

Moorcock

The Urth list — 6 messages, 5 voices, 18 Apr 2003

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3952>

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Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 18 Apr 2003, 16:19

I would agree with much of what Blattid said about Moorcock, and plead guilty to oversimplifying with that "serious non-Elric" tag. But I disagree concerning Moorcock's "moral vacuity".

Clarification: I refer to the books, not the man. The Cornelius books, the S'n'S megaserie, the Pyat books, the Dancers ... all Moorcock's work seems to me to breathe the thick atmosphere of a rather facile moral nihilism (his fascination with real nihilists is especially clear in the Cornelius books) that I can't even find offensive, it's so ... empty. That's what I meant by vacuity.

He has admitted that if he wrote "Gloriana" again he would not have included the rape scene

And what would that leave? A book with no climax -- no pun intended -- whatsoever. Plus, if it were only GLORIANA, I could accept that, but there's also ... Oh, I've forgotten it, the one where the Fireclown rapes Miss Mavis Ming and solves all her troubles. Once is a mistake, twice is something else entirely.

and has written extensively on Feminism, against pornography,

Oh. So now he's in favor of censorship too? That can't be right, not if he's still

... in favour of his own brand of radical anarchy.

After all, anarchy and censorship simply don't work well together.

H'mmm. It occurs to me that I'm being awfully harsh on Moorcock. After all, I've read dozens of his books and will doubtless read more of them in the future ... So what's my point here? Wish I knew ...

In fact, as

Blattid mentions, he has written extensively on just about everything. He holds a discussion forum at www.multiverse.org where he shares his views on almost any subject you care to bring up, and his deep moral concerns, especially with world politics, are expounded with passion.

I'll have to check this out.

These views are embedded in his books to varying degrees, but I would again recommend "King of the City" as showing his deepest moral sense.

Based on your recommendation I will definitely check it out.

Moorcock's multiverse can be infuriating, but is mostly a game that he plays.

There is no such thing as an innocent game.

By playing this game, Moorcock puts all his work into a specific dialectical relationship with all his other work; "Mother London" is in dialog with "The Black Corridor," both are in dialog with

"The Warhound and the World's Pain" (my personal favorite Moorcock, btw); all three are in dialog with "The Stealer of Souls"; etc. The mechanism of the "Eternal Champion" provides a specific framework to that dialectic -- each text contributes something to the master-concept, which in turn reads itself into the text.

(The only possible exception is "Postcards from Hollywood," which -- as a naturalized Californian -- I enjoyed immensely.)

Most of his various series can be read alone, with the recurring characters playing very different roles.

Well, yes; but the fact that the "same" characters are playing "different" roles is vital to finding meaning in those characters, in those roles. This is nowhere more explicit than in the Cornelius books, where the characters dance from one set of roles to another in a way that brings the entire concept of "character" into question.

Mike would be deeply insulted to be compared in any way to Heinlein,

That's a pity, because to refuse such comparison is essentially to insist on situating himself outside the SF/F genre entirely; RAH is, so to speak, the elephant in the room. Like every SF/F writer from the 1950s on, Moorcock uses (consciously or not) rhetorical techniques and moves invented or improved by Heinlein to establish the nature of his discursive pseudo-realities.

whose politics are anathema to him.

... nor are their politics actually that far off. Heinlein was a rightist anarchist*, Moorcock a leftist anarchist: but anarchism is a place where the political spectrum bends around and meets itself. What is anathematic to Moorcock is the received version of Heinlein's politics, a version based on a highly-motivated and colored reading of his various fictional positions into a unified model of "the conservative enemy."

* Though adopted by the minarchist and libertarian movements, RAH clearly regarded government of any sort as never anything better than a necessary evil, but an evil nonetheless. I do not derive my understanding of Heinlein's politics, by the way, from his fictional writings -- which are far more polyvocal on the subject than most critics are willing to recognize -- but on published nonfiction statements, including a book-length interview by Neil Shulman (sp?).

His attitude towards government was probably best summed up in his fiction by the Professor in "The Moon is a Harsh Mistress," who said -- I paraphrase from memory -- "Make any laws you need to feel safe. I will either obey them or break them and accept the consequences."

The motives of the two writers in bringing in repeated characters is very different, Heinlein seeming to do it just to say "Look, all these heroic guys with amazing sex-lives are really good old RAH".

You are, of course, talking about a guy who was monogamous -- with, admittedly, his second wife -- for more decades than most of us on this list have been alive. This is exactly the kind of thing I mean by the received opinion: Somehow it got decided that "all" Heinlein's protagonists were (a) identical and (b) projections of himself, and it's heresy to question this.

(As an aside, did anyone ever write worse about sex than Heinlein.

Yep. Asimov. But not _much_ worse.

My wife still won't believe that anyone could call nipples "those twin spiggots of desire" or claim that one woman's "nipples went spung").

These are classic, aren't they ... Up there with "five minutes of squelching noise."

But you may be right about Moorcock not being suitable for recommendation to Wolfe fans.

That really wasn't what I was trying to say -- after all, of the two people sampled so far, who have read substantial amounts of both writers, 100% thought both were worthwhile writers.

My point, rather, is that Moorcock is not necessarily suitable for recommendation to all Wolfe fans. As someone noted on here, Wolfe "contains multitudes." Ditto for Moorcock, though his multitudes are rather more like to one another than Wolfe's are. Depending on what you like in Wolfe, you might find something ... not similar, but similarly appealing ... in some of Moorcock's work.

Fair 'nuff?

Josh Geller — 18 Apr 2003, 20:09 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

On Fri, 18 Apr 2003, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:
[Heinlein] was monogamous -- with, admittedly, his second wife [....]

She was his third wife, and they had an open marriage.

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Alice K. Turner — 18 Apr 2003, 16:17 · follows Josh Geller

From Dan'l. quoting somebody:

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Wrong. No one ever, ever, including hack porn writers, EVER, EVER wrote worse sex than Heinlein. With possibly the momentary exception of a long-forgotten 9-day wonder of the 60s or 70s called -The Harrad Experiment-. And I am something of an expert here. I should probably say, for members of this group, that IMO Sturgeon wrote bad sex too, though not, by leagues, in the same abysmal class.

-alga

Roy C. Lackey — 19 Apr 2003, 04:04 · follows Alice K. Turner

Dan'l quoted and wrote:
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Amen! I don't think I've ever been so entirely in agreement with Dan'l about anything so much as his eloquent defense of a man who shouldn't need defending.

Perhaps the most conspicuous instance of Heinlein in Wolfe is "The Last Thrilling Wonder Story". From my first reading of it to today, I have always thought that Wolfe was making some sort of dig at Heinlein -- putting him down in some way -- that I've never been comfortable with. Maybe it's just me.

-Roy

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 20 Apr 2003, 01:27 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Oh, good lord, I remember THE HARRAD EXPERIMENT. Leon Urine, wasn't it? Or packaged to look like his stuff anyway (I remember seeing it on the racks next to MILA-somethingteen). My parents tended to buy a lot of schlocky novels of the sort at that time -- I guess that's why they were bestsellers, eh? -- and I'd sneak them. My introduction to the Giants, as the Trek movie put it ... Suzanne, Robbins, etc. (On the other hand, I sneak- read THE GODFATHER the same way, and that's not a half bad read.)

I guess what defines bad sex writing is partly what you're looking for ... I don't think RAH (or Asimov for that matter) was trying to write stiffer stuff, the way (say) Delany sometimes does. But they both managed to write sex scenes that were gratuitous, dull, and offensive at the same time ... something of an accomplishment, actually.

Sturgeon? Well, yeah, but then, with Sturgeon, sex ain't nothing but love misspelled, and he could write about sex (from "If All Men Were Brothers..." to GODBODY to SOME OF YOUR BLOOD to ...), even if he couldn't write sex scenes.

From: "Alice K. Turner" <aturner6 at nyc.rr.com>
Reply-To: urth at urth.net
To: <urth at urth.net>
Subject: Re: (urth) Moorcock
Date: Fri, 18 Apr 2003 12:17:24 -0400

From Dan'l. quoting somebody:

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-alga

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Jeff Wilson — 20 Apr 2003, 06:21 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

From:

"Alice K. Turner" <aturner6 at nyc.rr.com>

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I don't find sprunging nipples to be an inappropriate idiom, and neither did my ex-wife. The spiggots remark I will give you, but I find Clarke's depiction of sex to be poorer storytelling than Heinlein's overall.

Jeff Wilson - <http://www.io.com/~jwilson>

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