

Robert Ackerman. **The Myth and Ritual School: J.G. Frazer and the Cambridge Ritualists.** Theorists of Myth, 2. New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991. Pp. xiv + 253, editor's foreword, preface, bibliography, index. \$34.00 cloth.

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I see most of their books on my shelf, thanks in part to the paperback revolution that began around 1959, when I was finishing high school. They include Jane Harrison's *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion, Ancient Art and Ritual*, and *Themis*; Gilbert Murray's *The Rise of the Greek Epic, Five Stages of Greek Religion*, and *The Classical Tradition in Poetry*; and Francis Cornford's *Thucydides Mythohistoricus, From Religion to Philosophy, The Origin of Attic Comedy*, and *Principium Sapientiae*. The fourth member of the group, A.B. Cook, author of a multi-volume study on Zeus, is the only member of the group whose books have not been reissued.

The Cambridge Ritualists were the most famous and influential of the myth-ritualists. They were all classical scholars, and except for Gilbert Murray, who was at Oxford, they were all affiliated with Cambridge University. The great influence upon them was their contemporary, James George Frazer, from whom they took much of their interest in anthropology and in comparativism.

It can be easy to forget the excitement that the Cambridge Ritualists evidently felt about their theme and could sometimes inspire in others. An excerpt from a lecture on Hamlet and Orestes delivered in 1914 by Gilbert Murray will perhaps convey something of it:

The things that thrill and amaze us in *Hamlet* or the *Agamemnon* are not any historical particulars about medieval Elsinore or pre-historic Mycenae, but things belonging to the old stories and the old magic rites, which stirred and thrilled our forefathers five and six thousand years ago; set them dancing all night in the hills, tearing beasts and men in pieces, and giving up their own bodies to a ghastly death, in hope thereby to keep the green world from dying and to be the saviours of their own people." (*The Classical Tradition in Poetry* [Cambridge, Mass., 1927], p. 236)

Ackerman tells the story of this fascinating group of British scholars clearly, intelligently, and interestingly, tracing its origins and development, its accomplishments, and its reception. He deals both with their scholarly ideas and with their relationships to one another and to other scholars. To this end he makes considerable use of their personal letters published and

unpublished, giving us many enjoyable glimpses into their own views of and feelings about the events in their lives, such as that Harrison was exasperated that Cook's writings had no "plot."

The first chapters survey the intellectual background. Chapter One surveys eighteenth-century rationalists with their view of religion and mythology as error, and the reaction to them initiated by Vico and the German romantics. Chapter Two deals with the nineteenth-century romantic historians, who placed a more positive value upon mythology as the spiritual expression of a folk or nation, and with the philologists (that is, scholars of language, linguistics, history, and antiquity in general), whose triumph was the employment of the comparative method to demonstrate the kinship of the Indo-European languages. In midcentury Max Mueller applied the methods of comparative philology to mythology, begetting comparative mythology. Toward the end of the century (Chapter Three), Andrew Lang attacked the weaknesses of the comparative mythologists, E.B. Tylor laid the foundation for an evolutionary study of human culture, and William Robertson Smith in his comparative study of Semitic peoples demonstrated the importance of ritual in ancient religion. The next chapter describes how J.G. Frazer, a classicist turned anthropologist and folklorist under the influence especially of Tylor and Smith, extended comparative evolutionary anthropology into the classical past.

The final three chapters are devoted to the Ritualists themselves, especially to Jane Harrison. They were active from ca. 1900-1915, working on the origins of Greek religion and drama. Jane Harrison, born in 1850, was actually a few years older than Frazer and was among the first generation of women admitted to English university education. Her close ties with Murray, Cornford, and Cook individually, together with her broad conception of their common subject, her sense of mission, and her passionate nature, placed her in the center of the group. Unlike Frazer, she embraced Freud's psychology and Durkheim's sociology, for she was strongly attracted to imaginative ideas in which both reason and emotion played a role. She met Gilbert Murray in 1900, and they became friends for life. She wrote her famous *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* in part to correct the purely literary approach to Greek mythology and religion that then was current in Britain. Later Harrison became acquainted with Francis Cornford, who went on to author a number of books mostly on the theme of religion and philosophy, and with Arthur Cook.

Among the basic ideas elaborated by Harrison were that rites (*dromena*, "things done") were performed collectively by a social group, which thereby created and projected their god. The *eniautos-daimon* (literally, "year-daimon" in Harrison's not very good Greek) was the incarnation of the whole world-process. The chief seasonal festival of the early Greeks was that of spring, and from it arose two great cultural

institutions: athletic games and drama. The spring *dromenon*, conceived of dramatically as a conflict between living beings, was represented either as a death-and-rebirth or as a contest in which one being emerged victorious. In Athens a unique union took place between this ritual and the epic legends, resulting in the creation of Greek tragedy, but the ritual itself lives on in Europe in the springtime mummers plays and carnival festivals.

The Cambridge Ritualists, who together with Frazer have had so much influence on the scholarship in the twentieth century, especially on literary scholarship (for example, Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*), are enjoying a revival of interest at the present time. In addition to the present book by Robert Ackerman, we also have *The Cambridge Ritualists Reconsidered* (Illinois Classical Studies, Supplement 2, 1991), edited by another intellectual historian, William Calder, a volume to which Ackerman contributes an essay. Shelley Arlen has published a bibliography of the school, *The Cambridge Ritualists: An Annotated Bibliography* (1990), and among other relevant books Ackerman has published a biography of Frazer, *J. C. Frazer: His Life and Work* (1987).

Readers should be warned that in two chapters the numbering of the footnotes becomes confused when the notes gathered at the end of the chapters cease corresponding to the numbers in the text. In Chapter Three things go wrong beginning with superscript 20 in the text, which really corresponds to note 21, superscript 21 to note 22, etc.; similarly, in Chapter Six, superscript 31 corresponds to note 32, and so on.

**Hal Rammel. *Nowhere in America: The Big Rock Candy Mountain and Other Comic Utopias*.** Folklore and Society Series. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990. Pp. xii + 165, illustrations, bibliography, index. \$25.95 cloth.

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Hal Rammel explores the "history and geography of Nowhere" in this readable and enjoyable excursus into the nature and function of the comic utopian impulse in popular and folk culture. His initial interest was spurred by his purchase a few years previously of Red Ingle's 1947 recording "Nowhere," a nonsense song that describes and valorizes a land of plenty and liberation, a place where no taxes or mothers-in-law exist but where money and food and sex abound. His attempts to find parallels to the themes of this song serve to form the historical, comparative, and theoretical orientations of this book.