

Introduction

This comparative essay contrasts two secondary sources: Kirsten Hoving's 'Joseph Cornell's Cosmos: An Artist's Modern Interpretations of Astronomical Myths' and Ben Pestell's 'The Sun Within: New Solar Myth in Early Novels of Wilson Harris and J. G. Ballard'. Visual art for Hoving and modern mythopoeic literature for Pestell¹—they both examine the role of sky myth in modern culture. Hoving investigates how astronomical and mythological symbolism appears in the work of artist Joseph Cornell, while Pestell studies how solar myth is adapted by comparing twentieth-century fiction. Although both articles are concerned with myth, they diverge in the methods they use, the evidence they privilege, and the claims they ultimately make.

Hoving relies on an art-historical case study based on visual and archival analysis, while Pestell uses a comparative literary approach to study how solar imagery functions in two modern novels. Hoving's essay is centred on Joseph Cornell's use of astronomical myths, specifically his interest in Andromeda, to explore how astronomical stories and mythology are expressed through personal symbolism, artistic practice, and cultural memory.² Pestell, on the other hand, compares novelists Wilson Harris and J. G. Ballard, arguing that solar imagery in *Palace of the Peacock* and *The Drowned World* is central to how each writer deals with myth and individuation.³ Both articles fit within the field of cultural astronomy, but Pestell's is more comparative and theoretical, while Hoving's is more rooted in archival material, biography, and analysis of Cornell's works. This essay suggests that Pestell's article is more consistent in its conceptual framework and use of scholarship, while Hoving's is more persuasive when it stays close to Cornell's works and archival materials, but less so when it broadens into claims that are more narrowly centred on the artist and less fully supported by wider scholarly discussion.

Author Background and Critical Positioning

Hoving's article is an art-historical study of Cornell's engagement with myths of the spiralling galaxy Andromeda amongst his 'wide-ranging obsessions' centralised throughout his artwork.⁵ (Page 58) Her abstract describes the paper as 'a case study of the complex relations among myth and art' and proposes that psychological myth theory can illuminate Cornell's 'personalised reconfigurations of established myths of the stars'.⁴ Hoving outlines the paper's main focus from the outset. She writes from an established position within Cornell scholarship and as a professor and scholar of modern art, and cites her own monograph, *Joseph Cornell and Astronomy: A Case for the Stars*, as an earlier contribution to the field.⁵ She approaches the subject as a specialist in Cornell studies, though not as an insider to Cornell's historical world. This background is apparent in her handling of the archival record, Cornell's library, his clipping files, and the visual history of the motifs he reworks. The essay is strongest and more convincing when it draws on her expertise.

While Hoving builds a case study, Pestell develops a comparative argument. Rather than focusing on a single artist, he compares two early novels through the shared image of the Sun. His abstract outlines the main differences between the two novelists: Ballard's Sun is 'a transcendental engine that drives individual psychic integration', while Harris's is 'a gateway into a metaphysical realm of spiritual unity'.⁶ Pestell makes his comparative goal initially clear by showing that the two novels use solar imagery in different ways, which gives his essay a stronger structure. As a literary scholar and Visiting Fellow at the University of Essex, Pestell

works at the intersection of myth criticism, psychology, and modern literature.⁷ He also pays attention to the biographical and cultural backgrounds of Harris and Ballard, especially their experiences of migration and displacement, augmenting the study. Drawing on Charles Sugnet's discussion of 'exile,' Pestell presents both writers as outsiders, suggesting that this status gave them a unique view of Western modernity.⁸ Pestell addresses the position of the authors more directly, showing how their backgrounds shape his interpretation, whereas Hoving says less about how her own scholarly position informs her reading.

The two articles differ in how far the authors develop their own critical position and in how they handle distance and reflexive awareness. Pestell is more explicit about the terms of his reading: he defines the comparative basis of the article early, stating more clearly how theory is being used, and distinguishes his interpretation from a simple application of psychology to literature. Hoving, by contrast, says less about how her position as a Cornell specialist shapes the article's perspective. She identifies the essay as a case study and invokes psychological myth theory, but does not reflect in the same detail on how that framework guides her interpretation. In this respect, Pestell's article is more reflexive at the level of method, whereas Hoving's remains less explicit about its own critical standpoint.

A further contrast appears in the articles' handling of scale. Hoving's analysis is centrally focused on the single figure of Cornell, and this concentration gives the essay a clear centre, but also means that broader contextual claims are introduced selectively and often return quickly to the artist's symbolic world. Hoving's article is more insular, while Pestell's comparison between his selected authors' works reaches farther and wider. His article thoughtfully holds together two novelists, two texts, and a larger theoretical frame; he is required to make his transitions and comparative terms more visible to the reader. This difference does not make one article automatically superior to the other, but it does affect how each argument is supported. Hoving's article reads more as a study led by objects and motifs, while Pestell's reads more as a study led by comparison. Noting this difference helps clarify why Hoving's article is more intimate and texturally rich in detail, whereas Pestell often appears more explicit in method and structure.

Subject Matter and Scholarly Context

The two papers share a central concern: both ask how heavenly bodies retain meaning in modern times; however, they approach this question differently. Hoving looks at how astronomical myth appears in Cornell's collages, assemblages, and boxed constructions. She traces his interest in astronomy through his reading of Camille Flammarion, his use of Hevelius's and Bode's constellation maps, and his turning these materials into personal symbols.⁹ Hoving moves from Cornell's fascination with Andromeda to his use of the old constellation Custos Messium in works related to Marilyn Monroe. Her main point is that myth gave Cornell a way to explore his own inner process through scientific modernity, desire, companionship, grief, and release.¹⁰

Pestell's discussion is broader in scope and more overtly concerned with philosophical questions. He starts by placing the modern Sun in the context of a supposedly disenchanted twentieth century, referencing Weber's idea of modern rationality but arguing that fiction can still bring back spiritual and mythic forms.¹¹ Pestell claims that, for both writers, the Sun is a symbol connected to inner life and change. He then makes a clear distinction between the two authors. As he says in the abstract, 'Ballard's Sun is a transcendental engine that drives individual psychic integration, while Harris's is a gateway into a metaphysical realm of spiritual unity'.¹² So, the

focus is not just on solar imagery, but on how mythic consciousness continues in modern literature. Comparatively, Pestell's approach is more ambitious and more clearly theoretical.

The difference is also evident in the way the two articles are organised. Hoving's article is clear and mostly well-organised. The beginning explains Cornell's long-term interest in astronomy, highlights Flammarion and old celestial atlases as key sources, and then narrows the focus to Andromeda and Custos Messium.¹¹ Her essay is structured around specific examples from Cornell's work. The shift from Andromeda to Custos Messium is also thematically coherent: the first group centres on eroticism, innocence, and sacrifice, while the second is more concerned with mourning, guardianship, and memory. Hoving concludes by arguing that Cornell transformed myth into 'personalised visions of the stars' that answered his need for 'companionship, intimacy, and deliverance'.¹²

However, there are some structural weaknesses. Hoving's thesis is not as fully developed as it could be. The abstract promises to use psychological myth theory, but the paper does not define this theory, name its main thinkers, or explicitly explain how it is used as a method. The article shifts between art history, biography, archives, and psychological ideas without always explaining the connections between them. Cornell's wider cultural importance is more often assumed than fully demonstrated. More broadly, although Hoving's expertise is clear, the article does not fully develop its scholarly and theoretical context. Hoving notes his lifelong interest in astronomy and refers to a *Life* article about his 'imagined universe stored in boxes', but she does not fully explain why Cornell is important in the wider context of modern astronomical imagination.¹³ This does not undermine the essay as a whole, but it does narrow the reach of its argument.

Pestell's article is more tightly organised and more consistently supported by secondary scholarship. After the introductory framing around disenchantment and modern solar symbolism, he offers a short discussion of modernist precedents, especially Yeats and Stevens, which helps situate Harris and Ballard within a wider literary tradition.¹⁴ He then puts forward his comparative lens via Jungian individuation while also taking care to note that neither novelist simply illustrates psychological theory.¹⁵ From there, the article divides cleanly into substantial sections on *The Drowned World* and *Palace of the Peacock*, before returning in a final section towards a more general question of the 'twentieth-century Sun-god'. The article is organised so that the argument builds progressively; each section is strategically distinct, analytically worked, and its conclusion unpacks the argument as a whole.

Pestell is also careful to keep his main ideas clear and supported throughout the article. He often returns to terms such as myth, psyche, transcendence, exile, and visionary experience, and each recurrence helps clarify and strengthen the comparison. Specifically, how he discusses individuation. Instead of only mentioning Jung, Pestell draws on other scholars to clarify and deepen the comparison. For example, Samuel Francis's idea that Ballard changes Jungian individuation by adding a Freudian death instinct helps Pestell showcase the difference between Ballard's bleak path and Harris's move toward unity.¹⁶ These references support Pestell's comparison and help to sustain it throughout the article.

Both papers outline how myth remains active in modern culture rather than being preserved solely in earlier traditions. In Hoving, myth often appears as narrative content or a symbolic reservoir specific to Cornell. It is something he adapts, personalises, and modernises through his art. Hoving argues that Cornell used the myths of Andromeda and Custos Messium as symbolic structures through which private desire and public grief could be mediated.¹⁷ In Pestell's article,

myth is not only part of the novels' content, but also part of the interpretive framework used to read them. He is interested in solar depictions, but also in how literary form can become mythopoeic. Pestell argues that myth remains meaningful in a disenchanted age and that the Sun continues to hold symbolic power in modern literature.¹⁸

Hoving is most persuasive when she shows how Cornell combines modern science, old star maps, and private fantasy into his visual world. In passages of this kind, Hoving is not relying primarily on broad theory or psychological interpretation, but rather showing, through visual and material evidence, how Cornell brings together scientific imagery, historical star charts, and his own imaginative symbolism. Her discussion of Andromeda is especially effective in showing that the myth provided Cornell with a flexible structure through which innocence, eroticism, sacrifice, and scientific vastness could coexist.¹⁹ Still, these interpretive moves are not consistently supported by a clarified theory of myth. When she suggests that myths can function as culturally sanctioned outlets for repressed desire, the point is suggestive but briefly stated and insufficiently grounded in scholarship.²⁰ The reader is left to infer the theoretical basis.

Pestell, on the other hand, handles similar concepts with greater explicitness. His solar myth is tied to modern disenchantment, to literary modernism, to Jungian and post-Jungian discussion, and to outsider consciousness.²¹ He is careful not to overstate theoretical correspondence. At a crucial point, he remarks that fiction is not obliged to reproduce psychological theories or scientific hypotheses and that the novelist's observations possess their own kind of truth.²² This is methodologically helpful because it shows that Pestell uses theory to guide his interpretation without making the novels conform too neatly to it. Hoving does not offer a similar clarification, leaving her theoretical approach less clearly explained.

Use of Sources and Critical Limits

Hoving's use of sources as evidence is strongest at the level of visual and archival material. Cornell's clipping files, library, notes, star charts, and works give the article substantial texture, and her discussion of visual precedents such as Titian, Rubens, Delacroix, and Burne-Jones adds a persuasive art-historical depth. This is one of the article's most defining strengths. Even so, the secondary scholarship is lighter and less dialogic than in Pestell's essay. The references often provide support or context, but they are less often placed in active tension with Hoving's own reading. As a result, the article can at times feel assured without being equally debated. The two articles also differ in the role that citation plays in their arguments. Hoving's references frequently anchor a point of context or visual precedent, help identify sources, position Cornell's interests, and support the link between his artwork, archive, and biography. Pestell uses references often throughout his article to define and develop the argument's conceptual terms, refining distinctions and positioning his individual claims within larger debates about myth, modernity, and psychic process. His scholarship is more dialogic, despite both authors being well read. Pestell's sources are not just there to support what he already thinks; they actively help form the argument and direct how the novels are being read. While Hoving's references often stabilise the reading, Pestell's more often support, extend, and qualify his argument. Their differences in citations help explain why the two essays feel different and why they argue differently. Pestell's method is easier to follow because the structure of the argument remains coherent, whereas Hoving more often leaves the reader to make the connection between method, evidence, and interpretation.

Pestell draws on a broader and more sustained range of secondary scholarship. References to Weber, Frye, Tew, Francis, Sugnet, Stephenson, Sterenberg, and others are used to build the article's conceptual structure throughout. They help him connect solar symbolism to larger questions of disenchantment, literary form, myth, and psychic process. This makes the essay more fully situated within an ongoing scholarly conversation. At the same time, Pestell's confidence at the level of theory can sometimes move the discussion towards abstraction, where the argument becomes more conceptual than concrete. Harris, in particular, is mainly described through myth and spiritual ideas, and gives less space than he might to Harris's specific historical and Guyanese colonial background. Ballard, similarly, is read mainly through psyche and symbolic process, which can reduce attention to the political force of environmental collapse in *The Drowned World*. The result is a stronger comparative argument overall, but one that occasionally smooths over historical differences in order to sustain conceptual coherence.

Hoving's limitations are different. They arise less from abstraction than from uneven theoretical development. Her treatment of objects and archives is often impressive, and her discussion of *Silent Dedication* to MM through *Custos Messium* is especially memorable. She is particularly good at outlining how an obsolete constellation, removed from modern astronomical systems, could still return in Cornell's work as a figure of mourning and protection. One of the article's most implicit claims is that astronomical exactness and imaginative personification do not cancel one another out. Yet because this point remains more suggestive than fully developed, the article does not always build out the wider analytical implications of its strongest material.

Conclusions

Both essays end coherently, though again with different levels of persuasiveness. Hoving concludes that Cornell turned constellation myths into personal visions that enlarged the expressive range of his art and sustained him psychologically.³¹ This results from the examples discussed, especially *Andromeda* and *Custos Messium*. The conclusion is therefore justified by the archival evidence, even if it does not completely resolve the theoretical questions opened at the start. Pestell's conclusion, by contrast, synthesises his readings of Harris and Ballard into a broader claim about the reactivation of the Sun as a modern deity or visionary lens. This is a stronger conclusion because it both answers the comparative question and returns to the opening frame of disenchantment. It reads as the natural progression and outcome of the analysis rather than a separate final statement.

Both articles challenge the idea that myth belongs only to the ancient world by showing how celestial symbolism continues to shape modern art, literature, and cultural expression. The main differences between Hoving and Pestell's articles lie in their methods, use of evidence, and engagement with secondary scholarship. Hoving's article is a centralised and thoughtful reading of Cornell's work, grounded in visual analysis and rich archival material, but its conceptual framework is often underdeveloped and poorly defined, and its engagement with wider scholarship is limited. Pestell, by contrast, presents a more sustained argument, supported by a clearly stated and well-supported methodology and a more extensive range of secondary sources. He defines its key terms more clearly, distinguishes more carefully between its two authors, and sustains a clearer line of argument from beginning to the abstract to the conclusion, woven throughout.

Hoving's article continues to hold value for its archival sensitivity and for demonstrating how Cornell made star myth intimate and modern. Pestell's article offers a more persuasive model of

comparative analysis because it continually relates textual evidence, clearly outlines Pestell's thought patterns and conclusion throughout the paper through clearly articulated claims, while keeping its theoretical commitments visible and under control. Taken together, the two papers show the range of ways in which modern culture can reimagine the sky and myth. Taken separately, both Hoving and Pestell show that interpretive ambition requires methodological and secondary support to remain convincing.