



Mythopoeic Society

mythLORE

A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis,
Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature

Volume 37
Number 2

Article 21

Spring 4-17-2019

***Pamela Colman Smith: The Untold Story* by Stuart R. Kaplan with Mary K. Greer, Elizabeth Foley O'Connor, and Melinda Boyd Parsons**

Emily E. Auger
Independent Scholar

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), [Fine Arts Commons](#), [History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons](#), [Illustration Commons](#), and the [Theatre History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Auger, Emily E. (2019) "*Pamela Colman Smith: The Untold Story* by Stuart R. Kaplan with Mary K. Greer, Elizabeth Foley O'Connor, and Melinda Boyd Parsons," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 37 : No. 2 , Article 21.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol37/iss2/21>

This Book Reviews is brought to you for free and open access by the Mythopoeic Society at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature by an authorized editor of SWOSU Digital Commons. An ADA compliant document is available upon request. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.

To join the Mythopoeic Society go to:
<http://www.mythsoc.org/join.htm>

SWOSUTM

Mythcon 51: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

Albuquerque, New Mexico • Postponed to: July 30 – August 2, 2021



Additional Keywords

Pamela Colman Smith; Arthur Waite; Tarot; illustration; art

Cover Page Footnote

Pamela Colman Smith *The Untold Story* by Stuart R. Kaplan with Mary K. Greer, Elizabeth Foley O'Connor, and Melinda Boyd Parsons. U.S. Games Systems, 2018. 440 pp. with over 400 color illustrations; 500 entry bibliography detailing Smith's published works, reviews, articles, and advertisements; and a 2100 entry index. ISBN Hardcover 978-1-57281-912-2 ISBN Clothbound limited edition 978-1-57281-944-3

and *The Dark Tower*. Como's opinions are clear in his dedication of the book to Hooper, whom he refers to as his friend: "Now and again there arises the question of who is the greatest authority on Lewis, to which my answer is: there is none, except . . . Hooper. [...] Without him we simply would not have Lewis as we do" (xix). In response to critical concerns about *The Dark Tower*, "many people looking into the matter found no foundation to the charges, which were finally put to rest" (104). It may be overreaching to suggest such views are fact, and these and other claims seem a bit out of place for a text which is intended to be an introduction to Lewis. Still, for scholars who remain skeptical of the grey areas and other artistic freedoms, rest assured that these shaded parts do not significantly impact the whole.

In all, Como's *C.S. Lewis: A Very Short Introduction* is a useful text to recommend to new scholars and fans of Lewis and his work and is a refreshing reminder of how the various Lewises make up the one man. The fluid narrative speaks to Como's status of Professor Emeritus of Rhetoric and Public Communication at York College (CUNY), and his command of Lewisania reflects his enduring commitment to scholarship in the field as a founding member of the New York C.S. Lewis Society (1969) as well as his articles, on-air documentaries, and books (including *Branches to Heaven: The Geniuses of C.S. Lewis* and *Remembering C.S. Lewis*).

—Zachary A. Rhone



PAMELA COLMAN SMITH: THE UNTOLD STORY by Stuart R. Kaplan, Mary K. Greer, Elizabeth Foley O'Connor, and Melinda Boyd Parsons. U.S. Games Systems, 2018. 440 pp. with over 400 color illustrations; bibliography and index. ISBN Hardcover 978-1-57281-912-2 ISBN Clothbound limited edition 978-1-57281-944-3

*P*AMELA COLMAN SMITH: *THE UNTOLD STORY* IS A MUST-HAVE for students of early twentieth-century British and American art and art history, illustration, the Golden Dawn, the *Rider-Waite Tarot*, folktales, fairytales, and/or theater, not to mention synaesthesia and spiritualism. Bram Stoker and Arthur Conan Doyle fans might also want to take a good long look as well. A modern homage to the Arts and Crafts movement of which Smith was a part, it has been made for intensive library use and to please the eye of individual patrons. The binding is sturdy and the paper thick and high-quality—off-white for text and tan for sections dedicated to the hundreds of color reproductions. The cover is

adorned by a beautiful portrait of the artist, gold lettering, and, on the spine, a miniature golden Fool. This Fool, not incidentally, is borrowed from the U.S. Games Systems flagship Tarot, the *Rider-Waite*, created by Smith and first published in 1909/10.

The first essay is Elizabeth Foley O'Connor's "Pamela's Life," which lays the groundwork for understanding Smith's subjects and style relative to her personal life and the social and historical context in which she lived. O'Connor does well by Smith, although the calling of the artist by her given, rather than her surname will strike an odd note on the scholarly ear. This choice was evidently a collective one or one made by the publisher, perhaps intended to personalize the artist and perhaps to avoid invoking "the great artist" syndrome that plagues writing about artists who may or may not warrant that accolade. Readers thus learn about "Pamela's" time in Jamaica and how it catalyzed her later Jamaican folktale performances and collections; while the time she spent in New York at the Pratt Institute and studying with Arthur Wesley Dow in the 1890s defined many aspects of her visual art. After her return to London, she made her first synaesthesia-based painting while listening to Bach (1900). She also joined the Isis-Urania Temple of the Golden Dawn (1901) headed by W.B. Yeats, and then Arthur E. Waite's Independent and Rectified Order of the Golden Dawn (1903). These associations were instrumental to the very idea of a Tarot designed to reflect Golden Dawn ideals (as understood by Waite), which eventually took form as the *Rider-Waite Tarot* (1909). Smith's conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1911 is linked with her move to Cornwall in 1919 where she took out a long term lease on a property with a chapel which she reinvented as "Our Lady of the Lizard."

"Folktales, Art & Poetry" (101-349) is by Stuart Kaplan, the founder and owner of U.S. Games Systems and known for his re-publication of the *Rider-Waite* deck, his publication of hundreds of Tarot decks created by contemporary artists, and, among other books, his copiously illustrated, four volume *Encyclopedia of Tarot* (1978-2005), which includes extensive material on Smith and the *Rider-Waite* deck. Here, Kaplan offers an extraordinary compilation of full- and half-page reproductions representing the range of Smith's creative undertakings. Students of Smith's work will note, no doubt with a smile and a "thank you," that a few of these images are offered not once but twice: once with the text essays, where they support the historical and biographical discussions, and again in the chronological order of Smith's own work. These reproductions include drawings and paintings that Smith produced for others as posters and as pamphlet and book illustrations, and for her own publications, including her one-page *A Broad Sheet* (1902-03) and little magazine *The Green Sheaf*, which first appeared in 1903. Among my many favorites are the platinum prints from a folio produced by Alfred Stieglitz after he gave Smith a show—the first of a non-

photographic artist in his Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession—in January 1907 (66; illus. 252 ff). All of these illustrations are carefully labelled, although I confess to not yet having figured out exactly which two of those five are supposed to be Sherlock Holmes . . . and I had to get out my own magnifying glass to read the reproductions of some of Smith's folktales. Such things happen only when a book inspires study, rather than browsing; when the presentation motivates the reader to care about the content, rather than scan (or scroll) past it as so many unrelated bits of information.

Melinda Boyd Parsons, author of *To All Believers: The Art of Pamela Colman Smith* [Exhibition] Delaware Art Museum 1975 (The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1975), contributes a third essay, "Influences and Expressions in the *Rider-Waite Tarot Deck*." It provides a too-brief study of the primary influences on Smith introduced in O'Connor's essay in relation to the Tarot deck she created with Arthur Waite, as well as other factors, including the so-called "secret tradition," Arthurian and Grail legends, the *Sola Busca Tarot* on display at the British Museum after 1907, and even the popular "cabinet cards" of costumed actors (Boyd cites Mary K. Greer for this one). These are well presented, for the most part, with the exception of the claim that some of the faces of the Tarot figures are actually likenesses of people Smith knew. I just don't see it, in spite of the photos and details, although the notion that specific people in Smith's life inspired her conceptualization of at least some of the cards is entirely plausible.

The fourth and final essay is a summing up of Smith's legacy by Mary K. Greer, widely recognized as an authority on Tarot and for her card reading skills. Greer acknowledges all of Smith's marvelous projects, and finds that the most significant aspect of that legacy is the *Rider-Waite Tarot*. Now commonly referred to as the Waite-Smith or Smith-Waite Tarot, it is not only used by more people today than it ever was in the artist's lifetime, it has become the template for many of the new decks being produced. It is also, I might add, the deck most often featured in popular film, a fact that contributes even more to its familiarity and popularity.

The Addendum is a scrapbook of the sort that genealogists will love, as it features reproductions of Smith's birth and death certificate, passport, correspondence with publishers, doodled pages from books she owned, and other such items. It also offers a reproduction of Smith's pithy article "Should the Art Student Think" (1908), and pages from the brochure advertising the first edition of the *Rider-Waite* deck in 1910, drawings of some of the cards, and last but not least, Kaplan's two-page essay about the cover portrait of Smith.

The bibliography includes sections devoted to Smith's authorship and art work, a third of works about Smith and her folktales, a fourth of advertisements about Smith, a fifth about Smith in general, a sixth of her

correspondence, and a final section of the books in her personal library. The index is extensive, useful, and accurate.

The authors and publisher are to be commended for their exemplary tribute to an extraordinarily talented creative artist and writer. *Pamela Colman Smith* belongs in college and university libraries with art and literature programs of any kind and, being both substantial in content and accessible in form, will make an equally valuable addition to public library and personal collections.

—Emily E. Auger



WOMEN WHO FLY: GODDESSES, WITCHES, MYSTICS, AND OTHER AIRBORNE FEMALES. Serinity Young. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN 9780195307887. Hardback. £21.99.

YOUNG'S BOOK IS, FIRST AND FOREMOST, an innovative addition to the field of academic and scholarly writing. Upon first inspection, one cannot help but notice the pleasingly tidy organization of chapters and book sections. This helps to ease the reader in and clarify the subject matter at hand. *Women Who Fly* focuses exclusively on the depiction, symbolism, and culturally constructed gender norms surrounding fictional airborne women throughout human history. The resulting project sets out to explore this unique area of research with the intention of unpacking the weighted meanings behind cultural and historic portrayals of winged women. In terms of structure, Young's book is divided into two parts, and divided further into twelve sections. Each section deals with a specific winged female creature, goddess, or aviatrix. The first part deals with the fantastical depictions of flying women, such as ancient flying goddesses, swan maidens, Valkyries, and Apsaras. The latter part of the book focuses on human women, such as witches, flying mystics and outstanding or inspirational airborne women, such as Amelia Earhart. Young's use of relevant images further supports her research and provides clarity for the reader. Altogether these aspects add to the quality and enjoyment of delving into her research.

Young approaches this topic from a feminist angle, but her analysis is broad, to say the least. The book is introduced with a quotation from French feminist writer Hélène Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa": "flying is woman's gesture—flying in language and making it fly" (vi). The reader might, at this point, presume that this book will be in some way dense, drawing on similar theoretically-driven feminist authors. However, Young's argument, though