



Mythopoeic Society

mythLORE

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

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Volume 42  
Number 2

Article 19

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April 2024

## *The Archetype of the Dying and Rising God in World Mythology* by Paul R. Rovang

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### Recommended Citation

Hamby, James (2024) "The Archetype of the Dying and Rising God in World Mythology by Paul R. Rovang," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 42: No. 2, Article 19.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol42/iss2/19>

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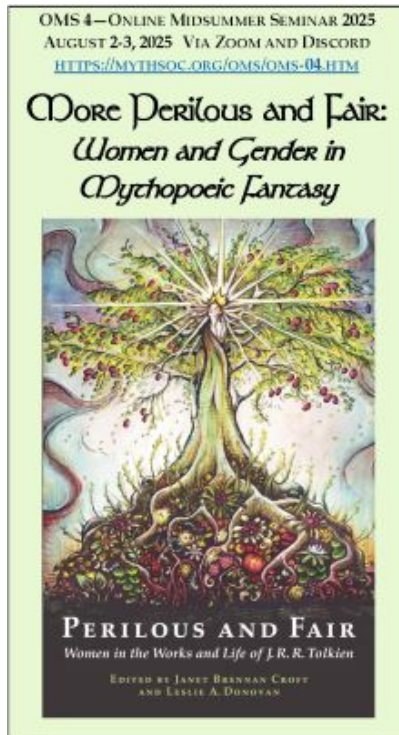
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August 2-5, 2024

Via Zoom and Discord

<https://www.mythsoc.org/oms/oms-04.htm>



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**Additional Keywords**

archetype

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of view on these topics of interest to their field. This book may also be of interest to scholars interested in Arthurian studies, as Auger often draws on the Arthurian and Tarot overlap, from the Fisher King myth to the archetypes represented by the characters of Arthuriana, for her examples throughout all four sections. The addition of the fourth section, the small changes to the first three sections, and the updated appendices do make this a worthy second edition with new information to be obtained on the part of the reader.

—Laurel M. Stevens

**LAUREL M. STEVENS** is an independent scholar of varied interests with a BA in English from Westminster College and an MA in Literature and Language from Signum University. Stevens first began literary research with Tolkien, but has an expansive love for all imaginative literature. Some of her latest areas of interest have been dark academia, non-human narrators, and contemporary fantasy and science-fiction novellas.



**THE ARCHETYPE OF THE DYING AND RISING GOD IN WORLD MYTHOLOGY.** Paul R. Rovang. Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2023. 224p. 9781666917086. \$100.

**L**ONG CONSIDERED AN IMPORTANT CONCEPT in world mythology, the dying and rising god has been called into question by scholars who suggest this archetype only arose after Christianity spread across the Mediterranean Basin. Against this recent trend, Paul R. Rovang frames his work, *The Archetype of the Dying and Rising God in World Mythology*. Rovang argues that scholars who have proclaimed the archetype dead do so only because their definition of a dying and rising god is too narrow, thus eliminating candidates that would otherwise fit into the category. In chapter one of his work, Rovang argues against the prevailing trend of declaring the dying and rising god passé. He then demonstrates the presence of this archetype throughout world mythologies in chapters two through four. He focuses exclusively on Jesus in chapter five and argues that, while in some ways, Sir James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough* is outdated, its assessment of the story of Christ aligning with pre-existing narratives of dying and resurrected deities still makes more sense than arguing that the archetype began with the New Testament. Chapters six and seven focus on post-traditional literature. Chapter six examines T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* and its roots in Arthurian legend. Rovang's concluding chapter discusses the archetype as seen by Joseph Campbell, Northrop Frye, and Carl Jung, pointing

out once again that this archetype is widespread, but stressing that not every iteration is exactly the same.

Rovang begins by placing his work in opposition to Jonathan Z. Smith's entry in the *Encyclopedia of Religion* on "Dying and Rising Gods" and his later book, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (1990), where he argues that dying and resurrected gods are an invented category based on texts from late antiquity (9). Smith's conclusions, Rovang argues, are based on a biased agenda. In desiring to challenge early twentieth-century Protestant scholars' views of Protestantism as a return to the Apostolic Christianity of the early church, a faith that was later corrupted by Catholicism, which they viewed as being tainted by pagan beliefs, these scholars read their own theological beliefs into pagan myths. Simultaneously, Smith's work also denies that other religions of late antiquity influenced Christianity. Rovang counters this argument by saying that considering "Smith's not-so-hidden agenda of searching out and destroying what he considers a Protestant hidden agenda, it is mystifying that he goes on to assault any notion whatsoever of genealogy" (12). Rovang also points out the irony that, upon the publication of Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, "this is the very feature Protestants have sought to deny" due to the perceived notion that it posed "a threat to Christian belief in the uniqueness of Christ's historical resurrection" (12). Furthermore, Mark S. Smith, building on Jonathan Smith's argument, asserts that many myths, such as the one of Baal, long held up as dying and resurrected gods, do not fit the archetype as the gods merely "disappear" rather than die. Rovang counters this claim by saying "While figures from Odysseus through Dante return from among the dead without undergoing physical death [...], their return is usually understood as a resurrection to new life on some level, at least symbolically" (13). Here Rovang makes a common-sense claim that is characteristic of his arguments throughout this volume, demonstrating that scholars who support the existence of the archetype are objective while Smith and his followers are in fact the ones placing ideology before observation. In responding to a similar criticism from J.Z. Smith, Rovang replies that, "Smith initially sets the bar high for exclusion in this privileged class, with the less-than-astonishing result that nobody qualifies" (21). After establishing his opposition to this new take on the archetype, Rovang then provides a wealth of examples of dying and rising gods to disprove the notion that the archetype is the result of back formation by biased scholars.

Chapters two and three, "Other Ancient Near Eastern Candidates?" and "Greco-Roman Connections," explore examples of the archetype found throughout the Mediterranean world. The myths he addresses all demonstrate the presence of the archetype well before the story of Christ spread throughout the Roman world. While Rovang admits that not every myth *precisely* parallels

the story of Jesus's death and resurrection, the essential narratological elements are all present. Rovang points out that the gods he writes about in this chapter "die and in some definitive manner rise again to a new physical existence" and that "the manner of the particular divinity's death and resurrection must be understood in terms of the god or goddess's cultural matrix" (40). Chapter two focuses on Inanna and Dumuzi from Sumerian mythology, Adonis (who is cognate with both Dumuzi and also Tamuz from the Levant) from Greek myth, and the story of Osiris from Egypt. Chapter three examines the archetype in Greco-Roman myth and its connection to Near Eastern traditions. Rovang discusses Persephone and Demeter, Adonis, Heracles, and Dionysos, suggesting the Greeks and Romans adapted the archetype from the Near East. He notes that due to "the Greek definition of gods as 'deathless,' the notion of a divinity's death was foreign and problematic for the Greco-Roman pantheon" but that the archetype was strong enough to "overcome native resistance" in its reception (62). Rovang once again refutes the notion that these myths do not fit the archetype just because they are not exactly the same when he asserts "Rather than a late borrowing from the Christian tradition the Greco-Roman motif of dying and rising gods [...] is received from or at least strongly influenced by earlier Near Eastern tradition" (63). Rovang then extends his criticism of Smith's position by examining mythological traditions from across the world.

Chapter four, "Non-Classical and Traditional Cultures," turns to global mythological traditions to support Rovang's assertion that the dying and rising god archetype is a common mythological element and not merely derived from Christianity. This chapter draws broadly from a number of traditions, ranging from Nordic tales to Sub-Saharan African traditions to Meso-American myth. Rovang's analysis of the heroic twin brothers from the Quiché Mayan sacred text, *The Popol Vuh*, is convincing as it is a Pre-Columbian New World story; and, as Rovang observes, "The presence of dying and rising gods in Mayan culture is [...] not just strong, it is pervasive" (124). While critics may point out that Christian elements may have been grafted onto pre-existing traditions (as they certainly were in some cases), the existence of the archetype in mythologies before contact with Christianity in traditions as widespread as Indigenous North American maize gods, the Rainbow Serpent of Australian myth, or the god Hainuwele from what is now Indonesia strongly refutes Smith's assertion that this archetype does not exist. Once again, as Rovang acknowledges in previous chapters, not every god exactly parallels Christ in all particulars of the archetype, but they all fit the general pattern well enough to prove the archetype "an unambiguously valid mythological classification" (126). Instead of this paradigm being indiscriminately applied to other mythologies a century ago by Protestant scholars with an agenda, Rovang ably demonstrates that it is Smith's analysis that is not entirely neutral.

The final three chapters re-examine the archetypes in relationship to Jesus and explore how it has manifested in later literature and literary theory. Chapter five, "Jesus," follows Frazer's arguments in *The Golden Bough* in saying the story of Christ's resurrection was one formed by pre-existing narrative traditions from other Near Eastern cultures. The following chapter, "The Dying and Rising God in Literature: T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*," provides a wonderful analysis of Eliot's classic poem, but seems a bit out of place since it does nothing to support Rovang's central argument. In the brief concluding chapter, Rovang summarizes his claims, and then further posits that even if the archetype is ultimately dismissed by scholars, its "historical manifestation" still contains important theological, psychological, and literary value. He writes, "An archetype that is not just a product of the human mind, conscious or unconscious, but a component of ultimate reality, is a lodestar not only for the psyche but also for artistic creativity and criticism" (193). Rovang's volume restores this archetype to its important place in the study of world mythology.

This book should be of great interest to scholars and general readers of mythology, world religion, and narratology. Like any other academic discipline, the study of mythology has its own history that has followed trends and patterns and sometimes has had periods which produced questionable scholarship that needs to be corrected or refuted. Undoubtedly, scholars of the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries, in fields from literary studies to anthropology, often saw world cultures from a Western point of view. While this caused scholars in some instances to overlook the nuances and uniqueness of mythological traditions from other cultures, Smith's assertion that there never was a dying and rising god archetype goes too far in taking a postmodern stance that there is no connection between human mythologies. Rovang's book demonstrates that this archetype *is* a significant cross-cultural phenomenon, and that its study is worthwhile. Hopefully, this work will help to swing the pendulum back towards the view of this archetype as a central component of comparative mythology.

—James Hamby

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