Michael Moorcock has a well-established reputation as a writer of fiction. In *Wizardry and Wild Romance* he enters a different field, trying to set himself up as a literary critic. For the most part, he seeks to lay down the law about what is and is not good literature in a field which he labels "epic fantasy". *The Lord of the Rings* is included in this category, but evidently fails to match Mr. Moorcock's criteria for good literature. In fact he denounces it fiercely.

I do not regard *LoTR* as above criticism. I do regard it as a major work deserving of serious and well-informed criticism. And Moorcock has simply sneered at Tolkien without knowing what he is talking about. He is one of those people who approach every subject with an open mouth!

*LoTR* is in fact a shallow work; the ramblings of a light-weight thinker with a fairly average knowledge of literature. But Moorcock's popularity as a writer will undoubtedly make it influential; widely known and widely quoted. This article can only do a little to undo the damage that Moorcock's foolishness will undoubtedly do. But even that little is surely worthwhile.

**Defining the Terms**

Firstly, does "epic fantasy" actually exist as a single body of literature that can usefully be considered in isolation? It seems to me a completely artificial category. Modern fantasy and modern science-fiction have never been two sharply distinct traditions - at least not in English-speaking countries. Even H.G. Wells strayed across the boundaries, in short stories like *The Man Who Could Work Miracles* and *The Magic Shop*. Telepathy and paranormal powers occupy a broad border country between the two.

Is science-fiction necessarily more realistic than fantasy? Some basic science-fiction concepts, such as faster-than-light spaceships or time travel, are flatly against all accepted laws of physics. "Death rays" are a concept that existed long before the laser was invented; and in real-life lasers are not in fact very much like death rays, even though this aspect has caught the public imagination. Anti-gravity, a nineteenth-century notion, is not remotely possible according to current ideas about physics; the "fifth force", if it exists at all, is far too weak to be significant.

Moreover, the social context of science-fiction is often highly unlikely, and has less to do with real life than the better sort of fantasy story. Galactic wars between barbarians in spaceships strike me as a much more improbable concept than Tolkien's Elves. Likewise far-off and strange civilisations where everyone behaves like a 20th century American.

Then again, some works generally recognised as great literature contain elements that
CORRIGENDA

Please accept my apologies for forgetting to number the notes to John Ellison's article. Here is the numbering, for you to write down in the relevant spaces:

1. Page 17, line 3, between 'diary' and the full stop.
2. Same page, par. 2, l. 4, between 'issue' and the comma.
3. Page 19, 1st column, par. 2, l. 4, between '1934' and the comma.
4. Same page, same column, par. 3, l. 3, between 'kind' and the full stop.
5. Same paragraph, l. 17, between 'Tolkien's' and the full stop.
6. Page 18, 2nd column, par. 2, l. 16, between 'suicide' and 'in'.
7. Same paragraph, following line, between 'Catholic' and the full stop.
8. Page 20, 1st column, par. 2, l. 11, between 'book' and 'he'.
9. Same column, par. 3, l. 12, between 'says' and the comma.
10. Same page, 2nd column, after the text's last word.

By this time you should have noticed that pp. 18 and 19 have been reversed. So please read the right hand page before the left hand one.

Further apologies are made to John Ellison whose article has been the victim of these mistakes on both occasions.

The Editor.
would be regarded as typical fantasy in other contexts. In both Hambert and Leuthing the ghost comes to the plot. Magic and spirits are crucial to *The Tempest*. In *Macbeth*, there are witches, a ghost, and two "fairy-tale" conditions that have to be fulfilled before *Macbeth* can be killed. A *Midsummer-night's Dream* is always pure fairy-tale fiction. As are the relationship between mortals and immortal yet imperfect spirits. Likewise one has *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, in which someone says "I smell a spirit of middle earth," though the "spirit" in this case is an overwhelming force.

To take a wider view, Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* is normally to be found among works of philosophy. But you could equally call it a novel with some of Nietzsche's depths of vision and imagination. *Zarathustra* is normally to be found among works of philosophy, though one has *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, in which almost pure fairy-tale, concentrating on the relationship between mortals and immortal yet imperfect spirits. Likewise one has *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, in which someone says "I smell a spirit of middle earth," though the "spirit" in this case is an overwhelming force.

*Definite authorship is also a problem. The original edition of *Le Morte d'Arthur*, (which is prose), gives its author as "Sir Thomas Malory knight*. It is generally accepted that one indeed believed Malory was the author, as we would put it in modern spelling. Records of the period do mention a Sir Thomas Malory of Newbold Revel; a rather unruly knight who was at various times charged with crimes such as attempted murder and burning in the Royal Palace. *Malory* is specifically excluded from the General Parliaments of 1468 and 1480; and if he was the man, he was a much more colourful character than most authors.

Again, it could have been another man of the same literary milieu. Critics could get very confused by identifying William Morris, the author of *News from Nowhere*, with William Morris the founder of Morris Motors.

In any case, Malory was working with older material. For parts of the work, he draws heavily on French verse versions of the tales; he is halfway between being a translator and an original author. And no one can have any idea whether he viewed his work as a rational, historical or something in between. He certainly made his own changes and interpretations of the ancient tales.

To pretend to give an account of actual events is a common enough literary device. For instance, Tolkien traces in *The Lord of the Rings* his medieval tradition as an historical account in his Prologue. In my opinion the *Prologue* gives his true view — but a good argument against this could be made on the basis of some of his earlier works.

An even more complex case are Norse legends. Our main source is the works of Snorri Sturluson, who wrote centuries after Iceland had accepted Christianity, and who very probably did not believe in the literal existence of the gods and heroes mentioned in the work of earlier authors, some of whom probably did regard the gods as real and the legends as essentially true. Others may have been using myth as a basis for their storytelling — as authors today may retell or adapt a Greek myth. The line between myth, legend, folklore and fantastical fiction is in practice impossible to draw. Tolkien's concept of "the Pot of Soup, the Cauldron of Story" comes much closer to describing the basically.

Moorcock does mention various poetic works later on, that is the strongest real connection between them. Moorcock does not say why each particular work is left guessing as to just what Moorcock has in mind. Tolkien's concept of "the Pot of Soup, the Cauldron of Story" comes much closer to describing the basically.

Moorcock's Confusion

Moorcock ends up declaring that the term "epic fantasy" is meaningless. But, he says, we know roughly what is described by it. Indeed we do — but that does not make it a useful category. Works by authors with names beginning with *M* is a real and definable one. But Tolkien's work is ambiguous enough. Tolkien's concept of "the Pot of Soup, the Cauldron of Story" comes much closer to describing the basically.

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Moorcock is a good writer, and one might have hoped that he would give some insights into what it is that makes a good song. Or perhaps he would provide some fresh and original insight into some well-known tales. Unfortunately, he does very little of this. He gives you opinions, but not reasons. The logic behind his likes and dislikes is far from apparent - though he does have a fondness for shallow fantasy-world imitations of one type of mainstream literature.

Moorcock ignores the possibility that fantasy and science-fiction could have their own logic, quite different from the aims and purposes of the mainstream novel. Stained glass does not follow the same rules as oil-on-canvas paintings; bronze statues have a form and logic that is different from that of stone statues. Moorcock has picked up on none of this from any of the types of mainstream literary criticism. He applies them mindlessly to a very different area.

Moorcock is fierce in his denunciations. Thus William Morris in "Melville and Stoddard: Moriarty the Hearted" for instance. And Gore Vidal is a "provincial American literary snob." Don't ask me what Gore Vidal is doing in a book about epic fantasy. His A Search for the King could quite reasonably be regarded as sophisticated sword-and-sorcery, though I have never seen it marketed as anything other than a "mainstream" novel. But there is no indication that Moorcock is familiar with this work. Gore Vidal simply pops up, and is used as an example so that I could follow. Another of Gore Vidal's work, Messiah, is usually classed as Science-Fiction. But it is definitely not a work of Epic Fantasy.

Moorcock seems to have great confidence in his own knowledge, taste and judgement. So let us look in detail at some of his attempts at analysis.

Robin Hood and the Hobbits

Moorcock says:

"The appeal of the shire has certain similarities with the appeal of the "Greenworld" which is, unquestionably, rooted in most of us.

There is a fundamental difference between the "Romance of Robin Hood", however, whereas Tolkien, going against the grain of his subject matter, forces one on us - as a matter of policy:

And lastly there is the oldest and deepest desire, the Great Escape: The Escape from Death. Fairy stories provide many examples and modes of this... But the "consolation" of fairy-tales has another aspect than the imaginative satisfaction of ancient desires. Important too is the Consolation of the Happy Ending' (J.R.R. Tolkien, 'On Fairy Stories')

The great epics dignified death but they did not ignore it, and it is one of the reasons why they are superior to the artificial romances, of which Lord of the Rings is merely one of the most recent.

I can't really see why Moorcock sees the appeal of placid hobbits in their tidy Shire as being similar to that of Robin Hood and his tough and dangerous outlaws in the depths of the untamed forest. But let it go. The central point is that Tolkien's essay On Fairy Stories is just that; a description of the fairy-tale tradition as it actually existed, and not an attempt to lay down the law for imaginative literature in general. Tolkien draws a clear distinction between fairy-stories and such things as beast-fables, for instance.

Now it is a fact that most fairy stories do have a happy ending. Tolkien feels that there was a fundamental difference between Little Red Riding Hood as we have it and Perrault's tale; in the one the heroine dies. The fairy story derives from Perrault, but needed such a change before it could succeed as a fairy story.

On Fairy Stories is a serious analysis of a complex matter. Moorcock's criticism is ill-informed and completely misses the point. But then Tolkien's writing. He has a description of what fairy stories actually were and treated it as if it were intended as a general rule for "epic fantasy," a category that Tolkien never used and would probably not have entirely considered. Moorcock says that some great epics (which no sensible person would ever class as fairy-tales) do not follow Tolkien's rule. That's about as sensible as refuting the Highway Code by pointing out that drivers in France drive on the right!

What Tolkien says about fairy stories is valid for fairy stories. And it is worth noting that even Shakespeare seems to have followed "fairytale" rules in those cases where fantastical material is central to a play. Both The Tempest and A Midsummer Night's Dream have their protagonists running away from problems in a certain sense, so does Macbeth. It's not happy for Macbeth, of course - but then neither fairy-tale rules nor the rules of tragedy would allow it to be. But the bold hero Macbeth gets his own back. The fairy-tale hero Macbeth rescues his father's throne, and the wicked usurper Macbeth is duly punished. Remarkably enough, the play works equally well if you view it as a tragedy or a dramatised fairy-tale.

(Tolkien, of course, did not think much of Macbeth - that's a matter of taste - and on this point I do not agree with him."

Robin Hood is not a fairy-tale. It can't even be classed as an epically, for the normal sense of the word. The various tales about him are fairly realistic. They take place in real geogaphic locations - Sherwood Forest and Barnsdale. The social setting of outlaws, sheriffs, monks and knights existed as an historical reality. And for some dramatic exaggeration, the deeds are all perfectly possible. There are a scattering of historical records that may have references to Robin Hood the outlaw, though both "Hood" and "Robin" were very common names. It is very unlikely that some of the deeds he is credited with, if not, men very much like him lived similar lives during the period the stories are set in. The familiar elements of a fairy-tale do not fit in. What Moorcock calls "the Romance of Robin Hood" was realistic at the time the stories were first composed; at least as realistic as a modern James Bond story. (And like the Bond tales, one can find similarities to myth and legend, a sub-structure below the realistic details of the setting.)

It was also a collection of tales. It grew over the centuries, from an original core which did not include either Maid Marian or Friar Tuck. Most of the "core" tales are to be found in the "Geste of Robin Hood", which is thought to have been composed using separate works by earlier authors. There is also a 16th c. reference to "Rhymes of Robin Hood" in Piers Ploughman, where they are implicitly denounced in much the same terms as modern adventure tales are often condemned by modern moralists. What we read are particular versions of a very old tradition.

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The consolation of fairy-stories, the joy of the happy ending, the essential ‘escapist’, or ‘fugitive’ in its fairy-tale - or otherworld - setting, it is a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on. No writer who does not know this - or does not deny the existence of dyscatastrophe, of sorrow and failure - but the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat.

Only fools would have failed to notice that the greedy and powerful often do win out. But there is a basic moral sense in most people that makes one want to see them lose. Songs are sung about the man who broke the bank at Monte Carlo; the bank that broke the nerve near-famous characters and celebrated victories for a world that is too familiar and does not deserve celebration. Moorcock, of course, tends to admire those writers who assume that "universal final defeat" is inevitable, and then moan about it in a fairly pointless way. Some of these writers are good, indeed; but Moorcock seems to think that any other view of the world must be based on naïve ignorance.

Moorcock is a rather narrow-minded character, in fact, even though his narrow-mindedness centers around the existence of dyscatastrophe, but essentially he has decided to be a literary pessimist while still a teenager. The Golden Barge, published in 1958, expresses this view in quite a sophisticated form. His hero follows the golden barge down the river and into the future. When it reaches the sea, and it seems clear the man is too familiar and does not deserve celebration. Moorcock’s work is a sudden joy of deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat. It does not deny the existence of dyscatastrophe, of sorrow and failure: the world of the early 20th century was disrupted by the war. It does not deny the existence of dyscatastrophe, of sorrow and failure: the world of the early 20th century was disrupted by the war. It does not deny the existence of dyscatastrophe, of sorrow and failure: the world of the early 20th century was disrupted by the war. It does not deny the existence of dyscatastrophe, of sorrow and failure: the world of the early 20th century was disrupted by the war.

Tolkien, like a great many other writers, protested against the way in which the Industrial Revolution had created ugliness on a massive scale. Moorcock takes great exception to this.

Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, the idea of society as a whole that we have been yearning for an ideal rural world they believe to have vanished - yearning for a mythical state of innocence (as Morris did) ... this refusal to face pleasant or pleasant aspects of urban industrial life ... is a fundamental theme in popular English literature. Novels set in the countryside probably always outsell novels set in the city.

For most people the sixties were a time of transition. Most of those who went through it have since transformed into something else. Into a great variety of different things - Yuppies, hard-line leantist, pacifists, Bennies, Kerbeckites, right-wing libertarians, mystics, Greens, peace activists, etc. Moorcock, however, has hardly changed at all. He remains essentially the same man he was in the late 1950’s. Society at large moved closer to his viewpoint in the 1960’s before they started happening in society at large. Or rather, he had acquired a pattern of thinking that was marginal at the time he acquired it, but was later to become widespread and powerful.

For many people, the direction of the changes since the 1960’s have been tragic. Not for Moorcock. He has always been a pessimist, regardless of what might be happening in the world, and whatever had happened, he would have found reasons for moaning about it. He had decided in advance that there was no point in hoping for a better world. It is hardly surprising that Moorcock, of course, failed long run - Moorcock was almost prepared for defeat even before the battle had begun.

Tolkien and Tragedy

When Tolkien spoke of tragedy, he knew what he was talking about. He was very young when he was eight. His father died when he was four. When he was eight, his mother was rejected by most of her relatives after her conversion to Catholicism. In those days there was a bitter cold war between Protestants and Catholics. Each side was likely to view the other with horror, hatred, and disgust. Tolkien survived - mainly because he had relatively good fortune to escape "trench fever" after taking part in the Battle of the Somme. But his closest friends from school all died. A sense of tragedy was always a part of his make-up. But he refused to surrender to it.

"Superb Countryside"

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elsewhere to get jobs. It has remained superb countryside because there was no coal or iron under it. Unlike the mining valleys further south, where the landscape has been ruined and the mines are now being closed.

Mr. Moorcock doesn't give the location of the "superb countryside" that he's been enjoying, though a land remark indicates that it is in Northumberland. He seems to think that because he himself is able both to enjoy it and to earn a nice living as a professional writer, all must be well.

"This country, like many others, has seemingly limitless landscapes of great beauty and variety, unspoiled by excessive tourism or the uglier forms of industry."

Well, it isn't in fact limitless. It would be quite possible for industrial society to destroy all the remaining wild places and places of great natural beauty. If this is unlikely to actually happen, it is only because a continuous battle has been fought to preserve such landscape, by people who did not share Mr. Moorcock's snobbery about the matter. And even so, a great deal has been lost, that could and should have been saved.

If someone were to propose destroying the works of Mervyn Peake, on the grounds that there is a seemingly limitless supply of well-written books by good authors, I don't say that Tolkien or others would protest very loudly. But each individual landscape, each place within a landscape, is just as unique and irrereplaceable as an author. Perhaps more so.

Beauty and Ugliness

Now let's look at what Tolkien actually said about the ugliness of industrial society.

"In Faërie one can indeed conceive of an ogre who possesses a castle hideous as a nightmare (for the evil of the ogre wills it so), but one cannot conceive of a house built with a Tolkienian purpose - an inn, a hostel for travellers, the hall of a virtuous and noble king - that is yet sickeningly ugly. At the present day it would be rash to hope to see one such: it was built before our time....Many stories out of the past have only become 'escapist' in their appeal through surviving from a time when men were as a rule delighted with the work of their hands and the work of their time, when many men feel disgust with man-made things."

Tolkien protested against the unnecessary ugliness that industrial society had created. You could take him to be rejecting a material society in general, though this is less clear. He did not reject advanced technology as such - he was quick to see the merits of the tape recorder, for example.

In any case Tolkien was a philologist and a writer, not a politician or a propagandist. Unlike C.S. Lewis, he did not publicly express his feelings on wider social matters. The basic feeling - that useful things should not be destroyed - is a fairly general one, compatible with a great range of social and political views. (Moorcock himself mentions William Morris, who was one of the pioneers of socialism in Britain, and who is claimed as a moral predecessor - he was quick to see the merits of the tape recorder, for example.)

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Tolkien protested against the unnecessary ugliness that industrial society had created. You could take him to be rejecting a material society in general, though this is less clear. He did not reject advanced technology as such - he was quick to see the merits of the tape recorder, for example.

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masters from among the old and wise." 

In fact the Master of Lake-Town at the time of Smug's assault proves to be cowardly and corrupt, Bard the Bowman gets the chance to overthrow this system and set himself as king. He refuses, and instead becomes king of Dale to which he now returns as a military right. And Lake-town chooses for itself a new and more worthy Master.

This is significantly different from C.S. Lewis' approach. In The Voyage of the Dawn Treader, the last ruler of the Gnome of the Lonely Isles is extinguished by an hereditary dukedom. Tolkien and Lewis influenced each other, but their views were by no means always the same.

Clash and Kingship

In point of fact, Tolkien is close to the reality of medieval and pre-medieval kingship than most writers who have touched upon the subject. It is usually assumed - even by left-wing writers - that a dominant hereditary monarchy is the norm. But in fact, the Swiss Cantons and the various free or semi-free cities were just as much a part of the medieval European world as kings and nobles.

Nor was there any fixed rule about how kingship was passed on. There were a mixture of notions - that a king was in some way chosen by the people, or was appointed by the chief men of the realm - as Harold Godwinson was - or was selected by the previous king.

Primogeniture - kingship passing automatically to the eldest son of the king - took a long time to get established. It might seem just as logical that a younger brother of the king should take over. This was the earliest system in many countries and Tolkien uses it for the Elven High Kingship in The Silmarillion.

Tolkien was well aware that kings and nobles could not exist without a lower class or peasantry. He recognized the social realities though he saw nothing inherently wrong with such a system.

Moorcock has no such awareness. His view of history is one in which the common people do not even exist - or at best are part of the scenery. His heroes are all ancient aristocratic stock - often, indeed, of a different and superior race! When it comes to kings and nobles, he seems to forget that there are other types of people in the world, apart from a few criminals, servants and hangers-on!

Authors and Politics

Most people can and do enjoy works by authors whose politics they do not agree with. For instance, I dare say that many of those who like the poems of Milton would not agree with his support for Cromwell, his arguments for divorce or his justification of the execution of Charles the First. And Karl Marx, the works of Balzac, who was on the far right of the politics of his day.

But what is offensive is writers who fly false colours, who proclaim principles that they do not even try to live up to. Moorcock has pretensions to be an anarchist. Personally I think that these are no more than pretensions, because he shows no sign of trying to present anarchism as a reasonable or attractive alternative to the present social system. To summarise his view, one might adapt a remark by Karl Marx and say "The point is not to change the world, but simply to think about it in various ways. Sometimes the means sound left-wing, sometimes not, but there never seems to be any serious purpose behind them!"

Pore Literary Methods

Not only does Moorcock admire aristocrats - particularly sneaky and selfish aristocrats. He also sneers at "the lower order", in a way that does not square with his claim to be a left-wing anarchist. Thus in Byzantium Endures, he has the following:

"I whispered in English to Mrs. Cornelius. "Why do they shoot them so mercilessly?"...she said seriously "They're bloody shit-scared, Ivan. Leo an' the ovvers...They can't get her stopper back in..." She screamed with laughter all of a sudden. "Pore bugger!"..." She sighed. "Well, it was fun while it lasted...""

In a book that poses as Moorcock's rendering of a multilingual journal by a Russian exile, why is it only the speech of a Cockney woman than is rendered phonetically, that is full of "comic" mispronunciations?

Just imagine writing something like this:

"Oud nowneing, Hear iz thi nuze."

"In winmin hu whur trapt on an 'land fewner al 'lowers bweat tu satli bie thi ari yr is reskew servis juzd a few mints agow. Wun ov them iz sed to bi suffering from exposuere, bweat as."

"In the Hawse of Comuns yestaday, the Chancellor ov the Eschecker sed thay thay thay that the reasent bugbat had pruved to be a graite sukses. But sum ekonomists hav cawd daw on thay was a noo thing in the numba stw ov work."

"Moorcock is close to the reality of medieval and pre-medieval kingship than most writers who have touched upon the subject. It is usually assumed - even by left-wing writers - that a dominant hereditary monarchy is the norm. But in fact, the Swiss Cantons and the various free or semi-free cities were just as much a part of the medieval European world as kings and nobles."

The rest of the news did not interest him. He began to cook supper.

No one does this to BBC English, of course. It is only ever done to dialects of English, and then only as a way of mocking and sneering at such dialects. Usually, it is done against poor people or against some sort of foreigner.

This method has been widely criticised in recent years. Its basic absurdity has been pointed out many times, especially by people on the political left. Most will not have even stopped doing it, but not Mr. Moorcock, despite his radical pretensions.

And in fact, his rendering of Cockney isn't even really based on specific East End pronunciations. Everybody pronounces "was" as "waz." And "poor" and "pore" are very much the same word, when spoken with a standard English accent.

Vroo United?

...but once again I saw all the old arguments being aired: Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Frank Herbert, Isaac Asimov...and the rest, bourgeois reactionaries to a man, Christian apologists, crypto-Stalinists, being praised in IT, HERN, and OZ and everywhere else...I started writing about what I thought was the implicit authoritarianism of these authors and as often as not found myself being accused of being reactionary, elitist or at very best a spoilsport...' "

"...Sauren and his henchmen are the old bourgeois bugaboos, the Mob - mindless football supporters throwing their beer-bottles over the fence..."

"...there is Tolkien and that group of middle-class Christian fantasists whose villains are thinly disguised working-class agitators." "

"...Tolkien sees the petite bourgeoisie, the honest artisans and peasants, as the bulwark against Chaos...solid good sense opposed to a perverted intellectualism." "

Moorcock has evidently picked up the style of one variety of left-wing literary criticism. The style, but not the substance. The words and phrases he uses are expressions of a definite view of the world. But Moorcock's own view of the world is indefinite and ever-changing.

Moorcock is not a leftist. He is parastic upon the left; picking up phrases and stray ideas, but giving nothing back. He neither accepts nor rejects the standard left-wing view of the world; he simply messes about with it and makes it totally incomprehensible.

Would it be pedantic to point out that football hooligans, trade union militants and perverted intellectuals are three essentially separate groups of people? Or that the three do not greatly resemble any of these, being largely based on the traditional image of brigands, bandits or evil gobblins?

In point of fact, while Lewis and Tolkien were indeed Christian, (though not of the same denomination), Asimov is Jewish, and Herbert has a personal faith that owes more to Islam and Zen Buddhism than Christianity.

For that matter, how can anyone be a "bourgeois reactionary" when "reactionary" indicates a desire to return to an earlier form of social order, and Britain and America remain bourgeois, in the normal sense of the term?

Nor can I see why any of those he mentions should
be regarded as Stalinists, "crypto" or otherwise. To the best of my knowledge, none of them have ever claimed to be Marxists of any variety. Nor has anyone ever described them as such.

Perhaps Mr. Moorcock is applying Humpty Dumpty logic: he does not like Stalinists; he does not like these authors; therefore these authors are Stalinists. Q.E.D.

The Faceless Men

To be fair, one must also mention one place where Moorcock shows some insight: Tolkien. Speaking of an evil character in a Gothic novel, he says: "Throughout this long book, Molchon can also be seen as the Faceless Man of our dreams, the unknown aspect of ourselves which is symbolised as well in the figure of the cowled monk or the shadowy, omniscient spectre. It appears in many modern fantasy tales — Leiber's Sheelah of the Eyeball Face in the "Gray Mouser" stories, Tolkien's faceless villain in The Lord of the Rings, Paul Anderson's Odin in The Broken Sword... There is probably a link somewhere perhaps, between the unknown aspect and the "evil" aspect of ourselves in that we sense the presence of the unknown aspect and fear it, judging it evil. Robert Louis Stevenson might have experienced such a process..." [Dr. Jackyll and Mr. Hyde].

Now this is quite perceptive. Had Moorcock only developed this line of thought, one might be willing to forgive him a great deal (including anglicising Paul Anderson's names). The "faceless villain" in The Lord of the Rings might be a reference to Sauron, to the Witch-King or to one of the other black riders, but I would judge it to be a valid comment in any case.

Ursula K. le Guin says somewhere that Sam, Frodo and Gollum are, in a sense, different aspects of the same individual. It had occurred to me even before I read Moorcock's remarks that perhaps Sauron was also part of the process. Frodo sees the danger of becoming like Gollum; he is also tempted by the thought of becoming like Sauron. I was surprised to find the same notion in Moorcock's book, in a broader and better-developed form. Doubly surprising! Moorcock could see so much in one chapter, and so little in the passages that I quoted earlier. It's as if the Moorcock who wrote about faceless men never talks to the Moorcock who wrote Epic Poesy.

A Sideways Look at Lovecraft

Moorcock is a muddled writer, who can have a good insight at one point and then forget about it elsewhere. The concept of the "unseen self" might also seem highly applicable to Lovecraft's Mythos. But Moorcock does not see it this way. In Uf the sheers at Lovecraft, and in Starship Staretroopers he says: "In a writer like Lovecraft a terror of sex... is combined (or confused for) a terror of the masses, the "ugly" crowd. But this is so common to so much 'horror' fiction that it's hardly worth discussing...Lovecraft appeals to us primarily in a sense of moral weakness. Apart from his offensively awful writing and a resultant inability to describe his horrors (leaving us to do the work — the secret of his success — we're all better writers than he is...)."

If Lovecraft were not a good writer, how is it that he has survived all these years? And when most of his contemporaries are out of print and forgotten? As Moorcock says, sexual fear has a part in a great many horror stories.

Moorcock speaks of "terror of the masses". He does not say quite what he means by this. He could be referring to the theory that Frankenstein's Monster is rooted in a fear of the "lower orders". But the same analysis makes Count Dracula a representative of the ruling classes and exploiters.

Accepting a class analysis is valid for some monsters, that does not make it valid for Lovecraft. Stretching a point, one could see the Shuggoth as a sort of unpleasant uncanny proletariat. But the class basis of Cthulhu, the Mi-Go or Yog-Sothoth is by no means clear to me.

Moorcock mentions the obvious faults in Lovecraft, and misses the interesting fact that Lovecraft does successfully create a sense of cosmic horror; creatures that seem to have an existence beyond the scope of the human imagination.

I would not claim to know how Lovecraft does it. It's hard to see how a writer can ignore so many of the basic rules of good writing, and yet produce a sense of terror for a high proportion of those who read him. But if it's undeniable that this is the case.

Actually, Moorcock's own remarks about the "faceless man" give a clue. Part of the trick must lie in letting the reader attach his own fears onto the horrors that Lovecraft himself didn't. But, if that were the whole of the method, then any hack writer could write stories as enduring and popular as Lovecraft's.

Lovecraft is clearly not to Mr. Moorcock's taste — not even in a broadened and better-developed form. Doubly surprising that Moorcock could see so much in one chapter, and so little in the passages that I quoted earlier. It's as if the Moorcock who wrote about faceless men never talks to the Moorcock who wrote Epic Poesy.

Dunsway Dunsway

Moorcock also sneers at Dunsway. He accuses him of prose inspired by railway journeys and compares a poem to emphasise the point: "Up from the platform and onto the train Got Welleran, Rollory and young Iaine. Grueful streets of birded incomings Were Booranard, Mammoleck, Akanan: And in their dreams Dunsway's lord Misread the communication cord." [6]

The names have a rhythm; railways also have a rhythm. It is doubtful that there is any deeper connection. Most poetry has a rhythm, though rhythm and rhyme are out of favour with some modern poets. (As indeed is reason).

It is easy to play the same games with Moorcock's own creations: A trip along the railway With torturer and sleepy ley (Past peasants full of resignation And no ideas above their station); With Jerry, full of gloom and ire, Glorianna's unholy Quire; Un-grey Dorian, Corum true, Treese, Uri — Uri too? To London, where shadows leak (For Membonobe, change Mervyn Peake) Being a single person They can get a cheap excursion!

Dunsway was a pioneer. It is easy to compare him unfavourably with other writers in a field that he helped open up. Moorcock stamps round well-trodden ground. There is little in his work that was not already present in the works of James Branch Cabell, for instance. Except that Cabell knew a great deal more, and was much less pretentious.

Who Dares, Whispers

Moorcock seems to have a strange hang-up about Winnie-the-Pooh. He really hates the Pooh stories. One might have thought that the author who has written for the young children who read them. If children start off with stuff like Pooh, there are more likely to read the world's great literature later on. The stories are limited, of course, and somewhat soft. But after all, what sort of literature is likely to be read by small children? Would you read them Dostoyevski, maybe?

Moorcock sees a similarity between Pooh and the Hobbits. The similarity is very minor one. Both draw on the English fairy-tale tradition, but they use it in
very different ways. Tolkien used it to create the
Hobbits' Shire, which served as a useful stepping stone
to the stranger and more epic-heroic events of the
war of the Ring.

Moorcock says:

'The humour is often unconscious because, as
with Tolkien, the authors take words seriously
but without pleasure.

"One summer's evening an astonishing piece
of news reached the I Ivy Bush and Green Dragon.
Giants and other portents on the borders
of the Shire were forgotten for more
important matters: Mr. Frodo was selling
Bag End... just why Mr. Frodo was selling
his beautiful hole was even more debatable
than the price..."'.

Uncanny humour, Mr. Moorcock? If you can't
see that the author is well aware of the comic absurdity
of the whole adventure of Mr. Baggins, then you have
ever understood very little. And do you suppose a writer
who took no pleasure in words could come up with a
name like Sackville-Baggins? "Sackville" is of course
a pseudo-French rendering of Baggins.

Or what about the Proudfoot family? In his farewell
party speech, Bilbo refers to them, quite correctly.
I think it's a bit of a mouthful of English words. (Myself,
I have always wondered why we have mice infesting
houses, rather than mouses infecting hice.).

Perhaps Tolkien's humour is too subtle for Michael
Moorcock to follow. Moorcock's own writings tend to
run to weird extremes. He has a talent for the wildly
improbable and extra-ordinary, but very little for the
sort of not-quite-real settings that Tolkien used so
good.

Mr. Moorcock adds the note that:

'The Silmarillion (1977) is, of course, the
finest proof of his argument'.

This would be surprising, to anyone who hadn't
worked out that any bit of evidence will be treated
as proof by Mr. Moorcock, once he has made up his
mind on a matter.

In fact, we know from The Silmarillion that Tolkien
began with tragic and epic-heroic works, starting with
The Fall of Gondolin. But he found that most people
failed to understand them; in those days, myths and
stories based on myths were much less familiar than
they are today. Tolkien's works were too far away from
the normal world, and from fictional writing as it existed
then. He worked on The Silmarillion as a labour of love,
with little hope that it could ever be published (let
alone bring him fame).

The Hobbits provided a bridge between the familiar
world and the world of The Silmarillion. Tolkien was
not at first sure that the two were connected. He did
not set out to write stories of little people in an almost
fictional world having adventures in some grand remnant
of the epic wars between Morgoth and the High Elves.
That's just how it came out; The Hobbit has an echo
of the epic wars between Morgoth and the High Elves.

Mr. Moorcock the Pretender

Moorcock says:

'The little hills and woods of that Surrey
of the mind, the Shire, are 'safe', but the wild
landscape everywhere beyond the Shire is
'dangerous'. Experience of life itself is

dangerous. The Lord of the Rings is a pernicious
confirmation of the values of a morally bankrupt
middle-class.'

Firstly, the Shire and the surrounding lands
are based on real landscapes in and around Oxfordshire,
which was where Tolkien lived much of his life. Moorcock
should know this, although people seem to point it out.

Secondly, and more to the point, the
wild or semi-wild environment of Middle-earth
doesn't suit the Hobbits... quite literally. Moorcock
may see strange and wonderful things, but you will also
pay a price. You may think that the journey was well
worth the price - as does Bilbo when he returns to
Bag-End. But to suppose that experience of life will
not be dangerous is sheer deception.

It was with good reason that Nietzsche said "Live
Dangerously". Moorcock pretends to be someone who
lives dangerously. But I don't think he is, really. He
pretends to have himself in a bit of a rather special way;
not just the superior ones

It is probably just as well

High Art and Low Art

There have been various attempts to make
science-fiction and fantasy conform to what are regarded
as good literary standards. Moorcock follows this trend,
as well as he can. But even when it is done with real
learning and scholarship, I would regard it as a doubtful
practice.

Even the best literary critic can only describe
what has already happened. Most of it concerns literary
forms that have already been meaningfully analysed, digested
and assimilated. Works of fantasy and science-fiction tend
to conform to these norms. Sometimes because they are
low-grade and crude, other times because they are
developing in interesting new directions. And both these
things may be true at the same time.

In the Elizabethan age, high art was poetry. Drama
was seen as vulgar. And indeed, a lot of it was vulgar,
and trivial, and of interest only because of its connection
with more substantial works. It was the vulgar drama
that created the environment in which Shakespeare
could develop. Educated opinion at the time rather looked
down on plays; and in many cases had rules for proper
plays that Shakespeare quite often broke. What he
was praised for was his narrative poems Venus and
Adonis and Hero and Leander; works that hardly anyone
bothers to read today. There is nothing wrong with
them as poems, but nothing particularly interesting
about them either. They lack the human insights of
the plays.

Shakespeare himself seems not to have viewed his
plays as anything very important. He took no steps
to preserve them, for instance. Nevertheless, we have
because some of his friends had the
First Folio published. It is generally agreed that not
everything is it is by Shakespeare. And it may not include
the full text of all the plays that Shakespeare wrote.
For instance, it has been argued that a substantial
chunk of Macbeth was left out, and is now lost for ever.

When plants grow, they tend to produce a lot of
dull roots, stems and leaves before they ever put forth
a flower or a fruit. Likewise with new cultural forms.

When the modern novel was developed, educated people knew that it was not to be compared to the essay, the serious literary form. And indeed, a lot of early novels were so bad that no one nowadays reads those books except to get an insight into how the Novel developed.

Cinema was low art in its early days; it was only later that people realised that it could be used for serious drama that would go well beyond the limits set by live theatre. Television began as a vulgar younger brother to the cinema; it was only later that people realised that it was an art-form in its own right.

I doubt if he will be the Shakespeare of the computer game - but he may help clear the ground for some such development. Over the next two or three decades - who knows what will happen?

Moorcock has never tried anything along these lines. Now consider Gollum. His thinking, like that of Tolkien, is without doubt rooted in his experience of being Czech and of being Jewish. It may also owe something to his having suffered tuberculosis: a fatal illness in that era. Fellow sufferers who read The Trial reckoned that this was its true meaning. But it is nevertheless a fact that Kafka's work, for instance, is indifferent to such questions.

The Role of the Artist

The simplest link between the "inner worlds" of two different individuals is via the "external world", which everyone has access to. And there will be a stronger link if the experience is of the same part of the "external world". The thoughts of a doubting Catholic are more likely to be of interest to another Catholic, or to an ex-Catholic. Likewise the thoughts of a doubting Communist are more likely to be of interest to another Communist, or to an ex-Communist. Meditations upon the "internal world" of the soul (or of the inner recesses of the "external world") will mean little to a reader who barely knows what transubstantiation (or the dialectic) is supposed to be about. It will probably not interest a reader who is indifferent to such questions.

On the other hand, fantasy writing can and does work for people whose "inner world" is quite different from that of the author. Kafka's work, for instance, is quite different from a state of being Jewish. It may also owe something to his having suffered tuberculosis: a fatal illness in that era. Fellow sufferers who read The Trial reckoned that this was its true meaning. But it is nevertheless a fact that Kafka's work is indifferent to such questions.

Weiss: "Epic fantasy can offer a world of metaphor in which to explore the rich, hidden territories deep within us. And this, of course, is why epic romances, romantic poetry, grotesques, fascinated painters and illustrators for centuries, just as fabulous and mythological subjects have always inspired them, as representations of this inner world."

There is only one use of fantasy, and not necessarily the most serious or constructive one. People usually find their own "inner world" fascinating. Others may not share this feeling at all, unless it ties into some aspect of their own "inner world".

Orson Welles in Citizen Kane builds the whole film around an enigma. The man had said "Rosebud" just before he died; what did it mean by it?

Within the framework of the film, the investigators can not resolve the matter. "Rosebud" could be a reference to hundreds of different things: they cannot deduce what it means in Kane's personal symbolism. The audience would be equally baffled, except that the solution is suddenly given at the very end of the film. A very unexpected solution - it is in fact the name of the St. Regis Hotel. But even this - if we won't try to summarise here, it ties together the disparate elements of the film and illuminates the complex character of Kane.

"Explorations of inner worlds tend to become baffling, trivial and subjective; home movies of the soul. There are few things more fascinating than one's own home movies; few things more dull and boring than other people's home movies."

At the risk of sounding rude, I quite find that writers who set out "to explore the rich, hidden territories deep within..." are usually self-effaced, eventually vanishing up their own back passages. It is their right to do this, of course. But pardon me if I am reluctant to follow them there!

This sort of thing is in any case hardly new. Mainstream literature has done it already, at least as well and probably much better. "New Wave" Science-Fiction was a borrowing of some very old waves from other parts of the literary and the arts. For instance, Robert Graves once said of the poetry of his times: "By the Forties, Nature had gone out; the inner recesses of the soul took her place. Revelations of these tended to be dull, one soul recess much like another - as you may also say about coal-cellars!"
Equally, in the world of the Star Wars films, sound seems able to propagate through a vacuum. This is nonsensical in terms of the laws of physics, but necessary for dramatic effect. For the Death Star, dangerous, uncontrolled detonation in total silence would seem a terrible anti-climax, and might sharply remind us that what we are actually witnessing is the destruction of a small special-effects machine.

Secondary worlds work because they are both more comprehensible and more generally valid than slices of the writer's own "inner world". Done properly, they are shared between the author and the reader, and comprehensible and more generally valid than slices of the writer's own "inner world". Done properly, they will thus be a part of everyone's "inner world", in one form or another. Of course, the derivation is not simple or straightforward. To be enjoyed by a range of people with very different views of the matter.

Had Tolkien simply given us a slice of his own "inner world", it would never have been as saleable as it was. Tolkien was very popular among hippies - a human type that did not exist at the time he conceived it, and still has no less popular among people who are not at all like him. He created a world that has a wider meaning.

Moorcock describes only half of the process. And his own writing, though at times very good, is limited by his inability to stop beyond his own familiar environment. No matter what the story is, his characters have a strong resemblance to sixties hippies playing-acting in fancy dress. What he thinks very superior is actually no more than half-baked!

The reader may have noticed that I have been using the terms "inner world" and "external world" without trying to define exactly what I mean. This is unavoidable; it ties us with the most complex, controversial and fundamental questions in philosophy. But the get diverted too far onto these matters, I will say simply that I assume that there is an "external world" that is by and large independent of our own immediate will, and an "inner world" in each person which is composed of the sum of our own experience plus the perception of that experience, and of what we wish to do (which will often be frustrated in the "external world").

I do not want to get involved in the respective merits of the strict materialistic views (any and all versions), of the Kantian thing-in-itself, or of the views of Bishop Berkeley (who held that the world does not exist at all, but is simply an illusion that God maintains for our benefit). These are complex matters, and not really relevant to a discussion of Tolkien and Moorcock.

I simply want to say that, for all ordinary purposes, the world has an existence independent of our view of it. This is relevant, since a lot of Moorcock's thinking seems to be rooted in a confused notion that one can somehow change the world by changing one's view of it.

Lots of people favour some version of this view, although they tend to shrink back from its full implications. For the Death Star, dangerous, uncontrolled detonation in total silence would seem a terrible anti-climax, and might sharply remind us that what we are actually witnessing is the destruction of a small special-effects machine.

It does seem to imply that the behaviour of an electron can be influenced by the observer's view of it. On the other hand, no physicist assumes that an electron's behaviour can be predicted by the observer's perception of it. Nor can the speed of light, or many other basic physical constants. And for everything from a dust-mote up to a galaxy, normal rules of cause-and-effect apply.

I would prefer the view of Omar Khayyam:
The moving finger writes; and, having writ
Moves on... 3

It is notable that we often discover things in the material world that are both more complex and more wonderful than anything we had expected. The moons of the outer planets turn out to be far more remarkable and diverse than anyone had imagined. The rings of Saturn had been perceived as several large rings and they unexpectedly turned out to be a huge number of very much smaller rings, and quite against the reason, the outermost planets also turned out to have rings. At the time of writing, Neptune has not yet been reached: I suspect that it will also surprise us.

To take another example: it is possible to grab hold of a sparrow, take a bite of it... even though you perceived it as a blackberry. Your own will and perception can not turn it into a blackberry.

This is not to say that perception or view of the world is unimportant. Once you have grabbed the spider, and discovered that it is in fact a spider, your actions will depend very much on your perception of spiders. You may drop it with a scream of horror, crush it in your fingers, drop it and stamp on it, flick it away, study it as an interesting specimen or put it gently back where you found it. This all depends on how you perceive the substrate of the scene, the scene as unimportant, interesting or a creature with its own right to life. Your perception will determine its future; whether it remains alive or becomes a crushed and dead spider. (Once more, if people would eat it, permeating the spider as just edible as a blackberry?)

To link back to Tolkien. Tolkien had a fear of spiders, probably because of the poisonous spider which bit him when he was young. In his "inner world", spiders had a significant role which other people might not agree with. But in the secondary world that he created, his feelings about spiders were actualised in monsters like Ungoliant and Shelob. These work fine as monsters, even for readers who do not share Tolkien's feelings about spiders in the present world.

Tolkien created secondary worlds. Moorcock's creations are muddled mixtures, half-formed secondary worlds combined with lumps that derive directly from his "inner world". And Moorcock is now looking more dated than Tolkien, as the world continues to change. I suspect that it is Tolkien's vision that will prove the longer lasting.

Fantasy - Origins and Categories

Earlier, I objected to Moorcock's attempts to define "epic fantasy". I am suspicious of all such attempts. This is not to say that all categories are wholly unreal. There can be whole groups of stories that are strongly influenced by each other, and not much influenced by anything else. Fairy stories are an obvious example of this. But in the broad sense of the term, tales of adventure long ago and/or far away, is a far older form; a form common to a great many highly diverse cultures.

Other traditions are still alive and active. Sword and Sorcery, for instance. Or westerns, which mostly include exactly the same distortions of the actual way of life of the 19th c. American Midwest, but "epic fantasy" is an absurdly broad term, which includes several quite separate traditions and a great many works that belong to no single or definite tradition.

The distinction between fantasy, science-fiction, andSF&F is basically arbitrary. The rings of Saturn, in the broad sense of the term, tales of adventure long ago and/or far away, is a far older form; a form common to a great many highly diverse cultures.

The modern novel represented a break with this tradition. Novels tended to be contemporary, indigenous and socially extended. That is to say, they were about the present or the fairly recent past; and were about places and people familiar to their readers. This went along with the developments of new methods of writing, a vast increase in the amount that was written and the creation of some outstandingly good literary works (together with a much greater number of lesser works, and enormous amounts of worthless and forgotten trash). Our current literary scene is a main-stream which is derived from this tradition, but the main-stream has always included a few works that used the methods of the novel for the wider subject-matter of the romance.