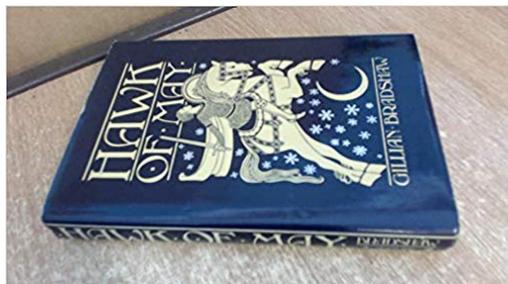


## Hawk of May *by* Gillian Bradshaw



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In sixth century Britain, Gwalchmai, the second son of Morgawse and Lot, escapes from the evil world of his sorceress mother and joins King Arthur's men, challenging the cruelest of Arthur's enemies--Aldwulf the sorcerer



## Reviews of the **Hawk of May** *by* Gillian Bradshaw

sunrise bird

I have read most of the Arthurian classics—Le Morte, the Mabinogion, Sir Gawain & the Green Knight, the Idylls, A Connecticut Yankee, and so forth to even delve into the more contemporary versions by White, Stewart, Cooper & Sutcliff. All of these I consider books that should be read before going down a tier into other noteworthy works such as this one. Somehow this novel elides the category of fantasy a la T.H. White and the pseudo historical retellings that have now plagued the market in such overabundance. Somehow, Bradshaw aims for the middle and manages to upset both kinds of readers in the process.

For such a young writer at the time, Bradshaw definitely impressed me with a style that is a bit more reminiscent of Sutcliff's "Sword at Sunset." She keeps many of the canonical aspects of the legend such as the role of Morgause, which follows in the tradition of Malory. What does not follow in the tradition of Malory is Bradshaw's characterization of Gawain, whom she returns to the nobler Welsh counterpart Gwalchmai (as found in the Mabinogion). Bradshaw also brings in the later Arthurian developments of Ceii's sharp-tongued buffoonery, coupling this with his earlier courageous portrayals from Welsh sources. Bedwyr is here and he is truly the one armed warrior who retains his place among Arthur's first companions.

The novel is not without its problems. In attempting to bridge the magical with gritty portrayal of post Roman Britain, we have the pacing issues mentioned by others, particularly the surreal Lugh episode that takes some time to reconcile with the narrative that follows. There are also some battle sequences, while well described, did not capture the tension of other novels I have read in a similar vein. I cannot put my finger on what doesn't work. Did the fantasy element nullify the pseudo historical tension? I'm still not sure.

The portrayal of Arthur is more human than that of Tennyson, but retains much of the coldness and distance that Tennyson's version has. If you are wanting a bit of the warmth of T.H. White or Mary Stewart, look elsewhere.

There is a moving and unforgettable episode with a horse, Ceincaled (Gringalot from the Green Knight romance). Here is no knight riding his horse till it dies from under him, but rather two kindred spirits fleeing those who would contain them. Agrivain and Medraut (Mordred) are here (no Gaheris or Gareth), and the former seems closer to Malory's Gawain—hotheaded but endearing nonetheless. I have not read the rest of Bradshaw's trilogy but am looking forward as this does feel very much like a set up novel for more to come. Will we encounter the Gawain that we find in the Green Knight romance? Bradshaw certainly seems to be restoring a much nobler Gawain from earlier source materials whom his brother Agrivain realizes will be "a great warrior, a man they make songs about."

I do recommend reading this one after you have made yourself acquainted with the Arthurian legend through some other classic, and highly recommend the audible narration by Nicole Quinn. She imbues the narration with a distinct northern (even Irish) feel that actually improves upon the pleasure of reading this tale.

Ffel

I must admit to a bit of confusion about the way Amazon is referring to this book, since it's subtitled "Down the Long Way 1), but apparently the series title is "Down the Long WIND".

At any rate, it takes a fresh look at the Arthurian Legend, approaching it through the eyes of young Gwalchmai ap Lot, whom readers may more readily recognize as Gawain. As the son of King Lot of Orkney and the sorceress / general s\*\*\* disturber, Morgawse (Morgan LeFay), young Gwalchmai has a pretty tough row to hoe in general, and being notably untalented in the warrior department doesn't make things any easier. Ultimately he sets off on a journey which -- not surprisingly -- ends in manhood and acceptance to Arthur's warband.

It's a long, cold, violent trip to Arthur's inner circle, however, and Bradshaw does a good, if somewhat slow, job getting him there. There are many of the magical traditions of the Arthurian cycle present here, but Merlin, Lancelot, Guinevere, and Excalibur are notably absent. Arthur is mostly offstage except for the last third of the novel, and when he does appear, he's presented as a stubborn, suspicious, and surprisingly ill-tempered young monarch. One must wonder why Gwalchmai is going to all this trouble to win a place at his side.

All in all, it's an engaging read. Bradshaw includes introductory information to help readers tackle the pronunciation of some of the more difficult words, though in the Kindle edition, it's a bit cumbersome to refer back to them. Arthurian completists will probably want to go on to the next two books, but the casual reader can be satisfied with this story as a stand-alone tale.

Burgas

This is a GREAT take on the Arthurian legends, centering on the knight I believe normally called 'Sir Gawain' but in this series is known by the old Celtic name of "Gwalchmai" (Hawk of May).

The book starts out with a brief backstory of Gwalchmai as a child. Not naturally a warrior, he turns toward his mother Morgawse's dark knowledge of sorcery before checking himself and turning to the path of the "Light." This results in his being taken to the Isle of the Blessed (aka Avalon) and being given the tools to aid King Arthur in his quest to unite the Britains. The book and series follow Gwalchmai's struggle to do right in a barbaric age of war and inequity. There is a good bit of action in the book as well if you're after that. Overall this series is my favorite of all the Arthurian legends.

Even with all three books taken together it's an easily read story and like all well written series, it ends too soon. Gillian Bradshaw did amazingly in my opinion, although these books seem to have sadly fallen out of print. I have also unfortunately not been able to locate them in digital format, nor in audio book format. These three books would make an awesome series of movies!

This book 'Hawk of May' is the first book of the series. Be sure to read the second book- 'Kingdom of Summer' and then check out the final book of the series "In Winter's Shadow." It will be worth your while! If you like the Arthurian legends, you'll love these stories. If you've never read the legend before, THIS is the version to read and will likely convert you.

Agalen

This is the first book of a trilogy. I guess it's time to renew the copyright, so it's being reissued. I'm glad Gillian has been able to create a legacy for her grandchildren. The worst book by Gillian Bradshaw is better than the best book by most authors! I've been collecting her books for over 20 years. She is a wonderfully good writer. In just a couple of pages, I am out of my world, and into hers. All of her books can be reread any number of times. I buy most books by Kindle these days, but for Bradshaw books, I want the real thing. When the price comes down, I buy them as gifts. I can't recommend her books highly enough, and this is one of the best. (By the way, she never uses crude or filthy language. What a relief!)

Androrim

Held my attention such that I want the next ones by this author

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