

# MA IN MYTH, COSMOLOGY AND THE SACRED

## OPEN LECTURES

MARCH-JUNE 2019

All lectures in Ng07, 6.15-7.45

**March 9: GEOFF DOEL**

*Mythical beasts – ancient & modern*



Mythical beasts have resonated through diverse societies reflecting religious, cultural and social values and psychological fears and desires. Their symbolic interpretations have not remained static, but have evolved in interaction with changing communities and beliefs to acquire a modern relevance, in particular with changing attitudes to the concept of 'other' via gender revaluation and greater sympathy for the natural world. This lecture will explore the cultural evolution of the mythologies of a number of fabulous beasts including dragons, unicorns, sirens, mermaids and shape-shifters, plus the cult of the horse and the symbolism of horns, drawing on mythology, literature, films and traditional lore, customs and folksongs -, particularly, but not exclusively, focusing on the British Isles.

Geoff Doel lectured of British Folklore & Mythology for Birkbeck College, where he took a PhD on Thomas Hardy's use of folklore, and on the Summer Academy & Durham University Summer School programmes. He currently teaches literature, medieval history & traditional culture for the Universities of Kent & Canterbury Christ Church on their adult education programmes. Geoff is co-author of 15 books on aspects of folklore, including *Folklore of Kent: The Kent Hooden Horse; Worlds*

*of Arthur: & The Green Man in Britain*. He featured on *Time Team*, which used his book on the Arthurian legends and is actively involved in traditional folk song & drama.

**March 23: DR WILLIAM ROWLANDSON**  
*Magical Realism*

**April 6: SIMAO CORTES**  
*Dream Animals*

**April 20: PROFESSOR LINDEN WEST**  
*Transforming perspectives in lifelong learning and adult education: a pilgrimage*



The metaphor shaping this lecture, and a new book, (see below), is one of pilgrimage. Laura Formenti and Linden West, both academics and psychotherapists from different schools, have dialogued together when walking their way through various theories and perspectives on learning, formation and transformation as well as biographical experiences. They find landmarks on the way, meaningful and challenging, and converse with people like Bauman and Freud, who, in differing ways, question our assumptions about transformation. They struggled with their own differences, and dialogue was threatened. They drew on Bunyan, Dante, Jung and Beckett too to argue that journeys are far deeper, demanding processes than represented in contemporary discussion of lifelong transformative learning. This is often marketed as a means to update our skills in a highly competitive world; or as a passport, perhaps, to relative

material abundance, social status and ‘success’. The literature of learning and education also privileges cognition in shifts in self or collective understanding.

We seem to be living in a world perpetually teetering on the brink of catastrophe. Ours is a moment where conversation and civility in public life get drowned out by the beating drums of fascism and xenophobia. Denigration of the other and trivialisation of complexity seem virulent. Adult education, in many countries, including our own – Britain and Italy in our two cases – once represented hopeful public and spiritual space where conversation, dialogue and conviviality were nurtured across profound difference. But adult education of a liberal and popular kind has weakened while the idea of public space has shrunk in a privatised world. We should cherish the important work every one of us has to do individually, but alongside the importance of learning to dialogue, across our differences, in public space.

Formenti L and West L (2018) *Transforming perspectives in lifelong learning and adult education: a dialogue*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. Go to <https://www.palgrave.com/gb/book/9783319963877>

**June 1: DR CHRIS DEACY**  
*How do we screen the Afterlife?*

**June 15: DR PETER MOORE**  
*Reinventing the Afterlife*



Nietzsche famously declared that God was dead, and for many people his death sentence must also apply to any idea of an afterlife. And yet perhaps there is a 'life after death' for the afterlife itself? If the idea of an afterlife does have a future, however, it is likely to be markedly different in some ways from the ideas familiar to traditional religious believers. On what basis can ideas about the afterlife be developed, or recovered, in ways likely to make sense to a sophisticated and increasingly global humanity – one that is aware of many different religious doctrines and traditions, not to mention the many discoveries of science?

One possibility is that any revised eschatology – or doctrine of the afterlife – will need to bring together the kind of data dealt investigated by parapsychology with the philosophical and metaphysical ideas of the great religious traditions. This marrying of scientific data with religious insights is, after all, how many religious people nowadays approach questions about topics as diverse as the origins of the universe, the evolution of humankind, sexual morality or social justice. One problem is that parapsychological data and theories seem too 'materialist' for many theologians but too 'spiritual' for many scientists. As a result questions about life after death tend to get stranded in a no-man's land between disciplines. In this lecture I broach ways of squaring the circle in the discussion of a topic in which science and religion should both be taking far more interest.

Born in 1945, Peter Moore read English, French and Philosophy at the University of Sheffield, and completed a doctorate in Religious Studies, under the supervision of Professor Ninian Smart, at the University of Lancaster. He has spent most of his academic career at the University of Kent at Canterbury, where he pioneered the discipline of Religious Studies, and (together with the late Dr Leon Schlam) initiated an MA in the Study of Mysticism and Religious Experience. His publications, in books and articles, have covered methodology in the study of religion, religious art and iconography, mysticism and religious experience, and the relationship between religion and parapsychology. His most recent publications include *Where Are the Dead? Exploring the Idea of an Embodied Afterlife* (Routledge, 2017) and *Earthly Immortalities: How the Dead Live On in the Lives of Others* (Reaktion, 2019). He retired from full-time teaching in 2011.