



Witch Wood (Canongate Classics)

John Buchan

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Introduced by Christopher Harvie.

Set against the religious struggles of seventeenth-century Scotland, with Montrose for the king against a covenanted kirk, John Buchan's *Witch Wood* is a gripping atmospheric tale in the spirit of Stevenson and Neil Munro.

As a moderate Presbyterian minister, young David Sempill disputes with the extremists of his faith. All around, the defeated remnants of Montrose's men are being harried and slaughtered by the faithful, and Sempill's plea for compassion, like his love for the beautiful Katrine Yester, is out of joint with the times.

There are still older conflicts to be faced however, symbolised by the presence of the Melanudrigill Wood, a last remnant of the ancient Caledonian forest. Here there is black magic to be uncovered, but also the more positive pre-Christian intimations of nature worship.

In such setting, and faced with the onset of the plague, David Sempill's struggle and eventual disappearance take on a strange and timeless aspect in what was John Buchan's own favourite among his many novels.

'Set in the Borders which he knew so well, this story of 17th-century Scotland shows the qualities which have enabled Buchan's thrillers to last so well, and which still persuade serious readers to regard him more highly than many apparently more ambitious novelists.' *Independent*

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