

**LEM Notes for Best Book Club reading: Shantaram, Gregory David Roberts,
St. Martin's Griffin, 2003**

Meeting: April 12, 2011

— an epic autobiographical novel

Definition of EPIC

1: of, relating to, or having the characteristics of an epic <an epic poem>

2 a : extending beyond the usual or ordinary especially in size or scope <his genius was epic — Times Literary Supplement>

b : [heroic](#)

Examples of EPIC

1. The football game was an epic battle between two great teams.
2. The bridge was an epic achievement.
3. The company is engaged in an epic struggle for survival.
4. an accomplishment of epic proportions

Origin of EPIC

Latin epicus, from Greek epikos, from epos word, speech, poem — more at [voice](#)

First Known Use: 1589

Related to EPIC

Synonyms: [august](#), [baronial](#), [grand](#), [gallant](#), [glorious](#), [grandiose](#), [heroic](#) (also [heroical](#)), [Homeric](#), [imperial](#), [imposing](#), [magnific](#), [magnificent](#), [majestic](#), [massive](#), [monumental](#), [noble](#), [proud](#), [regal](#), [royal](#), [splendid](#), [stately](#)

Antonyms: [humble](#), [unheroic](#), [unimposing](#), [unimpressive](#)

...Or

- 933 pages
- divided into five parts of 42 chapters
- with an architecture composed of at least 17 elements
- including 118 characters
- interacting in at least three settings: Bombay, rural Indian, and Afghanistan

...and “it ain’t worth a hill of beans”.

...But there are some beans:

1. Don’t do drugs.
2. Don’t go to war in Afghanistan
3. How the counterfeit passport business works (sort of)—Chapter 27.
4. Don’t write or ever again read an ‘epic autobiographical novel’.
5. Don’t go to see any movie based on this book no matter what critical acclaim it may receive.

—Two reasons why I didn’t like this book:

1. Horribly written
 - Clunky prose — misprint or author error: lots of problems with diction, syntax, grammar that draw attention to themselves
 - Purple prose — overwritten, clumsy, cliched love scenes
 - Weak description — ‘Karla’s beautiful green eyes’

- Unnecessarily repetitive vs. Not careful enough to bring the reader along = Jerky, inconsistent pace of story telling...sometimes too fast and sometimes too slow.
- Obvious foreshadowing
- The authorial voice—the first person narrator — ends up telling not showing the story, describing not animating the characters.

2. Cliched, uninspiring, if not downright annoying ideas: Essay on Shantaram

The lowest point for me: — “p.837 But I was alone for two reasons. The mafia was theirs, not mine. ...I was loyal to the men, not the mafia; to the brothers, not the brotherhood. ...And there was another difference between the men in that group and me—a difference so profound that friendship, on its own, couldn’t surmount it. I was the only man at that table who hadn’t killed a human being, in hot blood or cold. ...at that moment the differences suddenly seemed immense and unconquerable to me—far greater and more significant than the hundred talents, desires, and tendencies that we had in common.”

For all the protestations of undying love, affection and respect despite their criminality, he’s keeping careful score that puts him on the good side of the ledger. He is the ultimate con and the whole story reduces to the conning of the con, who since he is the storyteller must still somehow redeem himself in his own eyes. And as much as I can make of it while he mouths all sorts of lovely sentiments, his insufferable self-involvement/self-inflation seeps through to render his high-mindedness mere pretence.

The last paragraph is the last straw. “For this is what we do...God help us. God forgive us. We live on.” — A celebration of the human spirit...the will to keep on going. Flat as a pancake.