

Furthermore, the editors could have dealt more explicitly with issues of representation. For example, although there are snippets of revealing commentary that suggests how the WPA workers regarded the people they interviewed, the reader is able to gain only a limited understanding of ways in which the ideology and research agenda of the WPA influenced the portrayal of life in Virginia during the era of the Great Depression.

Talk About Trouble is a welcome addition to the literature on the WPA writing projects and an invaluable historical documentation of Virginia folklife. When the WPA's state guides were first published, many of them were met with mixed reviews. With the benefit of 50 years of hindsight, the Perdues worked diligently and carefully to develop a study that shows the value of WPA field materials and allows the people interviewed to speak for themselves in a sympathetic manner that is not always evident in the original publications of the WPA.

David Leeming with Margaret Leeming. **A Dictionary of Creation Myths.** New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. Pp. vii + 330, bibliography, index. \$15.95 paper.

Tom Mould

At a time in Folklore scholarship when performance theories appear omnipresent, context reigns supreme, and ethno poetics demand attention in any translated text, the cross-cultural collection would seem a dying breed. But the comparativist dies hard in the folklorist, in the collector even harder, hence this dictionary of creation myths from across the globe amassed by David and Margaret Leeming. First published in 1994 as the *Encyclopedia of Creation Myths*, the book has been reissued in paperback as the *Dictionary of Creation Myths*. The name change appears to be an attempt at more accurate labeling: the entries far more closely resemble those of a dictionary—brief, suggestive, and heavily abridged—than more detailed encyclopedic entries.

The format is novel, the collection less so. The majority of entries have been amassed from previous collections of world creation myths. By summarizing many of the myths and including only the barest of contextual information, the book attempts to surpass previous collections of creation myths in sheer breadth. The collection covers the myths of small, ethnically organized groups such as the Cupeno Indians of California, as well as those of expansive, international religious groups such as Christians and Muslims. The entries also include a number of concepts and terms intended both to facilitate an understanding of creation myths as a genre as well as to unify the book thematically. In their brief introduction, the Leemings suggest that

this cohesive theme is based upon universal structures and archetypal forms. The categories of creation—from chaos, a cosmic egg or mound, world parents, earth-diving, or emergence from other worlds—have been generally accepted by scholars and have been used in earlier collections by Maria Leech and Barbara Sproul (among others) from which many of the entries of this kind are culled.

The archetypal forms, however, echo more loudly the theories of Carl Jung, James Frazer, and Joseph Campbell. And, like the works of these authors, this book encourages comparative, cross-cultural analyses of the world's creation myths. While perusing the entry on Dogon Creation, for example, we are told to see also "incest in creation myths," "Creation from a Cosmic Egg," "Creation by *Deus Faber*," and "Creation Myths as Explanation." Following these leads, we come upon the myths of other groups with similar themes in their creation myths. The drawback to such hopscotch reading is that it encourages facile leaps into cross-cultural comparison without sufficient cultural or historical context. This lack of context is a problem of any expansive collection of folklore, particularly one whose scope is the entire globe.

The utility of the book lies not in the strength of individual selections, but in the attempts to unify the book thematically—one entry leads to another related entry, and then on to another. Recognizing that organization into chapters according to type of creation myth is problematic (it rules out other interesting connections between material according to less global structure and themes), the Leemings have opted for short entries that lead the reader in a multitude of directions. While this is useful for showing the complexity and multivocality of the material, it makes reading difficult.

Any collection of such global proportions will demand trade-offs, in this case, breadth for context, multivocality for readability. As an introduction to creation myths, the Leemings' effort is a laudable one. But for a more coherent analysis, many of the collections the Leemings have drawn upon to make this book are far more effective.