

and the relationships within each group, the social, political and economic histories of each region and country and so forth" (p. 98). One may then ask why he dedicates the largest part of his work to superficial and questionable comparisons, based almost entirely on written sources, if he is critical of this approach himself. The book is obviously conceived for a wide audience, evident in the lack of footnotes and proper attribution of quotations, as well as the pitifully brief bibliography which does not even cover all the works cited in the text. Pegg's noble attempt to correct the common misconception that all folk customs harked back to the dim, pagan past is diminished by his own incongruous approach. Furthermore, the publisher fails to grasp Pegg's point and advertises *Rites and Riots* precisely as what it is **not**, a book describing "the heritage of any people of British or European ancestry" and useful to "anyone who plans to travel to Great Britain or Europe" (the dates of most of the customs are not indicated).

The major strength of the book lies in its illustrations. Some of the photographs date from the turn of the century, and together with the recent color plates and the older engravings, visual variety through time and space is provided. *Rites and Riots* remains then one of the many "pretty picture books," which fail to provide further insights into the dynamics of customs and rituals. This is all the more regrettable, as Bob Pegg's promising ideas-- had they been granted more time to ripen-- would have made his book far more satisfying not only for the wider audience it is aimed at but also for the folklorist and historian.

NOTES

1. Sir James Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (London: MacMillan Publishers Ltd., 1907-15).

Familiar Mysteries: The Truth in Myth. By Shirley Park Lowry. Pp. x + 339, bibliography, index. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982. \$19.95 Cloth.

Reviewed by Eric Montenyohl.

Familiar Mysteries claims familiarity with folklore materials and purports to be of utility to folklorists, both on the book jacket and inside. The author is knowledgeable in folklore in the same sense that Indiana Jones (of **Raiders of the Lost Ark**) is a traditional American folk hero. This book is certainly no contribution to folkloristics; it fails on the most basic grounds, not the least of which is the promise expressed in the subtitle.

A continual problem with the book is the author's definition of "myth" (p. 3): "In this book, "myth" will mean a story about a culture's gods or heroes, a story whose vivid symbols render concrete a special perception about people and their world." The first part of the definition seems to be one with which a folklorist can agree.

But the "or heroes,..." indicates that Lowry has chosen to speak of myth in the vaguest possible terms. But this only demonstrates that Lowry has no sense that myth is one of the oral forms of folklore. Her book dwells on non-oral, non-sacred literary or subliterate stories, from Homer to the Incredible Hulk and Star Trek.

The result of Lowry's definition of "myth" and attempt to distinguish myth from legend or folktales (citing G.S. Kirk) is her utter abandonment of any sacred narratives. Should any references to sacred narratives appear in the book, it is not because they are sacred to a culture; it is because Lowry can claim that the culture utilizes some of the same symbols as narratives from other cultures. The book, then, is not an examination of myth (sacred stories), but an attempt to draw examples of similar or recurrent symbols from random world cultures to impress the reader with Joseph Campbell's theories.

Chapters 1-3 are all grouped together as "The Symbolic Language of Myths." In these chapters Lowry begins assembling symbols for life and death and giving examples from cultures around the world, in the tradition of nineteenth century anthropologists. Here she claims the unanimity of human experience and thought over and over: "Because in human experience flying is the freest form of motion and birds are the most conspicuous flying creatures, we often picture the soul as flying like a bird." (p.66) or "But precisely because water is for most peoples an alien medium, a natural barrier, the separateness of

the Other World is often symbolized by a boundary of water." (p. 67). In her selection of symbols and examples and in her attempts to assert the uniformity of human existence, Lowry blends the diverse human cultures into a pablum. Perhaps the best example of this is Lowry's own conclusion to the section: "we come to terms with even the greatest mysteries by seeing them as analogous to familiar things" (p. 72). This is hardly profound.

The second section of **Familiar Mysteries** should offer more to folklorists, as Lowry turns to "The Hero." Chapter 4 is entitled "What Heroes Do." Despite prefacing the chapter with two quotations from the Grimms' **Kinder-und-Hausmärchen**, the author rapidly abandons any direct use of mythic or folkloric narratives. In considering "The Dark Forest" as a recurrent symbol in heroic narratives, Lowry might have used any of a number of traditional narratives. Instead, she examines (1) Dante's **The Divine Comedy**, (2) Spenser's **The Faerie Queen**, (3) Coleridge's "Christabel," (4) Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown," and (5) James Dickey's **Deliverance**. The book seems to have abandoned all interest in myth to focus on literary symbolism.

"What Heroes Do" (as the author admits she draws from Joseph Campbell) is "Quest, boon, and return; This is the essence of the heroic life-pattern. The hero leaves the safety of home, ventures into the wilderness, finds something there that is mysteriously dangerous or valuable --often both--and returns home in triumph." (p. 78). This is absolutely true for the romance and its related literary forms. But Lowry omits that there are heroes in myth, legend, folktales, and literature who are not "heriocratic." What of the great number of stories which are mythic but not heroic in this sense?

Of primary concern in this chapter, though, is the author's use of literature to describe mythic symbols (apparently because Melville, Conrad, **Beowulf**, **Wuthering Heights**, Thomas Hardy, **Huckleberry Finn**, and **Star Wars** are more familiar to us than myths are). This use of literature and literary symbolism to describe myth and mythic symbolism is a considerably more complex issue than the author faces. She assumes that symbolism is symbolism, mythic or otherwise. Neither literature nor myth exists in a vacuum; each form can create symbols. But each also can borrow symbols from the other. In doing so, one form cannot merely illustrate

or describe a symbol without commenting or criticizing the other's use--and thus a complex interaction begins. Assembling literary symbols to seek "The Truth in Myth" is certainly not using the best evidence, myth itself. Indeed, to study "what heroes do" one must distinguish between literary heroes (whether Huckleberry Finn or Walter Mitty) and mythic heroes (Odysseus).

Chapter 5 pursues "The Heroic Life-Pattern," a subject tailor made for folklorists. Lowry again depends on Joseph Campbell for theory, adding her own examples: Robin Hood, Neal Cassidy, Han Solo, and Humphrey Bogart. It is very disappointing to find that here, on a topic about which folklorists have written fairly frequently, the author seems wholly ignorant. Lowry does base her elaboration of the heroic life-pattern on Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*; in the same footnote she also cites Jan de Vries' *Heroic Song and Heroic Legend*. She mentions Lord Raglan, although she accuses *The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth, and Drama* of "frequent lapses in logic and scholarship" (p. 313). There exist numerous other sources from American folkloristics that Lowry should have cited, works familiar to most American folklore scholars.¹ If Ms. Lowry had consulted some of these other sources, she would have discovered support for some of her arguments about the romantic hero's life-pattern. But she would also discover the complexities in making generalizations about the legendary folk hero, the popular hero, or any folk hero.

Section 3 of the book, "The Compleat Hero and the Monster at the Door," and Section 4, "Conquering Death," continue the author's work of assembling symbols and examples from around the world. There is little concern for cultural differences so long as the cultures share similar symbolic representations. Section 3 is more interesting than the final one, which is dominated by a discussion of Christianity's concern with death and the changes in those attitudes. This section plods badly in comparison to the rest of the book.

In sum, the book's claims are badly overstated. *Familiar Mysteries* operates with the literary conception of myth, not an anthropological or folkloristic conception.

The book does not seek "the truth in myth" so much as recurrent symbols. And, as it contains no significant amount of folklore, it offers nothing consequence to folklorists.

NOTES

1. See, for example:

Richard Dorson's **American Folklore** (chapters 2 and 6 look particularly at American heroes and the forces that molded them);

Richard Dorson's **America in Legend** (The Early National Period is especially revealing for the development of heroic figures, but certainly from then until contemporary times);

Archer Taylor's "The Biographical Pattern in Traditional Narrative," **Journal of the Folklore Institute** 1 (1964): 114-29;

Otto Rank's **The Myth of the Birth of the Hero**;

Francis Lee Utley's "Lincoln Wasn't There, or Lord Raglan's Hero" in the supplement to **The CEA Critic**, vol. 22, no. 9 (1965): 1-33.

Horace Beck's "The Making of the Popular Legendary Hero" in Wayland Hand (ed.) **American Folk Legend: A Symposium**, pp. 121-132.

Alan Dundes, "The Hero Pattern and the Life of Jesus" **Colloquy** 25 (1977). Reprinted in Dundes (ed.), **Interpreting Folklore**, pp. 233-261.

Orrin E. Klapp, "The Folk Hero" **Journal of American Folklore** 62 (1949): 17-29.