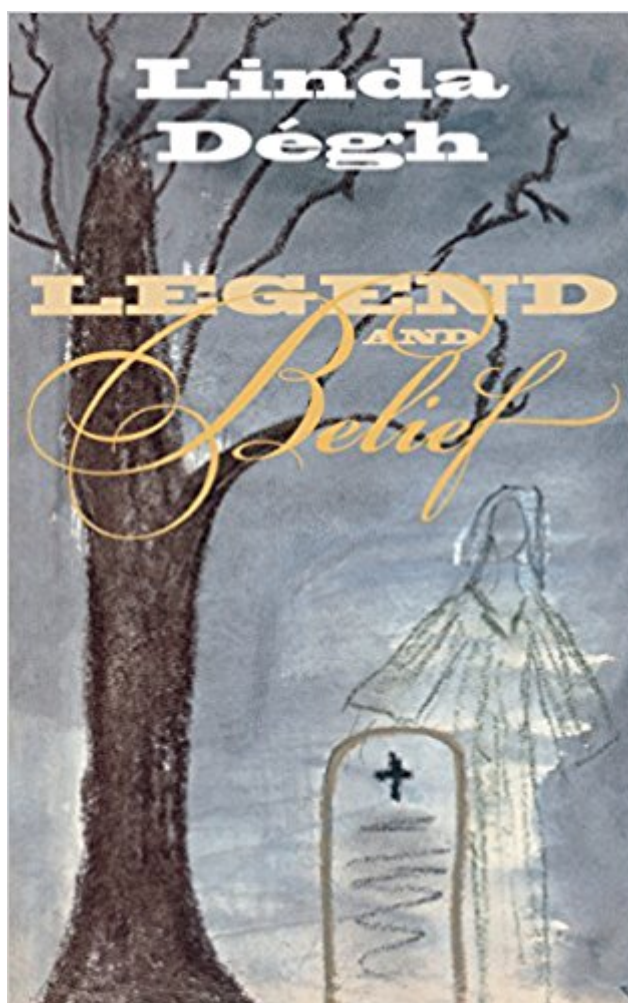


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Legend And Belief: Dialectics Of A Folklore Genre



Synopsis

Legend and Belief: Dialectics of a Folklore Genre
Linda Dowling
An acclaimed folklorist asks "What is legend?" Legend and Belief is a descriptive and analytical study of the legend, the most prolific and characteristic form of folklore in contemporary Western civilization. Not that the legend does not have ancient roots; like the tale, the joke, the ballad, the proverb, and mummery, it was also a part of an archaic preindustrial tradition. But the legend—as old as conversation and debate, and similarly questioning the human condition—was able to survive technological innovations. It has remained contemporaneous, whereas many other genres succumbed to their own anachronism. The legend's concerns are universal and eternal, touching on the most sensitive areas of our existence. That is why stories about supernatural encounters, possessions, divine and infernal miracles, evil spirits, monsters, and prophetic dreams, as well as horror stories about insane and criminal agencies, inundate the urban/industrial world. Industrial advancement does not change the basic fragility of human life, while commercialization and the consumer orientation of the mass media have helped legends travel faster and farther. Legends are not only communicated orally, face-to-face, but also appear in the press, on radio and TV, on countless internet websites, and by e-mail to keep alive new waves of the "culture of fear."
Linda Dowling, Distinguished Professor Emerita of Folklore at Indiana University, is a folklorist/ethnologist whose speciality is the analysis of personally observed creative processes of narration in both traditional and modern communities of Europe and North America. Her numerous publications include *Four Lives: People in the Tobacco Belt*; *Folktales and Society*; *American Folklore and the Mass Media*; and *Narratives in Society*.
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Customer Reviews

"Though urban legends have become trendy, the legend itself is not a new genre in American and European folklore. DãfÂ©gh (Degh) (emer., folklore, Indiana Univ.) has spent a lifetime gathering contemporary legends, reflecting on how they function in culture, and analyzing what they reveal about people and society. Neither a legend collection nor a recycling of old articles, this book in its early chapters defines and describes legends and situates legend studies in folklore and ethnology. Later chapters discuss legends as texts, legend tellers and networks, and the social and physical contexts in which legends flourish. These chapters touch on legend scares about AIDS needles in coin boxes, razors in apples, LSD on tickets, and satanism at Proctor and Gamble, and on legend-inspired personalities such as legend trippers, exorcists, the Columbine shooters, and leaders of suicide cults. The final chapter analyzes particular legends and legend complexes in detail. Even libraries that hold excellent books of legends and legend essays will want to own this definitive study, the crowning achievement of a scholar who understands that folklore can be not nice but dangerous and that we neglect it at our peril. Upper-division undergraduates through faculty; general readers." [W. B. McCarthy, Pennsylvania State University, Choice, June 2002](#)

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