



## Literary Wonderlands: A Journey Through the Greatest Fictional Worlds Ever Created

*Laura Miller (Editor) , Lev Grossman (Contributor) , John Sutherland (Contributor) , Tom Shippey (Contributor) , John Clute (Contributor) , Mary Hamilton (Contributor) , Kat Howard (Contributor) , Mahvesh Murad (Contributor) , more... Abigail Nussbaum (Contributor) , Laurie Penny (Contributor) , Adam Roberts (Contributor) , Jared Shurin (Contributor) , James Smythe (Contributor) , Lisa Tuttle (Contributor) ...less*

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A glorious, full-illustrated collection that delves deep into the inception, influences, and literary and historical underpinnings of nearly 100 of our most beloved fictional realms.

*Literary Wonderlands* is a thoroughly researched, wonderfully written, and beautifully produced book that spans two thousand years of creative endeavor. From Spenser's *The Fairie Queene* to Wells's *The Time Machine* to Murakami's *1Q84* it explores the timeless and captivating features of fiction's imagined worlds including the relevance of the writer's own life to the creation of the story, influential contemporary events and philosophies, and the meaning that can be extracted from the details of the work. With hundreds of pieces of original artwork, illustration and cartography, as well as a detailed overview of the plot and a "Dramatis Personae" for each work, *Literary Wonderlands* is a fascinating read for lovers of literature, fantasy, and science fiction.

## Literary Wonderlands: A Journey Through the Greatest Fictional Worlds Ever Created Details

Date : Published November 1st 2016 by Black Dog & Leventhal

ISBN : 9780316316385

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Format : Hardcover 320 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Writing, Books About Books, History, Language

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**Worlds Ever Created** Laura Miller (Editor) , Lev Grossman (Contributor) , John Sutherland (Contributor) , Tom Shippey (Contributor) , John Clute (Contributor) , Mary Hamilton (Contributor) , Kat Howard (Contributor) , Mahvesh Murad (Contributor) , more... Abigail Nussbaum (Contributor) , Laurie Penny (Contributor) , Adam Roberts (Contributor) , Jared Shurin (Contributor) , James Smythe (Contributor) , Lisa Tuttle (Contributor) ...less

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# From Reader Review Literary Wonderlands: A Journey Through the Greatest Fictional Worlds Ever Created for online ebook

## Lynn DiFerdinando says

First of all, "worlds" is a misnomer. Many of the entries picked were closer to magical realism, or just simply invented cities or places. At some point, "world" has to mean something different, or any invented town in any drama fiction novel would count. For example... *Pale Fire* by Nabokov? That's hardly a world, now is it? *One Hundred Years of Solitude*? Several of these only work in the context of our world at all, yes, *Hundred Years* has magic in it (or does it? symbolic imagery exists, author) The whole point is that it's Mexico, it can't be without it being Mexico, and so it MUST be in our world. Not to mention *Kindred*. How on earth is that a separate world? The whole conceit is about seeing the truth of the world we live in and the lies we tell each other.

As the book continued, the pieces seemed to get fluffier and more summary-like. My favorite parts were where the authors talked about how the created world(s) impacted literature and culture that followed it. That also decreased as the book went on, which I guess is slightly acceptable because it was going forward in time, but also not really, because otherwise why include it?

Mostly I just quibbled with what they included and what they didn't. All in all, it was an ok book to flip through, but not much past that.

At the very least they slightly attempted to be multicultural, so it's not *completely* white, English and male. Just almost completely.

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## Honesty says

This was an interesting read, and I learned a lot of good trivia behind many of the worlds presented. It also served as a good preview for several books I haven't read. My to-read list is now a little longer (as if it wasn't long enough already), although I now also know of a few books I'll most likely never want to touch.

Overall, this is a nice overview of the evolution of fictional worlds. That being said, a few of the choices confused me. Why was Asimov's *I, Robot* featured but not his *Foundation* series? *I, Robot* certainly had a major impact on science fiction, but *Foundation* seems like it has a larger focus on world-building. Also, I'm sure most readers will find at least one world she/he is surprised did not make it in. (My coworkers and I came up with North America in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, Arrakis from *Dune*, and the aforementioned *Foundation* universe, just to name a few). Also, the essays themselves varied in quality. Some were brief but meaningful explorations of the worlds presented, while others were little more than summaries. Overall, I would say this book is worth reading, if for no other reason than to improve your to-read list.

3/5 stars.

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## Peter Tillman says

Off to a very good start. Slanted toward SF/F (proto in the early days, e.g. *Beowulf*, *Orlando Furioso*, *Metamorphoses*), nice little story capsules and great ART!. Works mentioned extend from Gilgamesh (1750 BC) to 2015. Your interest in this book will depend on your interest in the fantastic in literature. And the book capsules range from excellent to pretty murky

Here's the NYT review, which you should read first:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/02/books/review/literary-wonderlands-a-journey-through-the-greatest-fictional-worlds-ever-created.html>...

TOC is at Google, with some samples: <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=hSgKD...> -- and here's a tip: DO NOT BUY the ebook, as it is text-only. A major part of the charm of the book is the excellent reproductions of the color illustrations from the works.

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## **Lisa says**

*Literary Wonderlands* was an impulse buy which turned out to be most enjoyable reading. It is, as implied by the full title *Literary Wonderlands, a Journey through the Greatest Fictional Worlds Ever Created*, a brief exploration of notable fictional worlds, beginning with the ancient world and concluding in the computer age. Its five sections are:

Ancient Myth and Legend  
Science and Romanticism  
Golden Age of Fantasy  
New World Order  
The Computer Age.

Ancient Myths and Legends includes the epics you'd expect, and many of which I've read. Each 2-4 page summary includes beautiful artworks illustrating scenes from the stories; books from later eras also have author photos, maps of the fictional worlds and stills from film adaptations.

The Epic of Gilgamesh (c1750BC)  
The Odyssey (c.725—675 BC)  
Ovid's Metamorphoses (c.8)  
Beowulf (c.700-1100)  
The One Thousand and One Nights (c.700-947)  
The Mabinogion (12th-14th century) (on my TBR, but I have read bits of it)  
The Prose Edda (c.1220) by the Icelandic author Snorri Sturluson (I have read some Norse myth but this is on my wishlist now)  
The Divine Comedy (c.1308—21) by Dante Alighieri (on my TBR in three versions, Clive James' s translation partly read)  
Le Morte d'Arthur (1485) by Thomas Malory (have read bits of this, at uni when I studied Arthurian legend)  
Orlando Furioso (c.1516/32) by Ludovico Ariosto, a rival to Arthurian romances, apparently, and inspiration for authors such as Italo Calvino, Jorge Luis Borges and Salman Rushdie)  
Utopia (1516) by Thomas More  
The Faerie Queen (1590—1609) by Edmund Spenser  
Journey to the West (Xiyouji) (c.1592) by Wu Cheng'En (abridged by Arthur Waley, apparently as the more well-known *Monkey* (1942)  
The City of the Sun (1602) by Tommaso Campanella, another of many utopias included in the book  
Don Quixote (1605/15) by Miguel de Cervantes (see my rambling thoughts here)  
The Tempest (1611) Shakespeare  
A Voyage to the Moon (1657) by Cyrano de Bergerac (who I've never been tempted to read)  
The Description of a New World, called The Blazing World (1666) by Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, and apparently an inspiration for Virginia Woolf and Siri Hustvedt.

Yes, you can see the problem. Only one woman. But not surprising given the era that's covered. Gender equity would mean the inclusion of obscure works most of us have never heard of, denying readers the pleasure of connecting with the familiar. This is not a scholarly text. It's (as the blurb says) *an armchair traveller's guide to magical realms*.

To read the rest of my review please visit <https://anzlitlovers.com/2018/09/23/1...>

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### **Siavahda says**

I can't remember the last time I read a book that made me *this angry*.

I probably shouldn't be quite so mad. As a whole, this is a fluff-piece, clearly not meant seriously; as amply demonstrated by the shallow blurb-like summaries of each 'literary wonderland'. Few of the 'essays' even quote from the material, and when they do, it's only once; none of the ones I read (in the spirit of honesty, I should tell you that I only made it halfway through the book before wishing I had a paperback copy to *set on fire*, so it is theoretically possible that the essays in the latter half of the book are better) discuss what makes each wonderland worthy of inclusion among 'the greatest', or what effect each had on the readers and society of its time. Few give any meaningful cultural or historical background, and then only in crumb-form.

A book like this is probably always a risk: it's probably impossible to make a list of the 'greatest' without upsetting *someone*. Someone will always be confused or offended that their particular favorites didn't make the cut. And I will freely admit that I am not a personal fan of most of the works listed in the first three sections of the book (ANCIENT MYTH & LEGEND, SCIENCE & ROMANTICISM, and GOLDEN AGE OF FANTASY).

But there are some very gaping exclusions that I find personally unforgivable; *The Tale of Genji*, written by Murasaki Shikibu in 11th century Japan, inarguably the world's first/oldest attributed novel (there are older pieces of literature, but we don't know who wrote those), is one. Instead, *Literary Wonderlands* claims that honor for *Don Quixote*, written centuries later. There is also no mention of the *Kalevala*, the Finnish legendary epic which inspired Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and is recognized as being the foundation of Tolkien's *Silmarillion* and *Lord of the Rings*; Tolkien's love of and fascination with the *Kalevala* is well-documented. For that reason alone, I would think the *Kalevala* ought to have been included, and that's without delving into what an incredible, and extremely old, epic piece it is. Mary Shelley, despite almost universal agreement that her *Frankenstein* constitutes the first science fiction novel, is nowhere to be found either.

*'Who is the Shakespeare of imaginative fiction? For many it's a debate between HG Wells and Jules Verne...' <--ACTUAL QUOTE FROM THIS PYRE OF AWFULNESS.*

In fact, that's what first set alarm-bells ringing for me; a quick glance at the table of contents shows very few female authors listed at all. THE COMPUTER AGE includes Lois Lowry, Margaret Atwood, JK Rowling, Cornelia Funke, Susanna Clarke, Suzanna Collins, Ann Leckie, and Nnedi Okorafor – eight names out of the 22 authors included in the section. NEW WORLD ORDER, which precedes it, includes Ursula Le Guin, Gerd Mjøen Brantenberg, Angela Carter, Octavia Butler - and that's all. Four names out of the 21 in that section.

There's no mention of Madeleine L'Engle. No Anne Rice. No Connie Willis. Doris Lessing is mentioned in passing, but none of her works are featured, despite her having won the Nobel Prize for Literature. There's

no Marion Zimmer Bradley, who, while a disgusting piece of human trash, nonetheless produced multiple groundbreaking works in the fields of speculative fiction. NK Jemisin, Jacqueline Carey, Martha Wells, Catherynne Valente, and Kate Elliott have all created breathtaking and mindblowing fantasy and science fiction worlds, but none are included here. Julie E. Czerneda, C.J. Cherryh, Lois McMaster Bujold, James Tiptree Jr, Jo Walton, Mercedes Lackey, Mary Stewart, Anne Bishop, Meredith Ann Pierce, Jane Yolen, Joanna Russ, Patricia A. McKillip, Nicola Griffith, DIANA WYNNE JONES, Elizabeth Bear, Suzette Haden Elgin - I could sit here typing names for hours and yes, of course not all of these authors could have been included if the editors wanted to keep this book as fluffy and short as they clearly did. But that doesn't excuse the fact that so many of them are missing.

If I'm being kind, I'll theorise that there were two ways the editors chose which authors/works to include. Either they wanted works that featured secondary worlds/societies that were intricate, impressive, and groundbreaking – so, demonstrations of immense literary craft on the part of the author – or they wanted works which precipitated literary or cultural revolution. By either standard, most of the authors I just listed should have been included. How can anyone make a list of 'greatest fictional worlds' and exclude Diana Wynne Jones? How can you talk about the history of speculative fiction and ignore James Tiptree or Marion Zimmer Bradley?

The lack of female-authored works is enraging, but that's all without touching on the airy fluff pieces of the essays themselves. As mentioned above, each one mostly summarises the plot of the work; as someone who studied the *Odyssey* for two years at A Level, the banal three-page *blurb* written on it for this book makes me want to scream. For example, there's no mention of the incredible *cleverness* of the very language used in the *Odyssey*, word-play and cultural jokes only intelligible with some understanding of the time period and Ancient Greek itself. There's no mention of the fact that 'Homer' almost certainly didn't exist, or that modern scholarship is leaning more and more towards the idea of both the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* as having been written by a woman. There's no real explanation as to why the *Odyssey* is so groundbreaking and impressive, or why it has resonated so strongly with readers throughout human history.

And every piece is like that. Even when, as in the essay on *The Water Babies*, some of the motifs used in the text are decoded for non-Victorian Age readers, no mention is made of why, how, or even *if* the literary wonderland in question affected readers so strongly as to make it into this book. The standard by which these fictional worlds were selected for this collection is entirely missing; nor is there any explanation of why so many major pieces of fiction by women have been overlooked.

All in all, this is a stupidly pretentious fluff-piece whose authors prove their very unsuitability for crafting such a collection by their ignorance of those genres they purport to have studied so carefully. This is not a list of 'the greatest' any genuine speculative fiction fan can support, and the essays on each work do nothing to explain why even those greats included *are* so great.

On bended knee, I beg you: PLEASE do not buy this as a neat Yuletide gift for the spec-fic fan in your family. They might well beat you to death with it.

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## **Paul says**

People have been immersing themselves in stories for thousands of years, originally these were passed from person to person before someone had the genius idea of writing them down. What stories though are the defining example of a type? Literary Wonderlands tries to do this by picking around 100 books and series

that they think have redefined the literary landscape when they were published.

There are five sections of books, beginning with Ancient Myth & Legend and then Science and Romanticism it then goes onto the Golden age of Fantasy a New World Order and finishes up in the Computer Age. There are classics such as The Odyssey and Beowulf and the Tempest, The Time Machine and The Water Babies and it brings pretty much up to date with Ann Leckie's Imperial Radch trilogy. I was pleased to see favourite authors like Sir Terry Pratchett, Iain M. Banks and Neil Gaiman, and titles that I had read and enjoyed like Snow Crash and Neuromancer that I hadn't expected to make it in.

This lavish coffee table book of books has a small biography of the author and there are lots of pictures, artworks and maps from the books covered. There is a plot overview and for a series or trilogy there is a broader look at the story, but be aware there are frequently spoilers! The main flaw is that as it is very broad in its scope, it misses so many other books that should have been included as defining books of a particular genre but it would have made the book too unwieldy though.

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### **Jaylia3 says**

This is a truly beautiful book, with gorgeous color illustrations on almost every page 2-page spread, so reading it, even flipping through it, is a delight. The first thing I did was check to see which of my favorite literary worlds had been included (Strange/Norrell! Thursday Next! And many others!), and I read those entries feeling great pleasure and satisfaction to see the texts I love treated with such respectful and thought-provoking attention.

But discovering new-to-you authors is the biggest perk of Literary Wonderlands, with one very slight caveat. If you are someone who avoids spoilers at all costs (I am not), if your reading pleasure is diminished by knowing ahead of time some of what happens in a story, then you'll want to proceed with caution. In order for them give substantial insights, quite a few of the entries contain summaries which tell in a very general way what happens in the book being featured. Since many of these books are well known classics, especially the older ones, I don't think this will be an issue for most readers.

The entries were authored by an impressive list of knowledgeable and talented writers, some of them scholars or historians, and some of them creators of their own literary wonderlands, like Lev Grossman (his The Magicians series is, sadly, not included in the book). Essays are arranged in 5 chronological groups: Ancient Myth and Legend, Science and Romanticism, Golden Age of Fantasy, New World Order, and The Computer Age (a strange title choice because most of the stories in this group have nothing to do with computers). Many, but not quite all, of the authors are from Europe or the United States.

This would be a great holiday gift for anyone (including yourself) who loves fiction.

I received a free copy of this book from the publisher with obligations. Review opinions are mine.

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### **Suanne Laqueur says**

I'm not sure what I expected this to be but as I was reading it, I kept thinking, "This isn't what I expected it to

be." I know that makes no sense. It's still a beautiful book and I enjoyed every page.

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### **Ron says**

Fills a gap we didn't know existed, and still aren't sure. A supposed catalog of the lands of fantasy and science fiction through the ages. Is more like a survey of those fantasy and fiction works through the ages which created worlds or universes.

Over a hundred entries, so the coverage is shallow.

Nice illustrations.

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### **Jesse Richards says**

I don't understand what the point of this book is. It is very different than I expected. It is just a list of summaries of 100 books.

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### **Heather says**

Literary Wonderlands is a true gem for any real book lover. Filled with beautiful illustrations and brief, yet incisive write-ups on everything from The Epic of Gilgamesh to Salman Rushdie's Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Days, it highlights literature both famous and overlooked. Each book has a well-researched, concise abstract detailing not just the story itself but also information on the author and the book's place in the literary world. Reading it made me remember countless childhood hours spent in the library searching the shelves for a new favorite book. Now, I can just open up Literary Wonderlands to find what I want to read next!

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### **Joanne says**

Literary Wonderlands takes you on 100 adventures to fictional worlds you may be familiar with already or places you have yet to discover.

This beautifully illustrated hardback book is perfect for book-lovers. It will take you from the time of ancient myth and legend, through the golden age of fantasy, right up to the contemporary computer age. As you journey through the ages, these literary wonderlands will also transport you throughout the world. Some of the locations are real such as the Spain of Cervantes' Don Quixote or the near future California of Neal Stephenson's Snow Crash. However, some are purely fictional such as down the rabbit hole with Alice in Wonderland, Peter Pan's Neverland and Harry Potter's Hogwarts. You will also journey to the Moon with Cyrano de Bergerac, under the sea with Jules Verne and to other galaxies with Douglas Adams. Each entry explains a bit about the plot of the book, describes the setting created, often tells a little of the historical context when the author was writing and talks of the place it held in people's thoughts then or now. Each entry is also accompanied by original illustrations, author photographs and occasionally film stills.

As I flicked through the book, choosing entries at random to read, many childhood memories were evoked.

For example, I remembered how much I enjoyed The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe, so much that I had to read about all the other adventures set in the magical world of Narnia. I loved the inclusion of the illustrations I remembered from Alice in Wonderland and remember being terrified by the Queen of Hearts! The Wizard of Oz is probably more associated with the film these days but I do remember borrowing the book and some sequels from my library and being surprised at the differences from the film. Perhaps a first introduction that the book is almost always better than a film adaptation! A more recent discovery (though more years ago than I care to think about actually) is the magical Discworld created by the late great Terry Pratchett. I was introduced to Discworld by my husband who, not long after we met, recommended that I read Mort. I did and I was hooked – and I don't normally enjoy fantasy type books.

But as well as bringing back memories, I have also come across new authors to investigate and new literary worlds to explore. Literary Wonderlands is a real treasury to be enjoyed at leisure, something I fully intend to do as I read more of the book.

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### **Dina says**

Also known as 'The Big Book of Spoilers.'

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### **Girl with her Head in a Book says**

For my full review: [https://girlwithherheadinabook.co.uk/...](https://girlwithherheadinabook.co.uk/)

I fell in love with this in the bookshop. I have a great weakness for books about books and leafing through the pages of beautiful illustrations and biographies of fantasy worlds that I had loved over the years, I felt that this was a book that I really needed to have for my own. Fortunately, it was just before Christmas and Santa Claus (in the guise of my parents) was very obliging. Tracking back from early mythology all the way through to the modern age, Literary Wonderlands is in the words of its creator Laura Miller is a compendium of the 'lands that exist only in the imagination', offering a panoramic view of the development of story-telling. Bibliophiles will delight.

Miller emphasises in her introduction that the book is designed to focus on one of the 'least celebrated' aspects of reading; 'its ability to make us feel transported to a different time and place'. Along with a vast team of contributors, Miller has grouped the literary wonderlands by era, going from Ancient Myth and Legend to Science and Romanticism through to the Golden Age of Fantasy and then on to New World Order before finishing up with the Computer Age. Providing synopses and background information for each of the almost hundred wonderlands featured, we gain valuable context about the influences behind many of the most celebrated works of creative fiction.

Of course, when one actually reads through the wonderlands, one realises that being transported to these places would not be as desirable as all that. From the Hell in Dante's Divine Comedy to the terrifying world of The Water Babies (this scarred me as a child) to the Gilead of The Handmaid's Tale, all too often the author's wonderland has many of the aspects of a nightmare. Personally, I have always thought that even Alice's Wonderland is a horrifying story with pretty illustrations. Yet there are others such as the book world of Thursday Next and Moominvalley which have much warmer memories and the wealth of illustrations in this book only serve to remind us of why they captured our imagination in the first place.

Collected together, it becomes possible to see trends in story-telling which go beyond the individual author inspiration. It was striking however that the Ancient Myth and Legend section stretched from 1750 BCE to 1666 AD while subsequent sections tended to be a century or so at most, with the Computer Age chapters lasting only the last thirty years. Additionally, while Miller has examples aplenty for each of her categories, there were a number of notable absentees, such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. This was particularly strange given that in the segment on *Never Let Me Go*, the former novel is hailed as the first piece of true science fiction. Moreover, *Literary Wonderlands* is centred on mostly Western literature, meaning that a number of works are cited without reference to the non-Western pieces which inspired them.

More peculiarly, as we move through the sections, there were an increasing number of books which did not seem to be taking place in a wonderland at all, but in worlds strikingly similar to our own. Does *The Handmaid's Tale* 'count' as fantasy literature? Does speculative fiction transport us to an entirely new time and place? Where does the border come between the two?

It was odd too how Miller seemed to pick the first novel in a series as the point of focus for a segment without considering its place within its individual canon. So, the Moomins are represented by *The Moomins* and the Great Flood even though *Literary Wonderlands* acknowledges that this book is non-canonical and that most agree that the story's true continuity did not begin until *Comet in Moominland*. Similarly, Peter Pan in *Kensington Gardens* is featured rather than *Peter Pan* itself. Because of this, I felt that some of the wonderlands that I loved the best did not quite get their fair coverage.

Tonally, the book is rather disjointed. This is unsurprising given that there are over forty contributors, but it does mean that certain entries are more readable than others. It is not immediately clear who has written about which book, further complicating the issue. That being said, there are some truly fantastic passages, such as the closing lines on *The Chronicles of Narnia*: 'It isn't the elaboration of the backdrop that casts the spell, that makes the place seem real in spite of its many absurdities, but the inexhaustible delight of the dancers who inhabit it, as well as the man who made it'. So very, very true. There is a real tenderness too in the descriptions of Douglas Adams' *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and Terry Pratchett's *Discworld*. The one thing I did find a little sad however was how few quotations were made from the original material; the pictures and illustrations are stunningly beautiful but it was the words that transported us in the first place.

What intrigued me most however was the realisation that creative ideas recur over time. *Egalia's Daughters: A Satire of the Sexes* was published in 1977 and seems to feature many of the same themes as Naomi Alderman's recent bestseller *The Power*. I would imagine that this comes from the ongoing frustration of women with our patriarchal society but I was fascinated by how Alderman's novel could be hailed as ground-breaking when another book had achieved success with the same message so comparatively recently. Indeed, many of the wonderlands do seem to be inter-related, with numerous examples of cross-pollination. I wondered, was this because the stories we hear in childhood leave a mark which decides on the ultimate path of our own future imaginings? Or are there just a finite number of fresh ideas in the world?

While not quite qualifying as encyclopedic, *Literary Wonderlands* is a feast for the book-lover and a wonderful chance to revisit old friends. I found a number of books to be added to the TBR pile and enjoyed tracing the lines of intertextuality. Despite the impressive credentials of its contributors, this is less an academic piece as it is a joyous recognition of fiction's power to make us visualise the product of someone else's imagination. While *Wonderlands* is not without its flaws, I am still smitten with its unabashed enthusiasm for its subject matter and of course, the beauty of the book itself.

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## Terence says

It's not that there's anything wrong with this book but I didn't find it to be a useful reference work.<sup>[1]</sup> The entries are short and superficial. And scattershot. I'm not sure what the guiding principle for including an author was.

A much better reference (and one that manages to pack a lot of useful info into short entries) is John Clute's *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*.

[1] I *did* extract two titles of interest, so the effort wasn't entirely in vain.

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