At another level, Albini is dealing theoretically with the structure of groups, organized, unorganized, and syndicated. As controversy over what constitutes a "folk group" continues, any work which deals with what some would define as a folk group, namely, the underworld, can be of value. Albini's definition of "organization" and "syndicate" are limited to criminal organizations and criminal syndicates, but the potential for imaginative use of his categories need not be so limited.

The book deals less inventively with the historical relationships of ethnic groups in an urban setting. Although the predominance of ethnic minorities, Irish, Italian, Jewish, and Black, within the structure of organized crime is acknowledged, Albini only touches briefly on this fact, and the dynamics of the succession of one ethnic group after another to positions of dominance within organized crime are intriguingly outlined but never fully investigated. The author seems to find it enough to point out that others besides Sicilians and Italians have been members and bosses of syndicates, and herein lies a shortcoming of the book. It is written as a defense, a rebuttal of what Albini would call the "legends" about the "Mafia". It is also one of the few attempts in print at a scholarly approach to the subject. Albini's reaction to prior shoddy scholarship is so violent as to make his work appear silly. His research is so rigorous it becomes inane. He quotes his opposition extensively, including not merely some or even most of his opponents' works, but every careless reference to "the Mafia" he could find. His work is, therefore, not only a competent collection of underworld jargon and legend, but an anthology of inept scholarship as well. At times he appears to be blatantly setting up straw men in order to annihilate them. This practice, naturally, takes away from his basically sound arguments.

With a final word about his method, it should be added that although Albini claims to have done some field work for this book, it is primarily a piece of library scholarship. Some of the most interesting portions of the book are the words of his informants but these instances are so few as to be counted on one hand. A further investigation, be it sociological or folkloristic, would do well to make more use of the testimony of informants.

Fredric R. Brandfon is working toward his Ph.D. in folklore at the University of Pennsylvania.

The Ritual Theory of Myth, by Joseph Fontenrose.
77 pp. Bibliography, Index, Index of Greek and Latin Citations.

Reviewed by Sandra K. Stahl

Joseph Fontenrose serves as Professor of Classics at the University of California at Berkeley, and is the author of four major works in the classics and literary criticism: Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and Its Origins (1959), The Cult and Myth of Pyrrhos at Delphi (1960), John Steinbeck: An Introduction and Interpretation (1963), and The Ritual Theory of Myth, first published in 1966. The first two of these he draws upon on several occasions in The Ritual Theory of Myth.
The title of this thin volume is somewhat misleading. Fontenrose is not yet another die-hard disciple of the theory, but rather a helpful scholar who no doubt hopes to save impatient novitiates such as the present reviewer from the bog of outmoded theories. The ritual theory of myth has been very important in the field of literary criticism and in other fields as well. And although few anthropologists, folklorists, or classicists accept the theory, it should not be lightly dismissed without convincing evidence drawn against it. Merely retracing the path of the theory through its development and criticism should be valuable to anyone interested in the process of theory development or the theories of myth.

In this light, then, Fontenrose is helpful in two ways. He briefly presents the major proponents of the theory, discussing the ideas and illustrations most closely associated with each, and he then offers his own critical judgment against the individual ideas and the general theory with, in most cases, convincing evidence gleaned from his own research. This, in fact, points to the underlying criticism Fontenrose wishes to direct against the several founders of the theory -- the fact that they base their theory upon little evidence (which is often misinterpreted) and upon conjecture and second-hand information.

The Ritual Theory of Myth is well-organized and clearly written, the only trouble developing inversely with this reader's knowledge of Greek myth and language. The first two sections of the book deal separately with Lord Raglan and Stanley E. Hyman, the standard-bearers of the theory. Both of these men are, as Fontenrose says, "extreme and derivative," drawing continually upon their authorities, Frazer, Jane Harrison, and S. H. Hooke. In the section on Lord Raglan, Fontenrose offers one of his many attacks on the "sloppy scholarship" of the ritualists. In an article in The Labyrinth (edited by S. H. Hooke), another ritualist, C. N. Deedes, refers to Egyptian seals dating back to about 3000 B.C. which depict the actual killing of the king. This, of course, is presumed to illustrate the ritual sacrifice of the divine king and suggest the Near East as the center of diffusion -- both important concepts in Raglan's theory. Fontenrose immediately destroys the intended effect of the evidence by direct investigation of the seals (in Frankfort's Cylinder Seals), finding that the figures represent the sun-god Shamash killing an enemy. The process of criticism in this example is repeated throughout the first three sections of the book, usually revealing the inaccurate and conjectural quality of much of the evidence for the theory. (Note especially his treatment of Jane Harrison and "The Palaikostro Hymn.")

The final section dealing with definition and function of myth is perhaps the most interesting and valuable to the general reader. Here, Fontenrose proposes that scholars adopt a definition of myth which does not include any statement on origin or function. This would avoid the ritualists' definition of origin and the functional definition of myth as explanatory tales devised to satisfy curiosity. Fontenrose would define a myth as "a story of a certain kind" -- it is traditional; it has characters of a certain kind; and it has a plot (p. 54). He then differentiates between myth, legend, and folktale by the kinds of characters in each. His aim is to find a working definition which can be used by those who wish to work more in the area of research before proposing theories of myth. And again before closing, he laments the failure on the part of Frazer, Raglan,
Harrison, and Hyman to make any detailed analytic comparisons. It is obvious that he supports Levi-Strauss' proposal for structural study. He concludes with a timely call for more analytic study of myth, legends, and folktales.

Sandra K. Stahl is a graduate student at the Folklore Institute, Indiana University. Her special interests are in folklore and literature and in English and comparative literature.