



## **Wizardry and Wild Romance: A Study of Epic Fantasy**

*Michael Moorcock, China Miéville (Introduction), Jeff VanderMeer (Afterword)*

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Newly revised and expanded by the author, this study of epic fantasy analyzes the genre from its earliest beginnings in Medieval romances, on through practitioners like Tolkien, up to today's brightest lights.

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Date : Published March 16th 2004 by Monkeybrain (first published 1987)

ISBN : 9781932265071

Author : Michael Moorcock , China Miéville (Introduction) , Jeff VanderMeer (Afterword)

Format : Paperback 206 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Language, Writing, Criticism, Literary Criticism, Essays, Science Fiction, Literature, Science Fiction Fantasy



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# From Reader Review Wizardry and Wild Romance: A Study of Epic Fantasy for online ebook

## Cynthia Ravinski says

Check out my review at [Wandering around the Words](#)

favorite quotes:

"Writers like Tolkien take you to the edge of the Abyss and point out the excellent tea-garden at the bottom, showing you the steps carved into the cliff and reminding you to be a bit careful because the hand-rails are a trifle shaky as you go down; they haven't got the approval yet to put a new one in." (Epic Pooh, 129)

"Jokes are not Comedy and stories which contain jokes are not comic stories." (Wit and Humor, 110)

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## R.M.F Brown says

A writing masterclass from a fantasy master

When it comes to Fantasy writing, there are few better than Moorcock, and its often been pointed out, that Moorcock has written most of it!

So there are few more qualified than Moorcock to guide us through literary labyrinth.

In this collection of essays, Moorcock casts a critical, no holds barred, eye over the genre. The result is an insightful, and sometimes frustrating look at the evolution of the fantasy genre.

Moorcock's critique of Tolkien's works is a welcome antidote to the persistent and lingering notion that modern fantasy started with the LOTR. As much as I've enjoyed the LOTR, there are aspects of it that do not stand up to critical scrutiny. Moorcock's championing of Fritz Lieber and Mervyn Peake, as giants of the genre, is long overdue, and introduced me to criminally overlooked novels. For that, I'm grateful.

The role of women in the genre (criticised for being often two dimensional or the stereotypical maiden in distress) and the use of evocative imagery (landscapes) are discussed, and yield up insights that no aspiring fantasy author should do without. There is an element of Jung philosophy here when dealing with environment: how does one affect the landscape, and how does the landscape affect us. A simple question as Moorcock points out, but also one that yields works such as *Mythago Wood*

On the negative side, the random insertion of obscure authors, and the structure of this book (random essays thrown together) did make me gnash my teeth at times. On the other hand, if you have time, then many of these obscure works can be traced through Goodreads, and thanks to the wonders of ebay, hard to find books can be purchased such as this hidden gem: *The Blue Sword*

As a critique of the genre or as a primer in fantasy writing, I have yet to come across a comparable book. Well worth a look.

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## Robert Beveridge says

Michael Moorcock, *Wizardry and Wild Romance* (Gollancz, 1987)

Michel Moorcock would be, it seems, the obvious choice to produce a critical work on epic fantasy. After all, he's written more of it than just about any living author, or he had at the time this book was commissioned, ten years before its release, after the publication of his article "Epic Pooh" in 1977. ("Epic Pooh," revised, appears as chapter five here, and is one of the true gems of this book.) Still an excellent choice, as most of the similarly prolific writers who have emerged in the shadow of Moorcock lack the wit and originality he displays in novel after novel.

Interestingly, this is one of his main criticisms of the fantasy genre overall, not just in the moderns but going back to the earliest days of epic fantasy. The book, which is far more a survey than a critical analysis, strikes a Paul DeMan-esque note in its willingness (perhaps too much willingness) to turn many of fantasy's sacred cows into shish kebab. What is refreshing about Moorcock is that, unlike most critics, he is always willing to suggest a good number of alternatives for each piece of overwrought, mindless fluff the public is willing to take to heart. (Moorcock seems to have a special circle in Hell reserved for the Inklings, the chief fantasists of which were J. R. R. Tolkein and C. S. Lewis, both of whom Moorcock roundly despises; he spends more column inches disparaging Narnia and Middle Earth than all the other writers he castigates combined.)

One wonders, idly, why a survey draws as much money as it does these days. I could probably pay a month's rent auctioning off my copy of this, a first edition/first printing. Odd, since the volume barely gets a few lines into page one hundred fifty before it reaches its conclusion. But mine is not to reason why. It's not worth the incredible sums it fetches from booksellers these days, but as a jumping-off point for readers of fantasy who are looking for ways to branch out into wider genre-specific reading, it's a pretty darned fine piece of work.

Most of Moorcock's jaundiced views on epic fantasy could apply to all types of literature, which is at the same time both the book's main strength and its weakness. One expects, when reading a survey, to see the ways that the subject's lineage relates to what has come before and what has come after (see Eliade's wonderful *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* for perhaps the finest extant example of how to write a survey on a particular subject), but Moorcock seems to have the underlying belief that writing in a particular genre should have the same strengths and weaknesses as writing in any other, or in writing that is genreless or transcends its genre. To some extent this is true; the best fantasy writers, like the best writers of most genres, do transcend what the hacks are doing and make their work into literature. Where Moorcock goes slightly wrong, though, is in not delineating the transcendent from the more satisfying genre tales. He gives equal weight to, for example, Terry Pratchett (whose work, while parodic, is still very much genre fiction) and Ursula K. LeGuin (who is the very definition of an author who transcends any genre in which she chooses to apply herself). Perhaps he is expecting the reader to be able to discern which is which. Not an unreasonable expectation, if you assume your audience is as widely read in the genre as you are. I doubt many fantasy readers, or for that matter many academics, are as widely-read in their chosen fields as Moorcock, who tosses out the names and critical overviews of fantasy works going back to the pre-Romantic period that have been out of print for a few hundred years as if he'd assigned them the week before while teaching a class on fantasy literature, and we are all expected to go down to the University bookstore and pick up copies of them. Would that we could.

Still, as an overview of what's out there, where both the aspiring fantasy reader and the aspiring fantasy

writer should be looking to find the stuff that really is worth being influenced by, despite its age *Wizardry and Wild Romance* is still the definitive survey on epic fantasy. It'd be nice to see a second edition. I, for one, would love to see what Moorcock thinks of, say, Philip Pullman, Terry Goodkind, or Neil Gaiman. But the recommendations in here should be enough to keep me hunting down obscure titles for the next decade, and the approach he takes to epic fantasy is a witty and readable one. \*\*\*\*

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### **Mieneke says**

I ran across this book at work and decided to take it out to brush up a bit on the history of fantasy, in this case epic fantasy. It took me a while to finally pick it up - I think I renewed the loan about 4 times - and once I did the experience was a mixed one, to be honest. Partly, that is due to the age of the book, it was published in 1987, and partly, it was due to the tone of the author's writing. But it did give me plenty of food for thought and gave a very interesting overview of the evolution of (epic) fantasy. It certainly gave me a list of seminal and classic works to check out!

The book is over 24 years old and it shows its age in some of the statements found in the book. It should be noted however that a new and revised edition of this book was published in 2004 by MonkeyBrain Books, so these statements might have changed in this newer edition. To me though, they gave an added sense of interest to the book, as they show how much has changed in 24 years, both in the genre and in the world at large.

*Wizardry and Wild Romance* gave me a lot to think about and I plan on checking out some of the classic authors Mr Moorcock mentions. Additionally, I plan on searching our library catalogue for more titles on the subject of speculative fiction.

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### **Bill Kerwin says**

Moorcock, master of fantasy—and self-described pragmatist and anarchist—offers his opinionated and passionate observations on the genre and its practitioners. He derides J.R.R. Tolkien's world—and C.S. Lewis' as well—as a kind of “epic Pooh,” a privileged and nostalgic vision of England, fearful of social change, defensive in its conservative Christianity and profoundly uninterested in the subtlety and ambiguity of evil. He prefers the nuanced and ironic works of E.R. Eddison, Mervyn Peake, Fritz Leiber, and—among his own contemporaries—Gene Wolfe and M. John Harrison, whom Moorcock argues are all better stylists than the two hallowed “masters” of the genre. He is quick to praise—and to condemn—other authors as well, having particularly harsh words for the sexist S&M indulgences of John Norman's series, the *Chronicles of Gor*.

This collection of observations can be both infuriating and illuminating. Moorcock's essay “Epic Pooh” is particularly fine, and central to a mature understanding of fantasy fiction.

(Note: this review refers to the 1987 edition, not the expansion and revision of 2004.)

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## **Joseph says**

Recommended for all fantasy genre lovers.

This edition features an introduction by China Mieville, a foreword by Moorcock, 6 essays, various book reviews done by Moorcock including a very good forward about Peake, and an afterword by Jeff VanderMeer.

5 stars for Moorcock's anti-tolkien essay, "Epic Pooh." - An argument about everything that is wrong with The Rings, which I whole-heartedly agree with.

The essays are good, as well as his book reviews; he would be a good GR friend to have as I have already further lengthened my To-Read pile on his recommendations.

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## **Mark Donnelly says**

Brilliant!

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## **AT says**

A politically-tinged analysis of fantasy. Fairly disappointing as it opts to be a somewhat shallow polemic at critical moments rather than a more thoughtful piece of writing. The criticism of ironic fantasy is particularly specious; modern fantasy wishes it had an author as good as James Branch Cabell.

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## **Steve says**

This is a hard book to rate. It's a choppy read, and for good reason. Basically it's a collection of essays, necessary essays I would argue, on Fantasy literature. Moorcock, as sure a guide as you can find, is also strong in this opinions. If you're a big fan of *Lord of the Rings*, you may not want to read this book.

Moorcock has problems with Tolkien, which are captured best in this quote:

*Writers like Tolkien take you to the Abyss and point out the excellent tea-garden at the bottom, showing you the steps carved into the cliff and reminding you to be a bit careful because the hand-rails are a trifle shaky as you go down; they haven't got the approval yet to put a new one in. (pg. 129)*

There are specific criticisms of *Lord of the Rings*, but that "be a bit careful" line scored with me. Have you ever noticed how no one who really matters or who you care about in *Lord of the Rings*, ever dies? I'm not pushing for a body count, but if you read some of the older sagas and such that Tolkien used as source material, you know that major characters die like flies in those books. In counterpoint, a modern example that Moorcock is very high on (as am I), is Poul Anderson's *The Broken Sword*, which has more tragedy and action in its few hundred pages than *The Lord of the Rings* has in its thousand plus. In fairness to Tolkien however, there is no analysis of *The Silmarillion*, a work I feel does have the epic sweep – and tragedy, of the sagas of old. But I'm in a distinct minority with that sentiment.

But Moorcock's book is not just about Tolkien (he's also not a fan of Robert E. Howard or Lovecraft). It's about what he thinks works in Fantasy, and what doesn't. He names names, at least up to a certain point. If you're looking for titles and books to read this is a good book, but one that needs to be updated every 5 or 10 years or so. I suppose we should thankful for what we do have.

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### **Sffgeek says**

This is the book of criticism where Moorcock slags off Tolkien, and all other fantasy writers who are not his own proteges. Reading this was when I realised that his arrogance had overtaken his critical abilities, and that he would never again write anything to match the standard of the original Elric stories.

I've only given it one star, but it is still worth a read "for a laugh" if you can pick it up second-hand...

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### **Charles says**

Moorcock deserves to have his say about Heroic fantasy but there were quite a few sections of this that really irritated me. I often find myself disagreeing with Moorcock on many issues where Heroic Fantasy is concerned.

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### **Simon says**

I read the new expanded edition for a work related project, I'm glad Mike has revised this as a lot has happened in the realm of fantasy since it was originally published. The strange thing is I still find after all these years I still agree with his opinions on Tolkien and the Inklings, Lovecraft and Lieber.

A lot of fantasy fans will have a hard time with Mike's opinion on Tolkien, but I found it quite refreshing that someone was able to take a tilt at such an institution.

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### **Jaime says**

A short but extensive and very idiosyncratic overview of 'heroic fantasy' fiction by a pretty able practitioner of the form his own bad self - as a teenager I DEVoured Moorcock's books, as can be seen by my Goodreads shelf dedicated to his work (it certainly helped that his novels were short and sharp). His flying leaps at Tolkien and, by extension A.A. Milne, seem a little unjustified but I see it as exaggeration for effect. It also doesn't hurt that he rates quite highly one of my other favorite writers of sword & sorcery - Fritz Leiber. And 'Wizardry and Wild Romance' - whatta title!

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### **Steve Haynes says**

An absolute MUST read for any fan or budding writer of British fantasy. You don't have to agree with him, but Moorcock both educates and entertains. I've actually lost this book over a decade ago, but many of the passages stay in my mind.

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### **John says**

In brief: Wonderful, full of great observations and a distinctive grasp of the history of Romantic and fantastic literature. He's even fun to disagree with!

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