



Mythopoeic Society

mythLORE

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

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Volume 38  
Number 1

Article 16

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October 2019

## ***Fantastic Creatures in Mythology and Folklore: From Medieval Times to Present Day*** by Juliette Wood

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### **Recommended Citation**

Martin, Tiffany Brooke (2019) "*Fantastic Creatures in Mythology and Folklore: From Medieval Times to Present Day* by Juliette Wood," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 38 : No. 1 , Article 16.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol38/iss1/16>

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

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Paulus explores the important contrast between Charles Williams's theological appreciation of the city as "a divinely ordained project of and for human transformation" (5) with the rejection of technology by Lewis, Tolkien, Sayers, and theologian Jacques Ellul. Williams, in contrast, "developed a constructive theology of technological work" (5) in keeping with the Way of the Affirmation of Images. Useful observations on *The Masques of Amen House* and comparisons with Sayers's theology of work lead to a review of the history of information revolutions and a meditation on artificial intelligence and the apocalyptic imagination.

David Bratman expands on his previous work on C.S. Lewis's letters, here discussing his "endearing and open-hearted habit of writing fan letters to living authors whose works he admired" (22). The letters Bratman considers are to Charles Williams (Lewis's fan letter being the key to bringing him in to the Inklings), E.R. Eddison, T.H. White, and Mervyn Peake. Sorina Higgins's contribution draws heavily on her introductory material for *The Inklings and King Arthur* (reviewed in *Mythlore* #134 by Jared Lobdell) but there is plenty of new material here, particularly on inter-war and post-war Arthuriana and Arthurian mysticism, to make it well worth reading. Jim Prothero completes the issue with an essay on Lewis, Romanticism, and religion, with a strong emphasis on Lewis's long appreciation for and engagement with Wordsworth.

For the bibliographically-inclined, this is a journal which could use a history of publication, checklist of issues, and index of contents, as it is not widely held or indexed and the society's website provides little archival information and no method for ordering back issues. There has been much good material published within, and it would be a boon to Inklings scholarship to see it made more widely accessible.

—Janet Brennan Croft



**FANTASTIC CREATURES IN MYTHOLOGY AND FOLKLORE: FROM MEDIEVAL TIMES TO THE PRESENT DAY.** Juliette Wood. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. 256 p. 9781350059252. \$49.99.

*FANTASTIC CREATURES IN MYTHOLOGY AND FOLKLORE* IS A BROAD STUDY in which Juliette Wood seeks to address certain questions about human imagination and interaction with such creatures as mythical beasts. The material is an encyclopedia of sorts on several fantastic creatures and their historical and current interpretations and uses, along with numerous illustrations to help

visualize the representations of fantastic creatures. Wood's sources range from classical documents to modern role-playing games (RPGs); however, Wood's book leaves out some fantastic creatures, so the coverage is not exhaustive. Instead, Wood "intends to focus on how differing views of these creatures embody complex concepts of 'otherness' and identity, and how they, in turn, reflect ways of understanding the world" (9).

After introducing her purposes and sources, Wood divides her study into four main chapters about the following fantastic creatures and similar ones: unicorns, mermaids, winged creatures, and dragons/monstrous serpents. Her first chapter covers the history of unicorns and their classical, Biblical, medieval, medical representations, such as their symbolic meaning and literary uses, traced into current trends with toys and animated films. Wood also considers other horned and horse-like creatures such as the narwhal and centaur. Though she looks at numerous hybrids in this broad category, she does not mention a similar creature, the faun, as hoofed and horned.

Her second chapter investigates the more human-like mermaid and other variants related to the sea world. Again, however, it seems odd that Wood does not mention seelie or selkie creatures as similar depictions, though she comments on old Irish traditions. Ecology and marine life is an important topic in this chapter, and Wood also discusses real creatures such as whales and dolphins regarding their relationship to myth and fantasy. Transitioning from the sea environment to the air, Wood's third chapter explores the background and representations of hybrid animals that can fly, which does not include angels and fairies (94). The sections in this chapter focus mostly on harpies and sirens, griffins, winged horses, mythical birds, and lizards with wings.

Noted in some form or another in previous chapters, dragons and monstrous serpents receive their own chapter, the fourth and final one, with much material about these creatures. Wood shares information from the Bible, ancient epics and traditions, lore, artwork, theatre, and more recent literature, film, and games. As she moves to her conclusion, Wood points out connections regarding humanity's interest in and portrayal of fantastic creatures, yet the study often comes across as summary more than analysis.

Overall, the book can be a useful resource for students and researchers on this specialized topic of fantastic and mythical creatures, despite some detracting typos and format inconsistencies that make it look less academic. The book also offers notes, primary sources, selected bibliography and references, and an index. Even though Wood's study was not meant to be comprehensive, it could have helped the general reader or scholar if she acknowledged the creatures she left out (and perhaps why she did or to recommend additional study), such as the faun and Celtic creatures similar to the mermaid. Another apparent lack is minimal commentary about the use of fantastic creatures in

gardens, landscape designs, and sculptures compared to the creative forms Wood highlights. These other notable artistic representations of hybrid animals would be interesting to examine further associated with fantasy and human creativity.

Wood determines at the end that fantastic creatures are popular and valuable to us because they “provide ways to engage with the world around us. By their very nature, these fantastic hybrids that combine features from actual and imagined animals create boundaries between the real and the unreal. However, they also provide an interface, which allows access to the very special worlds they inhabit” (169). With Wood’s discussion of how fantastic creatures are also marketed as toys and games, it raises some questions such as why do we turn the terror of a dragon into toys and trinkets, and the awe of a unicorn’s powerful presence into a cute, cuddly, even cartoonish creature? What motives are involved with these representations, and what harm or help might this have on the imagination and transmission of what has been and what might be? Does this devalue or attempt to normalize fantastic creatures? The book does not necessarily answer Wood’s or my proposed questions entirely but provides ideas to pursue as part of engaging with fantasy, myth, and imagination.

—Tiffany Brooke Martin



**H.P. LOVECRAFT: SELECTED WORKS, CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES AND INTERVIEWS ON HIS INFLUENCE.** H.P. Lovecraft. Leverett Butts, ed. Jefferson, North Carolina: MacFarland and Company Inc., 2018. 306 p. ISBN 978-1476670919. \$30.00.

THERE IS NO SHORTAGE OF EDITIONS OF H.P. LOVECRAFT’S WORKS. The Library of America’s release of Lovecraft’s writings provides an entry point for casual readers to explore the author’s mythos, Chartwell Classic’s *The Complete Fiction of H.P. Lovecraft* appeals to those interested in fully engaging with the Lovecraftian world, and Leslie Klinger’s *The New Annotated H.P. Lovecraft* is an invaluable resource for scholars. Yet, despite these varied and numerous releases, Leverett Butts rightly notes that no edition exists for instructors wanting to bring Lovecraft into the classroom. With this absence in mind, Butts compiles and structures *H.P. Lovecraft: Selected Works, Critical Perspectives and Interviews on His Influence* with a specific eye for the undergraduate classroom.

Butts separates his edition into the broad categories of “Primary Works” and “Secondary Works.” He further divides the “Primary Works”