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## ***H.P. Lovecraft: Selected Works, Critical Perspectives and Interviews on His Influence*, edited by Leverett Butts**

Perry Neil Harrison  
*Fort Hays State University*

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## Online Summer Seminar 2023

August 5-6, 2023: Fantasy Goes to Hell: Depictions of Hell in Modern Fantasy Texts

<https://mythsoc.org/oms/oms-2023.htm>



***H.P. Lovecraft: Selected Works, Critical Perspectives and Interviews on His Influence***, edited by Leverett Butts

### Additional Keywords

H.P. Lovecraft; weird fiction; horror; horror literature

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”

section of the book into selections of Lovecraft's fiction, poetry, and critical works. Butts asserts that he chooses the six short stories contained in the "Fiction" section for their "naturalist, modernist, and post-modernist themes," as well as the presence of film adaptations of the stories (5). With the exception of "The History of the Necronomicon," each of these stories is included in all of the other major releases of Lovecraft's writings. However, noticeably missing from Butts's selection is "Herbert West—Reanimator," the inspiration for what is perhaps the most well-known screen adaptation of Lovecraft's writings—the 1985 film *Reanimator*. While Butts annotates each of these entries with copious explanatory endnotes, they differ markedly in tone from Klinger's annotated edition; the footnotes are most commonly concerned with clarifying unfamiliar vocabulary for first-time readers and identifying the real-world figures that Lovecraft often references in his writings. While seasoned researchers will glean little from these notes, they are certainly useful for Butts' intended student audience.

The "Poetry" section consists of the sonnet cycle "Fungi from Yuggoth" and "Waste Paper," Lovecraft's satirical take on T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land." While S.T. Joshi's *The Ancient Track: The Complete Poetical Works of H.P. Lovecraft* provides introductions and commentary that are more scholarly and thorough, Butts's collection does represent the first fully annotated release of both poems. Butts's notes are certain to be of great assistance to instructors as they lead students through each work; however, like the annotations found in the book's "Fiction" section, the poems' endnotes are more broadly explanatory than scholarly. Most noticeably, the notes accompanying "Waste Paper" only once place Lovecraft's poem into conversation with the Eliot poem that it was written to lampoon. The "Critical" section's lone work is a shortened version of Lovecraft's seminal essay "Supernatural Horror in Literature." The notations on the essay are less comprehensive than Joshi's *Annotated Supernatural Horror in Literature*, but they are well-selected and sure to be a significant help to readers navigating the numerous references Lovecraft makes to past writers and their literature. The greatest benefit of this particular edition is Butts' decision to abridge the lengthy work "in the interest of brevity and clarity for the first-time, student reader" (6). To achieve this end, Butts excises plot summaries and catalogues of previous weird fiction in order to maintain an emphasis on Lovecraft's argument and ideas (6). These emendations make for a markedly more focused reading experience that will certainly help students better comprehend the points of the essay and help instructors as they lead classes through discussions of the essay.

Butts does an admirable job selecting and annotating Lovecraft's literary and critical writings, but it is the book's selection of "Secondary Works" that truly shines. There are, at the time of this review's writing, precious few

collections of criticism that explore Lovecraft's writings and influences. The first half of this section—"Criticism"—collects six essays by both influential Lovecraft researchers and emerging scholars; while Butts reprints contributions by Joshi and Robert M. Price—both mainstays of Lovecraft scholarship for decades—it is two previously unpublished works that will be the most beneficial to instructors. Shannon N. Gilstrap's exploration of Lovecraft's engagement with the writings and ideas of the Victorian Period is particularly useful as a companion to "Supernatural Horror in Literature," as it provides context for the works that Lovecraft identifies as influential to his own writings. Similarly, Tracy Bealer's exploration of the author's troubled relationship with Modernist writings and ideas serves as a fascinating epilogue to the concepts that Lovecraft sets forth in his essay. Viewed together, these two essays promise to be particularly useful in situating Lovecraft into the context of a wider-reaching survey class and helping students to understand how the literary works that Butts collects relate to the larger literary landscape.

While much of the criticism Butts collects aims to help students understand Lovecraft's relationship with the literary canon, the volume's final section—"Reflections"—explores Lovecraft's influence on present-day horror authors such as T.E.D Klein and Richard Monaco. While brief, these reflections help to support Butts' argument that Lovecraft is worthy of classroom study.

While Butts's collection offers little that is new for those outside of the education profession, the clarifying annotations, the emendations to "Supernatural Horror in Literature," and the well-selected critical essays make *H.P. Lovecraft: Selected Works, Critical Perspectives and Interviews on His Influence* a valuable tool for any instructor seeking to bring Lovecraft into an undergraduate classroom.

—Perry Neil Harrison



**THE ECHO OF ODIN: NORSE MYTHOLOGY AND HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS.** Edward W.L. Smith. McFarland, 2018. 211 pp. Bibliography and index. pISBN 978-1-4766-7509-1 eISBN 978-4766-3402-9. \$55.00.

*The Echo of Odin* caught my attention at McFarland's table at the 2019 Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association conference, probably because I had recently been working with Nancy-Lou Patterson's illustrations for Douglas Rossman's *The Nine Worlds: A Dictionary of Norse*