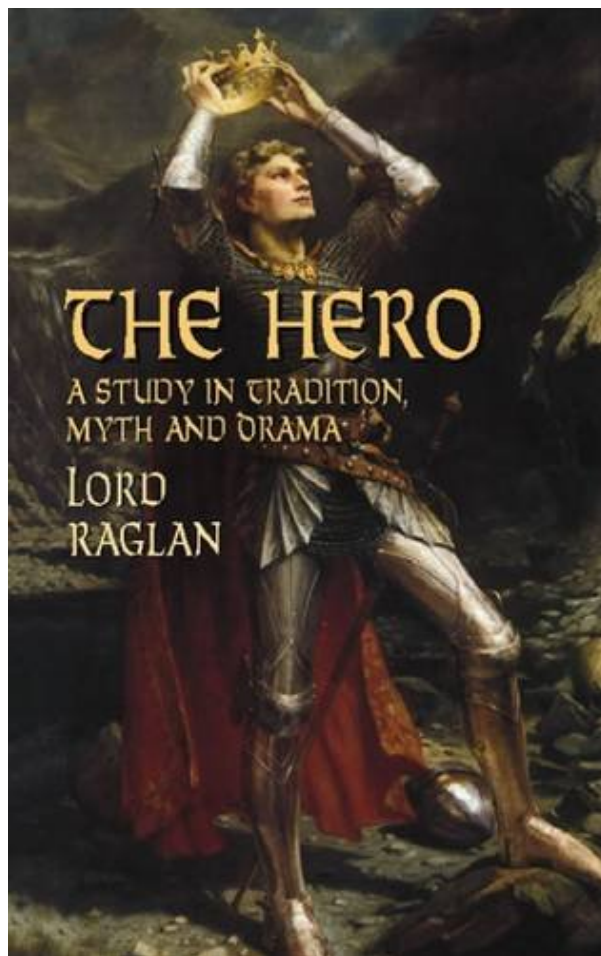
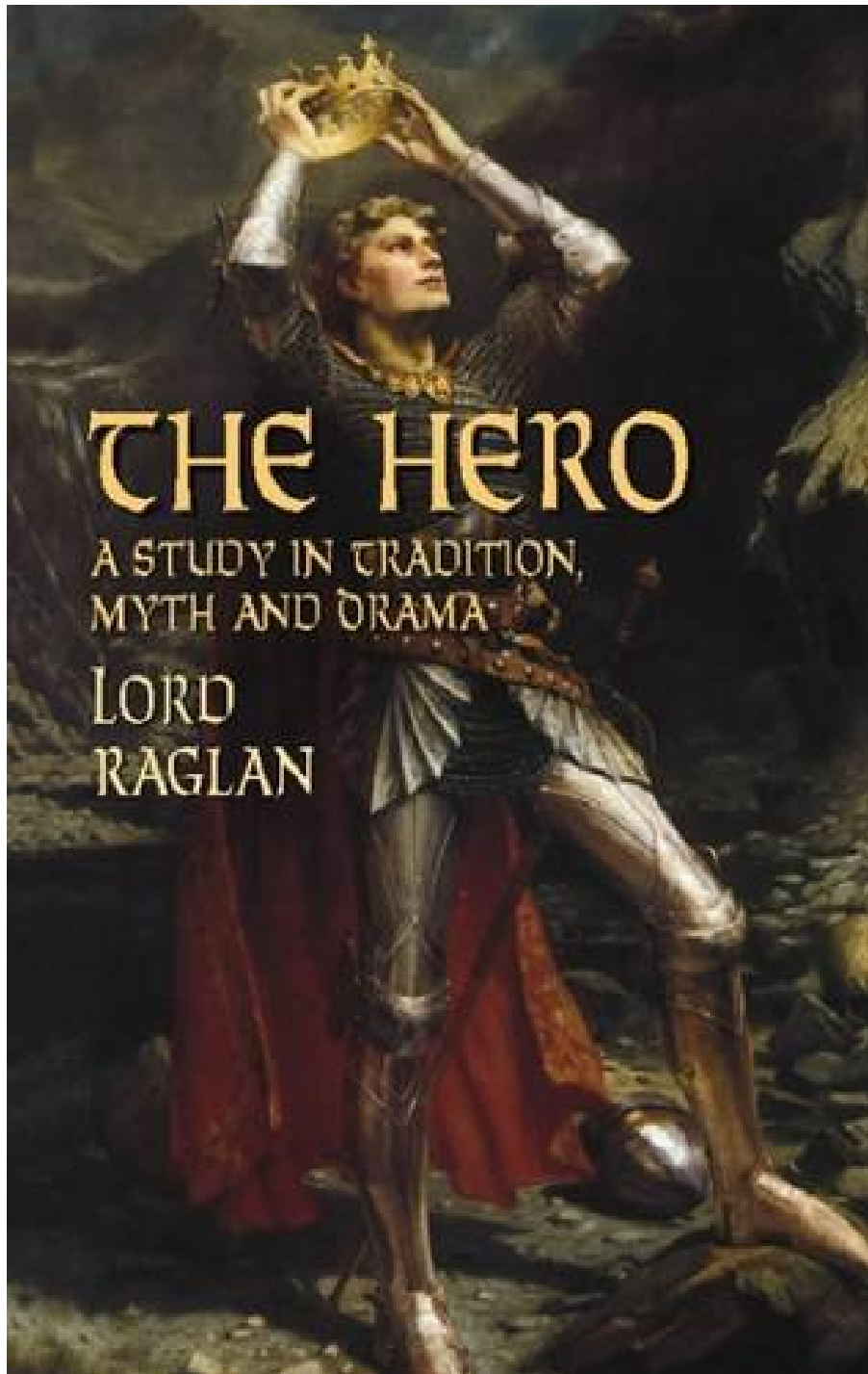


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His mother is a virgin and he's reputed to be the son of a god; he loses favor and is driven from his kingdom to a sorrowful death — sound familiar? In *The Hero*, Lord Raglan contends that the heroic figures from myth and legend are invested with a common pattern that satisfies the human desire for idealization. Raglan outlines 22 characteristic themes or motifs from the heroic tales and illustrates his theory with events from the lives of characters from Oedipus (21 out of a possible 22 points) to Robin Hood (a modest 13).

A fascinating study that relates details from world literature with a lively wit and style, it was acclaimed by literary critic Stanley Edgar Hyman as "a bold, speculative, and brilliantly convincing demonstration that myths are never historical but are fictional narratives derived from ritual dramas." This new edition of *The Hero* (which originally appeared some 13 years before Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*) is assured of a lasting popularity. This book will appeal to scholars of folklore and mythology, history, literature, and general readers as well.

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- 336 pages

About the Author

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Most helpful customer reviews

44 of 44 people found the following review helpful.

Better than Campbell

By Jimbo

Sacrilege, I know, but I found this book to be the most inciteful explanation of the hero mono-myth, at least in regards to western civilization, that I have ever read.

The basic premise is that the hero journey, which forms the basis for all western stories, myths and legends, is a remnant of an ancient ritual drama enacted at the coronation of a priest-king (probably in ancient Mesopotamia).

A definition: A ritual, according to Raglan, is an specific act performed for a magical purpose. A dramatic ritual is a ritual performed for an audience, and a ritual drama is a dramatic ritual where the participants play

specific roles. In order to play roles a story/plot was needed and this story forms the myth. The myth of the priest-king outlived the ritual and became the many myths and folktales we are familiar with, from Hercules to Robin Hood to Luke Skywalker and Harry Potter (my additions).

Raglan argues that at one time kings were more than kings, they were priests, even gods, and replaced on a regular basis. The ritual surrounding this replacement involved sacrificing the old king (in reality or ritually) and raising up a suitable substitute. Raglan says there are at least twenty-two aspects to this mono-myth and the closer the legend fits these aspects the less likely the hero was a historical personage at all.

His argument is that all historical persons that we know of from actual evidence have differed greatly from these twenty-two points. However all purely legendary heroes curiously share most of them.

- (1) Born of a royal virgin.
- (2) His father a King and
- (3) Often a near relative of mother, but
- (4) The circumstances of his conception are unusual and
- (5) He is reputed to be the son of a god.
- (6) An attempt is made to kill him at birth (often by father or father-figure) but
- (7) He is spirited away and
- (8) Raised by foster parents in a far country.
- (9) We are told nothing of his childhood.
- (10) On reaching manhood he journeys to his future kingdom.
- (11) Faces trials and tests.
- (12) Marries a princess and
- (13) Becomes king.
- (14) Rules uneventfully
- (15) Prescribes laws
- (16) Loses favor with the Gods or his subjects and
- (17) Is driven away where
- (18) He meets with a mysterious death
- (19) Often at the top of a hill.

(20)His children, if any, do not succeed him.

(21)His body is not buried, however

(22)He has one or more holy resting places.

Curiously Raglan neglected, while covering several legendary figures who fit this prototype, to mention Jesus Christ. Perhaps it was the time he wrote in (the 1930s).

Lord Raglan makes an excellent argument for his thesis.

I can't believe I am the first to review this amazing book.

Highly recommended.

23 of 25 people found the following review helpful.

Not so curious after all

By Liebestod

For Jimbo and others who may have wondered why Lord Raglan did not cover Jesus, a natural "top scorer," the answer is simple. The original publisher, Methuen, was a publisher mainly of religious books. Fortunately, generations of readers who have read this book have readily reached their own conclusions.

Lord Raglan's style is blunt and some of his conventions pedantic (such as the use of quotes at the beginning of each line to indicate continuous quotations). More recent scholarship has challenged some of his conclusions, such as the historical veracity (or lack thereof) of the Icelandic sagas. However, his simple and straightforward presentation of this revolutionary idea remains powerful, and a welcome antidote to Campbell's self-dramatizing quasi-psychobabble about "The Hero's Journey." This small volume will be eye-opening for anyone interested in mythology and its evolution from ritual drama. It will also serve as an antidote to the common perception that "all legends are based on truth." They are, but it is not the truth of historical facts, but of human development and our love of a good story.

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

The Literary Evolution of Heroic Figures from Ritual Dramas

By Magickal Merlin

If you are a fellow admirer of mythical legends and heroic dramas, then you will be captivated by this book. One of the literary questions, I ask from time to time, is whether Merlin or Jesus Christ, was the first true magician. Both performed miracles and feats that amazed watchers. Their accounts rippled outward through bardic narratives and recorded in countless legendary tales. But, this study glosses over the Jesus topic. Whether because of moral sensitivity or whether expurgated due to the mores of the day. This myth theory deals with the major classical epics from the European perspective. However, there are no tales from Afrika, India, the Americas or Asia. All heroic myths may have started from the first campfire rituals of Eastern Afrika. And as human migration spread, so did the retelling of the proto-myths. The myths evolved and the characters evolved. Yet, the root basis of our modern fictional legends derive from a wandering sole folk-teller's tongue on ancient ritual dramas. I think one of the greatest achievements of this complex exposition, is to convey, that all of mythical tales are patterned upon a single basic human desire to idealize the deeds of our heroic figures. I'm surprised that this book is not well-known today. I'm glad to have discovered this work on myth traditions. And would recommend it to anyone else interested in literary pursuits and drama studies.

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