



Christian Mythmakers: C.S. Lewis, Madeleine L'Engle, J.R.R. Tolkien, George MacDonald, G.K. Chesterton, Charles Williams, Dante Alighieri, John Bunyan, Walter Wangerin, Robert Siegel, and Hannah Hurnard

Rolland Hein , Clyde S. Kilby (Foreword by)

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Literature of such great writers as C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Madeleine L'Engle, Charles Williams, G. K. Chesterton, John Bunyan, Dante and others is examined in this introductory volume to Christian mythopoeia.

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Date : Published December 1st 2002 by Cornerstone Press Chicago (first published 1998)

ISBN : 9780940895485

Author : Rolland Hein , Clyde S. Kilby (Foreword by)

Format : Paperback 303 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Criticism, Literary Criticism, Biography, Religion, Christianity, Fantasy, Mythology

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From Reader Review Christian Mythmakers: C.S. Lewis, Madeleine L'Engle, J.R.R. Tolkien, George MacDonald, G.K. Chesterton, Charles Williams, Dante Alighieri, John Bunyan, Walter Wangerin, Robert Siegel, and Hannah Hurnard for online ebook

D. E. says

Rolland Hein is not a common name. However, He in is a very popular name of the Black Forest of what in now southern Germany. The next stop for the Rolland He in family tree was Alsace Lorraine an area between France and Germany. The family tree then went to Great Britain and Ireland. In the early 1400's the Hein family traveled to Nova Scotia and boated down the Hudson River until they arrived in eastern Pennsylvanian. The town of Bethlehem at the beginning of WW I, had become larger with many forms of the He in name. Suffice to say there are many branches of the family throughout the US. After many years and many marriages a DNA study was accomplished by selecting members of the family from different parts of the US to find that our family tree has black, red, yellow sand white on the limbs. I suspect that many families across North America are similar in nature...DEH

Rebekah Choat says

"Whether or not people are aware of the fact, they cannot live without myth, nor can they reach full stature as people without true myths. Wrong myths destroy lives; those only partially true affect the human spirit like disease. A proper response to true myth is necessary to moral and spiritual health."

Lara Lleverino says

This is one of those books that you read and then have 50+ new books to read.

J. Alfred says

Hein's love for the authors with whom he deals is unquestionable, and of course that makes for a good review and reminder of good works one knows, as well as a possible introduction to works one doesn't. Unfortunately, his argument is less than original (basically it is viewing writers in Lewis's tradition explicitly through Lewis's ideas) and his aesthetic judgements are often perplexing. The book does have some real merit, and if one is in love with some of these authors or wishes to know them better, I wouldn't want to discourage it. I probably wouldn't have rated it so poorly if I hadn't expected something more from something with a title like this.

Erika RS says

I am an avowed atheist, but to discover why I was reading a book about Christian myth makers, you need look no further than the subtitle of the book. Tolkien, L'Engle, MacDonald, and Lewis are all authors I have enjoyed. Although this book looks at them primarily as Christian writers, the discussion of each of those authors writings was enjoyable.

Also enjoyable was Clyde Kilby's forward on the nature of myth. Myth in the writings of these authors is not the low definition of discredited stories. Rather, this book discusses the higher meaning of myth. In the words of Kilby, "Myth is the name of a way of seeing, a way of knowing in depth, a way of experiencing -- a way that in being disinterested contains the freedom of unending and vital interest." Myth is necessary because "Systematizing flattens, but myth rounds out. Systematizing drains away color and life, but myth restores." Any translation of idea into language, reality into system loses some depth. Myth is what recaptures that depth by providing sidelong glimpses of some sensed truth.

Hein makes the assumption that the truth that myth points to is embodied in Christianity -- the Bible presents myth that is also factual truth. This is not a bad assumption in so far as it is what the authors under discussion believed. However, it is an assumption and one that fails to carry its own weight upon further examination.

In the end, this book was a worthwhile read, but the large number of authors surveyed and lack of willingness to examine the basic assumptions Christianity's relationship to myth made it somewhat shallow.

Josiah says

I enjoyed this book. Some parts better than others. Specifically because of either the author or work reviewed. At times it was difficult to return because the style of writing felt like I was in a constant classroom. I kept expecting some familiarity between reviewer and author/work to break up the monotony. Nevertheless still a worth while read especially if anyone of these writers or their works are unfamiliar and fantasy/myth is a passion. A passing interest will likely make this book feel weighty. Enjoy!

Bill Tillman says

MYTHOPOEIA is the word used by Rolland Hein to describe the writing styles of the authors reviewed and the analysis is excellent.

C.S. Lewis George MacDonald
G.K. Chesterton J.R.R. Tolkien
John Bunyan Madeleine L'Engle
Charles Williams Walter Wangerin

"Making and experiencing myth are universal human realities. Hein, ever aware of the fact, leads us on a tour of Christian mythmaking from Bunyan to Wangerin. An enlightening, refreshing, and motivating work." J.I. Packer, professor of Theology, Regent College.

Kathy Hale says

The author compares and contrasts the works of Bunyan's Pilgrims Progress and authors such as C.S. Lewis, Tolkien and George McDonald. Illustrates the difference between myth, fairy and folk tales and how these authors related them to their Christian faith.

E.L. says

While this had some good points and excellent moments, overall it did not work for me. Part of the problem would come with any kind of scholarly examination of mythic fiction - by examining the symbols, it strips them of their magic, reducing and flattening them to mere objects. Hein does his utmost to avoid this, but the nature of the work itself forced it. The other problem came about due to his narrow focus on the symbolism within the various works to the exclusion of story. It's the story - or Story, as Lewis or L'Engle (or I) would insist on calling it - that drives these works, not the symbols. The symbols must fit within the framework of the Story, the story is not crafted around the symbol, and Hein's approach seemed to take the latter view.

A book that is useful in many ways, but ultimately failed for me. I think I would much rather read the stories themselves and steep in them rather than read an essay which picks apart their symbolism.

William J. Meyer says

Marvelous study.

Justine Olawsky says

The very best books, in my opinion, are the ones that lead me to read many other very good books. Two examples of this sort *par excellence* are Francine Prose's *Reading like a Writer* and Stephen Cox's *The New Testament and Literature*. From them, I received not only the pleasure of those authors' well-written work, but also was turned on to many, many other works that have brought me varying levels of joy.

I have read at least some of the work of most of the writers discussed in Rolland Hein's *Christian Mythmakers*; having read this book, though, I now have a whole new list of to-reads by authors both beloved and new-to-me. I had forgotten that C.S. Lewis wrote a Space Trilogy and that I still had never read Gilbert Keith's *Manalive*. Man, it's going to be a busy reading season for me! Bring on the rainy days and cups of tea! Jack understands.

Much like the best of these works of literary criticism, *Christian Mythmakers* is delightful to read in and of itself. Mr. Hein fills the introduction with his contentions about the importance of myth and the role it plays in filling that "pervasive yearning after the eternal" that is called *Sehnsucht*. All myth, including Christian myth, follows patterns of "creation, fall, redemption, and apocalypse" while exploring themes of "struggle, calling, renunciation, and deliverance." Because these are the eternal ideas and conflicts that define the

human experience, we find truth in mythos, the stories we create, because they reflect the Truth of the Story that created us. Christian mythmakers, Hein asserts, hold a special place among storytellers, shaped and defined as they are by ever-revelatory Word that both is and is from God.

Especially interesting to me were the chapters on two of the most enigmatic of the writers -- the most symbolic, the least allegorical. These, to my mind, are George MacDonald and Charles Williams. I have read Mr. MacDonald's *Phantastes* and several of his short story/novella collections. I have not yet read anything by Charles Williams, though I think I once may have downloaded a freebie by him onto Kindle, but then turned away from what little I read in confusion and dismay. Mr. Hein's book has heartened me to read more by Mr. MacDonald (perhaps finally getting through *The Princess and the Goblin*) and given me the impetus to tackle Mr. Williams at last.

In writing about C.S. Lewis, Mr. Hein eschews the easy route of writing about Lewis's Narnia series, and he instead focuses on some of the more difficult in Lewis's oeuvre, the Space Trilogy and *Till We Have Faces*. This was a good call, I think, because, much as I love and adore Narnia, it never really achieves that other worldly/alternate reality feel of Tolkien's *Lord of the Ring* Trilogy or that Lewis's own *Till We Have Faces* does. Narnia, wonderful land that it is, has seemed to me as an adult visitor, to be mostly an idealized Medieval England with awesome talking animals and some more mythical and supernatural creatures thrown in. Believe me, that is why I feel so much more comfortable there than I ever have in Tolkien's Middle Earth or the strange pre-Christian landscape of *Faces*. But, it is easier to get a hold of; therefore, it was less necessary that Mr. Hein write about it in this lovely book.

If you are drawn to story, especially stories that dance alongside and reflect a bit of the light of the Story; that is, if you agree with Mr. Hein, Mr. Tolkien, Mr. Lewis, and me that "myth is integral to the completeness of our being," then I heartily and gladly recommend this book to you.

Stacey Lozano says

I read this every once in a while, and probably walk away with the same feeling each time. I can't sit and read through the entire thing. It's full of information but it is dry. It almost reads like a thesis, which maybe it is but I feel as if it is missing something. The best way for me to go to this book is to scan the different sections and focus on one or two authors at a time. That helps me to take in the information and figure out what I want to do with it without feeling overwhelmed.

Olivia says

Not quite what I expected (though I'm not sure what exactly I did expect), but this is an interesting read. It essentially examines these authors and several of their works, and how they've woven faith into fantasy/myth. I was a little confused by their definition of myth (the foreword, I'm afraid was lost on me and I'm not sure what I read there XD), but it was neat to see, in particular, the works of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, since those were basically the only authors whose books I remember well (I've read McDonald, but that was years ago and I remember little), and seeing how their faith and ideas were tucked smoothly into their stories. Like Tolkien's The Silmarillion or Lewis' Space Trilogy. It was neat to see how their faith was worked into their words.

Lady says

This is a hard book to review because in a lot of ways it's only as interesting as the author he's discussing. So, the section on Bunyan was mostly dull and dry, but Tolkien was fascinating. Rolland Hein's basic premise is engaging and he examines it thoroughly in the work of various authors. Taken as a counterpoint to Joseph Campbell, it's really interesting.

But I was disappointed in the balance of authors discussed. He goes into great detail with Dante and Bunyan and Chesterton and MacDonald and Williams but doesn't discuss Lewis' Narnia series at all and doesn't even devote an entire chapter to Madeleine L'Engle, even though her name is on the cover (even before Tolkien). I enjoyed being able to glance through the history of the older authors and seeing the effect they had on later storytellers. But, I then wanted more time spent discussing those modern authors whose work is more widely known to a modern audience.

Particularly, Lewis and L'Engle. I understand The Chronicles of Narnia are less mythological than Lewis' other books, but they are his widest read fantasy and I think it would have been interesting to bring them into the conversation. L'Engle also, I think, deserved more discussion of her various works. Especially since, like Tolkien and Lewis, she wrote quite a bit of non-fiction discussing myth and art and faith so she had a great perspective on her own work.

Rick says

First let me try a working definition of myth: take a value such as heroism, love, sacrifice, struggle, hope, and a quest, and weave a story around it, a story populated with humans and/or nonhumans, and magic outside of time or space. For Christians include faith and trust and the battle between good and evil.

This author says, "Myth is something people desperately need, cannot, in fact, live without. No other demand profoundly defines our humanity...The imagination in its highest reaches must have myth; it is a bridge that spans the gap between man and the eternal."

I cannot disagree. My favorite chapters were the ones about Tolkien and Lewis.
