



Wonders Will Never Cease

Robert Irwin

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Author : Robert Irwin

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From Reader Review Wonders Will Never Cease for online ebook

Samantha says

Would rather have had it either historical fiction or fairy tale.

Gregory Davis says

I was really enthralled with Irwin's earlier work and I wasn't disappointed with Wonders Will Never Cease.

The theme of the novel is the nature of narrative, the power of storytelling, and the question of where fiction ends and where reality begins. I enjoyed all the references to Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* (Sir Thomas Malory is one of the characters), *The Mabinogion*, and other works in the literary canon. If some of the characters are closer to their Shakespearean depiction than their historical personas, then that's part of the point. Characters become trapped in the narratives of others and these narratives take on a life of their own. The protagonist, Anthony Woodville, is buffeted about by the designs of various "narrators," and the idea of free will seems like just another fantasy. As individuals, perhaps we are the sums of the stories told about us and the stories we concoct about ourselves.

I recommend this novel to those interested in literature and history, especially on how texts influence our beliefs and perceptions. Fans of historical fiction or fantasy may enjoy it, but it's not a genre novel. Those interested in the conflicts and literature of 15th Century England will especially enjoy it.

Rebecca says

This novel is in many ways more like a collection of short stories or even fairy tales held together with a larger framing story. The stories match the medieval setting and often mirror or parody legends and fairy tales, so the subject matter is often suitably grim and violent as a result, which may be true to the medium but still may not be up your alley.

The writing is engaging and pulls you in, and most of the stories are enjoyable in their own right, though obviously not all will be enjoyed by all. Still, I honestly think I lack the literary/historical chops to grok the big picture or the point of this book, so I imagine those more well versed in Arthurian lore and England's history will get more out of it than I did.

The protagonist is pretty unlikable, and the book has a lot of the sort of sexism you'd expect from a medieval setting, but at least at the end the hero is self aware enough to recognize he's potentially a villain.

It's a hard book for me to review because I can see the glimmers of what's behind the curtain even if I don't fully perceive what's backstage.

The narration by James Langton is quite good and matches the immediacy and abrupt nature of the writing.

Roberta Sciortino says

Beautiful. Admirable as the author reaches the goal of writing a very correct historical fiction maintaining the rhythm of a very compelling book. Now I'm going to look for the other masterpieces of him!

Annie says

Truth is sometimes stranger than fiction, by Robert Irwin's *Wonders Will Never Cease* repeatedly demonstrates that fiction will always win a competition for imaginative bizarreness. This metafictional novel follows the life of Anthony Woodville, an actual historical figure, as he is bounced around by the vagaries of War of the Roses-era politics and by the fictional wrangling of the king's alchemist and Sir Thomas Malory. This is not a biographical novel so much as it is a bibliographic one. By the end, I think I had contemplated dozens of the purposes and consequences of storytelling along with the characters. Be warned, however. This is not an easy book to read because it is mostly people telling stories to each other. The action happens quickly and mostly off the page...

Read the rest of my review at A Bookish Type. I received a free copy of this book from the publisher via Edelweiss for review consideration.

Caidyn (SEMI-HIATUS; BW Reviews; he/him/his) says

This review and others can be found on BW Book Reviews.

4.5/5

First, I want to say that the damn description on Goodreads lies. This is not for fans of George R.R. Martin or Philippa Gregory. This book has one perspective and is told in a period-appropriate way, so it's not like Martin, although it deals with the time that inspired him. While this book isn't completely historically accurate, it has a purpose to it. Oh, and there's no sex scenes. Or people pitted against each other to create drama with women. So, not like Gregory.

The only knock I have for this book is that the beginning was a bit confusing and it took a bit to get into. But, once it started off, it really got going and I wound up loving it when I was worried about it being shitty.

So, why did I love it?

For one, I adored the theme of magic and how it really spoke to the period feeling like magic was alive in their world. It was accurate to how most people were religious, blending Christian theology in with folklore and the great romances. It was a huge theme of the book, and I loved how Irwin dealt with the themes.

It also showed the Burgundian influence on Edward's court that lasted through to Henry VIII. Then, it really talked well about the Arthurian revival that started during this time and, again, extended far into Henry VIII's reign. Uhm, then the writing style was authentic and fantastic.

But, what really did it for me, were the themes. Reality v. fiction and how there's a very thin line between

them. History and the influence of fiction on it, which is common through all periods but especially in this one since there was a huge difference in what people considered factual. Magic being alive and an active influence in the world. The feeling of magic dying away as you grow older. Aging in general. Death. I could go on.

This story was just so rich on so many levels that I adored it and the half star off is just because I wasn't a fan of the beginning. But, on a reread I'm definitely going to do, it'll probably be bumped up.

Rachel says

I can't say I'm usually this influenced by other reviewers on goodreads, but I felt sorry for Irwin after reading the reviews here - not because they're scanty, which they are, but because so many people dismissed it because of how it's written.

Granted, I came to it from Abigail Nussbaum's recommendation and had an expectation, maybe not fairly, raised by her that it was comparable to Hilary Mantel's historical fiction. (I qualify that because I haven't actually read her non-historical fiction.) It's certainly comparable in scope and historical knowledge, and possibly in the sense of somewhat rehabilitating a historical figure. But two things differentiate them: Anthony Woodville (who is variously referred to as Scales and de River in the book, thus losing the one connection shallow buffs of the War of the Roses might recognise) isn't a maligned figure in history like Danton or Thomas Cromwell so much as he is a forgotten one; and Irwin doesn't have remotely the same deep affection for him that Mantel clearly developed for her pet villains as she wrote.

There's also the fact that both are written in an atypical style for the genre, but Mantel's first person present tense (in *Wolf Hall*/*Bring Up the Bodies*) works better for me, personally, than Irwin's third person present tense. An assiduous commenter to reviews of Irwin on here has pointed out to a few people that what Irwin was trying to do was recreate the feeling of the *Canterbury Tales*, and perhaps other medieval literature and/or oral storytelling. I respect that this was his ambition and he entirely succeeded at that *as a thing of itself*. Whether that succeeds as a reading experience is a different matter entirely. I'm not a scholar or an academic, so the reading of texts venerated by scholarly academics is just a pastime for me. There's a reason longform poetry and re-creation of oral storytelling doesn't hold up in the twenty-first century. I'm not sure if it's the rise of cinema and television or if the simple fact that straightforward novels appeal more to a reader (as opposed to a listener) - I'm not a historian either. So while I can appreciate this on a technical level, I didn't enjoy it. I did like Anthony's and various other people's attempts to interrogate the stories, but I didn't like that there was no clear line between what was real and what was magical. It's one thing to have characters in history think that magic is real, and quite another to expect me in 2018 to believe it altered the course of history. The prophecy plotlines that kept intruding were amusing because I know how it ends, but it wasn't terribly ambiguous for the people listening to them, which bolsters Anthony's objection to them. It's just the mark of a hero to hear his own death prophesied and do the same thing anyway, instead of trying to avoid it? That's just straight up bullshit.

I could have dealt with the trippy real-fake stories and the magic and the prophecies if it wasn't for the slurring of time. Anthony just rambles along, skipping months and years at a time, arriving at random places to realise his father/mother/wife have died and never grieving for them. He doesn't have any feelings, except maybe for his horse. He also misses a lot of the most interesting pieces of history by virtue of not really being an important player. Clearly his most important trait is being Elizabeth Woodville's brother, but this is almost totally elided; the only thing I know about their relationship is that he used to give her piggy-back

rides as a child.

I sound like I have a lot of issues, but ultimately I don't get a feeling of incompleteness from the book. I think this is exactly the book Irwin wanted to write; that he hit all the character/storytelling beats he wanted for it. Do I wish it was a different *type* of story? Yes, but then someone else would have to have written it.

Nicole Beaudry says

This, theoretically, is a book I should have really enjoyed. And I did enjoy parts of it. It was wild and imaginative and has a sort of fable-type quality to it that made reading it a bit of a breathless experience, partially because it was written in the present tense. I don't love historical fiction in the present tense, it has to be said. I did feel I got to know Anthony, but really none of the other characters. It was fantastic, but the fantastic often gained foothold solely by shoving things like a consistent plot out of the way. The vaguely magical realism elements were fun, but I wish the historical part of the "historical fiction" were better researched, and I take considerable exception to the portrayal of Richard, Duke of Gloucester as a mean, villainous, ugly and extremely misshapen dwarf of a man. And so, while the book is often quite fun and absorbing, Irwin, it seems, did his study on the War of the Roses at the great school of Shakespeare, rather than via academic texts, which he surely has access to.

I'll get over it, but I think I'm disappointed because the synopsis (and the author's credentials) set me up to expect something much greater than what I got.

Brian says

Loved it, but beware, it is not as it is marketed. This isn't a traditional fantasy--it's more like epic storytelling, and by "epic" I mean "A long narrative poem written in elevated style, in which heroes of great historical or legendary importance perform valorous deeds". This isn't a poem, and it's style isn't really elevated, but it's also not "modern."

Maura Heaphy says

I have seen this compared to "Game of Thrones" and Russell Hoban's novel "Ridley Walker," both of which I love, but I could not get on board with this strange novel, which re-imagines the life of Anthony, Lord Scales, and later 2nd Earl Rivers, as a mythic saga, in the style of "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." On a line by line basis, it was very readable -- witty, clever -- but I just found it hard to care, once the novelty wore off.

Brittany says

It's rare that I rate a book so poorly but I just cannot recommend this book to anyone and feel OK about it. I picked up Wonders Will Never Cease at BEA this year and was pretty excited about it. I've never read any of Irwin's books prior to this but seeing a blurb from Gaiman on the front cover, it had to be good, right?

I don't know how to explain this book but I'll try. The way it was written was so odd. It was written as if a friend of mine was re telling a book to me that they read in the past. It was a whole lot of "Anthony went to see his mother and then he stopped at the store and bought some milk. And then two weeks later, the milk went bad." Maybe this a writing style that Irwin uses—he is a historian after all—but it was not a style I could get on board with. There were so many jumps in the timeline, i.e., there was literally a chapter that jumped to two weeks later, completely ignoring some potential escalating tension at Anthony's sisters coronation. This happens often—a whole lot of build up to get you hooked and then a whole lot of nothing. It was extremely underwhelming.

There were some great ideas in this book, especially the fact that Anthony has been brought back from the dead (hello, Jon Snow!), and sees ghosts, but after a few chapters it is seemingly forgotten. It was such a huge bombshell and then totally deserted. The synopsis on the back of the book mentions so many interesting adventures that happen in the book but don't expect anything more wild than what is mentioned. They are briefly explained and then left for you to think about.

So overall, this book was a giant letdown. I wish I could say better things about it but I really cannot. I still may try Arabian Nightmare considering the reviews it received but this has left me skeptical.

James says

Based loosely on the life of Anthony Woodville, Irwin adds fantasy encounters and adventures for Anthony as well as bizarre stories for other characters as well as Arthurian and Greek legends. At times it's hard to tell if this is a straight historical novel or a fantasy hodgepodge. It starts out well but soon gets strange, I almost stopped reading it. The ending is preordained about 75% into the book, and that's a bummer, I would have been much better off not knowing.

It's an odd duck, maybe this is the English version of magical realism and I'm too much of a literary booby to recognize its greatness. I think I will pass on future books by the author though his histories might be worth a look.

Jack Tripper says

I'm surprised there aren't more ratings and reviews for this, Robert Irwin's first novel in 17 years. Part reality-bending fantasy, part historical fiction, this was quite the absorbing read for me, with the same "stories within stories" concept of Irwin's (brilliant) *The Arabian Nightmare*, only set in England during the Wars of the Roses as opposed to medieval Cairo. It's a mostly third-person, partial first-person tale following Anthony, a knight who is killed early on in the book during the bloody Battle of Palm Sunday, but miraculously comes back to life three days later. While his life is relatively normal before his death -- for a highborn knight during the late middle ages, at least -- it is anything but thereafter. Wraiths, fantastical beasts, the undead, strange visions, demonic entities, and the like are not uncommon during Anthony's adventures now.

One thing that distanced me slightly from the narrative at times, at least during the first-person sections, is the fact that Anthony is an extremely unreliable narrator, and one is never sure if certain events "really happened" (within the context of the story) the way he says, or are just made up. King Edward's chief

alchemist, the odd and eccentric Ripley, is for some hidden reason determined to make Anthony a legendary figure, and so sometimes Anthony may exaggerate or make things up entirely due to Ripley's urgings. I know that this is fiction, but when the narrator is obviously lying for chapters at a time, it can be hard for me as a reader to stay totally enveloped, to "believe" what I'm reading.

But I soon got past all that as the utter strangeness of the story swept me up. It's pretty damn hilarious at times, creepy as hell at others, and just plain tripped-out yet others. Not to mention beautifully written, with some of the most memorably bizarre characters I've come across in fiction. I've seen reviews comparing this to *A Song of Ice and Fire*, due to both being inspired by the York-Lancaster rivalry, but this is about as far away from high fantasy as you can get. Yes, it's fantasy, and yes it has a medieval setting, but this is more of a surrealistic, dreamlike tale, with one POV character as opposed to several, and without all the political machinations and back-stabbings (though there is a bit of that in the background, of course, considering the time period). It's also cemented Irwin as a favorite author of mine. Hopefully he doesn't wait another 17 years for his followup.

4.5 Stars.

Roy Kenagy says

An extraordinarily satisfying existential fantasy, re-imagining the career of Anthony Woodville, 2nd Earl Rivers, doomed courtier in the court of Edward IV. The young King Edward marries Anthony's sister Elizabeth in a fit of lusty romance; this fatal MacGuffin casually propels the wandering, magical realist plot, eventually populating the Tower (which Anthony has chosen as his memory palace) with the skulls of almost all his enemies and friends. "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead" performed slightly closer to the stage, with an episodic melding of "3 Henry VI" and "Richard III" in the background. Spare, elegant, and elagiac.

Tim Hicks says

Anthony was dead: to begin with. Then he wasn't, sort of. His sorcerous amulet may or may not have had anything to do with it.

The Wars of the Roses unfold before us, as we follow Anthony Woodville (who existed). But his life path is hardly straightforward. Two odd men, Ripley and Malory (who existed, although perhaps not quite as shown here) weave in and out. Ripley's alchemy includes a Talking Head with some accurate predictions of the future (or are they causing that future?) and Malory's working on *Le Morte d'Arthur* in a way that gives Anthony odd visions and maybe more.

So here's a real history, carefully explained mostly the way it happened, but with some VERY creative explanations of why it happened that way.

I enjoyed it, but then I already had quite a good knowledge of the history and the Arthurian stories; if you don't maybe you'll find less value here.
