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***Robert Holdstock's Mythago Wood: A Critical Companion* by Paul Kincaid**

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story not only as a hyperbolic parable but also—in the obscured intersection of divine grace and human freedom—a narrative whose continued duality leaves room for hope. Guroian’s concluding bibliographical essay presents an expanded reading list of classic stories, grouped under the thematic categories of the preceding chapters (e.g., “Becoming Real” or “Evil and Redemption”).

In arguing for the transformative value of fairy stories, *Tending the Heart of Virtue* offers a compelling apologetic for mythopoeic literature in the educational sphere. While the work will likely prove a beloved resource for parents and educators, Guroian’s staunch Christian perspective may prove a barrier to more secular readers. Readers of *Mythlore* may also be surprised by Guroian’s neglect of J.R.R. Tolkien’s “On Fairy-stories,” especially given his reliance on Chesterton, MacDonald, and Lewis. Nonetheless, Guroian’s analyses provide a steady counterpoint to reductive readings that, in neglecting the spiritual dimensions of classic fairy tales, betray biases of their own. His inclusion of multiple stories by MacDonald is also encouraging, prompting hopes that MacDonald’s works may see a resurgence of popularity in the realm of children’s literature. If, as Guroian writes, “[e]very true nursery or playroom is a piece of fairyland, a place where metaphors may shade into full-blown allegories of the world outside” (63), then he has done well to remind us of these imaginative translations.

—Sarah O’Dell

Veith, Gene Edward. “Reading and Writing Worldviews.” *The Christian Imagination: The Practice of Faith in Literature and Writing*, edited by Leland Ryken, Waterbrook Press, 2002, pp. 117-34.



ROBERT HOLDSTOCK’S MYTHAGO WOOD: A CRITICAL COMPANION.

Paul Kincaid. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022. 102 p. ISBN 9783031103735. \$44.99.

ROBERT HOLDSTOCK’S *Mythago Wood* WAS HONORED with multiple awards, including the World Fantasy Award both as a novelette and as a full-length novel. Paul Kincaid’s brief treatment of Holdstock’s work is compact in length but substantial in the depth of its analysis. Kincaid’s work is part of the Palgrave Science Fiction and Fantasy: A New Canon series and includes a comprehensive bibliography.

While Kincaid’s focus is primarily on the *Mythago Wood* story as related in the original novelette and re-worked in the full-length novel, he does touch on the subsequent novels in the sequence. In the “Introduction,” Kincaid notes

that Holdstock's early 1970s novels (*Eye Among the Blind*, *Earthwind*, and *Necromancer*) already demonstrated a preoccupation with time, the mysteries of the past, and the present haunted by the past. In 1981, these interests were heightened with the publication of a new SF novel, *Where the Time Winds Blow*, and a novelette, *Mythago Wood*, both of which feature as a characteristic the variability of time, in particular time and its relationship to landscape. Holdstock developed this theme to its fullest flowering in the novel of *Mythago Wood*, published in 1984. With this novel Kincaid asserts that Holdstock remade fantasy from the perspective of science fiction, subverting the conventions of fantasy up to that point by presenting the non-linearity of time as the key aspect of the novel. While Parts 1 and 2 of the novel feature numbered chapters, by the time the reader has reached Part 3 the chapters are no longer numbered but titled, signifying a shifting away from chronological or linear time as events related in the narrative begin to lose their fixity. Kincaid alludes to John Clute's four stages of fantasy as defined in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, and establishes that the fourth stage, healing (or return), is missing in Holdstock's work. In Kincaid's view, this is a radical shift in fantasy that sets Holdstock apart from the field.

A lot of fantasy takes place in the "woods." Ryhope Wood, where the action of *Mythago Wood* is set, is an unmappable, unfixed landscape where time is fluid. Characters enter the wood and if or when they emerge from there they do so as *mythagos*, beings embodying archetypes from the human collective unconscious. As depicted in the novel, *mythagos* can shift over time into different incarnations or aspects of these archetypes, recalling in a way Pullman's daemons before they become fixed. To journey into the wood is a journey into the psychic imagination.

In the first chapter, "War," Kincaid details Holdstock's family history and its relationship to the novel. One of Holdstock's grandfathers served in WWI and experienced trauma in the battle at Trone's Wood; his other grandfather served as a gardener at Lacton Manor at Westwell in Kent which Holdstock acknowledged served as a model for Ryhope Wood. The family at the heart of the novel, the Huxleys, feature in clashes between George Huxley, a veteran of WWI, and his sons Christian and Steven, who both served in WWII. (In the "Introduction" Kincaid provides much insightful commentary on Holdstock's choice of Huxley for the family name, making connections to the historical Huxley family of Thomas and Aldous). War and warrior culture, as experienced in prehistoric, Roman, and the English Civil War cultures, respectively, are but a few examples of the clashes among the characters and the *mythagos* they come to embody over the course of the novel.

In the second chapter, "Time," Kincaid discusses further the fluid, non-linearity of time as the characters undergo the transformation into *mythagos*. In

the third chapter, “Myth,” Kincaid notes the references Holdstock made in the novels to individuals associated with the preservation/recovery of supposed English folk traditions, such as composer Ralph Vaughn Williams and the proponent of “ley lines,” Alfred Watkins. Mythagos of the archetypes for the Wild Hunt, Herne the Hunter, Peredur, Arthur, and Robin Hood occur throughout the novel. Holdstock acknowledged his debt to Jung concerning the collective unconscious, with the caveat that in Jung the collective unconscious was fixed, whereas in Holdstock mythagos continue to shift into different iterations of archetypes over time.

In the “Aftermath” Kincaid considers the further development of Holdstock’s mythago sequence, especially with respect to the use of masks, “hollowings,” and Gawain and the Green Knight. He reflects on the relationship of the Mythago sequence to the other books Holdstock produced in the latter half of his career, and on other authors that show the influence of Holdstock. It is curious that nowhere does Kincaid make any reference to Alan Garner, who before Holdstock published his Mythago works was already exploring similar territory, such as the non-linearity of time and its relationship to landscape in a mythic environment—the recurrence of mythic patterns in *The Owl Service* (1967), for example, and *Red Shift* (1973), which features episodes involving Roman soldiers and English Civil War characters as well as a neolithic artifact. Both Garner novels involve love triangles, which also play a prominent role in *Mythago Wood*. Garner’s work is also relevant considering Kincaid’s assertions concerning Clute’s fourth stage given the ambiguity of the ending of *Red Shift* or even *Elidor* (1965). At the very least, a discussion of Garner and his related preoccupations with landscape and time et cetera would seem pertinent. Additionally, although at the other end of the spectrum, given less of a focus on myth and archetype specifically, Christopher Priest’s Dream Archipelago sequence along with his other novels also invite comparison to Holdstock considering Priest’s treatment of the non-linearity of time and shifting landscapes. Kincaid has written about Priest elsewhere, but if seeking to further bolster Holdstock’s reputation in SFF is the aim here, then failing to make comparisons to Holdstock’s contemporary giants represents a missed opportunity. Nevertheless, Kincaid’s assessment of *Mythago Wood*’s place in the fantasy canon is both assured and compelling.

—Glenn R. Gray

