



# Bloody Mary in the Mirror: Essays in Psychoanalytic Folkloristics

By Alan Dundes

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**Bloody Mary in the Mirror: Essays in Psychoanalytic Folkloristics** By Alan Dundes

*Bloody Mary in the Mirror* mixes Sigmund Freud with vampires and *The Little Mermaid* to see what new light psychoanalysis can bring to folklore techniques and forms.

Ever since Freud published his analysis of Jewish jokes in 1905 and his disciple Otto Rank followed with his groundbreaking *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* in 1909, the psychoanalytic study of folklore has been an acknowledged part of applied psychoanalysis.

However, psychoanalysts, handicapped by their limited knowledge of folklore techniques, have tended to confine their efforts to the Bible, to classical mythology, and to the Grimm fairy tales. Most folklorists have been slow to consider psychoanalysis as a method of interpreting folklore.

One notable exception is folklorist Alan Dundes. In the seven fascinating essays of *Bloody Mary in the Mirror*, psychoanalytic theory illuminates such folklore genres as legend (in the vampire tale), folktale (in the ancient Egyptian tale of two brothers), custom (in fraternity hazing and ritual fasting), and games (in the modern Greek game of "Long Donkey"). One of two essays Dundes co-authored with his daughter Lauren Dundes, professor of sociology at Western Maryland College, successfully probes the content of Disney's *The Little Mermaid*, yielding new insights into this popular reworking of a Hans Christian Andersen favorite.

Among folk rituals investigated is the girl's game of "Bloody Mary." Elementary or middle school-age girls huddle in a darkened bathroom awaiting the appearance in the mirror of a frightening apparition. The plausible analysis of this well-known--if somewhat puzzling--American rite is one of many surprising and enlightening finds in this book.

All of the essays in this remarkable volume create new takes on old traditions. *Bloody Mary in the Mirror* is an expedition into psychoanalytic folklore techniques and constitutes a giant step towards realizing the potential Freud's work promises for folklore studies.

Alan Dundes is professor of anthropology and folklore at the University of California, Berkeley. Among many others, his books include *Interpreting Folklore* (1980) and *From Game to War and Other Psychoanalytic Essays on Folklore* (1997). He edited *Mother Wit from the Laughing Barrel: Readings in the Interpretation of Afro-American Folklore* (1991), which was published by University Press of Mississippi.

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