



## Legend Tripping: A Contemporary Legend Casebook

Edited by Lynne S. McNeill and Elizabeth Tucker. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2018. 235 pp. £21.00 (pbk). ISBN 978-1-60732-807-0

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## Book Review

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This volume is the first in a series of International Society for Contemporary Legend Research casebooks, which promises to bring together a variety of scholarly approaches to the subject, along with probing questions and projects for students. If the present volume is anything to go by, this will indeed be a welcome and useful series.

This 'casebook' is essentially a slimmed-down 'reader', mainly bringing together key articles and chapters on legend-tripping research, which many interested in the field will be familiar with, and which those starting out would be well advised to read. This collection is bookended with three original contributions by the editors: an Introduction (McNeill and Tucker), 'Early Studies' (Tucker, Chapter One), and 'Reflections' (McNeill, Chapter Ten). The editors have also provided some relevant and probing questions for students pertaining to each chapter of the book.

The republished studies here are ordered by publication date, from earliest to most recent, which provides us with a clear view of the development in *kinds* of legend trips and scholarly approaches to legend trips. The downside of a collection of previously published papers set in chronological order, however, is that the reader who wishes to survey the history of legend-tripping research is often subjected to reading the same background synthesis of legend-tripping scholarship, paper after paper. However, this also means that papers presenting shifts in scholarship are thrown into sharper relief. For example, the majority of the papers in this casebook interpretively frame legend tripping as an ostensive practice. Such interpretations, while valid in certain contexts, can become predictable and unchallenging, but when we are presented with Elizabeth Bird's paper (Chapter Five), which explores the representation of, and challenge to, gender roles through legend tripping, we pay more attention to the interpretive possibilities within legend-trip research. Another stand-out chapter of this casebook for me was Patricia Meley's paper (Chapter Three). This broadens the methods and analysis of legend-trip fieldwork by taking a longer-term investigation of legend trips among mixed-background adolescents. The second of the two Bill Ellis contributions (Chapter Four) also provides us with an excellent demonstration of the connectedness between legend tripping, popular media, and the development of 'new' folklore, as relevant today as it was when first published in 1991.

Given the dominance of excellent North American scholarship in the field of legend tripping, it is unsurprising that the papers are overwhelmingly by scholars, and about legend trips, from this region. It would have been more satisfying to have one or two chapters outside this domain (through either republished papers or original contributions), although the editors in their Introduction do acknowledge the dominance, and do nod to other work in, for example, the United Kingdom. This book could have seized the opportunity to present more diverse voices and approaches in 'humanity's interest in the frontier between life and death' (cover blurb) that so many legend trips represent. Indigenous, non-Western, the Global South—how does the legend-tripping experience compare?

This quote from the back cover also leads me to another issue with the selected papers: the emphasis on ghost legends and ghost-hunting. Of course, ghosts do dominate legend tripping, but they are not the only subject that inspires it; yet, on reading this book, one is left with the feeling that it is all about ghosts. My main problem with this is that the rich diversity of legend trips is not fully represented, and has the danger of limiting, rather than inspiring,

new legend-trip research. There is also a predominant focus on adolescent legend tripping. Tim Prizer's contribution (Chapter Six) here is a welcome attempt to rebalance this emphasis, and demonstrates that we have ample room to extend our view of the legend trip across all ages and backgrounds.

Despite these small issues, this volume provides gripping case studies, exemplifies key approaches, and is an important contribution to the topic of legend tripping, to the broader subject of contemporary legend, and to the development of folkloristic pedagogies. Through a volume such as this, we can challenge and further legend-tripping research and stimulate interest in the phenomenon and all its variations. While the book will predominantly be of interest to researchers, to teachers, and, particularly, to students, it may also appeal to a broader readership interested in contemporary legends or who themselves engage in their own legend trips.

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