

S/HE

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AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF GODDESS STUDIES

Mission Statement: *S/HE: An International Journal of Goddess Studies* is a web-based, peer-reviewed international scholarly journal committed to the academic exploration, analysis and interpretation, from a range of disciplinary perspectives, of Goddesses and the Female Divine in all religions, traditions, and cultures, to be ancient, historical, or contemporary. The journal is a multi-disciplinary forum for the publication of feminist scholarship in Goddess Studies and for discussion, comparison, and dialogue among scholars of differing feminist perspectives.

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BOOK REVIEWS

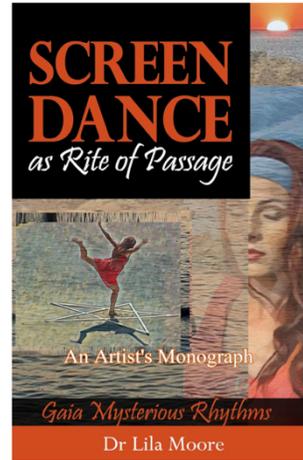
Lila Moore's
*Screen Dance as a Rite of Passage: An Artist's Monograph - Gaia
Mysterious Rhythms*
(Cybernetic Scribe, 2025)

Reviewed by Helen Benigni, Ph.D.

I am so grateful to have read *Screen Dance as a Rite of Passage* by Lila Moore as it enhanced my understanding of the role of dance in the contemporary and ancient rituals of women by embracing the need in our culture to join the past with the present. Primarily, the monograph and film that accompanies the monograph aim at defining the art of dance on screen as a hybrid form of art with its own unique characteristics, and Moore aims much of the monograph at consolidating that art form to an understandable technique for artists who seek creativity and guidance.

However, a closer examination of the references with special attention to the goddess Gaia in the film that accompanies the work entitled *Gaia Mysterious Rhythms* is of interest to feminists and scholars of Creatrix Studies.

At the basis of the screen dance itself is a deeply moving path towards self-awareness and healing for both the audience and the participant herself. As we observe Moore as a young woman dancing near the Mediterranean Sea, a profound rite of passage and spiritual awakening immerses us in her art. The dance is a metaphor for the realization of our feminine powers and spiritual strengths. As Moore states: "It is a transformative journey in which a young woman becomes aware of her innate power and potential through profound contact with the imaginal and natural realms. Although the protagonist is a fictional and archetypal character, she reflects my



own rite of passage” (15). Moore deftly emphasizes that the natural world and the world of the imagination spurred by the human psyche and the collective unconsciousness that women share are the elements necessary for spiritual awakening. Screen dance itself is the vehicle for that transformation, and the techniques are soundly based on the work of Andrei Trakovsky, David Finch and Carl Gustav Jung.

Without subverting the importance of the text concerning the art of screen dance itself, an examination of the symbols and images of the Goddess as Gaia highlight the underlying message so important to scholars and practitioners of feminist studies. As stated, the journey is one of a young woman’s rite of passage in both form and content. In the second section of the monograph, Moore devotes an analysis of *Gaia Mysterious Rhythms* with its theme base centered on “the interaction between the protagonist and the environment, as well as the natural elements.” To emphasize this interaction, Gaia becomes more of a concept rather than a reference to a specific Goddess or culture. Moore believes that “the concept of Gaia is rooted in the origins of the universe and the beginning of life. She is the primordial creatrix, a central figure in the myths of the pre-patriarchal era” (36). Moore reminds us that like other pre-Hellenic deities, Gaia represents an energy that rose from chaos to create the sun, moon, and the elements of the universe that mirror her image. Gaia also represents the body of the mother as the earth itself where birth and rebirth exist, and life begins and ends. The concept of the environment as a living organism allows the film maker to link the protagonist of the film, who is Moore herself, to the broader myth of the Creatrix. Moore emphasizes: “The mythic association of the protagonist with the ancient goddess of the Earth amplifies the affinity between her and the environment. As a result, the protagonist’s interaction with the natural elements becomes a process of self-revelation” (36).

To create this liaison between the protagonist and the environment, Moore designs a set with several symbols or props to create the screen image. The chapter entitled “The Natural Environment” outlines the use of the protagonist’s red dress which emphasizes her physical and mythical connection to the earth mother as Gaia; the seashell as a female symbol of the womb and birth; the ankh as a representative of the key to life”; and, the coastal

environment representing “the endless transforming forms of nature.” Moore’s analysis of the symbols also contains observations of the photographic project: “The photographic sessions with the still camera gradually solidified the central theme of *Gaia* as I became physically and photographically immersed in a passage through a landscape that in my mind, opened a window to a world shaped jointly by nature and my poetic musings” (40). The camera serves to intertwine space and time to create an enclosed universe for the protagonist to experience her movements, and the choreography for the camera and the screen generates a space and time where the natural elements such as the sand, the wind and the shoreline allow the protagonist to experience a transformative journey. Moreover, the soundtrack of the film also serves as an illustration of the poetic discovery of our protagonist by adding layers of texture and rhythm to the experience.

The final analysis presented by Moore, “The Journey Towards the Within,” demonstrates how each scene is formally constructed and how each scene delivers “a visual, choreographic, and performative event or screen.” This section is most helpful to perceive the protagonist’s inner thoughts and journey of self-enlightenment as she reacts to the environment. As a rite of passage, this exploration of the inner mind of the protagonist is a non-verbal expression containing emotions and thoughts. In my mind, this analysis explains the phenomena of the image making process of the mind that is so very different from other forms of artistic expression such as writing or painting. The image remains a vital part of comprehending not as a metaphor or a narrative journey, but as “poetic threads of emotion” committed to memory. The introductory scene or invocation is the female figure or protagonist lying beneath the moon near the Mediterranean shore ready for her rite of passage to enlightenment. Moore returns to the *Gaia* reference as the *Creatrix* to link the archetype to the human figure with the moon conveying a sense of deep sleep of the unconscious mind. When the protagonist awakens, the shell that she discovers allows her to discover her feminine identity which harmonizes with the natural elements. Most interesting is Moore’s reference to the photography that allows three images of the protagonist to evoke the archetype of the three faces of the Goddess seen in myth as Hecate or the Three Graces.

Other visual metaphors such as the protagonist as the carrier of water for her rebirth, her creative whirling energy, and the appearance of a five-pointed star solidify the protagonist's harmony with nature in the gradual process of her transformation. The peak experience of her transformation turns to Egyptian mythology with the ankh that the protagonist dances with to insure her femininity, her life as a woman, and her vitality. In an effort to combine mythologies, as a final image, Moore includes the hieroglyph of the eye of the sun or the eye of Horus as a symbol of "wisdom through deep knowing or enlightenment." The combination of Greek and Egyptian myth might have been expanded by Moore to include other mythologies such as Norse or Celtic to enhance the cross-cultural sense of those images used to represent the Creatrix, and the use of Horus' eye might have been replaced by a sacred feminine image of wisdom. Overall, this is a minor point to consider in the context of the entire film and monograph. In the Appendix of the monograph, Moore includes a scene-by-scene analysis that is most helpful to break down the film piece by piece to deftly follow the transitional stages of the protagonist's rites of passage to enlightenment. Overall, the text including the Appendix establishes what Moore aptly describes as "a lineage of filmmakers who explore concepts of female identity, sexuality, and feminine existence as expressed in various mythologies. *Gaia* continues this tradition, offering both inspiration and practical tools for women engaged in mythmaking and the creative investigation and development of the Self" (118).

In "Reflections and Conclusions," Moore's final comments include an impressive statement about the protagonist. Moore states that the protagonist resembles a Priestess of the Goddess who dances with symbols where "all elements of the physical environment subtly reveal their archetypal patterns, imaginal characteristics, and deeper meanings" (121). Moore's reference to the protagonist as a Priestess of the Goddess is perhaps one of the most striking revelations about our current culture surrounding The Sacred Feminine. I believe, like Moore, that feminism and the studies of the Goddesses of all cultures have evolved to a stage where the pragmatism and the initiation of rites, passages, hymns, dance, and all art forms are becoming an active part of the worship of female divinity. If you are of this mind where myths from the ancient past of women who actively worshipped the Goddess in all her myriad forms may be combined

with our current art, ritual and religious life, then a reading of *Screen Dance as a Rite of Passage* by Lila Moore will enhance your journey.

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The journal will be published semi-annually and papers to be reviewed are welcomed on a continuing basis. Submissions are accepted on a rolling basis. Publication deadlines are determined by the number of accepted papers.

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Book Reviews: *S/HE* is accepting reviews of scholarly books in the field of Goddess Studies (see Instructions for Submissions). Books must have been published approximately within the last 3 years. Authors may solicit book reviews of recent publications from qualified arm's-length reviewers. At this time, authors are asked to provide copies of their relevant publications in electronic form; likewise, publishers may submit books for review in electronic form. Book reviews stand independently. If authors or publishers intend to influence the review, the review proposal of the book may be refused or cancelled. Submission needs to be emailed to our Book Review Editor, Louis Lagana, Ph.D. (louis.lagana@um.edu.mt).

Art/Poetry: We are accepting artworks, poems, and prose pieces, which are previously unpublished.

For any additional questions please email co-editors, contact Helen Hye-Sook Hwang, Ph.D. (mago9books@gmail.com), and/or Mary Ann Beavis, Ph.D. (mbeavis@stmcollege.ca) for inquiries.

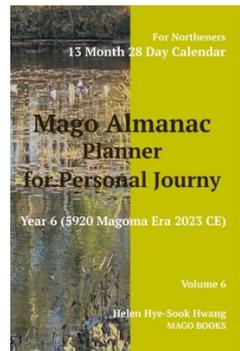
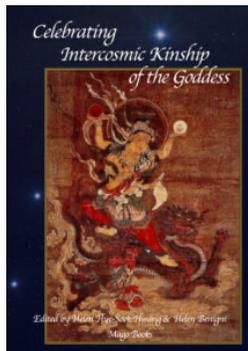
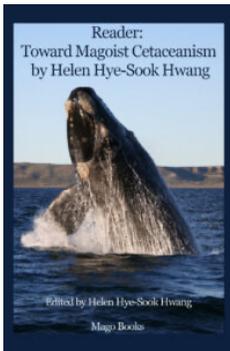
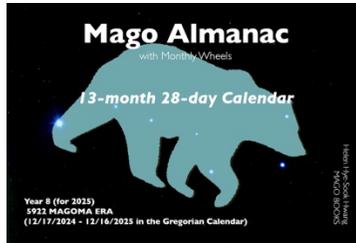
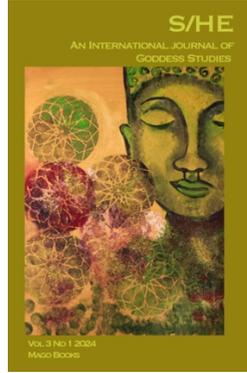
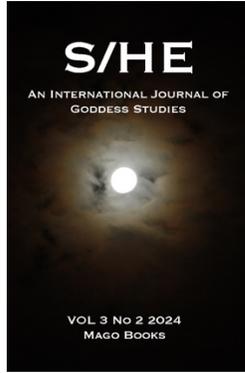
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