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***Women Who Fly: Goddesses, Witches, Mystics, and Other Airborne Females* by Serinity Young**

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Additional Keywords

feminism; witches, goddesses, Valkyries, mythology, gender studies

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

sound and well-structured, is shallow at points; it could profit from deeper analysis with reference to previous theoretical research on socially constructed rigid female gender roles or female entrapment. In the second chapter, which deals with goddesses of fertility and mortality, Young refers to the Egyptian goddess Isis and her intimate relationship to nature and the earth, similar to stories of other celestial goddesses. Here, Young is presented with an excellent opportunity for further analysis of this connection in relation to gender myths surrounding women and their ties to nature. This would indeed further her argument. Similarly, she discusses Lilith, a winged demon who snatches children away, in chapter eight. Immediately the work of Luce Irigaray is brought to mind (specifically her essay "The Bodily Encounter with the Mother") in relation to the cultural demonization of the maternal female body and mother figures in patriarchal society. This would add flavour and support to her argument. Instead, Young gives more of a historical overview of the different women figures and their relationship to social constructs of the time.

In spite of its sometimes shallow analysis, the book does provide a basis for understanding the role of cultural mythology in the creation of unbalanced gender binaries. One should be wary of assuming that this book is a mere whistle-stop tour of airborne women throughout history. Young's stated goal is "not to restrict this theme (or its imagery) nor to force it into the confines of any one discipline or cultural perspective, but rather to celebrate its diversity while highlighting commonalities and delineating the religious and social contexts in which it developed" (Young 2). She tries to tease out common threads in the treatment and representation of women throughout patriarchal societies.

Young focuses largely on the lineage and depictions of women in mythical or fantastical contexts. She simultaneously offers a large number of sources for further reading. The well-researched topics are closely tied and interconnected throughout the book, with frequent referral to different sections which deal with a similar topic. This highlights unchanging cultural representations of women throughout stories specific to certain cultures or religions. For example, Young deals with the Valkyries in chapter three and observes that they are connected to, and submit to, the patriarchal order. She then connects this with women in later chapters, such as chapter eight (witches and succubi). Both are situated in different cultural and historical contexts "marked by increasing restraint" (153); the Valkyrie being situated in Norse mythology and culture, whereas the fictional witch Circe in chapter eight is embedded in the culture of the Greek epic, *The Odyssey*. Regardless of this massive historic and cultural shift, Young aims to establish that the treatment of these fictional women has not developed positively, and in fact, largely remains unchanged. Societies cling to gendered stereotypes in relation to female sexuality and its relationship to their male counterparts. Her sexuality is forced

upon her by men; she either prescribes to the gender norms of unchecked female sexuality or a man, driven by lust, forces himself upon her. The message in these stories is clear—it does not usually end well for celestial women. Young links the entrapment of these women, caused usually by the loss of their flying abilities, to male perceptions of their sexuality. This topic relates to a variety of areas in terms of gender studies and fiction, and makes the book a highly recommended read for researchers beginning projects in similar areas.

Serinity Young's work is a new and refreshing project that outlines the stories of women of flight and traces them to their cultural origins; usually patriarchal. We see this shift from an expression of the importance of fertility and reproduction to the stereotyped depictions of women in relation to her sexuality above all else. Young clearly has a feminist goal. However, she remains largely objective in her findings and interpretations, basing her research on a plethora of scholarly sources.

—Felicity Gilbert

SOURCES

Irigaray, Luce. "The Bodily Encounter with the Mother." *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, 3rd ed., edited by David Lodge and Nigel Wood, Pearson Education Limited, 2008, pp. 532-540.



BRIEFLY NOTED

THE PLACE OF THE LION. By Charles Williams. The Charles Williams Society, 2016. 978-0-9977009-0-9. HB; 207 pp. \$21.95. <https://cwlibrary.com/books/the-place-of-the-lion>

WAR IN HEAVEN. By Charles Williams. The Charles Williams Society, 2018. 978-0-9977009-1-6. HB 251 pp. \$21.95. <https://cwlibrary.com/books/war-in-heaven>

THESE TWO VOLUMES ARE PART OF A PROJECT TO REPRINT all the Williams novels, organized by the London-based Charles Williams Society, but printed in the United States. The volumes are hardbound in black cloth, stamped with title and author in a different color for each volume with color-coordinated endpapers, and blind-stamped with an attractive motif representing that title; the motifs for all the novels in the series appear on the endpapers. The size is a bit smaller than standard modern hardbacks, and close to the size of the original hardbacks and the Eerdmans paperback reprints of the