

WOLFGANG MIEDER

ALAN DUNDES AS BOOK COLLECTOR

Among paremiologists and folklorists of the world who had the opportunity to visit the beautiful home of Alan Dundes in the Berkeley hills of California, the truly impressive personal library of this giant among scholars will always be remembered. He did in fact collect over 9,000 volumes, and it can well be imagined that this treasure became quite the problem for the Dundes family after Alan Dundes (1934-2005) had passed away. While still alive, Alan Dundes had on occasion expressed the wish and hope that his entire library could some day be housed somewhere to be used by scholars and students alike. After several years of looking for a home for the books, a special room at the Doheny Memorial Library on the campus of the University of Southern California was found and remodeled to house this unique collection of books. It was agreed that there would be an official opening ceremony with a reception sponsored by the Dundes family on April 16, 2011, in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Western States Folklore Society. It was my special honor to have been asked by the Dundes family to offer remarks on this memorable occasion, and since various friends and colleagues have asked me to publish my comments, I do present them here in memory of my best friend Alan Dundes.

Reception and opening ceremony for the:

Alan Dundes Folklore Library Collection Room  
Doheny Memorial Library, University of Southern California

Welcome everybody to this special event at the end of our annual meeting of the Western States Folklore Society. Let me start by thanking Carolyn Dundes and the entire Dundes family for making the incredibly rich personal library of Alan Dundes in its entirety available to the public. Special thanks go to Alison Dundes Renteln, Lauren Dundes, and David Dundes for their

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work in arranging the transfer of the books from the exquisite Dundes home in the Berkeley hills to the campus of the University of Southern California. But, of course, we also all want to express our appreciation to Catherine Quinlan, Dean of the Library, and Marje Schuetze-Coburn, Senior Associate Dean, for their willingness to house this truly unique collection of books in the Doheny Memorial Library.

In the modern world, the commitment and engagement of assembling such a vast personal library have become somewhat of a rarity, and it is equally rare for a library to find the space to house such a collection of books so that generations of scholars and students might benefit from this treasure trove of international scholarship. The fact that we can assemble here today at the opening of the Alan Dundes Folklore Library Collection Room is then surely an absolutely unique and memorable event!

Prof. Alan Dundes (1934-2005) was an esteemed, distinguished, and loved giant in the multifaceted field of international folkloristics, whose voluminous publications and lectures delivered around the world touched thousands of scholars and over twenty-thousand students of folklore, anthropology, psychology, art, history, religion, literature, language, etc.

He was *the* Pied Piper of Folklore *par excellence*. During his four decades at Berkeley his Folklore Program became internationally known as the ideal place to pursue serious comparative folklore studies, with the Berkeley Folklore Archives serving as a model for gathering various folklore materials from modern oral or written sources. Under his guidance Berkeley became the Mecca for folklore studies.

While Alan Dundes was busy with his own projects, he always had the time to welcome visitors from near and far, thereby practicing what he preached throughout his productive and fruitful life, namely that folkloristics is one of the keys to a better understanding of the human condition and that its practitioners should conduct their work on a comparative and international basis.

Alan Dundes was unique in numerous ways – his untiring commitment to folklore studies, his fabulous abilities as a lecturer in classes that attracted up to five hundred students, his international contacts, his vast knowledge in multiple scholarly disciplines, his incredible scholarly energy, his love and care for his

undergraduate and graduate students, his meaningful friendships, his editorial prowess, and, of course, his massive scholarship. More than anybody else in folklore studies, he knew how to make sense out of incomprehensible or seemingly nonsensical folkloric traditions, from toys to symbols, from folk narratives to myths, from riddles to proverbs, from art to mass lore, from tradition to innovation, from ethnic slurs to national character, from belief to worldview, etc.

But as his many students knew only too well, and as we can see from the books in this room, he was a true lover of books, always eager to instill this fascination with books in his students and fellow scholars. No advanced student got out of having to assemble a major annotated bibliography on a folkloric matter, with the master himself with his photographic memory registering all new articles, dissertations, and books in his mind and heart. Alan Dundes was a philologist in the finest, widest, and most inclusive meaning of that word. He still believed in books and followed in the footsteps of such world-famous folklorists like the Brothers Grimm, Archer Taylor, Lutz Röhrich, Wayland Hand, and others, whose personal libraries and encyclopedic minds we admire to this day.

Of course, Alan Dundes produced plenty of his own books, with most of them belonging to the standard works in folkloristics. They all cover unique folkloric phenomena, combining the two fundamental aspects of folklore studies: identification and interpretation. Let me just mention a few of the titles of his own books and those edited by him that have forever changed and advanced the study of folklore:

*The Study of Folklore* (1965)

*Mother Wit from the Laughing Barrel. Readings in the Interpretation of African-American Folklore* (1973)

*Urban Folklore from the Paperwork Empire* (1975, with Carl Pagter)

*Essays in Folkloristics* (1978)

*Interpreting Folklore* (1980)

*The Art of Mixing Metaphors. A Folkloristic Interpretation of the "Netherlandish Proverbs" by Pieter Bruegel the Elder* (1981, with Claudia Stibbe)

- The Wisdom of Many. Essays on the Proverb* (1981, with Wolfgang Mieder)
- Cinderella. A Folklore Casebook* (1982)
- Life is Like a Chicken Coup Ladder. A Portrait of German Culture Through Folklore* (1984)
- The Wandering Jew. Essays in the Interpretation of a Christian Legend* (1986, with Galit Hasan-Rokem)
- Cracking Jokes. Studies of Sick Humor Cycles and Stereotypes* (1987)
- Little Red Riding Hood. A Casebook* (1989)
- Parsing Through Customs. Essays by a Freudian Folklorist* (1987)
- Folklore Matters* (1989)
- Folk Law. Essays in the Theory and Practice of "Lex Non Scripta", 2 vols.* (1994, with Alison Dundes Renteln)
- The Cockfight. A Casebook* (1994)
- From Game to War and Other Psychoanalytical Essays on Folklore* (1997)
- Two Tales of Crow and Sparrow. A Freudian Folkloristic Essay on Caste and Untouchability* (1997)
- Holy Writ as Oral Lit. The Bible as Folklore* (1999)
- Bloody Mary in the Mirror. Essays in Psychoanalytic Folkloristics* (2002)
- The Shabbat Elevator and Other Sabbath Subterfuges. An Unorthodox Essay on Circumventing Custom and Jewish Character* (2002)
- Fables of the Ancients? Folklore in the Qur'an* (2003)
- Folklore. Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies, 4 vols.* (2005)

We could go on, but if we want to have enough time for me to mention the 9,000 titles of the books that have joined this library and of which many are assembled here in this room, I better stop!

As this treasure trove of books shows, Alan Dundes' love of and interest in books knew no limits. Books from around the world in numerous languages on folklore form the basis of his gargantuan collection. But there are also books on anthropology,

art, history, Judaica, linguistics, literature, mythology, Native Americans, psychology, religion, sociology, etc.

All these books represent a lifelong love and fascination with books. And how much Alan Dundes enjoyed the hunt for them! No second-hand bookstore was safe as he would pull books off the shelves that interested him. Never will I forget our hours together in such stores, finding books for ourselves and for each other. It was an obsession, but a relatively harmless one, as long as the price was not too exuberant. But we really didn't care about the money. I don't think we ever put a book back because it was too expensive. If we wanted it, we bought it, and we faced Carolyn Dundes and Barbara Mieder later. But our wives delighted in our bookish fun and joy!

There was never selfishness in the hunt. Leaving a second-hand bookstore without at least one newly discovered treasure was unacceptable! More often, we would walk out with so many books that we could hardly carry them – a bit like Simon Bronner likes to do now! When Alan and I were together, it was like two little kids edging each other on: Let's go to the bookstores! And let's have some pizza, Alan a coke and I a beer, of course. Oh what great fun it all was – and all in the name of scholarship and putting together personal libraries.

And oh the excitement when a book was found that would mean much more to the friend: "Hey, Wolfgang, look at this, Do you know this? What do you mean you don't have it? You must have it! Buy it!" Some of you know the volume of Alan's and my correspondence that I put out in 2006, and as I bring these short remarks to an end, I would just like to quote a few passages from our letters that show how books permeated our thoughts and scholarly dreams. The search was always on, but as we kept books meaningful to us, we also made sure that we would hand on books that were of importance to the friend. There are many references to this in our correspondence, but let me just cite a few letters from Alan Dundes:

Do let me know when the Serendipity [second-hand bookstore] books get to you. I worry about that French rare book and won't rest easy until I know it is safely in your hands. [The book was Pierre de La Mesangère,

*Dictionnaire des proverbes français*. Paris: Treuttel, 1821.] Glad you enjoyed your brief Berkeley visit.  
April 27, 2001 (p. 168)

I have a favor to ask. I just received via inter-library loan a splendid biographical dictionary of the members of the Viennese Psychoanalytic Society 1902-1938. It includes short c.v.'s on dozens of early psychoanalytic pioneers including my friend [Isidor] Sadger (whose book in Japan I may actually get a copy of, thanks to a student of mine there. The book does not circulate, but he can use it in the library and he hopes to photocopy it for me.) Anyway, I would love to buy this book but I don't have contact with German bookstores. The book is: Elke Mühlleitner, *Biographisches Lexikon der Psychoanalyse*. Tübingen: Edition Diskord, 1992. 400 pp. It will not be cheap, but I would very much like to have it. I thought of xeroxing the pages I liked, but came to realize that I would have to xerox nearly the entire book. I have asked our library to order a copy, but that could take weeks if not months. In any case, I would like to own my own copy. I will gladly reimburse you for this. Do you think you could locate a copy for me? Do let me know. Otherwise, I will just xerox the interlibrary copy I now have in hand. [Of course, I did get Alan the book!]

June 22, 2001 (p. 170)

The favor: In reading your latest Supplement [III of *International Proverb Scholarship*], every word! I came across Walter A. Koch, ed. *Simple Forms*, which I confess I did not know about. Our library does have a copy, but there's so much good stuff in it that it would be a nuisance to xerox most of it. Since it was published in Deutschland by Universitätsverlag Dr. Norbert Brockmeyer, Bochum in 1994, and since you seem to have good contacts with German bookstores, I wonder if you could possibly order me a copy. This time I insist I will pay for it as I suspect it is likely to be expensive. I don't recall it having been reviewed in JAF or the like. As I say, I learned about it only from reading your bibliography. I find it [Koch's book] quite impressive although

not always exhaustive. Anyway, I find it a useful reference work and I would like to have it in my personal library. If it is already out of print, then forget about it and I will keep my eyes open for it in American used bookstores. [Yes, I did obtain the book for my friend!] January 24, 2002 (p. 192)

Anyway, in an out-of-the-way small bookstore Carolyn and I stopped to visit on our drive back from Los Angeles (to visit Alison on her January 9th birthday), I saw a small book published by Stanford University Press in 1937. I am almost certain that you already have it, and if you do, no harm done as I can keep it in my own tiny proverb collection. The book is entitled *Seven Hundred Chinese Proverbs*, translated by Henry H. Hart. It has a short but intelligent “preface” and “The Proverb and Its Place in Chinese Life”. It’s quite a handsome little book and if you don’t have it, I will send it to you. Let me know. Hope you and Barbara are surviving the Vermont winter.

January 15, 2003 (p. 210)

Recently Alison was at a Conference in Honolulu and she went to the Bishop Museum bookstore where she called me on her cell phone and asked if I wanted any of the “folklore” books she saw there. I asked for only one: Mary Kawena Pukui, *Olelo No’eau. Hawaiian Proverbs & Poetical Sayings*. I thought that if you did not have it, I would send it to you. Alison is here for the weekend for a law and society retreat in Berkeley and she brought me the book. So I am asking you now if you have this book by Mary Kawena Pukui. It belongs in your library. Let me know. If you do not have it. I will mail it to you. Hope you are surviving the winter in Burlington.

March 11, 2005 (p. 282)

I hope that these remarks have given you an idea of how this magnificent personal library came into being. Each volume now has an “ex libris” in it stating that “Folklore Matters” with the name Alan Dundes attached to it.

How very exciting to have this book collection saved for posterity in this room! They are proof and testimony of the work of a world-class folklorist, a book lover through and through, and a bookish philologist unequaled in modern times. This personal collection of books will keep the work and memory of Alan Dundes alive, and it will inspire future generations of folklorists to carry on Alan Dundes' conviction that "Folklore Matters"!

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As would be expected, I added spontaneous remarks from memory to these prepared paragraphs that I cannot recall any longer. They certainly added some more anecdotal matters about Alan Dundes' love of books. For more of our letters and my longer tribute to Alan Dundes see:

Mieder, Wolfgang (ed.). *"Best of All Possible Friends". Three Decades of Correspondence Between Folklorists Alan Dundes and Wolfgang Mieder*. Burlington, Vermont: The University of Vermont, 2006. 313 pp.

Mieder, Wolfgang. "'The Proof of the Proverb is in the Probing'. Alan Dundes as Pioneering Paremiologist." *Western Folklore*, 65 (2006), 217-262.

Mieder, Wolfgang. "'Two Happy Workaholics are Better than One'. Additional Letters Between Alan Dundes and Wolfgang Mieder." *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*. 27 (2010), 173-200.

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