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Introduction

Lynne S. McNeill and Elizabeth Tucker

SIX TEENAGERS PILE INTO AN OLD BUICK to travel to a notorious haunted slaughterhouse late at night. How can they find this slaughterhouse? There is no mention of the place on any map or website about their town. On the way there, they argue about directions and tell stories about spooky things that have happened there before. After getting lost a couple of times, they finally arrive. Nervous but excited, they gather their equipment: smartphones with night-vision apps, a spirit box, and an electronic voice phenomena recorder. Furtively, because they know they're not supposed to be here, they push open the haunted slaughterhouse's door, which creaks in protest. Immediately they spot bloody buckets, old tools, and piles of other strange old stuff. Is this place really haunted? Eager to find out, they turn on their equipment and settle in for some serious exploration.

This scenario typifies teenagers' legend trips in the early twenty-first century. Carrying plenty of ghost-hunting equipment and steeling themselves to be brave no matter what happens, teens plunge into the realm of the supernatural. Their parents may raise hell if they find out where they've gone, and police may cause trouble if they notice the intrusion, but the kids accept these risks. Their trip is important; it helps them navigate the difficult passage from childhood to adulthood.

In a different part of the same middle-sized town, four men and one woman plan to visit an abandoned psychiatric hospital. Ranging in age from the mid-thirties to the late forties, they do different kinds of work but share one abiding passion: finding evidence that ghosts exist. Two of the men got to know each other as teenagers, when they loved to listen to legends about a green mist spreading through the historic psychiatric hospital on one of their hometown's highest hills. Later, through message boards online, they met the group's other three members. The five of them meet regularly at one another's homes, planning nocturnal adventures.

As they prepare for their trip to the abandoned hospital, the five adults check their equipment, much of which they purchased online. Tape

recorders, video cameras, night-vision goggles, electromagnetic frequency meters, and a laser grid scope are all ready to go. Once they get to the hospital, they will have to be careful to avoid the old hospital's security guards. Hopefully they will succeed in making a video before anyone stops them. No matter what obstacles arise, they will take this trip, which probes the boundaries of life, death, and the afterlife.¹

Not all legend trippers are teenagers; some are young or older adults. Legends can inspire trips at any stage of life, but trips taken by young people have captured more interest from scholars. This casebook includes studies of both young and older people's adventures. The book presents scholars' research in chronological order, tracing areas of interest, debates, and questions for the future.

LEGENDS

How can we define legends? The distinguished legend scholar Linda Dégh tells us, "Evidently, the legend touches upon the most sensitive areas of our existence, and its manifest forms cannot be isolated as simple and coherent stories. Rather, legends appear as products of conflicting opinions, expressed in conversation" (Dégh 2001, 2). Since 1973, when Dégh and her husband Andrew Vázsonyi published "The Dialectics of the Legend," folklorists have understood that legends arise from a complex dialogue involving believers, skeptics, and others in between. Although believers help keep legends alive, skeptics do too. It is in lively conversation with exchange of varying views that the "dialectic-polyphonic nature" of the legend comes forth (Dégh 2001, 2). While resolution as to the truth of a particular legend may never be reached, the emphasis on possibility makes this genre an important means of exploring the nature of reality.

When students tell legends about a haunted college residence hall, for example, some may express full belief, but others may scoff at the possibility of ghosts. "You think you saw a ghost in your mirror," one skeptic may say. "Don't you think you could have just seen your own face from a different angle?" Serious discussion of the time of day or night, the history of the building, and mirrors' association with magic ensues. No matter how the conversation ends, debate makes it meaningful.

Ever since the earliest days of legend definition, scholars have tended to define the legend by comparing it to another kind of narrative. Differences between the legend and the folktale, called the *Märchen* by Germans and the fairy tale by some English speakers, have especially interested folk narrative scholars. Jacob Grimm explains this distinction in his *Teutonic Mythology*,

published in German in 1844: “The fairy-tale flies, the legend walks, knocks at your door; the one can draw freely out of the fullness of poetry, the other has almost the authority of history” (Grimm 1883, xv). Acknowledging the folktale’s poetic beauty, Grimm emphasizes the legend’s greater authority; moored in human history, it offers wisdom relevant to the course of our own lives. Although the Grimms’ *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Children’s and Household Tales, 1812–1814) have become more well known than their *Deutsche Sagen* (German Legends, 1816) (Grimm and Grimm 2006), it is clear that these foundational scholars valued both genres very highly.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, other scholars have tried to explain the legend’s differences from the folktale. One of the most valuable articles is Max Lüthi’s “Aspects of the Märchen and the Legend,” which compares the folktale to a castle and the legend to a cave. In the folktale, Lüthi observes, angles are sharp and colors are bright; the hero goes forth to meet his challenge, and the reader or listener knows that the outcome will be successful. In contrast, the legend offers hazy outlines and muted colors; the hero, like any of us, has no guarantee of a victorious outcome in troubling situations. More specifically: The *Märchen* [folktale] considers man; the legend considers what happens to man. The *Märchen* outlines the narrow road of the hero walking through the world and does not dwell on the figures meeting him. But the legend looks fixedly at the inexplicable which confronts man. And because it is monstrous—war, pestilence, or landslide, and especially often a numinous power, be it nature, demons, or spirits of the dead—man becomes small and unsure before it (Lüthi 1976, 24). Note Lüthi’s focus on a “numinous power”: a mysterious, strongly spiritual quality that comes close to holiness. Some of the most intriguing legends involve this kind of power, but not all legends do. Legends about the numinous, more commonly known as the supernatural, are the ones most likely to inspire legend trips.

Besides the folktale, the saint’s legend is another type of narrative that is often compared to the legend. The Latin term for saint’s legend, *legenda*, means a story that people will read. In contrast, the German term for legend is *Sage*, something that people will say or tell. Linda Dégh notes that reading saint’s legends is a religious duty, but the “folk legend does not tolerate such sectarian and social compulsion” (Dégh and Vázsonyi 1973, 3). Nonetheless, there is some similarity between the legend and the saint’s legend. Although the saint’s legend has a clearer didactic message and demands more dutiful attention, both kinds of narratives have the potential to teach people to live better, safer lives.

The influence of religion should be considered carefully. Lauri Honko devotes much attention to *homo religiosus*, religious man, whose beliefs have

a major impact upon folk culture (Honko 1962, 120–125). Will-Erich Peuckert observes in his study of legends that people in his home village consider nonbelievers in spirits of the dead to be atheists (Peuckert 1965, 124). Similarly, Juha Pentikäinen explains that the most devoted churchgoers seem to be those who have the most run-ins with ghosts (Pentikäinen 1968, 153). Dégh reminds us that the Catholic Church supported belief in witches and devils for centuries and encouraged its congregations to believe in legends throughout much of the medieval period (Dégh 1973, 4). Today, many centuries later, we can still observe close connections between religion, folk belief, and legend in various cultural contexts.

Scholars have also developed distinctions between legends that explain the narrator's own experiences and legends that do not. In 1934 the influential Swedish folklorist Carl Wilhelm von Sydow (1948) published "Kategorien des Prosa-Volksdichtung" (Categories of Prose-Folk Poetry), which includes the terms *memorat* and *fabulat*: in English, memorate and fabulate. Memorates, narratives about personal experiences, may become fabulates—less subjective narratives—over time. For example, a farmer's narrative about a personal encounter with a ghost may lose its reference to him and become more generally identified with a folk group or culture area. Von Sydow's categories have made folklorists ask questions about the role of personal experience in legend telling. Is a legend derived from personal experience less of a full-fledged legend? Since the late twentieth century, folklorists have not worried much about this question. It has become common for people to tell legends from personal experience, so the kind of story that von Sydow calls a memorate has become increasingly normative.

Another change since the late twentieth century has been decrease in concern about distinguishing local legends from migratory legends. In 1958, Reidar Thoralf Christiansen (1958) published his well-known classificatory study *The Migratory Legends*. His list of legend types and detailed catalogue of Norwegian variants offer a fascinating glimpse of Norwegian legends that have migrated from one place to another over time. Titles of legend types include "The Black Book of Magic," "Trolls and Giants," "Witches and Witchcraft," and "Spirits of Rivers, Lakes and the Sea."

One of the most famous migratory legends around the world is "The Vanishing Hitchhiker," which puts traveling ghosts into a multitude of different cultural contexts. When Christiansen developed his type list and catalogue, legends traveled relatively slowly, both orally and in print, with some mass media involvement. Now the mass and new media are so dominant around the world that legends can migrate very quickly. With one push of a button on a computer or a smartphone, a legend can travel

around the world. Some legends continue to be most meaningful in their own geographical area, as Trevor J. Blank and David J. Puglia demonstrate in *Maryland Legends* (Blank and Puglia 2014); Elizabeth Tucker's *Haunted Southern Tier* (Tucker 2011) and other books in the History Press's Haunted America series similarly explicate the appeal of local legends. All legends have the potential to migrate quickly, taking on new features and characteristics as they travel. This process, wherein legends adapt themselves to different cultural and social contexts, is known as ecotypification, a term borrowed from the study of botany, where it's used to describe the way that the same plant species will manifest differently in different places due to changes in the local environment. The fact that legends can adapt themselves to different settings and situations is one of the reasons that they're such a tenacious form of narrative.

Legend scholarship since the 1980s has increasingly reflected awareness of what Lutz Röhrich (1988, 8) calls "the cultural language of fear." Concerns about health scares, organ thefts, business scams, political conspiracies, out-of-control sex, and communication horrors have emerged in folklorists' books and articles. Many of these studies have come from American folklorists. Although the United States can certainly not claim to have more fear-generating situations than any other country, its folklore scholars have become leaders in explicating the dynamics of the modern legend, and of the legend trip specifically.

The American legend scholar Jan Harold Brunvand began his influential series of books in 1981 with *The Vanishing Hitchhiker*, making *urban legend* a familiar term. As his later books, including *The Choking Doberman* (Brunvand 1984), *The Mexican Pet* (Brunvand 1986), and *The Baby Train* (Brunvand 1993), were published, "urban legend" became a household phrase in the United States. Brunvand discusses legend texts and scholarly research in an engaging style that appeals to a broad range of readers. The term that he established appears on Barbara and David Mikkelsen's Urban Legends Reference Pages, <https://www.snopes.com>, which provides an important information center for both folklorists and nonfolklorists.

Another term for urban legends, *contemporary legends*, emphasizes our current time period rather than urban or rural settings, and is the usage preferred by many legend scholars. This is the term used by the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research (ISCLR), which studies both current and historical legends and rumors. Some members of ISCLR present papers on ghost stories, while others discuss legends and rumors about the horrors of war, conspiracy theories, dangers to children, and other contemporary issues. Recent award-winning books by ISCLR presenters

include Andrea Kitta's (2011) *Vaccination and Public Concern in History: Legend, Rumor and Risk Perception*, Eda Kalmre's (2013) *The Human Sausage Factory: A Study of Post-war Rumour in Tartu*, and Joel Best and Kathleen A. Bogle's *Kids Gone Wild: From Rainbow Parties to Sexting, Understanding the Hype over Teen Sex* (Best and Bogle 2014). As these examples suggest, the range of contemporary legend subjects is broad and intriguing.

To describe a legend as "contemporary" doesn't necessarily mean that it's modern or up to date; if that were the case, then the contemporary legends of today would cease to be contemporary legends twenty years from now. The word *contemporary* simply means that these legends are (or were) contemporary to the time in which they're actively being told and shared. Narrative scholar Henrik Lassen conducted a study of the "improved product" legend, in which an inventor creates a revolutionary new product and, rather than being championed for it, is killed by the powers that be, people who benefit from the status quo (Lassen 1995). This legend has been told in recent years about cars that run on water (with oil industry executives suggested as the bad guys), and yet it was also told in ancient Rome about unbreakable glass (with the emperor, whose riches were all in the familiar form of gold, dispatching the unfortunate inventor). This is a great example of how a legend adapts to remain *contemporary* to different times and cultures.

EARLY LEGEND-TRIP SCHOLARSHIP

Scholars have used several different terms to identify visits to places associated with legends. The most frequent term is *legend trip*, so that is our choice for this casebook. We should note, however, that *legend quest* has been gaining strength in recent years. Linda Dégh observed, "Most of the adolescent legends are quest stories" (Dégh 2001, 253). A number of other scholars have used the term *quest* to describe exploratory journeys (Lindahl 2005, 165; Tucker 2007, 182–210; Bronner 2012, 319–323; Gabbert 2015, 146–169). "Trip" means the whole journey, while "quest" stresses the journey's objective and the hero's striving. According to Bill Ellis, "The trip, not the legend, is the thing" (Ellis 2001, 190). For legend trippers and for many of us who study legends (and we should note that those categories overlap!), that statement holds true.

Before discussing legend-trip scholarship, we should define two other relevant terms: *pilgrimage* and *tourism*. "Pilgrimage" usually pertains to religious journeys but has been used more loosely since the twentieth century. Victor Turner suggests, "The plain truth is that pilgrimage does not ensure a major change in religious state—and seldom in secular status—though it

may make one a better person, fortified by the graces merited by the hardships and self-sacrifices of the journey” (Turner 1992, 37). It is not unusual for travelers to describe their trips to highly meaningful, long-desired destinations such as Machu Picchu in Peru as pilgrimages. Takers of legend trips also have strong feelings about their experiences, but they follow a more specific sequence of events related to storytelling and ritual, and their trips may not require the same effort of planning or length of wait that a pilgrimage might.

Another kind of travel related to legend trips is tourism, discussed in detail by Diane E. Goldstein, Sylvia Ann Grider, and Jeannie Banks Thomas in *Haunting Experiences: Ghosts in Contemporary Folklore* (2007, 191–200). Goldstein, Grider, and Thomas discuss ghost tourism, organization of visits to allegedly haunted places that excite and intrigue people of varying ages. They refer to Thomas Blom’s “morbid tourism,” which “focuses on sudden violent death and which attracts large numbers of people” (Blom 2000, 32). Unlike ghost or morbid tourism, which operates for profit, legend trips do not entail money and usually involve small groups of friends.

Legend-trip scholarship began after Linda Dégh joined the Folklore Institute’s faculty at Indiana University in 1964. Having done extensive fieldwork related to folktales in rural Hungary, Dégh wanted to learn about American rural narratives. According to Richard M. Dorson, the Folklore Institute’s chair, American folk legends originated from local and national history (Dorson 1974). Rather than following this approach, Dégh examined legends about the supernatural. She undertook ambitious fieldwork projects and read all the legend material in the Folklore Institute’s archives. In 1968 she founded the journal *Indiana Folklore*, which would publish significant articles about explorations of places related to legends.

Dégh’s early articles show that young people’s visits to haunted places constitute an important kind of initiation. In “The Haunted Bridges Near Avon and Danville and Their Role in Legend Formation” (Dégh 1969a), she observes that visitors to haunted bridges “perform a series of designated acts known to be effective to prompt the ghosts to appear,” and that these acts comprise an initiation into adulthood (80–81). Another article, “The House of Blue Lights” (Dégh 1969b), shows how many legend variants a spooky house (this one in Indianapolis) can generate. It also eloquently demonstrates the role of print journalism in legend formation.

Folklorists in southern Indiana, including a number of Linda Dégh’s students, published studies of young people’s visits to haunted places in the late 1960s and early 1970s. “The Legend of Stepp Cemetery” by

William M. Clements and William E. Lightfoot discusses young people's attempts to spot a woman in black sitting on a stump in a cemetery near Bloomington (Clements and Lightfoot 1972). Gary Hall's 1973 "The Big Tunnel" documents hair-raising visits to a tunnel between Fort Ritner and Tunnelton that was famous among local teenagers; this is the first essay that uses the term *legend-trip*. Kenneth A. Thigpen's 1971 "Adolescent Legends in Brown County: A Survey" postulates a three-part structure for teenagers' visits to haunted places: storytelling on the way to the site, rituals such as headlight blinking and horn blowing to "cause the fulfillment of the legend" while there, and discussion of what happened at the site during the drive home (204–205). Studies from this time period in other parts of the United States show that the three-part structure is valid (Samuelson 1979; Harling 1971).

Bill Ellis's (1982–1983) "Legend-Tripping in Ohio: A Behavioral Survey" further clarifies the legend trip's structure and purpose, asking key questions. It confirms the trip's importance for young people as a form of initiation into adulthood and makes the important new point that the trip functions as a "ritual of rebellion" for the young. In addition, Ellis's article reinforces scholarly use of "legend trip." His study's influence can be seen in articles of the early 1990s such as Patricia M. Meley's (1991) "Adolescent Legend Trips as Teenage Cultural Response," which carefully examines legend trips by a group of teenaged friends over a six-month period.

Since many studies of legend trips have come from American scholars, is the legend trip intrinsically American? The typical American legend trip, according to scholars, involves a group of teenaged friends, a car, and a visit to an exciting place associated with violent crime and/or the supernatural. All of these components except for the car are known to have been important parts of legend trips in Europe as well. In *Lucifer Ascending*, Bill Ellis (2004, 112–141) discusses examples of legend trips several centuries ago in England, France, and Germany. Graveyards, churches, monuments, and castles have all inspired legend trips by adventurous walkers in Europe. Ellis suggests, "British legend-trips have not been collected as intensively as in the United States, where the teenage automobile culture may well have revitalized a tradition of visits originally made on foot and known only within a small radius" (116). We agree that the car is a crucial ingredient of the American legend trip; it provides an ideal setting for storytelling and socializing. However, automobile transportation is not the only way to take a legend trip. In Europe, Asia, and other parts of the world, legend trips continue. We hope that they will be studied more closely in the future.



Figure 0.1. The road to Stepp Cemetery in Morgan-Monroe Forest near Bloomington, Indiana. Photo by Jesse A. Fivecoate.

OSTENSION

For analysis of legend-trip behavior, the term *ostension* has become central. Derived from the Latin *ostendere*, “to show,” this term comes from semiotics, which took it from Ludwig Wittgenstein and Bertrand Russell. Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi’s article “Does the Word ‘Dog’ Bite? Ostensive Action: A Means of Legend-Telling” (Dégh and Vázsonyi 1983) introduces the term to folkloristics, defining it as “presentation as contrasted to representation” (6). The article also proposes three variations of ostension: pseudo-ostension, a hoax; proto-ostension, a narrator’s appropriation of a legend as his or her own experience; and quasi-ostension, a misunderstanding of something that takes place (18–20). Since ostension can involve so many levels of perception and intent, these variations help to clarify its dynamics.

Bill Ellis applies Dégh and Vázsonyi’s concepts of pseudo-ostension and quasi-ostension to his study of the Satanism scare of the 1980s in “Legend-Trips and Satanism: Adolescents’ Ostensive Traditions as ‘Cult’ Activity” (Ellis 1991). His analysis of this moral panic, which troubled many people, demonstrates the expressive potential of ostension for society at times of uncertainty and fear. One of the most significant aspects of Ellis’s study is his ability to look beyond fragmentary artifacts of so-called Satanic

worship to identify patterns of behavior in youth culture. Verification of such patterns is understandably difficult to achieve, since teenagers do not want to get punished for rebellious behavior. Nonetheless, Ellis's article makes a very persuasive case.

Is ostension always disruptive and rebellious? In *Legend and Belief*, Dégh observes that ostension can be harmless, especially in connection with Halloween. Criminal ostension, however, can cause serious problems; examples include the Tylenol poisoning of 1982, in which seven people died from cyanide poison put in the pain reliever, and the Diet Pepsi tamperers of 1993 (Dégh 2001, 423–424, 428–434), who emulated reports of a syringe found in a Pepsi can by putting various objects in their own Pepsi cans and trying to pass them off as evidence of further tampering. She also notes that instances of Halloween ostension such as taking off the seat of an outhouse or putting a farm wagon on a roof can fall into the categories of “practical joke” or “prank” (423–424). This point reminds us that legends can be enacted in pranks, as studies of children at summer camps (e.g., Posen 1974) and students at college (e.g., Grider 1973; Bowman 1987; Tucker 2005: 93–96) have shown; both legends and pranks ask for some level of buy-in from participants. In this kind of context and others, there is a close connection between amusement and fright: pranks provide an outlet for stress caused by fear and make the pranksters feel powerful. Nonpranking legend trips can often function the same way.

MORE RECENT LEGEND-TRIP SCHOLARSHIP

Folklore articles about legend trips from the late 1980s to the early twenty-first century have given increasing attention to performance of legend-trip rituals. S. Elizabeth Bird's (1994) “Playing with Fear,” for example, applies play theory and analysis of gender roles to legend-trip performance. Separately considering males and females as well as younger and older legend tellers, she suggests that young men and women learn gender-related lessons while performing their roles to the best of their ability. Another article, Tim Prizer's 2004 “Shame Old Roads Can't Talk: Narrative, Experience, and Belief in the Framing of Legend-Trips as Performance,” applies Erving Goffman's frame analysis.

Some early twenty-first century studies of legend trips have examined religious or quasi-religious elements. In his article “Ostensive Healing: Pilgrimage to the San Antonio Ghost Tracks,” Carl Lindahl (2005) suggests that “there is ample evidence that ostension can transcend horror and inspire a sense of wonder in those who bring legends to life” (165). He

examines narratives about a school bus getting crushed on train tracks; the scene of the tragedy becomes a sacred place where the spirits of children linger. Having read more than 100 accounts of visits to the San Antonio train tracks by Hispanics, he finds that these narrators express a sense of wonder in telling their stories. His use of the term *pilgrimage* suggests a quasi-religious feeling of awe.

A related subject has been legend trips' facilitation of an altered state of consciousness. In her article about haunted bridges near Avon and Danville, Linda Dégh (1969a, 80) notes, "The bridge visitors condition themselves mentally for a vision they desire to have." Comparing accounts of visits to these haunted bridges on dark, moonless nights, she finds that the narrators are emotionally involved in their search for a good scare. Bill Ellis views such trips by teenagers as rituals of rebellion, finding that drinking, pot smoking, and visits to haunted places are "trips" in more ways than one: they are "deliberate escapes into altered states of being where conventional laws do not operate" and where an adolescent's status may be increased by seeing a ghost (Ellis 2001, 189). Further discussion appears in Michael Kinsella's (2011) *Legend Tripping Online*, which examines alternate states of consciousness in relation to certain Internet sites.

Recently some scholars have studied performances of ghost hunters who have used technological devices. Lynne S. McNeill's (2006) "Contemporary Ghost Hunting and the Relationship between Proof and Experience" examines both the tradition of belief and the tradition of disbelief, finding that ghost hunters discover "at least according to their standards, potentially satisfying proof" (109). Elizabeth Tucker's 2016 "There's an App for That: Ghost Hunting with Smartphones" analyzes a student ghost-hunting team's search for ghosts in a college residence hall using the latest available smartphone technology. This article proposes a new term, *hypermodern ostension*, for the kind of ostension that is heavily influenced by technology. As technology continues to develop, it will be fascinating to see what kinds of ghost hunts will happen next.

OUR OWN EXPERIENCES

It seems only fair for the two of us, McNeill and Tucker, to share our own legend-trip experiences. We have been studying legends one way or another since we were teenagers: McNeill in the 1990s, Tucker in the 1960s. As folklorists we have taught classes about legends and encouraged students to collect them from friends and family members. Every year we have participated in meetings of the International Society for Contemporary Legend



Figure 0.2. “Weeping Woman” memorial in Logan City Cemetery, Logan, Utah. Photo by Lynne McNeill.

Research, which have usually included legend trips to cemeteries, murder sites, and other intriguing but slightly nerve-wracking places.

When Utah State University hosted the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research’s annual meeting in 2006, both of us visited the famous Weeping Woman one sunny afternoon with a whole crowd of folklorists. Holding hands as we stood in a circle around the statue, we chanted, “Weep, lady, weep” and then “Cry, lady cry.” Then we lifted Cathy Preston, the smallest, lightest folklorist in our group, up to the top of the statue’s head to see whether the statue was crying. We had fun and bonded wonderfully with each other, but we did not feel scared. Why not? We knew that if the Weeping Woman really did cry, she wouldn’t do it during the day.

Our experiences as teenagers were fairly similar, though thirty years apart. Tucker, cruising around Colorado Springs with her best girlfriend in



Figure 0.3. Elizabeth Tucker (*right*) as a teenager longing for adventure in the mountains of Colorado, with her sister Margaret (*left*) and dog Dixie.

an old red and white station wagon named Angela, longed to have an exciting adventure. Angela had the same colors as the bloodthirsty vehicle that Stephen King (1983) would name Christine but offered no thrills beyond driving around town. Up to the age of fifteen, the most adventurous things Tucker had managed to do were participate in a séance and sneak out to go to a football game she was forbidden to attend. That changed when she got a chance to spend a week at a church camp up in the mountains. Late one night at camp, a boy named Jim told a story about the ghost of a mean old man named Chas McGee. Jim led the group to the cemetery where Chas was buried. Suddenly he pulled Chas's tombstone out of the ground and started running. Lights flashed; could that be Chas's ghost? Everyone got punished the next morning, but Tucker didn't mind; at last, something

amazing had happened. Ten years later, she would start studying folklore at Indiana University and learn that the Chas McGee story was a legend.

Thirty years after Tucker's adolescent adventures, growing up in the Bay Area in California, McNeill and her friends experimented with forms of play that function as non-travel-based legend trips: séances and hypnosis games. They didn't use a Ouija board—maybe those seemed too scary, or maybe none of the friends owned one. McNeill *loved* that stuff; she found it mysterious, calming, and eerie. Because she cared so much about this kind of experience, she hesitated to go out at night to see if something supernatural would happen. Maintaining a too-scared-to-try-it-for-real stance let her hold off from “knowing” and just enjoy the work of “believing” and “wondering.”

As teenagers, both of us liked the idea of ghosts and hauntings, hoping to enter the “world within a world” of the supernatural. We both loved the *Chronicles of Narnia* by C. S. Lewis, in which four children discover a realm of magic by opening a wardrobe door. A generation apart, growing up in different parts of the United States, we intuited the importance of legends and wanted to learn how they worked. What better way to learn than to take and study legend trips?

LIMINAL LIFE STAGES

No matter where we grow up, we all go through transitions from one life stage to another. These transitions make us liminal (from the Latin *limen*, threshold): in between one clear state of being and another. While liminal states can be confusing, they also involve important discoveries. One way to make such discoveries is to go on a legend trip.

Many people think that legend trips belong to teenagers. Certainly most of the scholarship on legend trips, beginning with Linda Dégh's meticulous analyses of such excursions in southern Indiana, addresses young people's experiences. However, as we observed at the beginning of this introduction, teenagers are not the only people who take trips of this kind. Legend trips can happen at any age, although they serve an especially important initiatory purpose among the young.

The essence of the legend trip is the enactment of ambiguity, the experiential affirmation of the weird or the unexplainable. At times of transition, especially when moving from one age stage to another, people feel drawn to experiences that express how they feel. For teenagers, who are undergoing the major transition from childhood to adulthood, legend trips offer a chance to articulate feelings of ambiguity and to explore compelling issues. Sex, violence, racial injustice, gender inequality, and other complex



Figure 0.4. Lynne McNeill as a teenager in California.

subjects arise within exploration of the supernatural, which is inherently ambiguous and fascinating. This kind of exploration provides an exciting, sometimes chilling initiation into the mysterious world of adult concerns.

For those who have already made the transition to adulthood, legend trips still offer plenty of ambiguity. McNeill can offer an example from the early days of her career. Working as a professional folklorist, a career in which supernatural experimentation can double as research, she discovered ghost-hunting apps for cell phones and visited the Weeping Woman statue one Halloween night after giving a public talk about paranormal research. The shift from day to night, from student to professor, from low tech to high created a new opportunity for a legend trip in a familiar place. When the app suddenly changed from random sounds to a women's voice saying, "You all should go!" (heard by both people present), McNeill found a frightening new layer of potential belief in the tradition.

Some young and older adults enjoy planning legend trips for children and adolescents. At summer camp, a liminal place between home and the wilderness, a legend trip can be an important expression of ambiguity. Counselors at a number of camps in upstate New York organize trips to places associated with Cropsey, a maniac who supposedly kills campers each year in memory of his own children who died in a fire (Haring and Breslerman 1977). At the beginning of summer, counselors at a camp in

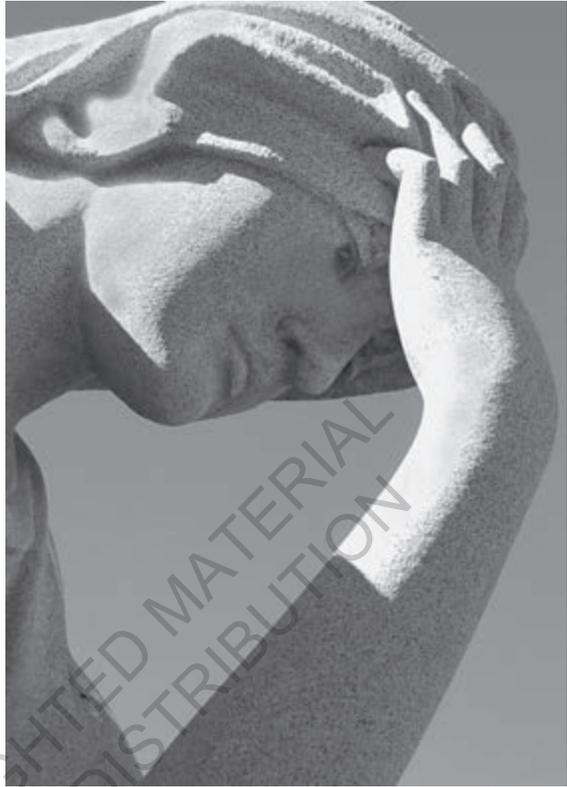


Figure 0.5. Close-up of the Weeping Woman memorial in Logan City Cemetery. Photo by Lynne McNeill.

Canada take new campers on a tour of a “coffin factory” that gives them a frightening preview of what their camp experience will offer them. Such trips serve as initiations in which young adults test campers’ courage. If these campers return the following year, they may help to initiate the next group of campers.

One popular legend-trip destination for both young and older people is the home of Lizzie Borden in Fall River, Massachusetts. In 1892 Lizzie’s parents, Andrew and Abby Borden, were murdered by someone wielding an ax. Lizzie was acquitted at her murder trial, but the killer was never identified. A journalist wrote a rhyme that children soon started to sing as they jumped rope: “Lizzie Borden took an ax /and gave her mother forty whacks. / When she saw what she had done, / she gave her father forty-one.” Today the Borden family home is a bed-and-breakfast. People of varying ages stay there overnight, hoping to communicate with spirits of the dead. One of Tucker’s students went to the Lizzie Borden B & B for her sixteenth birthday, accompanied by her mother and a few friends.



Figure 0.6. Gazing globe in a psychic medium's garden in Lily Dale, New York. Photo by Geoffrey Gould.

All of them enjoyed using a Ouija board to try to contact the Borden family's spirits.

Another well-known destination is Lily Dale in western New York, a Spiritualist assembly where psychics commune with spirits of the dead. Founded in 1879, three decades after Margaret and Kate Fox claimed to contact spirits in Hydesville, New York, Lily Dale has stimulated lively interest in Spiritualism. Students from nearby colleges enjoy traveling to Lily Dale, as do older adults from the United States, England, Germany, and other countries. In 2011 Home Box Office made a documentary, *No One Dies in Lily Dale*, which increased the assembly's fame. Since Lily Dale is well known as a place in which spirits of the dead are easy to reach, it has a special appeal for people who have lost relatives and close friends. For older adults who have suffered significant losses, the opportunity to talk with the spirits of loved ones through psychics may be particularly meaningful (Tucker 2015a).

EPIC AND LEGEND-TRIP HEROES

Both adolescents and adults enjoy epics, long narrative poems in which heroes dare to do something that seems impossible. Legend trips have their roots in these ancient poems. Epic heroes must accept a challenge that is so difficult they fear they may never get home. In accepting this challenge, they prove their courage as well as their willingness to try something that sounds a little crazy to most people. Epic heroes' quests involve vanquishing monsters, killing fierce animals, outwitting sorcerers, confronting supernatural forces, and entering realms where living people are not allowed to go. Legend trippers' quests may seem simpler and less soul-searing, but they involve similar risk taking and rule breaking.

Entering prohibited, horrifying places is an important part of what the epic hero achieves—and in our contemporary world, this kind of achievement also characterizes people who go on legend trips. Although visitors to haunted and notorious places are not as famous as epic heroes, they have a similar attitude that might, in contemporary slang, be called “badass”: bold, disrespectful of boundaries, and ready for almost anything that may happen. In their transgression of boundaries, both epic heroes and legend trippers fit the pattern of tricksters who insist on doing whatever they want to do, demonstrating the strength of their life force (Hyde 1998).

Tricksters, by definition, are characters who break the rules and in doing so, help us to see why those rules (whether official or unofficial) are there in the first place. The emphasis on liminality in legend tripping—whether the liminality of the supernatural, of adolescence, or simply of the setting, such as camp—provides a natural context for turning societal expectations on their head. Being decidedly “betwixt and between” makes it seem easier to break rules and do things like trespass or even commit vandalism; engaging in this kind of rule breaking can serve as a release, making it easier to put up with society's restrictions the rest of the time.

Like tricksters, epic heroes dare to break rules and go places where no one is supposed to go. One of the earliest epics, *Gilgamesh*, dates from approximately 2100 BCE in Sumeria. Gilgamesh, king of Uruk, fights with Enkidu, a wild man created by the gods; afterward he and Enkidu become close friends. Together they defeat the giant Humbaba. After the gods condemn Enkidu to death, Gilgamesh travels to the land of death to try to save his close friend. Like Orpheus in the later Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, he tries his best to bring a loved one back from the dead; tragically but predictably, he fails.

Another epic hero who attempts to break through to the kingdom of death is Aeneas, central character of the *Aeneid*, which Virgil wrote

sometime between 29 and 19 BCE. Traveling from Troy to Italy after the Trojan War, Aeneas founds Rome and becomes the ancestor of the Romans. In the sixth book of this epic, Aeneas asks for help from the oracle known as the Cumaean Sibyl to descend into the underworld so that he can speak with his father's spirit. Succeeding in this quest, he has a vision of Rome's destiny. Cumae, near Naples, is the alleged location of the Cumaean Sibyl's entrance to the underworld; it is now a popular tourist destination. As they have always done, people continue to wonder about the realm of death and imagine what it would be like to go there as a visitor.

Homer's *Odyssey*, written toward the end of the eighth century BCE, presents the journey of another Trojan warrior who encounters supernatural forces. During his long voyage home, Odysseus struggles with a one-eyed Cyclops, a sorceress who turns his men into pigs, and dangerous Sirens whose enchanting songs threaten to cause a shipwreck. To prevent himself from succumbing to the Sirens, he orders his shipmates to lash him to the mast. Finally he returns home, where his last task is the recovery of his faithful wife, Penelope.

Yet another epic hero is the central character of the *Epic of King Gesar*, which circulates actively today in Mongolia, Tibet, and other parts of Central Asia (Chadwick and Zhirmunsky 2010). Dating from the twelfth century, this epic has many variants. King Gesar, whose name resembles that of the Roman emperor Caesar, kills demons and gigantic animals as he struggles to establish his kingdom. In some versions, he descends to the underworld to be initiated or to rescue his mother. Gesar's adventures continue to grow as singers sing new songs and folklorists record their performances.

We do not mean to suggest that the epic heroes of the past were the only legend trippers of their times. It's quite likely that even in ancient Sumeria, just as in our contemporary societies, ordinary teenagers would gather together and set out to investigate their local communities' legendary haunted spots. Unfortunately, most early historical and folkloristic documentation privileged the impressive and important over the mundane and minor; this means that we'll likely never know about many of the legend-tripping experiences of the common people of the past. But the journeys of epic heroes still apply here—they provide us with a sense of the symbolic power of embarking on a journey, whether big or small, that involves approaching the liminal, facing one's fears, and investigating the world around us.

EARLY LEGEND TRIPS

Most of the legend trips we examine in this casebook are specific to American and British youth culture from the mid-twentieth to the twenty-first century, but we do have some tantalizing records of legend trips that happened much earlier. Most of these records come from Europe, but some originate from Asia. Wherever legends have a strong connection to a particular place, there is potential for people to go on legend trips.

From medieval folklore we learn of supernatural legends from rural England that Gervase of Tilbury recorded in his *Otia Imperialia* about 1212. Gervase describes a tall mound in a wooded vale in Gloucester County, explaining that if you stand on that mound and say, "I thirst," a cheerful servant will offer you a "most pleasing drink" from a large bejeweled horn (Oman 1944, 7). He also tells of a "well-established tradition" in the Gogmagog or Wandlebury Hills: if a knight rides unattended into camp by moonlight, shouting, "Let a knight come against a knight," an adversary will magically appear. When a knight named Osbert FitzHugh shouted this challenge, he received a grievous wound that opened up every year on the anniversary of the conflict (Oman 1944, 8). Both of these accounts suggest the possibility of exciting, somewhat frightening legend trips. Although the story of the mound no longer circulates, the mystery of what happened in the Gogmagog Hills still entices tourists to travel there.

Records of German folklore from the nineteenth and earlier twentieth century show how many people visited legendary places. Even very small villages had their own churches, and each church had at least one legend associated with it. One church, for example, held the ghost of a priest who had baptized someone in the name of the devil. Another church, which sank into the ground because its priests and monks misbehaved, could be located by listening to the muffled pealing of its bells on Good Friday. Ghosts of knights and nuns would return to their churches at certain times, encouraging parishioners to risk viewing their spectral presences. Besides legends about churches, German folklore includes many legends about haunted bridges, houses, and other locations (Hoffmann-Krayer and Bächtold-Stäubli 1931–1932: 1402–1408).

One of the most engaging and moving records of an early legend trip appears in Lafcadio Hearn's 2012 *Glimpses of an Unfamiliar Japan*. A sensitive observer of Japanese culture, Hearn wrote in his first anthology about finding a statue of Jizô, a god who protects people's souls, in a Buddhist cemetery. He learned that there was another statue of Jizô in the "cave of the children's ghosts" on the Shimane Peninsula. Since children's spirits were too weak to cross the river between our world and the afterlife, they had to

build towers of tiny stones in this seaside cave. Demons tried to knock the children's towers down, but visitors helped by building the towers back up. When he traveled to the cave, Hearn saw tiny footprints. He was participating in a legend trip that had existed for many years and can be found now on in Internet advertisements of boat rides for tourists, as Bill Ellis (2015, 211) notes in "The Haunted Asian Landscapes of Lafcadio Hearn."

LEGEND TRIPS IN LITERATURE, FILM, AND TELEVISION

To understand legend trips, especially in the United States and England, we need to consider certain classics of literature, film, and television that have influenced trippers' expectations. Ever since the rise of the Gothic novel in the middle of the eighteenth century, readers have viewed picturesque ruins, castles, and mansions as possible sources of supernatural stimulation. Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) was presented by its publisher as a found manuscript that was written in 1529 by the canon of the Church of Saint Nicholas. The novel begins with the son of Manfred, lord of the castle, getting crushed to death by a falling helmet. Fearing that this sudden death has resulted from an ancient prophecy, Manfred resolves to marry his son's fiancée, starting a series of intrigues and deceptions that will culminate in tragedy. There are many supernatural events, including three drops of blood falling from a statue's nose. The castle in Walpole's novel is the first of many large, mysterious buildings that readers explore as they move through the story; reading books of this kind whets the appetite for exploration of old castles and mansions.

The earliest American writer of Gothic literature was Edgar Allan Poe, who published his short story "The Fall of the House of Usher" in 1839. Worried about his friend Roderick Usher, who appears to be ill, the story's nameless narrator travels to Usher's house and immediately notices that it has a crack from its roof to its foundation. Roderick is obsessed with his house and has a morbid attachment to his twin sister Madeline, who falls into cataleptic trances and ends up being buried alive. Like the Usher twins, the house is ill; it is *alive* and wishes nobody well. This story marks the beginning of American horror stories and films about sentient houses of evil intent, which have complex symbolic meaning.

Another creepy house of early American literature is the one in Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1851 novel, *The House of the Seven Gables*. Based on a seventeenth-century gabled house owned by Hawthorne's cousin Susanna Ingersoll, the house in this novel has a tragic connection to the Salem witchcraft trials of 1692. Accused of being a witch, the character Matthew Maule

curses his relative Colonel Pyncheon with the fateful words “God will give him blood to drink!” (1999, 3). Like the castle in Horace Walpole’s Gothic novel, this house has a prophecy of doom derived from a difficult past. Today, as the House of the Seven Gables in Salem, the Ingersoll house draws many visitors.

As Sylvia Ann Grider (1999) explains in “The Haunted House in Literature, Popular Culture, and Tradition,” the American haunted house is “the ugly stepsister of the enchanted castle” (193). Certain features show that the house is haunted: a “gambrel roof, turrets or towers, and broken or boarded-up windows with ‘spooky’ inhabitants peeking out” (181). Often located on a hill or in another isolated place, this house symbolizes unhealthy separation from other people, neglect, and openness to dangerous supernatural forces. Grider notes that the image of the American haunted house as a spooky mansion owes part of its genesis to funeral homes: large, imposing buildings that offer comfortable spaces for people to mourn their lost loved ones.

Since the early 1960s, visits to haunted houses have been vividly portrayed in horror films. *The Innocents* (1961), based on Henry James’s novella *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), begins with a young governess’s journey from London to Bly, a country house in Essex, where she will teach young Miles and Flora. Soon she learns that both the last governess, Miss Jessel, and a valet, Peter Quint, have recently died. Does the governess actually see the ghosts of Jessel and Quint, or is her mind disturbed by social alienation and repression? Literary critics have tended toward the second possibility, but horror fans have favored the first: the governess’s and valet’s ghosts haunt the house and its grounds, exerting an evil influence on anyone who dares to approach them.

Another classic horror film, Shirley Jackson’s (1963) *The Haunting*, is based on her acclaimed novel *The Haunting of Hill House* (Jackson 1959). Two young women with a sensitivity to spirits, Eleanor and Theodora, travel to an eighty-year-old mansion at the behest of a scientist who hopes to prove that ghosts exist. The two women quickly discover that the house wants Eleanor to stay forever. Once Eleanor has decided to stay, she crashes her car into a tree. Like Poe’s House of Usher, Hill House has a malevolent, seething presence. Like James’s *The Turn of the Screw*, the narrative offers some ambiguity. Is Hill House truly haunted, or is Eleanor losing her mind? For viewers of the film who enjoy feeling scared, this is an easy choice; the house’s evil influence explains everything that happens.

Like Hill House, the house that takes center stage in *The Amityville Horror* (1979) inspires a feeling of dread. This film was released shortly

after the publication of Jay Anson's 1977 book of the same title, a narrative about sensational supernatural incidents that allegedly took place after Ronald DeFeo murdered six members of his family on November 13, 1974, at 112 Ocean Avenue in Amityville, New York. According to Anson, this supernatural activity had its genesis in the house having been built upon an Indian burial ground. Although this claim has no clear substantiation, it expresses the Gothic and horror film trope of a curse explaining horrific events. In the film, the house on Ocean Avenue looks like a demonic pumpkin with glowing yellow eyes; like Poe's House of Usher and Jackson's Hill House, it seems to have its own evil sentience. This house has become a popular destination for legend trips in spite of its owners' attempts to keep people away. Over time the house's owners have changed its façade, but teenagers have persisted in visiting, especially on Halloween (Tucker 2008).

In 1999 a shocking new film, *The Blair Witch Project*, brought legend trips into entertainment news. This film seemed disturbingly different from previous horror films, but its introduction resembled that of the first Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto*; *Blair Witch* was presented to the public as "found footage," just as *The Castle of Otranto* was said to be a found manuscript. The "found-footage" model of film making plays on the legend genre's qualities of belief and possibility, making it an ideal visual genre to use with legend-like stories. According to the legend created by the film's writers, Daniel Myrick and Edouardo Sanchez, three film students disappeared in the woods near Burkittsville, Maryland, while trying to learn about the Blair witch, who was executed in the eighteenth century. Part of the story described a hermit who claimed that the spirit of the Blair witch had forced him to kidnap and kill children. The release of a "mocumentary" on the SyFy Channel encouraged belief in this fabricated legend. Another reason for the movie's uncanny appeal was that its actors seemed genuinely scared. Later, moviegoers learned that the actors had been deprived of food while out in the woods and had not had any warning that certain scary things would happen during the night filming. Their screams were real! Since the directors placed the actors within the induced natural context of a legend trip, they succeeded in scaring both the actors and the film's eventual viewers.

Since the release of *Blair Witch*, it has become routine for viewers to see publicity driven variants of legend trips on television. Numerous TV shows have presented investigations of haunted places in which it seems likely that something terrifying will take place. Mikel J. Koven's (2008) *Film, Folklore, and Urban Legends* analyzes the convergence of folklore, belief, and the media in the wildly popular British reality TV show *Most Haunted*, which started in 2002. Koven finds that this show presents "a kind of televised

‘legend trip’” in which the televisual text “functions like a traditional legend-teller, creating a complex, matrixlike relationship among the supernatural belief traditions, the television show, and those watching that show” (154, 153). Because of this relationship, Koven argues, *Most Haunted* is not just entertainment; it is “*ostensive* entertainment” (171). It certainly is, and so are the multitudinous other ghost-hunting reality TV shows that have appeared since then.

There are so many ghost-hunting reality shows on TV now that it is difficult to keep track of them all. One of the most popular is *Ghost Hunters*, which premiered on SyFy in 2004; its spin-off, *Ghost Hunters International*, began in 2008 and ended in 2012. Another extremely popular reality show, *Ghost Adventures*, began in 2008 on the Travel Channel with an intriguing variety of international locations: Romania, Jamaica, Ireland, France, and Canada, among others. *Ghost Lab*, on the Discovery Channel since 2009, stars two brothers, Brad and Barry Klinge, who travel around the United States in an enormous truck seeking evidence of the afterlife in haunted places. Tucker was Skyped in as a guest speaker on *Ghost Lab* when the Klinge brothers came to New York. *Ghost Mine* premiered on the SyFy Channel in 2013 and lasted for two seasons; *Ghost Asylum* premiered in 2014 on Destination America, featuring the Tennessee Wraith Chasers, and is still going strong. With so many ghost-hunting teams out making TV shows, it might seem that there are no more new places to visit—but there are always more.

DIGITAL LEGEND TRIPS

While it may seem a strange kind of “place,” the Internet is a growing setting for a number of contemporary legend-trip experiences. We’re in an age where the distinction between being “online” and being “offline” is less and less clear; most of us have phones or other portable devices that let us take the Internet, in all its connective, informative power, with us in our pockets. This has affected our experience of legends trips just as much as it has affected so many other aspects of our lives. Michael Kinsella (2011), in *Legend-Tripping Online*, talks about the familiar ways that legend trips are mediated, even in entirely offline situations, such as through the use of a Ouija board or electronic voice phenomena recorder. He then moves to look at situations of technological mediation: the ways that computers, cell phones, and the Internet can further mediate our ostensive experiences.

Given that the Internet allows people to interact with each other and with narratives without the requirement of physical presence, we find

opportunities online that don't exist offline. We can observe and even “go along” with someone's legend trip to a haunted location that might be hundreds of miles from where we are, if they've posted a video of their adventure to social media. We can copy and paste a chain letter warning about a girl who died after being bullied in the hopes that our forwarding the message will help us avoid her wrath. We can watch filmed experiments with events like séances and the game “light as a feather, stiff as a board” and compare them to our own ritual attempts, without ever meeting the people who made the video.

Taking the idea of legend tripping further, toward a more purposefully constructed, commercial experience, we have alternate reality games (McNeill 2012), experiences that play on many of the same ideas as legend trips and found-footage movies: blurring the line between what's known to be real and what's suspected to be fiction. Alternate reality games often serve as viral marketing—in anticipation of a film or video game release, companies will begin planting clues for fans, such as phone numbers to call or websites to visit, in existing media. Fans then can break through the fictional barrier between the real world and that of the film or game, and can find themselves following trails that lead to increasingly strange additional clues, taking them to places in the real world they might otherwise never visit. Even when the end result is revealed to be commercial, participants often feel as though they've participated in something quite “folk,” and may pursue more traditional legend trips and legendary explorations in response.

As Kinsella says, things like digital legend tripping and alternate reality games become “world-making venues” that invite participants to “perform belief in worlds of plausibility to which the community gives breadth, coherence, and a sense of the real” (2011, 63). The world-making nature of the Internet makes it a perfect medium through which to explore the legend's inherent qualities of possibility and doubt. The ability to form a community online, without the need for like-minded people to live nearby, also makes the Internet a great place to share ideas about things like hauntings, aliens, cryptids, and ESP. Discussion forums abound where people share their own memorates, compare details of experiences, and pose questions about the veracity of various accounts. A local legend that doesn't get much attention locally may find a new life online.

Legend trips online can merge the virtual and physical worlds. Offline legend trips can be filmed and posted online, acting as a guide or model for others to follow. A search for “Bloody Mary” on *YouTube* brings up hundreds of thousands of results, ranging from shaky video footage

taken on a cell phone to near-professional-quality amateur short films. Some legend trips are *expected* to be filmed and posted to social media; the #CharlieCharlieChallenge, a divination ritual that uses two crossed pencils to communicate with a spirit named Charlie, shows up far more often online than it does offline (as indicated by its popular hashtag).

The Internet isn't limited to serving as a showcase for offline legend tripping, either. There are entirely digital forms of legendry and legend tripping, too. The emergent genre of "creepypasta" is one way that legends and legend tripping manifest digitally. Derived from the slang term *copypasta*, which emerged in 2007 to describe traditional copied and pasted digital texts, creepypasta refers to similarly shared content, but marked with an ominous or eerie tone. The most (in)famous example of creepypasta is the Slender Man, an Internet horror figure who burst onto the scene in 2009 and who has intrigued, frightened, and baffled Internet users ever since. In 2015, the journal *Contemporary Legend* published a special issue about Slender Man, with articles addressing questions of belief, play, and ostension, among other topics. The editors explain, "The Slender Man phenomenon is greatly indicative of folklore in the digital age, where media convergence and hybridized cultural communication outlets afford individuals greater access to (and dissemination of) information, operational autonomy, and the provision of infinite choice while exploring a vast array of creative avenues" (Blank and McNeill 2015, 9). The description of the Internet as a "hybrid" space is an important development of recent digital folklore studies; scholars have noted that in digital spaces, folk culture and institutional or commercial culture are often blended or combined (Blank 2013, 2015, 2016; Bronner 2009; Howard 2008). "User-generated" content (the more folk elements of digital content) often appears framed by commercial or official elements (such as a social media company's site).

As discussed in the *Contemporary Legend* special issue, the fact that Slender Man can be proven to be fictional—created in response to a web forum challenge to "create a paranormal image"—does not stop the spread of belief in him as a real legend, if not always as a real creature (though that's a popular outcome, too!). Folklorist Andrea Kitta, in her contribution to the special issue, takes on the question of belief directly, noting that Slender Man exists offline in children's games, oral storytelling, and belief. As she explains, "A person's experience reading a Slender Man narrative or watching a video can *feel* just as real as having an actual experience with Slender Man" (Kitta 2015, 64). Elizabeth Tucker's article on Slender Man and dark play similarly highlights the ways that folk culture

brings Slender Man offline and confuses the question of his possible reality (Tucker 2015b, 124–129).

The Internet community at large has done such a good job filling in a folkloresque (Foster 2015) backstory for this creature that an online search about the creature's origins can lead to results that confuse rather than answer the question of whether or not the Slender Man is a “real” legend from antiquity. Jeff Tolbert (2013), in his article “‘The Sort of Story That Has You Covering Your Mirrors’: The Case of Slender Man,” refers to this process of communal creation as “reverse ostension.” As he explains, “If ostension involves the privileging of experience over representation (e.g., acting out the content of a legend text, rather than simply listening to the recitation of a traditional story), Slender Man’s creators are effectively reversing this process by weaving together diverse strands of ‘experience’ (in the form of personal encounters with the creature, documentary and photographic evidence, and other material) into a more or less coherent body of narratives” (3). Of course, folklore that is born digital rarely stays that way. Already there are many accounts of people seeing (or sensing) Slender Man offline, including the horrific stabbing of a young girl in Wisconsin by her two friends, who claimed that the Slender Man told them to do it. If Slender Man was initially brought into being through reverse ostension, the process has now come full circle, and ostensive actions (and crimes, unfortunately) are now growing from the legend.

HOW TO USE THIS CASEBOOK

Like Alan Dundes’s folklore casebooks, which began in the 1980s (e.g., Dundes 1988), this casebook intends to fill the need for an up-to-date, thorough study of a subject that matters to folklorists. Since *Legend Tripping: A Contemporary Legend Casebook* presents major essays on this subject in chronological order, with prefaces written by the two of us, it should be useful as a reference book and as a text in college folklore courses. With support from the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research, we have prepared a book that professional folklorists, especially legend scholars, can use in doing research. The book should also be useful for scholars in other fields, including anthropology and sociology. Up to this point, no one book has presented all of the materials we include here. We have enjoyed putting our book together and hope that our fellow folklorists, scholars in related disciplines, and their students will enjoy it too.

We hope to go beyond an academic audience to appeal to contemporary readers. With roots in ancient epics and connections to popular novels

and films, legend trips explore the boundary between life and death; they also open the door to marvelous understanding from a numinous source. Those of us who have gone on legend trips ponder what took place and wonder if we can go on another trip sometime. Of course we can! As our book shows, legend trips are not just for teenagers; they are for anyone with a lively curiosity who wants to have an amazing experience.

The “Discussion Questions and Projects” section at the end of the book is not just for professors and students; it is for anyone who wants to engage in dialogue about legends and legend trips. Some of the questions and projects have a connection to digital technology. As digital technology grows and changes, we will probably see new modes of legend tripping develop. Currently we can buy ghost-hunting apps for \$1 or less. Although we don’t know what kind of legend tripping will happen next, we can be sure that it will be well worth studying.

NOTE

1. The descriptions of the two legend trips discussed here are based on interaction with members of two groups of people in Binghamton, New York, between 2009 and 2015.