structural Analysis of Historic Artifacts.

By Henry Glassie.

Pp. vii + 231, index, selected (categorized) bibliography, comprehensive notes, photographs and drawings by the author.

Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1975. \$12.50 cloth.

Reviewed by Charles L. Perdue

I was glad to get this book to review. My wife and I both have ancestral lines that go back to Louisa and Goochland Counties (Stamps, Byrds, Ballingers for me; Atkinsons and Fulchers for her) and we have driven through this area numerous times. We have also spent several days in the county courthouses doing genealogical research. In addition, I know that my great grandfather, Daniel Walton Mabry Perdue, was a private