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Goddess and Grail: The Battle for Arthur's Promised Land. Jeffrey John Dixon

BRIEFLY NOTED

GODDESS AND GRAIL: THE BATTLE FOR ARTHUR'S PROMISED LAND.

Jeffrey John Dixon. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2017. viii + 261 p. ISBN 9781476668666. paperback. \$35.00.

DIXON TRACES THE HISTORY OF THE MATTER OF BRITAIN from pagan mythology through the medieval Arthurian cycles to modern romantic treatments by William Blake and J.R.R. Tolkien. Part 1, "Mythological Roots," focuses on supernatural women in Arthurian literature (e.g. the Lady of the Lake, Ninienne, Morgan, and Guenevere) and their relationships to pre-Christian goddesses, all of whom, in Dixon's view, reflect the moon goddess, Diana. Part 2 focuses upon "Realms of Symbolism," largely, the Grail. The book's structure, then, presupposes an ancient philosophical "battle" between female and male, moon and sun, goddess and Grail, pagan and Christian. Dixon's approach is based on such sources as Robert Graves' *The White Goddess* (Faber & Faber, 1948), and Anne Baring and Jules Cashford's *The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image* (Penguin, 1991). Like those works, Dixon's comparativist methods will be most attractive to readers interested in neo-pagan Goddess studies. However, Dixon's work lies open to the same criticisms as his theoretical predecessors. Graves, for example, has been accused of employing "poor philology, inadequate texts and out-of-date archeology" (Wood 12). Baring and Cashford have been noted for "uncritically appropriating Jungian archetypal analysis" (Taylor). Dixon's own arguments are aimed squarely at the popular and speculative, rather than the scientific and scholarly. He writes, "Where history and archaeology are inconclusive, the legends of the Matter of Britain can provide us with an imaginative theology and meta-history that tell us more about the soul of its people than science" (27). Additionally, Dixon's book is plagued by weak writing, run-on sentences, and a number of errors. For example, Tolkien's biographer is misnamed "Humphrey Burton" (2), and Satan, rather than Lucifer, is named as the fallen angel who rules in Hell (7). Although somewhat dated, readers seeking more scholarly treatments of goddess studies can find them in *Roles of the Northern Goddess* by Hilda Ellis Davidson (Routledge, 1998), and *The Concept of the Goddess* edited by Sandra Billington and Miranda Green (Routledge, 1998). For a scholarly yet accessible treatment of the development of Grail legend, see *The Holy Grail: History and Legend* by Juliette Wood (University of Wales, 2012).

Dixon is also the author of *Gawain and the Grail Quest: Healing the Waste Land in Our Time* (Floris, 2012) and *The Glory of Arthur: The Legendary King in Epic Poems of Layamon, Spenser and Blake* (McFarland, 2014).

—Kris Swank

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- Wood, Juliette. "The Concept of the Goddess." *The Concept of the Goddess*, edited by Sandra Billington and Miranda Green, Routledge, 1998, reprinted 2002, pp. 8-25.



ABOUT THE REVIEWERS

JOE R. CHRISTOPHER is Professor *emeritus* of English at Tarleton State University, Stephenville TX. He has published two books (one in collaboration) on C.S. Lewis, published one chapbook of Tolkienian verse, and been an assistant editor of *Truths Breathed Through Silver: The Inklings' Moral and Mythopoetic Legacy* (ed. Jonathan B. Himes, Cambridge Scholars, 2008). Besides other editorial work, he has published essays on Lewis, Tolkien, Charles Williams, Dorothy L. Sayers, and some related authors, as well as such popular writers as Anthony Boucher, Ellery Queen, John Dickson Carr, Poul Anderson, Robert A. Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, and Gene Wolfe, and such standard authors as the Pearl Poet, Shakespeare, Coleridge, Hawthorne, Tennyson, and John Heath-Stubbs. He has published well over 150 poems. He has had one play—a farce about a vampire—produced at his university His book of poems about poetry—listed as *Ars Poetica* on Amazon.com, but in full *The Variety of Poetic Genres: Ars Poetica*—was published by Mellen Poetry Press in 2012.

PETER G. EPPS (M.A. '02, Ph.D. '09, Baylor) is a Religion and Literature Scholar, poet, and teacher. Over the past two decades, he has taught at Baiko Gakuin University in Shimonoseki, Japan; at Belhaven College and the College of Biblical Studies in Houston, Texas; and at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma. Most recently, he assisted with curriculum revision at St. Gregory's University during efforts to renew the school in its mission as Oklahoma's only Catholic institution of higher education. His most recent collections of poetry are *Going Home Words* (2014) and *The Clay Pot* (2016). His current research interests include the Thomistic doctrine of analogy, Ricouer's intervention in hermeneutics, and the integration of the Liberal and Practical Arts in the Catholic tradition.

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BONNIE GAARDEN teaches Bible and mythology at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. She has published several articles on MacDonald's fiction and fantasies, as well as a 2011 book, *The Christian Goddess: Archetype and Theology in the Fantasies of George MacDonald*.

TIFFANY BROOKE MARTIN has a PhD in English and the Teaching of English from Idaho State University. Her dissertation was on Owen Barfield's writings with a focus on fantasy and fiction, and she is an adviser and editor for the Owen Barfield Literary Estate. Tiffany currently works in communications for Roquette, a global company that produces plant-based ingredients for health and nutrition markets.

MICHAEL DAVID PREVETT is currently a graduate student at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. His particular love for the mythopoeic began by reading Lewis and especially Tolkien as a child. His academic interest in the biblical literature include narrative criticism, intertextuality, and ancient historiography, in large part due to the Inklings' effect on his thinking on and creative enjoyment of literature.

KRIS SWANK is Library Department Head at Pima Community College-Northwest Campus, Tucson, Arizona and teaches in the Honors program. She is a preceptor for Signum University, where she also earned an MA with a concentration in Tolkien Studies. Her literature criticism and book reviews have appeared in *Tolkien Studies*, *Mythlore*, *The Journal of Tolkien Research*, and several essay collections.

JOSEPH YOUNG is an independent scholar living and working in Dunedin, New Zealand. He is currently working on a book analysing George R.R. Martin's novels in the context of the modern fantasy tradition.

