

# THE FANTASY BOOK

AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY FROM DRACULA TO TOLKIEN  
FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER





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An Illustrated History from Dracula to Tolkien

*Franz Rottensteiner*

202 illustrations, 40 in color

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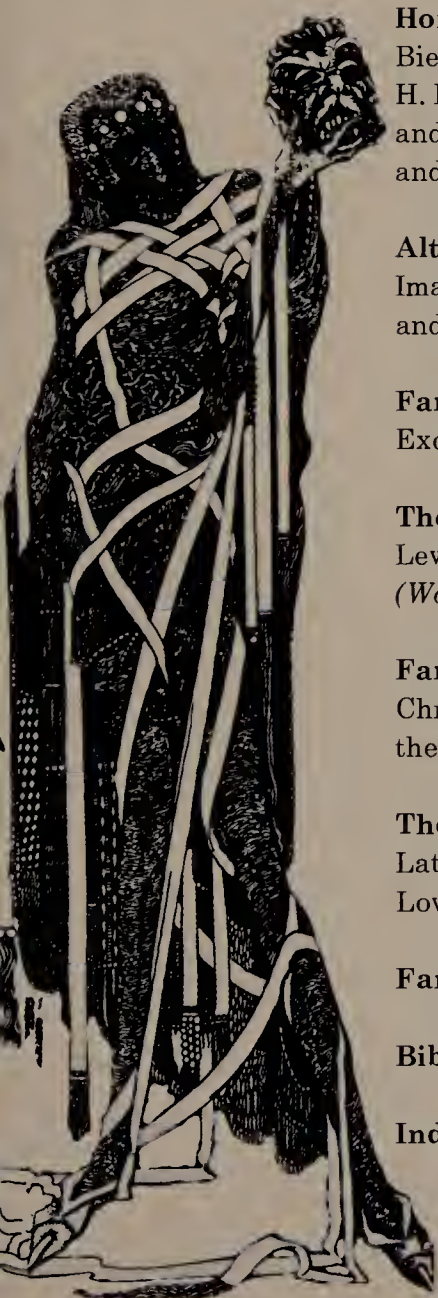
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## ntroduction

According to H. P. Lovecraft, in his famous essay, *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (1945):

'The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown. These facts few psychologists will dispute, and their admitted truth must establish for all time the genuineness and dignity of the weirdly horrible tale as a literary form.'

Granted that fear is, if not the oldest and strongest emotion, at least one of great power, there remains the puzzling question of why people should seek out the experience of fear in their reading matter, when life itself is a fearful business, and perhaps never more so than in the present age of anxiety. Compared to the threat of a nuclear holocaust, the horrors of starvation, international terror, natural catastrophes, pain, cruelty, and death in all forms, one might not think that spectres from the past would make much impression today. Vampires, ghosts, werewolves, ghouls, zombies, and all the other creatures from the bestiary of fantastic literature are surely hopelessly out of date, more appropriate for the age of gaslight rather than for our own, and capable only of frightening little children. And it seems strange that people should seek to escape from the oppressive and gruesome events of the real world into a fantasy world no less gruesome, though of a different nature, a world of archaic and presumably obsolete horrors.

Science fiction, a casual observer might suppose, represents the kind of fantasy most appropriate for our age, insofar as it appears to provide a glimpse into the future and its problems, and it should therefore have displaced the older fantasies. Science fiction certainly seems to be expanding continuously, at least in the number of titles published each year, but, with a few exceptions, the circulation of most individual books is still not very large, and there are hardly any bestsellers in this field.

Stories of the supernatural, on the other hand, though less frequently published, have a better chance of big sales. The most successful recent example is perhaps William P. Blatty's *The Exorcist*, hardly a piece of great writing by any standards. But the story of possession by

the Devil of a young and supposedly innocent girl, the perennially effective contrast between innocence of appearance and demoniac or diabolical deeds, so well known to the Marquis de Sade, has proved irresistible to the general public, both on the page and on the screen. *Rosemary's Baby* by Ira Levin, *The Sentinel* by Jeffry Konvitz, *'Salem's Lot* by Stephen King, *Interview with the Vampire* by Anne Rice, and *The Resurrection of Peter Proud* by Max Ehrlich, are further examples of fantasy books that have sold very well indeed though (or perhaps even because) they are not great examples of fantastic literature.

Earlier fantasy also still holds a great appeal, as is indicated by the frequent re-issues of older works: *Dracula*, for instance, by Bram Stoker, has remained in print ever since its first publication in 1897, and its many adaptations for the screen can hardly be counted. Much the same goes for *Frankenstein*, another movie classic that keeps returning in ever new versions. Both *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* have become modern myths, household words to many who have never read Stoker's or Shelley's books. The inevitable conclusion is that people actually like to be frightened, that they prefer fright of a specific, literary kind to the terrors of real life, and that many derive a particular kind of pleasure from reading about nightmarish supernatural beings and influences.

This suggests that experience of the uncanny induced by reading weird fiction is of a quite different order from the uncanny as experienced in real life. It may be that both author and reader are tacitly playing a game of make-believe by evoking horrors which, though real enough to our forefathers, have long since become tamed in fiction and have lost their primal hold on man, though still lingering on in the subconscious: no longer very potent, but not totally forgotten and powerless either, so that they may still be conjured up and then exorcized by a literary convention. 'The uncanny', as defined by Sigmund Freud in his influential essay of 1919, is 'that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar.' Perhaps it is precisely this diminished power of superstitions, at one time generally accepted as true, which enables



them to be used as fictional materials for calculated literary effects. Moreover, this may also explain why terror stories can serve as an escape from real terrors: once fictionalized they may lose their immediacy, and be experienced as aesthetically pleasing – even if the same things, when encountered in real life, would be most unpleasant. A similar explanation, linking pain and pleasure, dread and beauty, was provided in 1756 by Edmund Burke in *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*:

‘Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. . . . When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and [yet] with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we every day experience.’

All fiction is a game, a conjuring up of verbal worlds which may or may not be analogous to the world of physical reality. The view that fiction may simply be a description of reality and its laws has long been under attack, and it is perhaps now generally accepted that fiction presents no more than a verbal model of the world, governed by laws necessarily different from those of the real world. Nevertheless, the relationship of the fictional to the real is the decisive factor in the classification of a given piece of fiction as realistic or fantastic, although this simple fact has been obscured by some recent theoreticians of the genre, of whom the critic Tzvetan Todorov is perhaps the most prominent. Incidentally, most theoretical enquiries into fantasy or the fantastic have been produced by workers writing in languages other than English (although there is Eric S. Rabkin’s recent *The Fantastic in Literature*, a singularly barren study), most importantly by French scholars such as Louis Vax, Tzvetan Todorov and, above all, Roger Caillois, as well as a substantial Swedish contribution by Lars Gustafsson.

The most influential definition of fantasy





*Piranesi's Carceri sequence (1743) presents 'a world inaccessible to reason', one of the prime conditions of fantastic literature. It was to make a great impression on fantasy's early literary exponents.*

has been that of Roger Caillois in two books, *Au coeur du fantastique* (1965) and *Images, images . . .* (1966):

'The fantastic is always a break in the acknowledged order, an irruption of the inadmissible within the changeless everyday legality.'

Caillois locates the fantastic in the structure of the real world: it is a break in the natural order, a 'scandal', a transgression of natural law, an irregularity; and this intrusion of something strange into the familiar world results in 'the impression of irreducible strangeness' for the reader.

The structuralist Todorov, however, abhors such 'subjectivism', decrying any 'impression of irreducible strangeness' in the reader. He identifies the fantastic in the text itself, choosing as his criterion the degree to which the characters in the story are doubtful whether the events described really took place, i.e. whether there really was a supernatural occurrence, or whether everything was just an illusion, a product of the imagination. As long as they are in doubt, the fantastic exists; but once they have made up their minds, out it goes:

'The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighboring genre, the uncanny or the marvellous. The fantastic is the hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event.' (*The Fantastic*, 1975, p. 25.)

Thus Todorov's criterion for the fantastic lies neither in the impressions of the reader nor in the fictional world itself, but in the impressions of the characters of that world – an extremely narrow definition which excludes most of the work considered to be fantasy by other writers on the subject. By this token, horror stories and weird fiction become 'the uncanny', and most science fiction and work regarded as fantasy in the Anglo-Saxon countries (sometimes with the adjective 'adult') – fictions of the Tolkien type – would belong to the 'marvellous'. For in Tolkien's Middle-earth and other totally fantastic worlds, there is no conflict with our actual physical reality. The reader is plunged directly into another world whose reality is

not in doubt, distinctly different though it is from our own. This is the world of Faerie, a realm populated by beings that have no existence in ours: elves, orcs, hobbits, wizards. The practical effectiveness of magic is taken as a matter of course, raising no questions in the minds of any of the characters (nor in the reader's), since it comes perfectly naturally as part of the order of their world. The laws of this world are different from ours and they therefore appear fantastic to us but not to the characters living in it. To this extent such stories resemble fairy tales, presenting a world outside historical time, perhaps coexistent with our own, but with rules mainly following the established and familiar conventions of fairy tales. In fact, this kind of currently popular fantasy is an extended fairy tale, and the particular joy it offers is the detailed creation ('sub-creation', in Tolkien's phrase) of the other world, given an inner consistency and conviction:

'To experience *directly* a Secondary World: the potion is too strong, and you give to it Primary Belief, however marvellous the events. You are deluded – whether that is the intention of the elves (always or at any time) is another question. They at any rate are not themselves deluded. This is for them a form of Art, and distinct from Wizardry or Magic, properly so called.' (J. R. R. Tolkien, 'On Fairy-Stories', in *Tree and Leaf*, 1964.)

Such fantasies are close to home. They deal with simple but fundamental issues, reveal a feeling for 'the wonder of the things, such as stone, and wood, and iron; tree and grass; house and fire; bread and wine.' They describe basic moral concerns, straightforward manifestations of good and evil, timeless issues of a generalized nature.

In one sense this 'adult fantasy' (fairy tales for grown-ups) is a kind of science fiction since, like most science fiction, it is more concerned with other worlds than with individual characters and their plights. Admittedly, it tends to look back to an idealized past, while much of science fiction apparently looks forward to the future; but it often turns out that this supposed future is actually some well-known past. Central to science fiction is the creation of whole worlds and strange planets, together with their



*Fantasy presupposes a world where ordinary rules no longer apply, where nothing is what it seems. Left, Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland, illustration by John Tenniel; below, a film still from Jean Cocteau's La Belle et la bête (1946), with Jean Marais and Josette Day.*





inhabitants and their exotic customs. But unlike the worlds of pure fantasy, science fictional worlds tend to be dominated by technology. And the question which Todorov considers central to the existence of the fantastic, the characters' doubt whether they are confronted with natural or supernatural events, does not arise. For science fiction firmly believes in science, and, although the laws of its worlds may differ from contemporary understanding of our own, they are in practice either an extrapolation from or a new interpretation of current natural law, and not conceived as running contrary to it.

This adherence to unaltered natural laws is characteristic of science fiction. Objects and events may appear 'fantastic' in the ordinary sense (even to the characters in the stories), but the 'fantastic' in Todorov's sense has no chance of appearing. Modern SF usually thrusts its readers straight into a future world which is thereafter taken for granted. The older device of causing a character to be transported from the present, or even from the past, into a future that then naturally appears most amazing to him, is considered to be crude. Such a character would naturally be amazed by his experiences. Of course, the characters in a future world may also be amazed by their encounters with the strange and the unknown; but this wonder need be no more than the feeling which everyone experiences when confronted with something unknown, or rather, not yet known. A figure in the story might be in doubt whether some event had a natural or supernatural cause, but that would not necessarily make the story fantastic: there are always mad or uneducated characters insufficiently informed about the laws of their world.

It would appear, then, that there are several kinds of fantasy within the genre: in a wider sense, it may comprise the basically realistic, non-supernatural hypotheses of science fiction and the marvellous secondary worlds paralleling our own; or it may start from the ordinary world with its laws, and gradually (or abruptly) lead the reader into quite another realm. Its characteristic device is the intrusion of another reality into ours, an intrusion which may be experienced as threatening or painful, a disruption of the

order of everyday reality. Fantastic literature in this sense stands in direct opposition to the world of science fiction, the fairy tale worlds of Tolkien fantasy, and the other marvellous realms. Caillois writes:

'It should be particularly stressed that the fantastic makes no sense in an out-and-out strange world. To imagine the fantastic in it is even impossible. In a world full of marvels the extraordinary loses its power.'

This type of fantasy is firmly based on, and presupposes, an ordinary world with natural laws accessible to human reason; and because these laws are supposedly unbreakable, any break in them goes against nature, and therefore appears uncanny. Events described in science fiction, on the other hand, improbable and unlikely though they may be, are not in this sense contrary to human reason and the laws of the world. (This is, of course, something of an idealization; in reality, many authors ignore such distinctions, preferring to write down what occurs to them, and freely mixing futuristic scenery and scientific gadgets with fantastic, supernatural happenings; in the mass market, anything saleable goes, and there is even a term for such hybrids: 'science fantasy'.) Fantasy in the narrow sense, as defined by Caillois, is directly contrary to reason, describing events not susceptible to rational explanation by natural laws. This opposition is also stressed by Lars Gustafsson in his essay 'On the Fantastic in Literature' (in *Utopier och andra essäer om 'dikt' och 'Liv'*, 1969), in which he explains his views, using Piranesi's *Carceri* as an example:

'The fantastic in literature doesn't exist as a challenge to what is probable, but only there where it can be increased to a challenge of reason itself: the fantastic in literature consists, when all has been said, essentially in showing the world as opaque, as inaccessible to reason on principle. This happens when Piranesi in his imagined prisons depicts a world peopled by other beings than those for which it was created.'

This view, which strikes me as the best existing definition of the fantastic, is clearly opposed to the one prevalent in the Anglo-Saxon countries. Compare C. N. Manlove's definition of fantasy: 'A fiction evoking wonder and containing a substantial and

irreducible element of supernatural or impossible worlds, beings or objects with which the reader or the characters within the story become on at least familiar terms.'

(*Modern Fantasy*, 1975, pp. 10–11.)

Or Tolkien in 'On Fairy-Stories':

'Fantasy is a natural human activity. It certainly does not destroy or even insult Reason; and it does not either blunt the appetite for, nor obscure the perception of, scientific verity. On the contrary. The keener and the clearer is the reason, the better fantasy will it make. If men were ever in a state in which they did not want to know or could not perceive truth (facts or evidence), then Fantasy would languish until they were cured. If they ever get into that state (it would not seem at all impossible), Fantasy will perish, and become Morbid Delusion.'

On the one hand we have fantasy as a rational endeavour (although employing magical means), as in Tolkien; on the other, fantasy as a frontal assault on reason. Science fiction implicitly assumes that the universe can be understood by man, if not now then in the future, as the march of science goes on; the fantastic implies that there are things not meant for man to know, and not to be grasped by his feeble reason; that the universe is a truly alien place, forever outside human ken. Fantasy propounds a reactionary, pre-scientific view, admitting eternal mysteries, and sharply opposed to what is understood as natural law. 'The basis of all true cosmic horror is *violation of the order of nature*, and the profoundest violations are always the least concrete and describable', wrote H. P. Lovecraft (*Selected Letters III*, 1971).

According to this view, fantasy in the narrow sense is a late development in literature, beginning roughly with the Gothic novel, the anti-rationalist reaction to the Age of Enlightenment, pioneered by Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). Of course, fantasy in the usual meaning of the term is as old as literature, and the traditions of all peoples include descriptions of supernatural feats of gods and heroes, but these belong rather to the marvellous, with supernatural forces represented as benevolent and malevolent. At a time when there was no clear distinction between the natural and the

supernatural, the so-called laws of nature did not apply and could therefore be broken without comment. Only when a clear notion had been formed of what those laws were could there be a transgression against them, and only then could any affront against the natural order be experienced as inexplicable, strange and sinister, threatening the securities and certainties of everyday life. And this is the reason why most fantastic literature comes over as uncanny, weird, demoniac, horrible.

True, there are some frightening episodes in Homer, there is Pliny's tale of a haunted house in Athens, the story in the Bible of King Saul's visit to the Witch of Endor, who called up the ghost of Samuel, and many ghostly episodes in Apuleius's *The Golden Ass* (c. AD 170) wherein a lovesick young man is transformed by witchcraft into a donkey. The Middle Ages produced a large number of tales about the miraculous deeds of the saints. But the fact remains that fantastic surprise and horror were impossible as long as there was no impression of a shattering of the fundamental laws of the world. The fantastic came only later as a revolt against an all-encompassing reason that seemingly robbed nature of all its mysteries, reducing the world and human beings to mechanisms.

The fantastic postulates that there are forces in the outside world, and in our own natures, which we can neither know nor control, and these forces may even constitute the essence of our existence, beneath the comforting rational surface. The fantastic is, moreover, a product of human imagination, perhaps even an excess of imagination. It arises when laws thought to be absolute are transcended, in the borderland between life and death, the animate and the inanimate, the self and the world; it arises when the real turns into the unreal, and the solid presence into vision, dream or hallucination. The fantastic is the unexpected occurrence, the startling novelty which goes contrary to all our expectations of what is possible. The ego multiplies and splits, time and space are distorted.

Many of the best fantastic stories begin in a leisurely way, set in commonplace surroundings, with exact, meticulous descriptions of an



ordinary background, much as in a 'realistic' tale. Then a gradual – or it may be sometimes a shockingly abrupt – change becomes apparent, and the reader begins to realize that what is being described is alien to the world he is accustomed to, that something strange has crept or leapt into it. This strangeness changes the world permanently and fundamentally. The feeling of indecision may continue, but usually there is some kind of solution at the end, so that either the events turn out to be only apparently supernatural, and there is a natural explanation for them ('the supernatural explained'), or the supernatural is confirmed and the world is seen to be truly sinister.

The reactions of the reader may be predetermined by his expectations and by the conventions of the kind of fiction he is reading. Somebody expecting fantasy may be disappointed when the supernatural is explained – or explained away – rationally, and he may feel cheated by the usually strained but just possible natural explanation, which will appear much less plausible than an impossible supernatural solution. Similarly, a reader of mysteries will feel cheated when he is offered a supernatural solution to a 'locked room' mystery, and rightly so.

The impression of the impenetrability of the world is the mark of the weirdly fantastic. Therefore, 'atmosphere, not action, is the great desideratum of weird fiction' (H. P. Lovecraft in 'Notes on the Writing of Weird Fiction'):

'A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain – a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space. . . . Therefore we must judge a weird tale not by the author's intent, or by the mere mechanics of the plot; but by the emotional level which it attains at its least mundane point. . . . The one test of the really weird is simply this – whether or not there be excited in the reader a profound sense of dread, and of contact with unknown spheres

and powers; a subtle attitude of awed listening, as if for the beating of black wings or the scratching of outside shapes and entities on the known universe's utmost rim.' (Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, pp. 15–16.)

It is on criteria of inner conviction like these that the value of fantasy is based, and not on some correspondence with the occult. As has already been noted, fantastic literature developed at precisely the moment when genuine belief in the supernatural was on the wane, and when the sources provided by folklore could safely be used as literary material. It is almost a necessity, for the writer as well as for the reader of fantastic literature, that he or she should *not* believe in the literal truth of the beings and objects described, although the preferred mode of literary expression is a naive realism. Authors of fantastic literature are, with a few exceptions, not out to convert, but to set down a narrative story endowed with the consistency and conviction of inner reality only during the time of the reading: a game, sometimes a highly serious game, with anxiety and fright, horror and terror.

All too often, attempts have been made to link the extraordinary or pathological states described in fantastic stories with the psychic condition of their authors, sometimes, as in the case of Poe, Maupassant, Le Fanu or Machen, in order to dismiss them as pathological subjects and their products as the outpourings of diseased minds. Conversely, the superiority of some fiction is often attributed to the illness of the authors: inspired madness as the source of genius. Contrary to such popular beliefs, Edgar Allan Poe stressed the importance of rational construction, and E. T. A. Hoffmann, another of the really great writers of fantasy, exclaimed in *The Serapion Brethren* (*Die Serapionsbrüder*, 1819):

'There are . . . otherwise quite decent people who are so dull of nature that they believe that they must attribute the swift flight of fancy to some illness of the psyche, and thus it happens that this or that writer is said to create not other than while imbibing intoxicating drink, or that his fantasies are the result of over-excited nerves and resulting fever. But who can fail to know that, while a state of psychi-





*Fantasy takes a visual form in images of fear: left, The Pest (1898) by Arnold Böcklin; opposite, detail from Volaverunt (Gone for Good), a flight of witches from Goya's Caprichos series (1799).*

cal excitement caused by the one or other stimulant may indeed generate some lucky and brilliant ideas, it can never produce a well-founded, substantial work of art that requires the utmost presence of mind.'

Such psychological explanations are indeed tenuous and somewhat trivial. Among the psychically ill, only a small proportion are artistically talented in any way; and there are many entirely sane geniuses in literature. It may be safely assumed only that writers of fantastic literature do show a certain predilection for the macabre, a heightened sensitivity (Hoffmann was said on occasion to have been afraid of his own imagination), but the core of the artistic personality, the mystery of why

some people write great literature and others do not, remains untouched by such generalizations.

Nevertheless, the potential and actual importance of fantastic literature lies in such psychic links: what appears to be the result of an overweening imagination, boldly and arbitrarily defying the laws of time, space and ordered causality, is closely connected with, and structured by, the categories of the subconscious, the inner impulses of man's nature. At first glance the scope of fantastic literature, free as it is from the restrictions of natural law, appears to be unlimited. A closer look, however, will show that a few dominant themes and motifs constantly recur: deals





with the Devil; returns from the grave for revenge or atonement; invisible creatures; vampires; werewolves; golems; animated puppets or automatons; witchcraft and sorcery; human organs operating as separate entities, and so on. Fantastic literature is a kind of fiction that always leads us back to ourselves, however exotic the presentation; and the objects and events, however bizarre they seem, are simply externalizations of inner psychic states. This may often be mere mummery, but on occasion it seems to touch the heart in its inmost depths and become great literature. It is therefore not surprising that, in addition to writers who specialize in fantasy, major literary figures have nearly

always also added their contributions to the genre, paying as it were their tribute to the irrational side of the human psyche; and many of these writers are noted for their realism: Dickens, Henry James, Balzac.

Fantastic literature has been especially prominent in times of unrest, when the older values have been overthrown to make way for the new; it has often accompanied or predicted change, and served to shake up rational complacency, challenging reason and reminding man of his darker nature. Its popularity has had its ups and downs, and it has always been the preserve of a small literary minority. As a natural challenger of classical values, it is rarely part of a culture's literary mainstream, expressing the spirit of the age; but it is an important dissenting voice, a reminder of the vast mysteries of existence, sometimes truly metaphysical in scope, but more often merely riddling.

As long as human beings are what they are, it is unlikely that fantastic literature will ever completely disappear. Tzvetan Todorov, however, has recently predicted its death on the grounds that its function has largely been to express, in disguised form, sexual desires which had to be repressed in more puritan times. The role of fantastic literature, Todorov claims, has now been taken over by psychoanalysis.

It is undoubtedly true that the early psychoanalysts showed a particular and not unfriendly interest in fantasy, taking some of their material from Hoffmann, Poe, and even Hanns Heinz Ewers, and studying the issues of the golem and the doppelgänger. Indeed, many of the insights of psychoanalysis are already present in a latent form in fantasy. Nothing could be less surprising, if both fantasy and psychoanalysis are seen as valid interpretations of human nature: the great writers have always known what the psychologists found out only much later. But while psychoanalysis has been able to enlarge our theoretical knowledge of human nature, and has managed to explain our impulses, it has not succeeded in explaining them away. Even when recognized, they remain as virulent as ever, demanding symbolic expression in art and literature, and requiring sublimation in writing or reading. The prediction of the

imminent death of fantastic literature represents a fashionable tendency as manifestly untrue as predictions about the death of the novel or the death of all fiction, and deserves to be dismissed as such.

But psychoanalysis too has perhaps played a part in furthering a superficial approach. For whereas, before the advent of psychoanalysis, writers needed genuine insight into human nature, a few hours of reading may now enable them to pick up enough Freudian symbolism to impress reviewers who happen to have read the same books. Generally, fantastic literature of the nineteenth century is superior to the slicker works of more recent times, and touches more profound metaphysical depths. Much of modern fantasy is a crude re-working of exhausted devices which have long lost their original meaning and ability to impress. But great writers continue to make their contributions to the fantastic, and it seems likely that the 'magic realism' of Latin American literature might even become the dominant branch of a major part of current world literature – something which the iconoclastic, grotesque, and surrealist writings in other parts of the world have failed to achieve. Much fantasy of lesser rank is being written in various other countries, and only a fraction of it could be briefly covered in this volume: the map of fantasy is far too big to allow an exhaustive study in these pages.

This book does not aspire to be a scholarly study. The aim is to provide a succinct overview of the variety of literary fantasy in all its forms, with the exception of rational, non-supernatural fantastic speculation, i.e. science fiction and Utopian exercises. These fields would require a volume of their own, and indeed there already exist many such studies. The writers and the works discussed are illustrated with material drawn from books, magazines, and films. This is, however, not a book on fantastic art and illustration. Such books, too, already exist, at least in France and Germany, such as Marcel Brion's *Art fantastique* (1961) or Wieland Schmied's *200 Jahre phantastische Malerei* (1973). This volume concentrates on the fiction itself and its creators, and the pictorial material has been selected with this in mind.

Some injustices have been unavoidable, and many fine writers have been given only a short mention or have even been omitted altogether. More could have been written about Spain's Gustavo Adolfo Becquer (1836–70), Italy's Dino Buzzati, a writer of elegantly ironic short tales, or 'Isak Dinesen' (Karen Blixen), a writer of accomplished psychological Gothic short novels (*Seven Gothic Tales*, *Winter's Tales*). Much more could have been written on H. G. Wells who, although primarily famous for his science fiction, was also the author of some ghost stories and delightful gems like 'The Magic Shop'. Jack London's *The Star Rover* (1915) is a fine example of the sort of 'escapist' fantasy (escape taken literally here with the soul of a prisoner roaming through various ages) which really leads us into the depths of ourselves, and it is also a telling example of how fantastic ideas can be used as a tool for pointed social criticism. Mention could also have been made of *The Nightmare* (1916) by the Hungarian Mihály Babits, an incorporation of the great fantastic theme of life as a dream.

The present author favours Gustafsson's theory of the fantastic, but no attempt has been made to see the whole variety of fantastic tales in the light of any one theory: there are more manifestations of the fantastic than can easily be accommodated under any single theory, however glib. Criticism of the works under review is offered, but it is not the central issue. Fantasy ranges from the highest achievements in literature to common trash, and since every branch of fiction, even one committed by definition to the extraordinary, provides more examples of the banal than the remarkable, many of the works discussed here are not necessarily of high literary quality.

Personally, I believe that E. A. Poe, E. T. A. Hoffmann, and Nicolai Gogol are the greatest authors of fantastic literature, but others may make a different choice. Kafka, for instance, is also a giant, though not a writer of fantasy in quite the same sense as the others – his import goes beyond fantasy. However, even if the reader may not share the author's opinions, it is to be hoped that, at least, some fascinating areas of disagreement will emerge.

Franz Rottensteiner



G

## othic origins

Horace Walpole, the founding father/Two  
oriental fantasies: *Vathek* and *The Saragossa*  
*Manuscript*/The flowering of the Gothic novel/  
The Gothic in America.





## Horace Walpole, the founding father

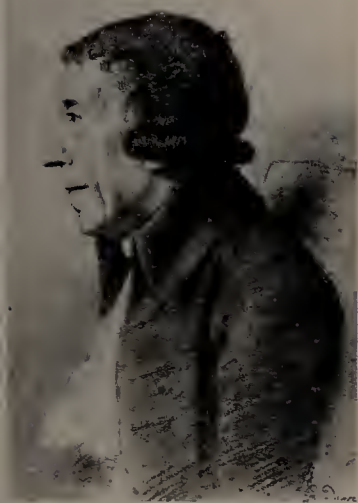
'I waked one morning in the beginning of last June from a dream, which all I could recover was, that I had thought myself in an ancient castle (a very natural dream for a head filled like mine with Gothic story) and that on the uppermost bannister of a great staircase I saw a gigantic hand in armour. In the evening I sat down and began to write, without knowing in the least what I intended to say or relate.'

Thus did Horace Walpole (1717–97), son of the famous English eighteenth-century politician, Sir Robert Walpole, describe the genesis of *The Castle of Otranto*, one of the most influential novels in English literary history. Fearing ridicule, Walpole first brought it out (on Christmas Eve, 1764) as the purported translation of an Italian manuscript by one Onuphrio Muralto. Only in the second edition did he admit his authorship. His book, he said, was an attempt to combine the contemporary novel, now considered respectable, with the marvels and wonders of medieval romance. In 1811, Sir Walter Scott repeated this point, calling the novel 'the first modern attempt to found a tale of amusing fiction upon the basis of the ancient romances of chivalry'.

Walpole set his novel in the so-called castle of Otranto, a fictional version of his own Strawberry Hill, which he had bought in 1749, transformed into 'a little Gothic castle', and filled with period furnishings intended to convey the 'Gothic' mood. The plot of *Otranto* is one of usurpation and revenge. Determined to continue his line, Manfred, prince of Otranto, plans to divorce his own wife and marry Isabella, the prospective wife of his only son Conrad, who has just been crushed to death on the morning of the wedding by the supernatural fall of a gigantic helmet. Seeking to escape, Isabella hides in the castle's subterranean vaults, where she meets a young and chivalrous youth, apparently of humble origins, who strangely resembles the portrait of the castle's founder and original lord, Alfonso. And he does indeed turn out to be the rightful heir to Otranto. Various supernatural incidents and portents occur as Manfred's villainy increases, culminating in his accidental killing of his own daughter Matilda, whereupon he repents and becomes a monk.







Above, Horace Walpole (1717–97), father of the 'Gothic fantastic' in architecture as in literature. Opposite, interior of Strawberry Hill, Walpole's 'little Gothic castle' in which he wrote *Otranto*. Below, the supernatural event which opens the book, as illustrated in an edition of 1884.

Superficially, *The Castle of Otranto* appears to challenge the rationalism of Walpole's age, but in practice the values of the period are still intact, with punishment duly inflicted on those who dare to usurp the inherited rights of the aristocracy. Even the dead see to it that justice is done, by moaning horribly and so forth, thus indicating to the living that the divine order has been infringed.

*Otranto's* plot is thoroughly melodramatic, laboured and unbelievable, possessing only the quaint charm of a period piece, and yet it was to be the first of a whole group of novels, the Gothic school. Hundreds of these thrillers were written up to the first three decades of the nineteenth century, and they are recapitulated in great detail in Montague R. Summers's *The Gothic Quest* (1938). H. P. Lovecraft has summed up the characteristics of the form as follows:

'This novel dramatic paraphernalia consisted first of all of the Gothic castle, with its awesome antiquity, vast distances and ramblings, deserted or ruined wings, damp

corridors, unwholesome hidden catacombs, and galaxy of ghosts and appalling legends, as a nucleus of suspense and daemonic fright. In addition, it included the tyrannical and malevolent nobleman as villain; the saintly, long-persecuted, and generally insipid heroine who undergoes the major terrors and serves as a point of view and focus for the reader's sympathies; the valorous and immaculate hero, always of high birth but often in humble disguise; the convention of high-sounding foreign names, mostly Italian, for the characters; and the infinite array of stage properties which includes strange lights, damp trap-doors, extinguished lamps, mouldy hidden manuscripts, creaking hinges, shaking arras, and the like. All this paraphernalia reappears with amusing sameness, yet sometimes with tremendous effect, through the history of the Gothic novel . . .'

It was perhaps inevitable that such a form should have attracted ridicule almost from the beginning. The most famous parody is probably Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818).

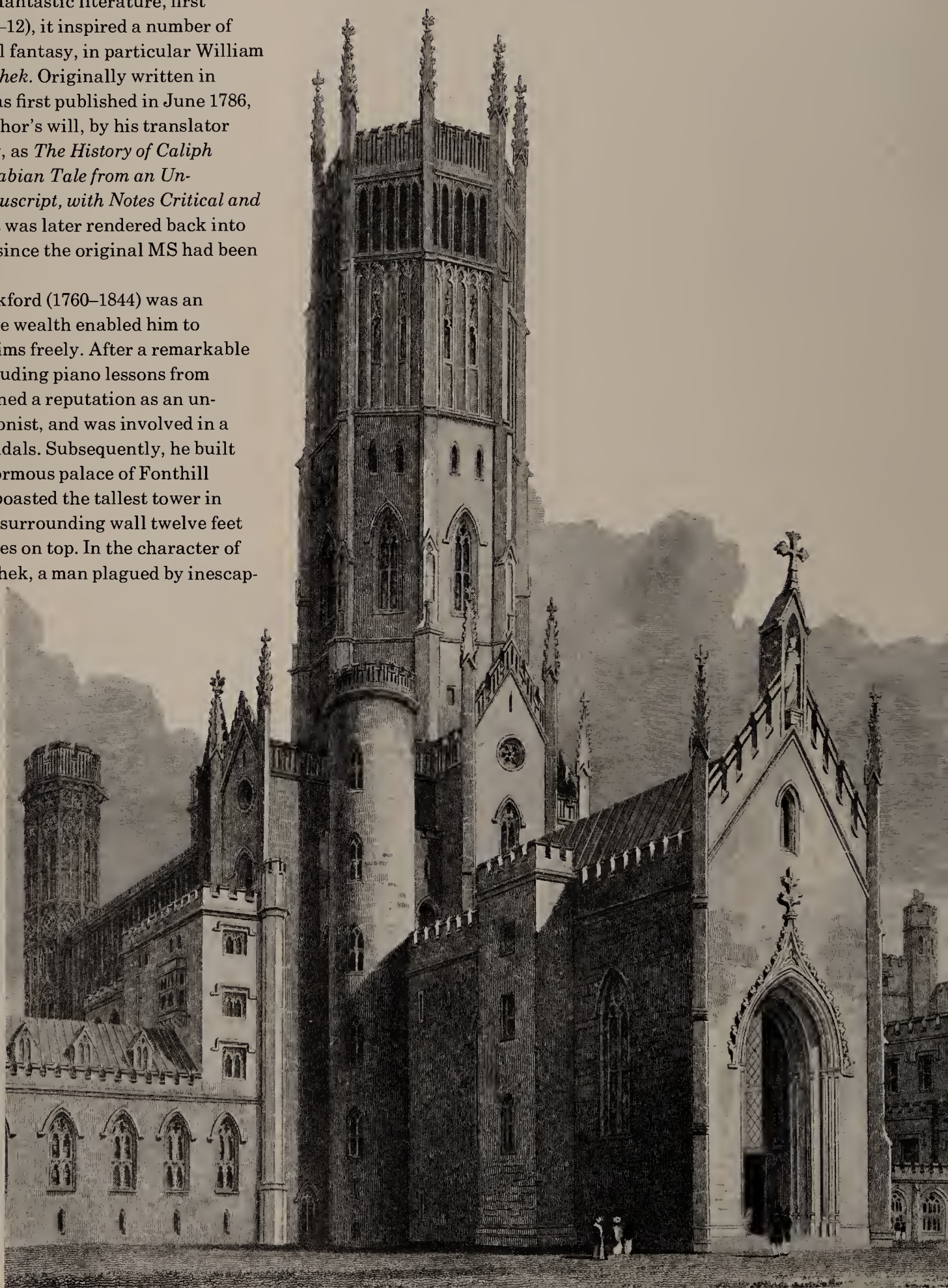




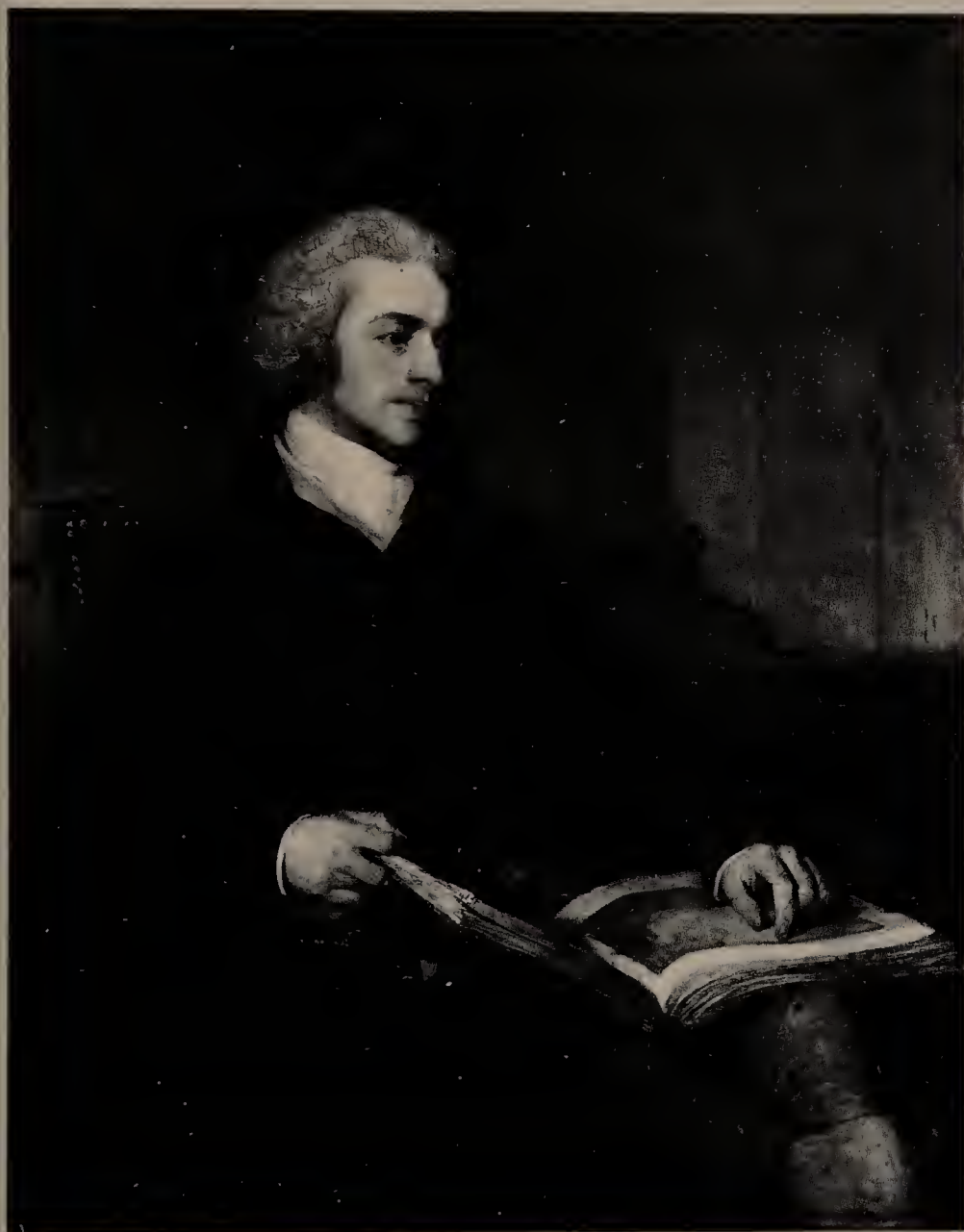
## Two oriental fantasies: *Vathek* and *The Saragossa Manuscript*

When Galland's lively French translation of the *Thousand and One Nights*, that oriental masterpiece of fantastic literature, first appeared (1704–12), it inspired a number of tales of oriental fantasy, in particular William Beckford's *Vathek*. Originally written in French, this was first published in June 1786, against the author's will, by his translator Samuel Henley, as *The History of Caliph Vathek, An Arabian Tale from an Unpublished Manuscript, with Notes Critical and Explanatory*. It was later rendered back into French again, since the original MS had been lost.

William Beckford (1760–1844) was an eccentric whose wealth enabled him to indulge his whims freely. After a remarkable education, including piano lessons from Mozart, he earned a reputation as an unrestrained hedonist, and was involved in a number of scandals. Subsequently, he built himself the enormous palace of Fonthill Abbey, which boasted the tallest tower in England and a surrounding wall twelve feet high, with spikes on top. In the character of the Caliph Vathek, a man plagued by inescap-







Above, William Beckford (1760–1844), the wealthy and eccentric author of *Vathek*, who built himself the enormous palace of Fonthill Abbey (opposite), now demolished. Above (right), Beckford's dwarf, with Fonthill in the background.

able *ennui*, and motivated by a kind of longing for the absolute, Beckford created a fictional equivalent of himself, embodying his hedonism, his separation of aesthetic from ethical considerations, and his pleasure in going against the conventional morality. *Vathek*, tempted by a mysterious Indian with the promise of Solomon's talisman, and encouraged by his sorcerous mother Carathis, commits ever greater impieties and crimes, including the slaying of fifty beautiful children as a sacrifice to the Devil. Finally he manages to obtain admission to the subterranean black palace of Eblis, only to be punished for his 'unrestrained passions and atrocious deeds', his heart being eternally encircled by living fire. It is a marvellous story, the creation of an erratic but powerful



imagination, which brilliantly evokes the mystery and wonder associated with the Orient, and as 'Gothic' in its way as was Walpole's *Otranto*.

Just as it is questionable, perhaps, whether Beckford's *Vathek* is a product of English literature, similarly *The Saragossa Manuscript*, by the Polish Count Potocki, may be more properly called a contribution to French literature, for Potocki wrote all his works in French. Born in 1761 into one of the most famous Polish families, Potocki's interests included ethnology, archaeology, geography, philology, and history, all of which he studied from a comparative point of view. He travelled widely, including Morocco and even China, which he visited as a member of a Russian mission; he made a point of acquainting himself with the history and the customs of the countries he visited, and wrote a number of travel books as well as the histories of the Polish and Russian peoples, among others. He is considered the founder of Slavic archaeology, although in his own age he was regarded as no more than an aristocratic dilettante. In 1788 he made a trip in the balloon of the French aeronaut Blanchard when the latter visited Warsaw.

But Potocki was also a neurasthenic, suffering from a variety of nervous ailments. On November 20, 1815, he committed suicide by firing a pistol into his mouth. The bullet was made of silver which he himself had prepared from part of his samovar.

Although Potocki wrote a number of plays, he is remembered almost entirely for his

masterpiece, *The Saragossa Manuscript* (*Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse*; *Rekopis znaleziony w Saragossie*), a jewel of stylistic elegance. In 1805 he had part of the novel printed in St Petersburg, untitled, with proof sheets of 158 and 48 pages respectively, ending in mid-sentence. In 1813 a second part of the novel was published by Gide fils in Paris, consisting of four small volumes titled *Avadoro, histoire espagnole* by M.L.C.J.P. (i.e. M. Le Comte Jan Potocki), and supposedly a sequel to the St Petersburg ms. The following year Gide fils republished the St Petersburg text in three volumes as *Les dix journées de la vie d'Alphonse van Worden*, but with some deletions and printing errors. The original was lost, and Pushkin, who admired the book so much that he wanted to put it into Russian verse, was unable to get hold of it. *The Saragossa Manuscript* was frequently plagiarized, and in 1842 there was a sensational trial in Paris. Roger Caillois, in a Postscript to the complete German translation of the novel, has suggested that the ms was in the hands of Charles Nodier, who had been asked by Potocki to prepare it for the printer; but Nodier did nothing apart from plagiarizing one episode himself, and his role in the affair is highly suspect. Some time after 1842 the ms got into the hands of a Polish emigrant named Edmund Chojecki, who translated the book into Polish. In 1847 his translation appeared in Leipzig, and was reprinted in Warsaw in 1857 and then again in 1950, 1956, and 1965. The German translation of 1961, reprinted in paperback in 1975, is, as far as I know, the only other complete version anywhere in the world, having been translated from French (where possible), while the rest was taken from Chojecki's not very accurate translation. The English, French and Italian editions only reproduce the French version.

*The Saragossa Manuscript* is arranged, like *The Decameron* or *The Heptameron*, as a series of stories held together in a narrative frame. More than 800 pages long, it is divided into 66 'nights', during which various characters tell their stories, interrupted by the stories of others, in the oriental manner. Some events constantly recur, being described from different points of view according to their effect on the different characters. The central

narrative is that of a lonely traveller tempted by two sisters, Emina and Zibedde, and sometimes their mother too. The first episodes are full of spectres, ghosts, skeletons and vampires (the brothers Zoto, who hang on a gallows during the day, and leave it at night). But as the novel proceeds, it gradually loses its supernatural flavour, while the erotic content increases. These witty, elegant narratives put over a rationalist ethic, ranging far through space and time (with the introduction of the Wandering Jew as a character), and enabling the author to employ advantageously his wide knowledge of philosophy, ethics, human aberrations, and social customs, especially those of Spain and the East. With unflagging invention Potocki constantly varies his motifs to achieve rare heights of elegant fantasy, and the work is characterized by 'the intrusion of the absolutely unusual and the repetition of the truly unique', as Roger Caillois writes. By establishing a marvellous, impossible reality, governed by supernatural laws, the book seems to question the rules of the ordinary world. But, regrettably, everything is explained in the end by natural means, as mummery, deceit and disguise, and there is nothing supernatural about the extraordinary characters. *The Saragossa Manuscript* may perhaps represent its learned author's attempt to exorcize his own demons. At all events, its rich texture, and its skilful depiction of different ways of life, both high and low, make it one of the enduring masterpieces of fantastic literature.

The *Saragossa Manuscript* (1805), Count Potocki's masterpiece of discursive fantasy. Vignette from a recent Polish edition.





## The flowering of the Gothic novel

Many Gothic novels are as mechanical as *The Castle of Otranto*, a typical example being Clara Reeve's *The Champion of Virtue* (1777), better known under its later title, *The Old English Baron*. The work of Mrs Ann Radcliffe (1764–1823), however, is an exception, for her novels still have an impact today with their evocative descriptions of landscape, and their lyrical passages reflecting the inner state of the characters. And she also created a number of memorable villains – Montelt in *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), Montoni in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), usually considered

her best novel, and the monk Schedoni in *The Italian, or, The Confessional of the Black Penitents* (1797), her real masterpiece.

Nevertheless, Ann Radcliffe's novels are in fact examples of the supernatural explained; for, although they abound in dark hints of supernatural events, in the end everything turns out to have been the result of merely human activity, and only in her posthumous novel, *Gaston de Blondville* (1826), does a genuine ghost make its appearance. Thus, though they suggest the irrational, Radcliffe's novels are really the last refuge of rationalism. Human institutions are presented as just, evil as the result of scheming individuals, and the supernatural as having no intrinsic value or significance. Once the elaborate plots of the villains have been unmasked, there is ample scope for the happy ending. Mrs Radcliffe was concerned with the distinction, in semantic terms, between terror and horror, the latter being defined as fear of something which appears in visible and perceptual form, be it a ghost or a murderer, whereas the former is a subtler sensation, an undetermined fear, a nightmare, the expectation of something uncertain. Of the two, her preference was clearly for terror.

Gregory Matthew 'Monk' Lewis (1775–1817), by contrast, reacted against the 'sublimity' of her books, and was very much in favour of stark horror: rape, incest, black magic, the Devil. The motivation of his doomed hero, the monk Ambrosio in *The Monk* (1796), is not property but lust. After thirty years of virtue in the sanctity of his Capuchin monastery, Ambrosio yields to the enticements of the beautiful Matilda who, disguised as a novice, drives him on to ever more evil deeds. As well she might, for she is no ordinary woman, but an evil spirit. Ambrosio proceeds to rape one of his penitents, the virtuous Antonia, in the crypt of the monastery ('amidst these lonely tombs, these images of death, these rotting, loathsome, corrupted bodies'), murdering her to prevent detection – as he has already killed her mother. He is finally tried before the Inquisition for his crimes, but is ironically and inexplicably pardoned, only to be subjected to a more sinister fate: the Devil himself takes him, letting him fall on some cliffs where his living body is torn apart by eagles. His death

An illustration from *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1803 edition), Mrs Radcliffe's much acclaimed – and ridiculed – Gothic romance.





struggle takes exactly six days, paralleling the creation of the world, and on the seventh day he is symbolically swept into the sea.

*The Monk* is not very well written (it was completed in ten weeks), but its forthright sexual descriptions were at the time extremely shocking and blasphemous. Written when Lewis was only nineteen, it depicts a chaotic world and a gifted hero, divided against himself, who is irrevocably led to his own destruction. When it became known that Lewis, who had written of the Bible that 'the annals of a brothel would scarcely furnish a greater choice of indecent expressions', was a Member of Parliament (curiously enough, he succeeded to the seat that William Beckford had held before him), the scandal was complete, and later editions were expurgated. Though often crude, *The Monk*, which is essentially a novel of human passion carried to extremes, as well as a young man's attack on the earlier form of the Gothic novel, is a work of indubitable power, and a major influence on the black romanticism of later years.

A torn personality is also at the centre of *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus*, the famous novel by Mary Godwin Shelley (1797–1851), daughter of the feminist, Mary Wollstonecraft, and second wife of the poet. Published in 1818, *Frankenstein* has been claimed by some critics as the first true manifestation of SF. Baron Frankenstein, the new Prometheus of the title, plans not merely to create artificial life, but to reawaken life in what has already died. From parts of stolen bodies he builds his monster, a frightening caricature of humanity which, although of hideous appearance, is initially good. But when it is frustrated in its wish for a female consort (reflecting a desire for companionship rather than sexual satisfaction), Frankenstein's monster, this doppelgänger ('My own vampire, my own spirit let loose from the grave'), turns against its creator. Yet, so strong are the bonds between creator and created, that it does not strike at Frankenstein himself but at those dearest to him, killing first his brother and then his wife on Frankenstein's wedding night. Only then does Frankenstein set out to destroy the object of his own creation, which inevitably reminds

The Monk (1796): scenes from the French edition (1797–8) of the scandalous Gothic novel by M. G. Lewis (inset), then aged only nineteen. Below, the monk Ambrosio with Matilda standing in a circle of fire. Opposite, Ambrosio is carried off by the Devil for his many crimes, including (below) cold-blooded murder.









him of his own inner state. *Frankenstein* has become one of the most successful myths of the cinema, but few if any of the many screen adaptations have done justice to a novel which, far from being a mere shocker, may be seen rather as a complex examination of guilt and moral responsibility.

Perhaps the best of the Gothic novels, however, is Charles Robert Maturin's (1780–1824) *Melmoth the Wanderer*, published in 1820. Often criticized for its convoluted construction, which makes it read more like a collection of horror stories than a novel, the book is difficult but very cleverly put together. The stories are not just independent tales set in a story-telling frame, as in Boccaccio, but interrelated, each contributing to the impact and import of the whole in a fashion similar to Jan Potocki's *The Saragossa Manuscript*.

Melmoth, the book's Byronic hero, has contracted to sell his soul to the Devil in return for prolonged life (he has already been living since the seventeenth century), but he may still escape if he can find someone to take his place. And so, like a vulture feeding on human misery, Melmoth is always present where his chances appear the greatest: in prisons, in the dungeons of the Inquisition, in the asylums of the insane, among the nearly dead in hospitals, and on the battlefield. Wherever life is most threatened, there Melmoth is to be found; but nobody, however desperate, is ultimately prepared to accept the exchange, and he is eventually carried off to eternal fire.

Like 'Monk' Lewis, the author, a Protestant minister, attacks Catholicism as a perversion of religion, and depicts the Spanish Inquisition as the ultimate horror for a liberal Christian. The book has a grandeur of imagery and conception which raises the miserable predicaments of the characters to a higher level. There is a feeling of inevitability as fate fulfils itself in the inexorable fashion of a Greek tragedy. Maturin's powerful style is also a contributing factor, and has been much praised by critics, including the Surrealist André Breton, who commented admiringly on such phrases as 'all colours disappear in the night, and despair has no diary'. Taken all in all, *Melmoth the Wanderer* is undeniably a novel of rare imaginative and rhetorical force.

Below, the *Frankenstein* monster as incarnated by Boris Karloff in the film version of 1931, with Mary Godwin Shelley (inset), *Frankenstein's* creator.





Below, *American Gothic*:  
an illustration for the 1865  
edition of Hawthorne's *The  
Marble Faun*.



## The Gothic in America

Charles Brockden Brown (1771–1810), who is generally considered to have been the first writer of novels in America, expressed a marked dislike for the Gothic form with its 'puerile superstitions and exploded manners, Gothic castles and chimeras' (though he excepted the novels of Ann Radcliffe, whose habit of rationalizing the supernatural he shared). But he himself resembled the Gothic novelists of England in his lack of interest in descriptions of ordinary life, and in his emphasis on the pathological. In fact, Brown's best novel, *Wieland, or The Transformation* (1798), which was influenced by William Godwin's ideas in *Political Justice* (1793) and by his *Caleb Williams* (1794), bears many hallmarks of Gothic romance.

Based on a contemporary crime, the book describes how *Wieland*, the son of a German mystic who has emigrated to Pennsylvania, murders his wife and children after being driven mad by voices from beyond, ordering him to sacrifice his relatives. The final explanation is unsatisfactory, and the dénouement fails to do justice to earlier suggestions of a sinister other world, but the novel has several exciting moments. In particular, the descriptions of psychic processes are always interesting – often far more so than the characters themselves. Brown's four best novels – *Wieland*, *Arthur Mervyn* (1799), *Ormond* (1799) and *Edgar Huntley* (1799) – were not very successful, but made a strong impression upon the English Romantics. Percy and Mary Shelley, Byron and Keats held him in high regard, and he also had a certain influence on Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe.

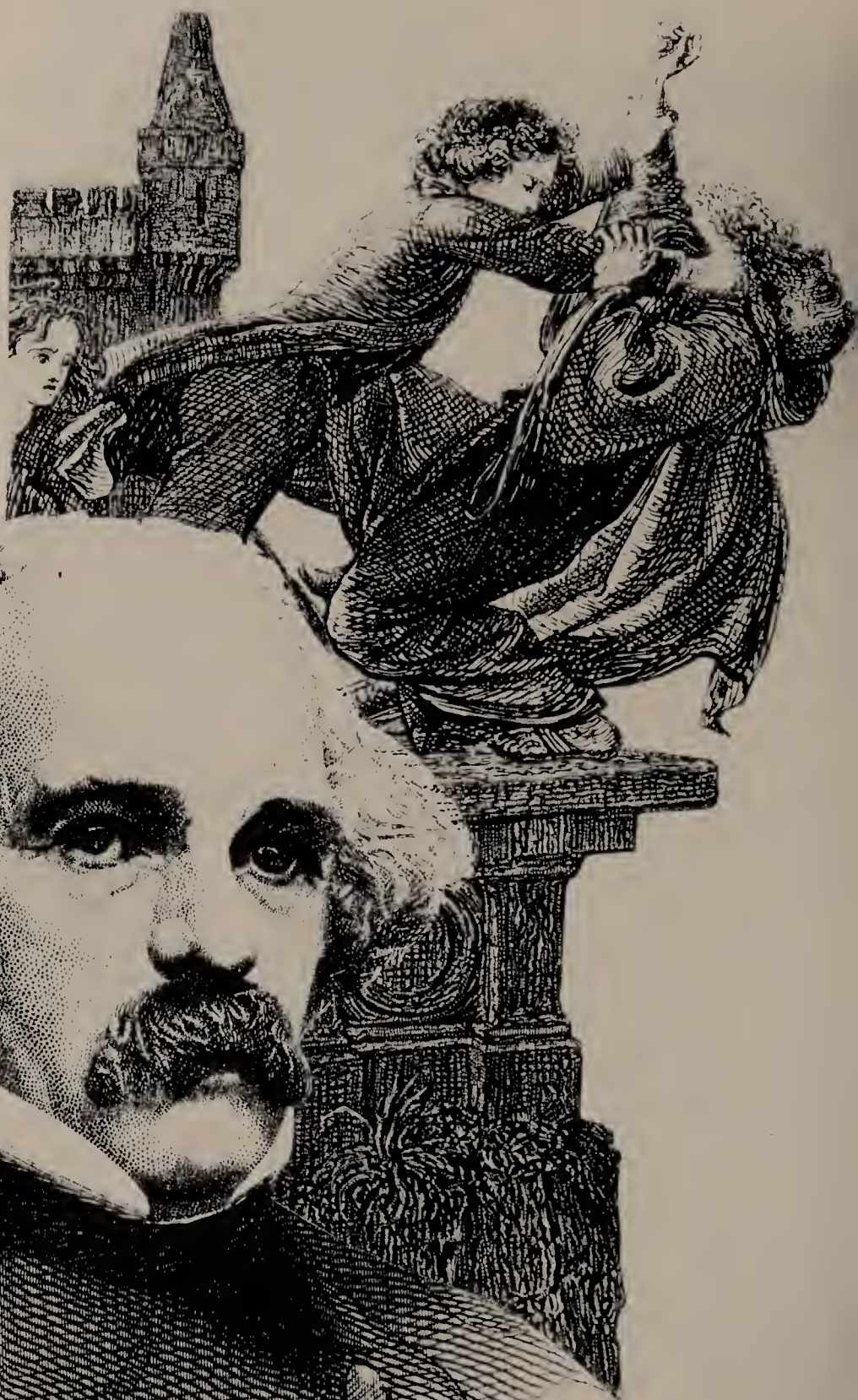
Vastly different from Brown's humourless novels are the spectral tales of Washington Irving (1783–1859), which frequently blend supernatural awe with laughter, as in *The Sketch Book* (1820) and 'Strange Stories by a Nervous Gentleman' in *Tales of a Traveller* (1824). Only occasionally does he strike a more macabre note, as in 'The Story of the German Student', when a young man sees the severed head of his lady roll to the floor on the removal of the bandage around her neck. The best known of Irving's stories is of course 'Rip Van Winkle', in which Rip, a good-natured Dutch-American, is persuaded to drink from a keg of



liquor which sends him into a twenty-year sleep, waking long after the American revolution.

Another early American writer, Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–64), was much preoccupied with Puritanism and the idea of sin, and his characters often embody moral or psychological qualities. In anguish he wrote in his *Notebook* (1840):

'I used to think I could imagine all the passions, all feelings and states of the heart and mind, but how little did I know! Indeed we are but shadows, we are not endowed with real life, and all that seems most real about us is but the thinnest shadow of a dream – till the heart be touched.'





Right, Washington Irving's 'Rip Van Winkle' from his Sketch Book (1819): a detail from Arthur Rackham's illustration of 1905. Opposite, Nathaniel Hawthorne (1805-64), whose blend of Puritanism and fantasy produced works like *The Marble Faun* (background) and 'Ethan Brand' (below), illustrated by Lee Brown Coye (1976).



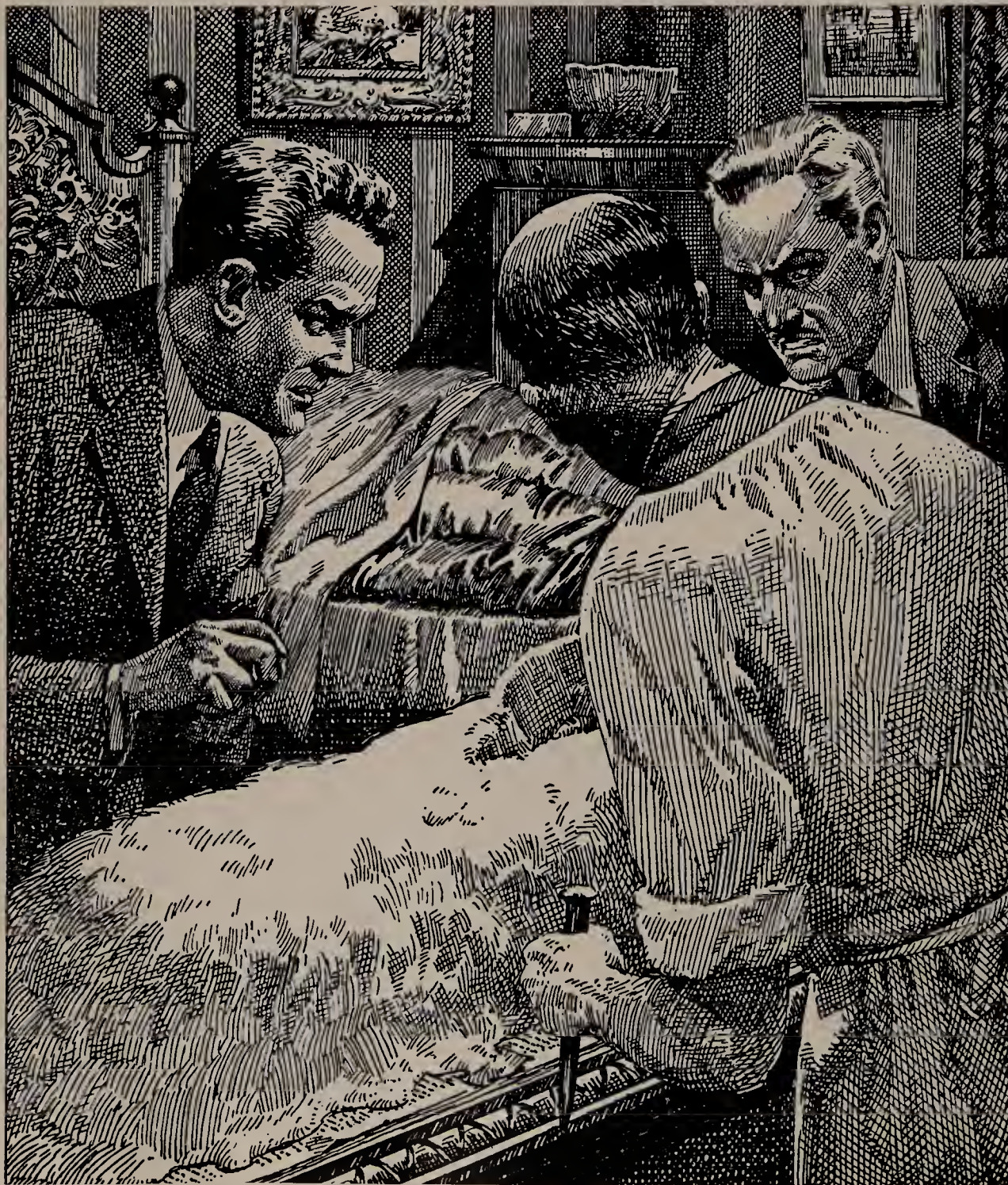
The eponymous hero of 'Young Goodman Brown' (1835), a Puritan from early Salem, attends a witches' sabbath in the woods, where he recognizes a number of respected citizens from his community. Uncertain whether it was reality or a dream which he witnessed, for the rest of his life he becomes a morose and distrustful man. 'Rappaccini's Daughter' (1844), which reveals a Gothic predilection for the Italian setting, describes a strange connection between Beatrice Rappaccini's beauty and her father's poisonous flowers. This too might be construed as a journey through the subconscious, leaving the reader to make up his own mind how much of the story is dream and how much reality. A supernatural element is present in much of Hawthorne's work, including the novels, *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) and *The Marble Faun* (1860), but his stories are principally allegorical. Poe was among the admirers of Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales* (1837 and 1842), and Herman Melville, whose *Moby Dick* (1851) might itself be called a Gothic novel of the sea, responded enthusiastically to *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846): 'Certain it is, however, that this great power



of blackness in him derives its force from its appeals to that Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin, from whose visitations, in some shape or other, no deeply thinking mind is always and wholly free. . . . Still more: this black conceit pervades him through and through. You may be witched by his sunlight, transported by the bright gildings in the skies he builds over you, but there is the blackness of darkness beyond . . .'

A transient but considerable figure in early American fantasy is Fitz-James O'Brien

(1828–62), an Irish-born author who came to the country in 1852. He is today remembered for a handful of brilliant fantasy short stories, some of them a kind of early science fiction. 'The Diamond Lens' is one of his best, describing a powerful microscope and the beautiful woman it reveals. Another, 'What Was It? A Mystery' (1859), offers an early version of the unknown, invisible entity to be found in such famous tales as Guy de Maupassant's 'Le Horla' (1887), or Ambrose Bierce's 'The Damned Thing' (c. 1895).



*A scene from 'What Was It? A Mystery' by Fitz-James O'Brien (1828–62), reprinted in Famous Fantastic Mysteries, December 1949.*





# Early grandmasters of fantasy

E. T. A. Hoffmann/Edgar Allan Poe/  
Gogol and Russian fantasy





## E. T. A. Hoffmann

German romanticism has produced a number of important contributions to fantastic literature: Adelbert von Chamisso's immortal story of Peter Schlemihl (1813), who sold his shadow to the Devil and thereby lost the substance of his existence; Baron Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué's bitter-sweet love story of *Undine*, the water elemental (1811); and the uncanny tales of Achim von Arnim, Joseph von Eichendorff and Ludwig Tieck. But greatest of all is Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann (1776–1822), who ranks with Gogol and Poe as one of the three finest writers in the history of fantastic literature.

Hoffmann was a man of manifold talents, and at first it was not clear whether he would make his mark as a painter or as a composer. He was also a music critic of repute, whose pioneering role is still remembered today. But it turned out that he was destined to become world famous for his writing, whereas his connection with music survives principally in the vivid, eccentric, and often insane musicians whom he created in his stories, foremost being the Kapellmeister Kreisler of *Kater Murr* (1819, 1822). Hoffmann's own musical contribution is now largely forgotten, but he lives on in the music of others, notably in Jacques Offenbach's opera, *The Tales of Hoffmann*.

Born of incompatible parents, Hoffmann had a lonely childhood. His education was undertaken by a stern and unsympathetic uncle in Königsberg, and he was trained in the law. For much of his life he served capably enough as a Prussian judge, living in Poznań, Warsaw, a small Polish village (where he had been transferred as punishment for caricaturing a Prussian general), and finally in Berlin. From 1808 to 1813 he worked in Bamberg as music director and composer at the opera house. Hoffmann had a morbid fear of going mad, and became a heavy drinker. His wit was sharp if sometimes cruel, and he appears to have been a fascinating person, no less interesting than his fiction.

Hoffmann's first published narrative was 'Ritter Gluck' in 1809, the story of a man so spellbound by Gluck's music that he imagines himself to be the composer. His first book, *Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier*, was published in 1814, and from then till his death he

wrote regularly. His best piece of fiction is probably 'The Golden Flower Pot' ('Der Goldne Topf', 1814), a richly faceted, complex piece of work, which contrasts the philistine world of everyday reality with a more spiritual ideal, juxtaposing the narrow-minded society of the people of Dresden with the mythical realm of Atlantis. The two spheres are

*'The terrifying children of madness': Hoffmann's own sketch for his Erzählungen (1839 edition).*



Ausgearteter Fantasie  
Graufenerregende Bilder  
Des gährenden Hirns Des  
Wahnfinns schreckhafte Kinder

nach W. Hoffmann's Handzeichnung:  
von E. Neureuther.



Below, Hoffmann's drawing of two riders, unusually mounted. The figure on the left is believed to be a self-caricature. Bottom, 'Meeting the Ghost': an illustration by Theodore Hosemann for Hoffmann's *The Devil's Elixirs* (1873 edition).



characterized by quite different styles, with the Archivarius Lindhorst, a sorcerer from Atlantis, together with his daughter Serpentina and their circle, representing a higher awareness in poetry, art and love. By introspection and recollection of his former life, Anselmus, the central character, matures

and achieves redemption through artistic consciousness: 'For what is the happiness of Anselmus,' asks Archivarius Lindhorst at the close, 'but a life devoted to art? It is through art that the sacred harmony of all living things is revealed as the profoundest secret of nature.'

According to more pessimistic interpretations, the poet's fate represents a retreat into dreams and fantasies, and a rejection of all worldly hopes. Hoffmann's ironic treatment of the ordinary world, together with Anselmus' infatuation with Faerie, makes the real import of the story difficult to establish; but 'The Golden Flower Pot' is without question a fine allegorical tale which goes far beyond the limitations of the fantastic adventure form, and contains some wonderful imaginative effects, especially the magic battle between Lindhorst and the witch.

'The Mines of Falun' ('Die Bergwerke zu Falun', 1819), 'The Entail' ('Das Majorat', 1817), 'Rath Krespel' (1818), and two automaton stories, 'Automata' ('Die Automate', 1814) and 'The Sand-Man' ('Der Sandmann', 1816/17), strike a more macabre note. In 1813 Hoffmann declared, after visiting an exhibition of mechanical figures, that 'the very thought of linking man with these lifeless figures which simulate the outward shape and movement of humans, and of causing them to act in like manner, fills me with alarm and misgiving – even with horror.' In 'The Sand-Man' Olympia, a lifelike puppet created by the scientist Spalanzani, becomes the object of Nathanael's love. This automaton theme is ironically treated, but a recurrent motif of torn out eyes, discussed by Freud in his famous essay on the uncanny, is more horrifyingly presented. In Nathanael's imagination a childhood fear of the Sand-Man, a creature who will tear out his eyes, becomes confused, first with the figure of the sinister lawyer Coppelius, and then with that of the glass vendor Coppola. The dark fate which overshadows Nathanael's life results in his final madness and death.

The conflict between good and evil in man is the theme of *The Devil's Elixirs* (*Die Elixiere des Teufels*, 1815), a novel influenced by M. G. Lewis's *The Monk*, although artistically much superior.



'My intention is to reveal [Hoffmann wrote], through the strange, tormented life of a man who from his birth has been tossed to and fro between Heaven and Hell, those mysterious associations between the human mind and the higher values enshrined in Nature, values which we only glimpse in those rare flashes of insight which we call the products of Chance.'

The sensuous nature of his hero, Medardus, is first aroused when he sees a woman's breasts, and hidden forces are released which turn him into a libertine and a murderer. Hoffmann also uses heredity as a further means of expressing these dark powers which dominate the divided character of Medardus, and which he remains ignorant of until the very last, though unwittingly and repeatedly offending against them. *The Devil's Elixirs* borrows themes and effects from the Gothic novel, but transforms them into a penetrating

study of character and the problem of evil in human society. The book is one of the most impressive adaptations of the doppelgänger motif in Romantic literature.

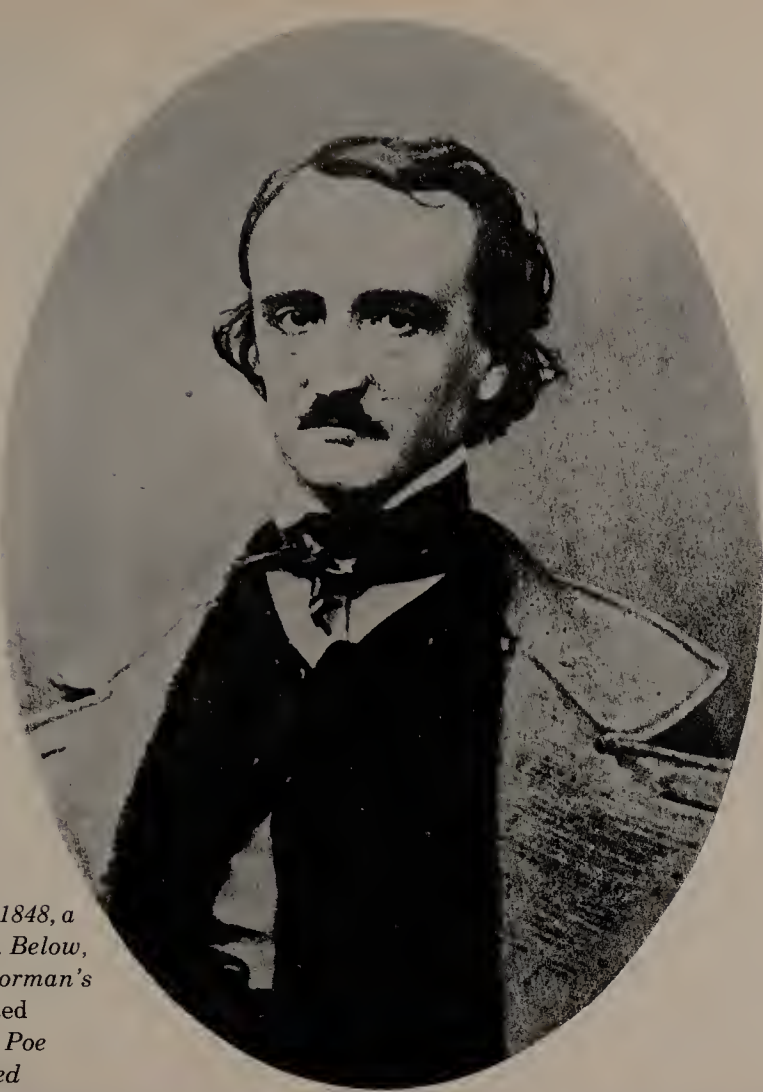
Hoffmann's writing is not always of this superlative quality; he produced a number of potboilers and standard horror stories. But his best work presents a convincing fusion of the fantastic and the supernatural with the ordinary, and he shows a remarkable insight into characters on the brink of insanity, which earned the admiration of Dostoevsky.

Little known in the English-speaking countries, Hoffmann's reputation has had its ups and down in Germany. But his influence in France and Russia has been tremendous, and he is truly one of the formative powers in fantastic literature, combining narrative power, evocative style, and a richly ironic imagination.

*Scene from The Tales of Hoffmann, film version. Offenbach was one of many composers to have been inspired by Hoffmann, whose own music has been forgotten.*







*Edgar Allan Poe, a photograph taken in 1848, a year before his death. Below, a scene from Roger Corman's The Masque of the Red Death, one of the few Poe stories to have received adequate screen treatment.*

## Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Allan Poe, born in Boston on January 19, 1809, was above all a master diagnostician of abnormal mental states. The son of actor parents, Poe came under the care of the merchant John Allan (hence the middle name) when his mother, deserted by her husband, died in 1811. Allan provided him with a good education in England and in Richmond, Virginia, but Poe had to give up his studies at the University of Virginia because his foster-father, who failed to supply him with adequate spending money, refused to pay his gambling debts. Shortly thereafter Poe enlisted in the US army, later (1830) entering West Point Academy, from which he got himself expelled. In 1833 he won a prize for his story 'MS Found in a Bottle', and subsequently became the editor of the *Richmond Messenger*, whose circulation he increased considerably. In 1836 he married his cousin Virginia Clemm, then







Poe's stories have attracted a wide variety of illustrators: 'The Premature Burial' (top left), illustrated by Alfred Kubin, the visionary artist, designer and author from Bohemia; 'The Cask of Amontillado' (top right) by the Irish artist Harry Clarke; Fernand Siméon's woodcut (above) from Baudelaire's translation of the same story; 'The Black Cat' (right) by Aubrey Beardsley. Opposite, a scene from the film, *The Pit and the Pendulum* (1961), based on the Poe story but lacking its obsessive power.







only thirteen years old, on whom he modelled a number of his female characters. She died of tuberculosis, after many years of illness. Poe's attempts to marry again, and to found a periodical of his own, met with little success. His drinking grew worse, and several times he was found unconscious outside taverns. He died on October 7, 1849.

Poe's relationship with John Allan (who neither adopted him nor made him his heir), his weakness for alcohol, his love for his very young wife, and his strange behaviour at the university and West Point, contributed to the legend surrounding him, and this was intensified by the slanderous biography of Rufus W. Griswold, his literary executor, who shamelessly betrayed the trust set in him. Griswold distorted the facts of Poe's life, depicting his subject as an ingrate, a wanton libertine, and a hopeless drunkard. Charles Baudelaire, one of Poe's greatest admirers, was referring to Griswold when he ironically asked whether there were no laws in America

barring dogs from entering graveyards.

Other Poe admirers, however, were pleased with the dark picture painted by Griswold and seemingly confirmed in Poe's fiction, where the heroes are often addicted to opium, seek an elusive love in vain, and do everything to destroy themselves. For them, Poe is the *poète maudit*, an outsider who turns away in disgust from a philistine society which cannot understand him, and is in turn rejected by it.

This self-destructive impulse takes form as a demon of perversity in many of his tales; not only in the story entitled 'The Imp of the Perverse', but also in 'The Tell-Tale Heart', 'The Black Cat', certain passages in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, and 'The Pit and the Pendulum'. It manifests itself when horror of the unknown takes hold of the hero, overruling his sense of self-preservation.

Baudelaire made Poe more famous in France than he was in his own country, admiring in particular the 'methodical way' in which he had 'pursued inspiration . . . and subjected it to the most stringent analysis'. Indeed, Poe's interest in terror verges on the clinical, with cold dissections of feverish dreams and ghosts conjured up from his own unconscious. Poe maintained that 'the highest order of the imaginative intellect is always predominantly mathematical; and the converse.' While beauty, he declared, could be better treated in a poem, it was 'not so with terror, or passion, or horror, or a multitude of such other points', for which the short tale was more appropriate. Unity of effect was what he strove after in his stories, and he stressed the importance of craftsmanship in the construction of a story no less than Hoffmann. But, unlike the German writer, there is nothing whimsical in his work, no different levels of intensity, no trace of romantic irony. He pursued his effects of horror with a rare single-mindedness of purpose, as evidenced in 'The Masque of the Red Death', 'The Oval Portrait', 'The Cask of Amontillado', 'The Fall of the House of Usher', 'The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar', and many other stories.

Metempsychosis and mesmerism, crime, fear of death (especially of being buried alive), figure again and again in his stories. The death of a beautiful woman is also a recurring theme. In 'Ligeia' the dead lady Ligeia, first





wife of the opium-crazed narrator, returns to take over the body of his second wife Rowena for a few brief moments as it lies in the coffin. In 'Berenice', the narrator is so obsessed with Berenice's beautiful small teeth that he goes to her tomb to break them out of her mouth – not without a struggle, for she is only seemingly dead. The narrator's obsession becomes 'the essence of my mental life', and lies at the core of his dreamlike existence. Like other tales by Poe, 'Berenice' may also be read as a symbolic statement about the nature of art and the creative process. The artist, taking a beauty which is dead in this world, transposes it into an idea of beauty in his visionary world, but by doing so unconsciously violates it.

Egeus of 'Berenice' succumbs to a trance-like state through the power of his obsession, so much so that afterwards he has to be told of his terrible crime. In defence of the morbid subject of the story, Poe explained in a letter to the editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger* the nature and psychological attraction of his work: 'It consists in the ludicrous heightened into the grotesque: the fearful coloured into the horrible: the witty exaggerated into the burlesque: the singular wrought out into the strange and mystical.'

The strange beauty of 'Eleonora', 'Ligeia', and 'Berenice' is lacking in 'The Fall of the House of Usher', which is all unrelieved

gloom. The first sentence sets the tone of the whole:

'During the whole of a dull, dark, and sunless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country; and at length found myself, as the shades of evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher.' The dark castle of Usher is an image of Roderick Usher's state of mind, its decay and final fall reflecting his increasing madness. An externalization of his sick imagination, it is seen as no more than a dissolving illusion. When the unconscious symbols are articulated in language, the dream ends, and what has been glimpsed in the unconscious is irrevocably destroyed. Similarly, the eponymous hero of 'William Wilson' creates, with his crimes and atrocities, a world of his own which can be challenged only by his doppelgänger, here his better self.

Poe tries to capture a fleeting dream world, located in unconscious depths, and to give it shape in language. His demons and horrors are far more real than the monsters of Gothic fantasy, since they are expressions of the only really credible demons in existence: the monsters lurking in men's minds, and the thought processes of the mentally aberrant. Therein lies his unsurpassed mastery.

Two episodes from 'The Fall of the House of Usher': Arthur Rackham's illustration (1935 edition) of the narrator's arrival at the doomed house; and (right) the rending of Madeline Usher's coffin, as drawn by Harry Clarke (1919).

Opposite, portrait of a fantastic genius: Poe, by the German artist Helmut Wenske.







## Gogol and Russian fantasy

Dostoevsky is said to have declared that 'we are all descended from Gogol's "The Overcoat"'; and Gogol's work was itself profoundly influenced by Hoffmann (whom he had read in French translation). His writing strikes a balance between romanticism and stark realism, and does indeed lay the foundation for much later Russian prose of the natural school. Born in 1809, the son of a Ukrainian landowner, Nicolai Vasilevich Gogol went to St Petersburg as a civil clerk but devoted himself to literature from 1835 onwards. His death in 1852 was largely the result of an extremely ascetic regime.

Gogol became famous overnight with the publication of his first cycle of fantasy stories, *Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka* (1831/2). Loosely structured, but colourful and brilliantly inventive, these tales are deeply rooted in Ukrainian folklore with its sagas and fairy stories about witches, sorcerers and the Devil. They present with sympathy a wide range of Russian characters – the Zaporozhian Cossacks, who regard themselves as inferior to nobody, and are ready to take on the Devil himself. In 1835 Gogol published *Mirgorod*, which contains the famous vampire story, 'Viy', and in the same year he brought out *Arabesques*, a collection of stories set in St Petersburg, including 'The Nevsky Prospect', 'The Diary of a Madman', and 'The Portrait'. This was followed in 1836 by 'The Nose'; but 'The Overcoat', on which he worked for several years, did not appear till 1842.

In his earlier, folklore-based, work, Gogol took for granted the fantastic world of witches, vampires, the Devil, etc., and exploited it with great skill. He then went on to write stories of greater realism, set in the everyday world, and stocked with ordinary characters – the clerks and civil servants of the capital's bureaucracy. But this apparent realism serves to put across carefully selected features of his bureaucratic targets, in order to expose their hollowness and triviality, and the base quality of their lives. Gogol's intention here, as in his strictly realistic satires like *The Inspector General* and *Dead Souls*, is to expose through ridicule the subhuman attitudes of characters who apparently regard their vices and abuses as entirely normal. This is achieved, not by moralizing, but by letting







Russian images of the uncanny: opposite, a detail from Feodor Sologub's 'Little Man', from a Polish collection illustrated by Andrzej Strumillov (1975); above, Pushkin's 'Queen of Spades', from the film version by Thorold Dickinson (1948); right, duellists and spectators in Gogol's *The Sorcerer*, woodcut by Karl Thylman.

Overleaf, 'The strange head stared unwinkingly through the cloud...'. Another image from Gogol's *The Sorcerer*.

his creations condemn themselves out of their own mouths with their naively candid admissions of corruption, tyranny, etc. 'The Nose' belongs to a certain Major Kovalev, but becomes a separate entity, walking around St Petersburg and claiming a higher rank than the Major himself. Nobody at first seems to notice that it is a nose. In 'The Overcoat', a humble clerk painfully saves up for and acquires a badly needed new overcoat, which is almost immediately stolen. His requests for help from an 'important person' lead to humiliating dismissal, and the poor hero dies, to return as an overcoat-stealing ghost, unable to rest until he has taken the greatcoat of the 'important person' himself.

These stories have received a wide variety of interpretations – psychoanalytical, metaphysical, social – and they have also been seen in general terms as an expression of the plight of the human animal. Their satirical intention, however, is not in dispute. Gogol himself, in an essay on his friend Pushkin, stressed that the more commonplace the subject matter, the greater must be the writer's art in extracting the unusual from it, expressing it in such a manner that it emerges as genuine truth. In just this way does he set out the unusual occurrences in 'The Nose' and 'The Overcoat' so as to reveal the grotesque as commonplace in an inherently alienated society. The surprising modernity of Gogol's literary technique, and his use of an alogical structure, point forward to Kafka. Far from arbitrary or unreal, he enables us to recognize more clearly

the underlying truth, and fantasy becomes a way of expressing reality.

Many other important Russian writers have produced fantasies, including Pushkin (1795–1837) with his famous 'Queen of Spades', Lermontov (1814–41), Alexei K. Tolstoy (1817–75), and, in modern times, Benjamin Kaverin and Platonov. Among Gogol's contemporaries, Antony Pogorelski (1787–1836) wrote grotesque fairy stories in the manner of Hoffmann, e.g. *The Doppelgänger* (1829), and a similar influence may be seen in the work of Prince Vladimir Odoyevsky (1803–69), who often described the situation of artists in opposition to a philistine society, or created a fantastic world behind familiar reality. One of his best stories is 'The Sylphide' (1837), which shows some similarity to Fitz-James O'Brien's 'The Diamond Lens'.

Although primarily a naturalistic writer, Ivan Turgenev (1818–83) wrote a number of fantastic tales of a lyrical type. In 'Clara Militch' he presents a very withdrawn character, Aratov, who drives a young actress to suicide when he rejects her love. Only then is his interest aroused, and he finally discovers the meaning of love with her in another world.





The idea of a love unconfessed, or taking a grotesque form, occurs in many of Turgenev's stories, notably 'A Strange Story' (1869) and, most impressively, in 'Faust'.

The stories of Valerii Briusov (1873–1924) are also remarkable for their psychological insights, especially in *The Republic of the Southern Cross and Other Stories* (English edition 1919). His *Fiery Angel*, a Gothic witch story set in the sixteenth century, was translated in 1930. Feodor Sologub (1863–1927) is another fine writer who has been translated, but the work of Alexander Grin (1880–1932) is almost entirely unknown in the West; only two of his stories have been translated in the French-language anthology, *La Russie Fantastique* (1975).

In the Soviet Union fantasy is not encouraged, and very little exists apart from technological science fiction. Much that has been translated in the last few decades has either failed to appear at all in the USSR, or has been published only in an abbreviated form and after long delays. Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*, for instance, though finished in 1938, was not published (in the periodical *Moskva*) till 1966/7, long after the death of its author. This novel interweaves the story of 'the Master', a playwright whose work cannot be performed for political reasons, with an original and fascinating interpretation of the Pilate legend, while the sinister foreigner Voland, a professor of black magic, wreaks havoc among Party-line artists and writers in Moscow, assisted by a Hoffmannesque black cat and another grotesquely comic character. The bizarre events of this impressive fantasy are in the best tradition of Hoffman and Gogol, satirizing the narrow-minded attitudes of the bureaucracy.

*Lyubimov* (1963), by Andrei Sinyavsky, was suppressed in the USSR, but appeared in the West as *The Makepeace Experiment* (1965) under Sinyavsky's pseudonym of Abram Tertz. Satire is the dominant mode of this fantastic story of a man who, by magnetic attraction, disposes of the authorities and seizes power himself in the small provincial town of Lyubimov. Something of the same spirit may also be seen in some of the fantastic SF stories of the Strugatsky brothers.







# hemes and characters

Vampires/A gentleman from Transylvania/  
Werewolves/The golem





## Vampires

Stories of ghouls, vampires, vurdulaks and similar entities, located in the shadowy regions between life and death, represent a recurring theme in many cultures. Vampiric creatures already appear in Homer and in *The Golden Ass* (c. AD 170) of Apuleius, as well as in *The Thousand and One Nights*, although the word 'vampire' is of Slavonic origin, and belief in it was particularly prevalent in the Balkans. However, the vampire was given its best known and definitive literary form in the English-speaking world. Gottfried August Bürger, Prosper Mérimée ('The Guzla') and even Goethe all wrote vampire poems, as did Byron ('The Giaour'), but it was William Polidori (1795–1821), Byron's conceited young physician, who wrote the prototype of the most widely known vampire story. Although the tale of the ruthless vampire Ruthven (partly a fictionalized Byron), has little to recommend it in terms of language or plot, it exerted an enormous influence, especially in France, where it was immediately adapted for the stage, notably by Charles Nodier; and in Germany it provided the basis for Marschner's opera *The Vampyre* (1828).

Polidori's story emerged in the course of the same rainy evenings which gave birth to *Frankenstein*, when Shelley, Mary Godwin, Byron, Polidori, and sometimes 'Monk' Lewis, read German ghost stories to each other at the Villa Diodati near Geneva, and then decided to try their hands at writing ghost stories themselves. Byron's attempt came to an end after a few hundred words, but his plot was used by Polidori for 'The Vampyre', first published in April 1819 in the *New Monthly Magazine*. It was often wrongly attributed to Byron and admired as his own work, a fact which contributed greatly to his popularity on the continent. Polidori's influence can already be seen in James Malcolm Rymer's spirited penny dreadful, *Varney the Vampire, or, The Feast of Blood* (1847), commonly regarded as the work of Thomas Pecket Prest.

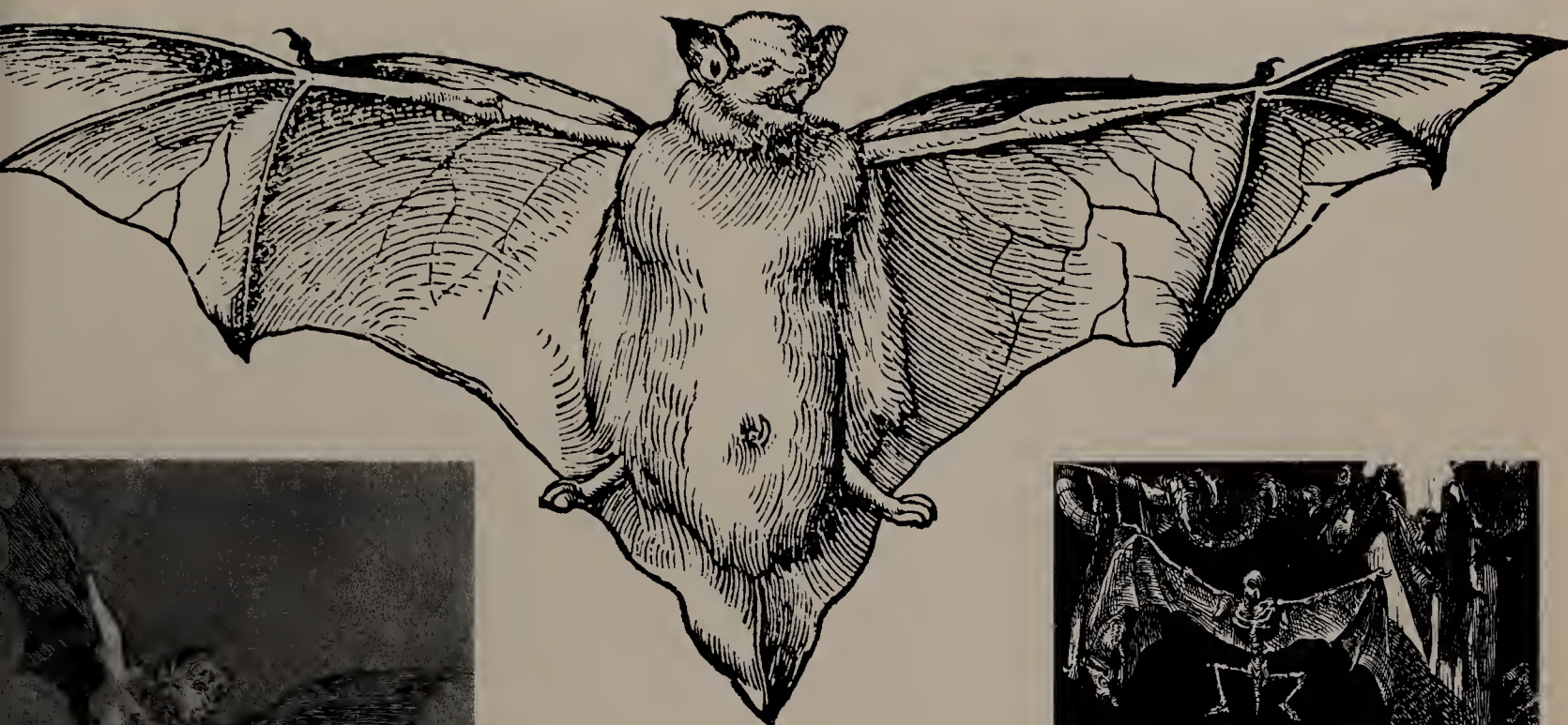
The sexual implications of the vampire, with its necrophiliac overtones, have often been commented on, and they constitute much of the attraction of a figure which, though dreadful, may subconsciously be no less desired than feared. J. Sheridan Le Fanu's lesbian treatment of the theme, 'Carmilla', was

first published in his collection *In A Glass Darkly* in 1872. The vampire Carmilla calls on the beautiful but passive Laura in her Styrian castle, where gradually and with loving restraint she draws her blood, while taking her nourishment among the more robust peasants' daughters in the vicinity. Carmilla is already acquainted with her victim, having visited her in childhood, during the course of a dream. Her courting of Laura is openly

*Vampires on film: below, Roman Polanski and Sharon Tate in Polanski's The Dance of the Vampires (1967); bottom, 'Carmilla', Sheridan Le Fanu's lesbian vampire, provided the basis for Roger Vadim's Blood and Roses (1960).*







*A bat-winged spirit of night and fear, the vampire appears in many different cultures: left, Goya's Soplones (Squealers) in the Caprichos series (1799); above, Varney the Vampire, the Victorian penny dreadful of 1847; right, Hindu vampires in Vikram and the Vampire, a collection translated by Richard Burton (1870), and illustrated by Ernest Griset.*





The bloodsucking mouth, basic image of the vampire in modern myth, appears (far left) on the cover by Peter Haars of a Norwegian anthology, and (left) in a paperback edition including 'Carmilla', Le Fanu's Victorian classic, and other stories. Opposite, vampire picture by Edvard Munch (1895).

romantic, and many of the scenes are as explicitly erotic as possible, given the climate of the Victorian age. The whole story is a tour de force of sado-necrophiliac writing. So much so that two of the most significant vampire films have been based on Le Fanu's evocative story – Carl Dreyer's *Vampyr* (1932) and Roger Vadim's *Blood and Roses* (1960) – and it is clear that these important film makers were well aware of the sexual implications of the theme.

The sexual element is also stressed in Théophile Gautier's 'La Morte amoureuse' (1836), translated as 'Clarimonde' or 'The Beautiful Vampire'. Here the vampire's deathly embrace is transformed by love into a kiss of life, when the courtesan Clarimonde wakes her lover, the introspective priest Romuald, to a new life. True, as a vampire she depends upon his blood, but Clarimonde is careful not to take enough to harm him. The true villain is the vampire-killer, the Abbé Serapion, and the 'moral' of the story is ironic: 'Never look at a woman, chaste and steadfast as you may be, one minute may make you lose eternity.' Another view is put forward by Wladislaw S. Reymont, the Polish Nobel prize winner, in his novel *Wampir* (1911) when he writes that 'for the true artist a woman is his evil destructive demon, she is his vampire'.

One of the most inventive as well as the most horrifying of vampire stories is Nicolai Gogol's 'Viy' (1835), supposedly a retelling of some untraceable folklore tale, in which a young student who has killed a witch is forced by her father to keep watch over her coffin for three consecutive nights. 'Viy' may be the most grotesque of vampire stories, but Ivan Turgenev's 'Phantoms' (1864) is perhaps the most spiritual, a lyrical description of nocturnal rides with a beautiful female vampire over the frozen European landscape. Outstanding also are Alexei Tolstoy's two vampire stories, 'The Vampyre' (1841), a complex love story, and 'The Family of the Vurdalak' ('La Famille du Vourdalak'), a tale of Serbian vampires which catches the flavour of genuine folklore. The latter was originally written in French and published in Russian only in 1884.

Many other vampire stories have been written since then, the most notable, of course, being Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), and still they continue to be written (recent examples are Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* and Stephen King's *Salem's Lot*, both bestsellers), but few are of any originality, although there have even been science fictional 'explanations' of vampires (e.g. Richard Matheson's *I am Legend*, 1954).





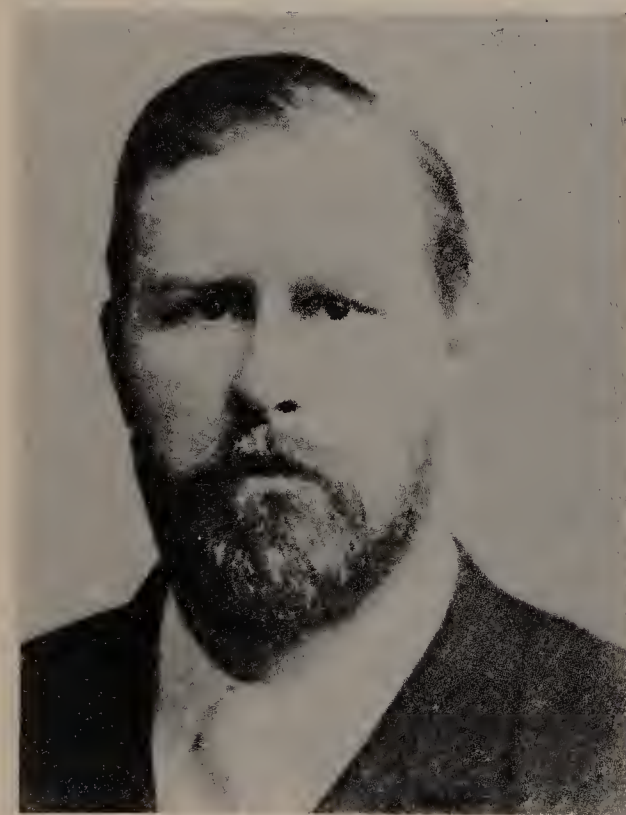


## A gentleman from Transylvania

Bram Stoker (1837–1912) was an Irishman, a genial red-bearded giant of a man, who worked devotedly for many years as Henry Irving's manager at the London Lyceum Theatre. Stoker's first published work was a manual, *The Duties of Clerks of Petty Sessions in Ireland*, but he went on to write a number of uncanny and gruesome stories and novels, such as 'The Squaw', 'The Burial of the Rats', *The Lady of the Shroud* (1909) and *The Lair of the White Worm* (1911), which features a psychoanalytically interesting worm-woman creature. But the book which made his name immortal was of course *Dracula* (1897), a compelling if not faultless masterpiece of a

screen myth of all, appearing under his own and various other names in well over 200 films. The Hungarian actor Bela Lugosi, who had already played Dracula in the successful American stage version by Hamilton Deane, became the familiar incarnation of the evil count in Tod Browning's film version of 1931, although some critics prefer the more realistic British actor Christopher Lee, star of *The Horror of Dracula* (1958) and many other Hammer horror films. But in 1922 F. W. Murnau had made an impressive silent version of Stoker's novel, called *Nosferatu*, with the locale changed to Germany. Prana, the German company, had failed to ask permis-

*Left, Bram Stoker, theatrical manager and inventor of the modern Dracula, a creation probably based on the fifteenth-century historical figure, Vlad the Impaler (below). Opposite, three versions of the infamous Count: silhouetted in Murnau's film Nosferatu (1922); baring his teeth in the Christopher Lee manifestation (Hammer Films, 1958); and, following Stoker's own description, a portrait by the Spanish artist Enric Sio.*



popular shocker. Many vampire stories have been written before, and more were to be written later, but none of them has caught the imagination with such force as did this tale of the vampiric count who sets out from his native Transylvania, 'the land beyond the forest', with fifty coffins as luggage, to conquer Victorian England.

Although he was finally thwarted by the Dutch vampire hunter Dr Van Helsing, *Dracula* succeeded in literary terms, conquering the whole world and becoming a household word, so that today he is, together with Frankenstein, the most powerful modern





sion, and Stoker's widow brought an action which drove them into bankruptcy.

Stoker was somewhat influenced by Sheridan Le Fanu's classic short story 'Carmilla' (1872), as is clearly shown in a discarded chapter of the novel later published as 'Dracula's Guest'. He also learned about vampire legends from his Hungarian acquaintance Arminius Vamber, who probably told him about the fifteenth-century 'Dracole' (Devil) Vlad Tepes, nicknamed 'The Impaler', who was one of the more unpleasant Wallachian rulers. When Mehmet the Conqueror led his army against Vlad in 1462, he is said to have proceeded for half an hour past 20,000 impaled Bulgars and Turks near Vlad's capital of Targoviste.

Vlad Tepes, however, was not himself believed to be a vampire. That connection was made by Bram Stoker, who 'saw the proper metaphor lurking in the man' (Leonard Wolf in his *Annotated Dracula*); or perhaps it was just poetic justice that, for once, the impaler should become the impaled, the customary fate of vampires.

The first four chapters, laid in Transylvania, are the book's finest, when the young British solicitor, Jonathan Harker, arrives at the boyar Dracula's Carpathian castle to discuss











*Opposite, Bela Lugosi's portrayal of Dracula (1931), sleek, hypnotic and leering, set the pattern for all subsequent Counts, of whom Christopher Lee (above), was probably the most effective. Right, Lugosi and Helen Chandler in the crypt scene.*

details of his plans to acquire some property in England. At last Harker meets the Count:

'His face was a strong – a very strong – aquiline, with high bridge of the thin nose and peculiarly arched nostrils; with lofty domed forehead, and hair growing scantily round the temples, but profusely elsewhere. His eyebrows were very massive, almost meeting over the nose, and with bushy hair that seemed to curl in its own profusion. The mouth, so far as I could see it under the heavy moustache, was fixed and rather cruel-looking, with peculiarly sharp white teeth; these protruded over the lips, whose remarkable ruddiness showed astonishing vitality in a man of his years. For the rest, his ears were pale and at the tops extremely pointed; the chin was broad and strong, and the cheeks firm though thin. The general effect was one of extraordinary pallor.'

Stoker used and confirmed a good deal of traditional vampire lore: Dracula casts no shadow, he is invisible in mirrors, afraid of garlic and the crucifix, feeble during daylight, able to appear as a bat or a mist, possessed of an extraordinarily strong grip, and – a feature unique to Stoker – having hairs growing from the palms of his hands. He is also capable of



crawling down the walls of his castle face downwards, 'with his cloak spreading around him like great wings'. Harker, virtually a prisoner, is visited in his trance by three female vampires who clearly have sexual designs on him (a feature overlooked in the film versions), and later discovers Dracula lying in his coffin.

The rest of the book, presented in the form of diaries and letters, also has some splendid scenes, such as the arrival of the vampire on a storm-swept British shore, but the omnipotent Dutch vampire hunter, Dr Van Helsing, is a rather ridiculous figure, with his long-winded speeches and his secretiveness about his true intentions (he confines himself to dark suggestions until the very end). Dieter Sturm, a recent German commentator on the novel, has suggested that Van Helsing is the true monster because his motives are unknown, and because he refuses to discuss his acts with anyone but commits various atrocities (such as the liquidation of the infected Lucy) in the name of God, fanatically obsessed as he is with ridding the world of vampires.

Whatever truth there may be in this, Stoker's erotically attractive, elegant creation, a combination of blood and death, has turned out to be enormously successful, apparently tapping deep psychic springs.







## Werewolves



The werewolf ('manwolf'), another constantly recurring theme in fantastic literature, is usually presented as straightforwardly ferocious. Opposite, cover for the Sphere Books collection, *Book of the Werewolf*. Above, '...tearing with sharp white fangs her beautiful white throat which I had caressed so often' Frank Kelly Freas's heading for 'The Werewolf of Ponkert' by H. W. Munn (*Weird Tales*, January 1953).

The vampire is an aristocrat of the supernatural realm. It is feared and dreaded, yet holds a terrible sadomasochistic sexual attraction. The violated victims tend to carry only the faintest traces of its canine toothmarks, while in some cases, as we have seen, fondness for its prey induces the vampire to extract only the minimum quantity of blood.

The werewolf, on the other hand, seems to belong to a lower order, though exceptions are naturally to be found, as with the gentlemanly werewolves of the English writer 'Saki' (H. H. Munro, 1870–1916). In general, however, it is one of the most vicious creatures in the demonic bestiary; treacherous, savage and bloodthirsty; and its methods are usually crude and inelegant in the extreme. Tearing its victims apart with superhuman strength, it presents a ravening image of sadistic cruelty and ferocity, and nearly always appears as an object of supernatural terror.

Belief in werewolves (the word means 'manwolf') goes back to antiquity, but human transformations into other creatures have also been widely credited – were-tigers, were-apes, were-bears. A chillingly effective story of such a transformation is Ambrose Bierce's 'The Eyes of the Panther', and one of the most beautiful is 'The Monkey' by Isak Dinesen in *Seven Gothic Tales* (1934). Two fine novels on the same theme are David Garnett's *Lady into Fox* (1922) and Vercors's *Sylva* (1963). But no other supernatural transformation has received as much attention from fantastic writers as the werewolf. Belief in werewolves and in vampires may in fact share the same psychological roots, since there is a tradition that a werewolf may, on death, become a vampire.

The werewolf has long been a stock element in the pulp magazines, where sheer quantity of horror is what counts, rather than finesse, but



the theme also appears in certain medieval romances, as well as in the occasional Gothic novel, for instance, in an episode in Charles R. Maturin's *The Albigenses*, (1824). The subject was exploited to the full by the prolific hacks who turned out the nineteenth-century penny dreadfuls, the British equivalent of the American dime novels. *Wagner, the Wehr-Wolf*, for instance, by G. W. M. Reynolds (1814–79), author of many successful thrillers, ran for 77 episodes in *Reynolds's Magazine of Romance, General Literature, Science and Art*, beginning in 1846. The transformation scenes in this novel are particularly vivid, though the general level is of course not very high. Considerably superior from a literary point of

view is Alexandre Dumas's *The Wolf-Leader* (1857), in which Thibault, an eighteenth-century French peasant, makes the usual pact with the Devil. But in this case, with each wish granted, a hair of his head is turned a giveaway shade of red – the mark of the Satanist! In spite of his determination to wish carefully and wisely, poor Thibault is forced to use them all up, whereupon he is turned into a werewolf and the Devil claims his soul.

Among many powerful short stories concerning werewolves we may mention 'The White Wolf of the Hartz Mountains' by Captain Marryat, from his *The Phantom Ship* (1839), and 'Hugues-le-Loup' (1869) by the Alsace writers Erckmann-Chatrian. A related

Two werewolf films: below, *The Werewolf of London* (1935) by Stuart Walker; opposite, *The Wolf Man* by George Wagner (1941). Opposite (below), a more sympathetic image of the werewolf: Edd Cartier's heading for Anthony Boucher's *The Compleat Werewolf* (1942).







theme is used by Kipling in his 'The Mark of the Beast' from *Life's Handicap* (1891), a chilling tale in which the curse of an Indian leper brings the soul of a beast into an Englishman's body.

Of traditional writers of weird fiction, Algernon Blackwood has produced a number of werewolf stories which, as one might expect from this sensitive author, present the subject in a refined form. In 'The Camp of the Dog' the werewolf is an astral projection, a victim rather than a monster. In 'Running



Wolf' an Indian kills the sacred animal of his tribe – the wolf – and is forced to appear after his death in wolf shape until the crime has been redeemed.

Werewolf novels are few, and the best is probably Guy Endore's *The Werewolf of Paris* (1933), based on the story of a certain Sergeant Bertrand, who is on record as having disinterred corpses and devoured their rotting flesh. Endore's protagonist, born with a marked canine appearance, experiences dreams of werewolf transformation during childhood, only later realizing that they are reality. Gradually his longing for flesh increases, and a number of bestial killings are reported; but then he falls in love. This relationship keeps his degeneration in check for a while, but when the woman leaves him, the conflict within himself between man and beast drives him into a mental asylum (where he becomes the victim of a doctor who refuses to believe in werewolves), and finally he kills himself. The author shows impressive insight into the links between love and cruelty, giving a convincing account of the woman's sadistic and masochistic tendencies, and offering a sympathetic portrayal of his inevitably repellent hero. The book is set against the background of the Communards' harsh rule, followed by the even greater violence and horrors of the French bourgeois government's counter-revolution. This appalling massacre, it is implied, far exceeds anything that Caillet can do, and his lycanthropy seems, in contrast, a comparatively minor affliction: the true monster is a brutally repressive society.

Apart from *The Werewolf of Paris*, most novels on this theme are pure entertainment, e.g. Jack Mann's *Grey Shapes* (1930), Franklin Gregory's *The White Wolf* (1941), and Jessie Douglas Kerruish's *The Undying Monster* (1936). *Darker than You Think*, by Jack Williamson (1940), is conceptually bolder, postulating an ancient race of *Homo Lycanthropus* with power to assume the shape of the animal, but this may belong more to the province of science fiction.

Finally, in its screen appearances the werewolf is usually portrayed as a pathetic figure, lacking the vitality and elegance of the vampire, and seeking only to be released from its affliction.



Chem





## The golem

*The golem, according to Helmut Wenske's Gesichte des Athanasius Pernath: opposite, the creature comes to life when the 'Shem', a mystical/magical formula, is applied to its forehead; below, it disintegrates when the word emeth (truth) on the Shem becomes changed to 'meth (dead).*

The legend of the golem, that 'quintessential product of the spirit of German Jewry', as Gershom Scholem calls it, has spread over much of the world from its origins in small East European Jewish communities, assuming many different forms and treatments, and continuing up to the present. The golem is an artificial human being, made out of clay and brought to life by secret incantations of a quasi-biblical kind. According to the stories, a number of rabbis are said to have created

clumsy versions of the creature; the process was a sort of ritual confirmation of the cosmology presented in the *Sefer Yezirah*. As Scholem tells us, the prophet Jeremiah, with his son Ben Sirah, was said to have created a human being on whose forehead he wrote the word *emeth* (truth) in analogy with God's seal on Adam's forehead. But with its own hand the artificial being effaced the letter *aleph* 'in order to confirm that God alone is truth, and died from the resulting word 'meth (dead)'.

In a more developed form of the legend, the message read IHVHELOHIM EMETH (God is truth), and the effacing of the *aleph* produced the ultimate blasphemy, 'God is dead', a topical concept challenging the traditional basis of creation. In later versions the golem is animated, not by the recital of letter combinations from the *Sefer Yezirah*, but by a 'Shem', a strip of parchment inscribed with the name of God. The golem is usually described as constantly growing in size, sometimes crushing its creator under masses of clay when finally deactivated.

Later, the High Rabbi Loew of Prague (c. 1512–1609) was attributed with the creation of a golem, and featured in the extremely novelistic treatment of Chayim Bloch's translation around the end of the nineteenth century, *Der Prager Golem*, and the golem became famous with him. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it has been the subject of poems (notably by the Argentinian Jorge Luis Borges), dramas, musical works, and films. Of the stage versions, the most successful was that of the Russian writer Halper Leivick. An English translation (*The Golem: A Dramatic Poem in Eight Scenes*) appeared in 1928 and was staged several times in New York, later being set to music. Leivick's play is the basis for the opera by Abraham Ellstein, first produced in the New York City Opera in 1962.

Paul Wegener produced three silent film versions of the golem theme, of which only the last (1920) still exists. Wegener always took the part of the golem himself, having already played the lead in *Der Student von Prag* (1913), which was based on a script by Hanns Heinz Ewers, and contained some similar elements. The first of his films was *Der Golem* (1914; American title, *The Monster of Fate*), the





second was *Der Golem und die Tänzerin* (1917), and the third *Der Golem: Wie er in die Welt kam*. The story was later filmed four more times by others. In the first film Wegener presented the golem as a pitiful, struggling character, painfully aware of its own limitations, while the second seems to have been a parody. The third version is remarkable for its many trick effects, especially impressive being the first stirrings of life in the golem. Siegfried Kracauer coined the term 'nascent motion' for the special attraction of this contrast between movement and immobility.

In Abraham Rothberg's *The Sword of the Golem* (1970), the creature is indistinguishable from a real human. At first it is a protector of the Jews against their enemies, in the manner of Chayim Bloch's popular golem version, but then it turns against the Jews themselves when thwarted in its love of the rabbi's

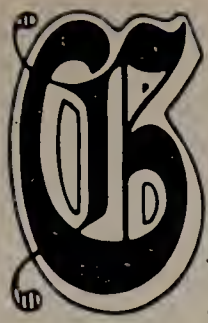
adopted daughter, and thereafter the novel deteriorates with scenes of carnage in the ghetto, described in a rather sensational and trivial manner.

The golem legend features only indirectly in Gustav Meyrink's novel, *Der Golem* (1915), where the important thing is the atmosphere, the dark world of the ghetto, which provides the novel with its specific structure. Set on the borderline between reality and dream, the narrator, Athanasius Pernath, merges with his dream hero, fluctuating between both worlds. Encompassing both past and present, Meyrink presents a wide variety of characters in his visionary novel and, while making little use of the golem legends, succeeds in creating a coherent occult vision of his own. The book's enduring success indicates that it has always been able to penetrate deep into the unconscious.

*The rabbi and the golem: a scene from Paul Wegener's Der Golem (1920).*







## ghost and horror stories in Britain

Victorian ghost stories: Le Fanu and others/  
The classic English ghost story: M. R. James  
and others/Psychic subtleties: de la Mare,  
Machen, Blackwood





## Victorian ghost stories: Le Fanu and others

J. Sheridan Le Fanu (1814–73) was perhaps the most important of all the Victorian ghost story writers. Descended from a family of Huguenot origin which had emigrated to Ireland in the eighteenth century, and from the playwright R. B. Sheridan, he graduated from Trinity College Dublin with a degree in law. Soon thereafter he became a journalist, owning and editing several periodicals, most notably the distinguished *Dublin University Magazine* (from 1856 till 1869). Altogether, Le Fanu wrote fourteen novels, and a large number of articles and short stories, many of them pseudonymously for well-known magazines like *Belgravia*, Dickens's *All the Year Round*, or his own *Dublin University Magazine*. After two historical novels Le Fanu published *Ghost Stories and Tales of Mystery* in 1851, containing 'The Watcher', 'Schalken the Painter', 'The Murdered Cousin', and 'The Evil Guest'. Then, from 1861 until his death, he produced a steady stream of novels, twelve in all, of which *The House by the Churchyard* (1863), *Uncle Silas* (1864), and *Wylder's Hand* (1864), are still remembered today. One modern critic, E. F. Bleiler, has claimed (in his Introduction to *Best Ghost Stories of J. S. Le Fanu*, 1964) that *Uncle Silas* is the Victorian mystery story par excellence, 'for it is equal in narrative skill to *The Woman in White* (1860) and *The Moonstone* (1868), and is superior to both in atmosphere, intelligence, and emotional power'. Le Fanu's short stories were collected in *Chronicles of Golden Friars* (1871), *In A Glass Darkly* (1872), and, posthumously, in *The Purcell Papers* (1880), *The Watcher* (1894), and *The Evil Guest* (1895). After his death, Le Fanu's reputation waned, but a modern revival was led by M. R. James, who located and identified many previously uncollected stories, bringing them together in *Madam Crowl's Ghost and other Tales of Mystery* (1923). Today all of Le Fanu's ghost stories and many of his mysteries (which are far more extensive than his supernatural writings) are in print, and some stories, especially the vampire classic 'Carmilla', 'Green Tea', and 'Schalken the Painter', have been the perennial favourites of the anthologists.

Le Fanu's work is of a singularly brooding character. He seems to have genuinely

believed in a ghostly world, and this lends his stories an authority and a conviction lacking in the work of contemporaries such as Mrs Charlotte Riddell (1832–1906), Miss Amelia B. Edwards (1831–92), Rhoda Broughton (1840–1920), Wilkie Collins (1824–89), 'Vernon Lee' (Violet Paget, 1856–1935), or even Charles Dickens, whose occasional ghost stories, like 'No. 1 Branch Line, The Signal-Man', present ghosts merely as a means to convey information to the living. A very different variety makes its appearance in Le Fanu's work; his preternatural beings, sometimes taking the form of amputated limbs, are vicious, malignant entities, seeking retribution from beyond the grave, and sometimes striking without provocation at innocent people. For Le Fanu, rational life seems to be a small island in an ocean of supernaturalism; the supernatural is always prepared to break through when man's resistance has been weakened, either by the use of stimulants (as in 'Green Tea') or by guilt. The manner in which Le Fanu often tackled the same story three or even four times seems to indicate that he was obsessed by the materials of his imagination. He may have been influenced by the German philosopher G. H. Schubert, who wrote in 1808:

'The road behind us is dark; only occasionally is it lit up by dreams of a remarkable clarity and intensity, dreams which appear related one to the other but which have no

*The underface of the Victorian age: below, Carmilla closes on her beloved victim, an illustration by M. Fitzgerald (1877) for Le Fanu's famous vampire story; opposite, 'Crazy Jane' by the psychotic painter Richard Dadd, a chronic patient at the Bethlem Royal Hospital; opposite (right), cover for a recent anthology of Victorian fantasy.*







connection with present, everyday existence. In such dreams . . . we must often see and acknowledge memories of a state of life which has gone before.'

And during the last years of his life Le Fanu was also strongly influenced by the mystic Swedenborg.

After the death of his wife in 1858, Le Fanu became, appropriately enough for a writer of weird fiction, increasingly reclusive, finally even refusing to see his closest friends. Living alone in his large house he wrote his macabre stories by candlelight, haunted by recurring dreams of a house falling about him. But his best work has both a diabolic vision and an analytic, passionless detachment.

Wilkie Collins (1824-89) is best known for his two detective novels, *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*, but, in addition to frequently reprinted horror stories like 'The Dream-Woman' and 'A Terribly Strange Bed', he also wrote *The Haunted Hotel* (1879), a short but intricate novel in which, as T. S. Eliot has pointed out, the 'principal character, the fatal woman, is herself obsessed by the idea of fatality'.

Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1803-73) is worth



Left, 'It was the face of his dead wife': Wilkie Collins's *'The Yellow Mask'* illustrated by Gordon Browne (1900); below, *Jekyll into Hyde*, two images, from screen (1932) and book (1930), of R. L. Stevenson's masterpiece of split personality incarnated.



attention for his supernatural novel *Zanoni* (1842), while his best-known fantastic short story, 'The Haunted and the Haunters, or, The House and the Brain' (1857) expresses the essence of many later stories of haunted houses: that the evil emanations of past crimes linger on, manifesting themselves in the present.

Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–94), whose story-telling abilities are of course best known in such adventure tales as *Treasure Island* (1883) and *Kidnapped* (1886), was also a gifted writer of the supernatural, notably *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), which was inspired by a vivid dream. Stevenson was not immune from the Victorian tendency to moralize, and later rewrote the book to emphasize its message. Nevertheless, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, the story of a split personality made incarnate, has a real ring of conviction to it, powerfully expressing the dark and the light in human nature, its good and its devilish aspects. The story has often been filmed. Also remarkable for atmospheric suggestiveness is Stevenson's handful of shorter stories of the supernatural, 'The Body Snatcher', 'Markheim', 'The Bottle Imp', 'Olalla' and others.





## The classic English ghost story: M. R. James and others

The work of M. R. James (1862–1936) represents the English ghost story at its best. Dr Montague Rhodes James, the product of a classical education, was Provost of Eton College from 1918, an antiquarian and a scholar of cultured tastes. He led the life of an English gentleman, apparently undisturbed by outer strife or mental turmoil. His easy-paced ghost stories are not so much the expression of metaphysical uncertainties or personal anxieties, as games or exercises in construction; an appropriate pastime, perhaps, for a scholar. In his opinion, two ingredients were most important in the concocting of a ghost story: the atmosphere and the adroitly managed crescendo:

'Let us, then, be introduced to the actors in a placid way; let us see them going about their ordinary business, undisturbed by forebodings, pleased with their surroundings; and into this calm environment let the ominous thing put out its head, unobtrusively at first, and then more insistently, until it holds the stage.' Thus he described his aesthetic of the ghost story in the Foreword to his *Ghosts and Marvels* (1924).

James's stories first appeared in the smaller volumes, *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (1904),

*More Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (1911), *A Thin Ghost and Others* (1919), and *A Warning to the Curious and Other Ghost Stories* (1925). They have been collected in several omnibus volumes, especially *The Collected Ghost Stories of M. R. James* (1931). James brought a rare precision of style and a deep, classical erudition to the writing of ghost stories, while his spectres often haunt the elegant surroundings of cathedrals or country estates. 'Oh, Whistle and I'll Come to You, My Lad' (from *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary*), about a ghost with a face 'like crumpled linen', is often considered to be his best story, but many others have been widely anthologized.

Closest to M. R. James in technique, although less refined in his style and lacking James's economy in choice of detail, is Herbert Russell Wakefield (b. 1889), perhaps the last living representative of the classic ghost story writer. His stories have appeared in *Ghost Stories* (1932), *The Clock Strikes Twelve* (1939), *Strayers from Sheol* (1961), and other collections. Unlike James, Wakefield believes in the supernatural, and this gives his less polished stories a certain power.

Some of the best ghost stories in the English language have been written by Oliver Onions (1873–1961). His 'The Beckoning Fair One', for instance, tells of a haunted house and the temptation of a supernatural visitant, with a female ghost triumphing over the attractions of a living woman. Onions held the view that ghosts are present all the time, but we cannot see them except at extraordinary moments. In 1935, the stories in *Widdershins* (1911), *Ghosts in Daylight* (1924), and *The Painted Face* (1929), were combined with some new material to form *The Collected Short Stories of Oliver Onions*.

In the second rank, but still very readable, are the stories of E. F. Benson (1867–1940), which also turn up frequently in anthologies. The son of an archbishop of Canterbury, Benson wrote much popular fiction, including some collections of weird tales, such as *The Room in the Tower* (1912), *Spook Stories* (1928), and *Visible and Invisible* (1923). In 'Mrs Amworth' he describes a strangely gentle vampire, while 'Caterpillars' is a piece which literally crawls with insanity. H. P. Lovecraft particularly admired 'Negotium

Below, E. F. Benson (1867–1940), archbishop's son and author of a number of notable weird tales, including 'Caterpillars' (right) illustrated by Lawrence for the Famous Fantastic Mysteries reprint of June 1947.







Perambulans'. Another writer of the same kind was Richard Middleton (1882–1911), whose output of published fiction was small, but whose powerful and humorous 'The Ghost Ship', the title story of a collection of supernatural tales published in 1912, is well worth reading. Mention should also be made of W. W. Jacobs (1863–1943), whose 'The Monkey's Paw' – one of the most anthologized of all ghost stories – is a superlative horror version of the story of the three wishes, in which the last must be used to correct the follies caused by the first two.

The sea has provided a background for many weird tales, the best known theme probably being that of the Flying Dutchman, which forms the subject of Captain Marryat's novel *The Phantom Ship* (1839), amongst

others. Remarkable, too, is Wilhelm Hauff's 'Das Gespensterschiff' with its dead crew, and the unforgettable image of its captain nailed to the mast, doomed constantly to relive during the night the horrors of his last day. But of all writers who have concentrated on this aspect of weird fiction, William Hope Hodgson (1875–1918) is perhaps the most intense.

The son of an Essex clergyman, Hodgson spent eight years at sea, hating every minute of it, and this animosity is reflected in his stories, collected principally in *Men of Deep Waters* (1914) and *The Luck of the Strong* (1916). These, together with the novels, *The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'* (1907) and *The Ghost Pirates* (1909), portray the sea as a place of mystery and supernatural dread, especially in the



Opposite, detail from the cover (c. 1889) of a collection of Rudyard Kipling's ghost stories produced in paperback by the Indian Railway Library. Inset, detail from Sphere Books' reprint of *The Ghost Pirates* by W. H. Hodgson (1875–1918). Right, cover by James MacBryde for M. R. James's classic collection.



weed-covered regions of the Sargasso. Slime, fungus, indefinable rubbery substances, new and hideous forms of life emerging from the sea – these are recurring images in his work. 'The Derelict', probably his most impressive short story, describes a strange and nauseous new living entity; in 'The Voice of the Night' a voracious fungus swarms over a derelict ship, horribly transforming the survivors; in *The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'* a group of castaways drift into the weeds of the Sargasso Sea, finally landing on a small island with a valley full of huge mushrooms and, in the centre, a mysterious pit. . . .

Hodgson's preferred situation is the siege, with lonely survivors barricaded against the monsters outside. This scenario also recurs in his two land-based novels, *The House on the Borderland* (1908) and *The Nightland* (1912). In the first, an ancient manuscript records the life of the central figure, who lives with his sister and dog near a great chasm. He is being besieged by gigantic creatures resembling huge pigs, and the events seem to occur both in his own time and place, and also in an identical replica of it set in the far future,

whither he is repeatedly transported.

Hodgson may have been an influence on Lovecraft, for although he is not mentioned in the 1927 version of 'Supernatural Horror in Literature', in the final version he is highly commended, when his work had been brought to Lovecraft's attention. The situation of the siege is certainly one of Lovecraft's favourites, universalized to include the whole Earth, with forces from beyond liable to break in at any time.

*The Nightland*, a huge novel set millions of years in the future, combines fantasy and science fiction. The remnants of mankind live in The Last Redoubt, a metal pyramid almost eight miles high, an oasis of peace and warmth in a world of perpetual cold and darkness, where nightmarish monsters roam. C. S. Lewis was impressed by the imaginative power of Hodgson's vision, but there is some truth in his criticism that '*The Nightland* would have made it in eminence from the unforgettable sombre splendour of the images it presents, if it were not disfigured by a sentimental and irrelevant erotic interest and by a flat and foolish archaism of style'.

Hodgson was killed near Ypres in 1918. Almost forgotten after his death, he had a modest revival after World War II, when Arkham House brought out all his novels in an omnibus volume, *The House on the Borderland and Other Novels* (1946). Since then there have been a number of other editions, paperbacks and translations, including the comparatively feeble stories of the psychic sleuth Carnacki (*Carnacki the Ghost Finder*, 1913). But Hodgson's sea stories represent his finest writing, with their power of reflecting in their dreadful and outlandish life forms man's primeval fears.

Many writers of this period whose reputation does not rest primarily on their fantasy have made important contributions to the genre, ranging from the whimsical to the uncanny. They include A. E. Coppard (1878–1957), 'Saki' (H. H. Munro 1870–1916), and Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936), who frequently provided Indian settings for a number of poetic but gruesome stories of supernatural retribution, werewolves and the like ('The Phantom Rickshaw', 'The Return of Imray', 'They', 'The Mark of the Beast', and others).





*M. R. James (below), Provost of Eton College and high master of the urbane-uncanny school. Left, illustrations for a Polish edition of his Ghost Stories of an Antiquary. Bottom, a BBC television version (1975) of 'Lost Hearts'.*



On a somewhat different level is the fantasy of E. M. Forster (1879–1970), whose 'The Celestial Omnibus' uses fantasy as a metaphor for the creative imagination, emphasizing the gap between artistic consciousness and the dull world of the everyday. It was the title story of a collection of fantastic tales issued in 1911.





## Psychic subtleties: de la Mare, Machen, Blackwood



### CREWE

WHEN murky winter dusk begins to settle over the railway station at Crewe its first-class waiting-room grows steadily more stagnant. Particularly if one is alone in it. The long grimed windows do little more than sift the failing light that slopes in on them from the glass roof outside and is too feeble to penetrate into the recesses beyond. And the grained massive black-leathered furniture becomes less and less inviting. It appears to have been made for a scene of extreme and diabolical violence that one may hope will never occur. One can hardly at any rate imagine it to have been designed by a really *good* man!

*The opening paragraph of Walter de la Mare's 'Crewe', from On the Edge (1930), with a woodcut by Elizabeth Rivers.*

In the fantasy of Walter de la Mare (1873–1956), the celebrated poet and writer introduces the supernatural element with such subtlety that its very existence is sometimes uncertain. He is a master of the psychological short story, investigating the character of his creations with a power of analysis akin to that of Julien Green, except that de la Mare was not attracted by Freud's theories, and sexuality plays little part in his work. Like Green, however, he often writes of very young people, youth being an especially impressionable age; or else of very old and strange characters, weird and alone, belonging partly to this world and partly to another, unseen one – like Mr Bloom in 'The Recluse'. Ultimately it is up to the reader to decide whether de la Mare really describes the other world of the occult in his fantasy, or whether it is the imagination of the characters, as they undergo extreme experiences, which is responsible for what appears to be happening.

This inconclusiveness, achieving its effect through suggestion and implication, is what gives his work its particular force; the suspense of waiting for something indefinite to appear may place a greater strain upon the

nerves than actually to face some ghost or monster. Thus the old hag in 'Seaton's Aunt' may or may not be a being from an evil and incomprehensible world, invisible but constantly affecting us; a psychic vampire characterized, like many other females, as a spider. As Seaton says: 'She's living on inside, on what you're rotten without. That's what it is – a cannibal feast. She's a spider. It doesn't much matter what you call it. It means the same kind of thing. I tell you, Withers, she hates me; and you can scarcely dream what that hatred means. I used to think I had an inkling of the reason. It's oceans deeper than that. It just lies behind: herself against myself. Why, after all, how much do we really understand of anything? We don't even know our own histories, and not a tenth, not a tenth of the reasons.'

Seaton is certainly a strange boy, and the narrator of the story is inclined to take his fears for invention till, many years later, Seaton's death as a young man, on the point of getting married, causes him to flee in terror. But what really happened remains a matter of conjecture. This characteristic open-endedness suggests that de la Mare may have been influenced by Henry James's 'The Turn of the Screw' (1898), the celebrated story of the apparent possession of two innocent children by the ghosts of a former servant and his sweetheart. This must surely be the most analysed ghost story in the whole canon, heatedly discussed even by those who don't care for ghost stories.

De la Mare published his first work under the pseudonym of 'Walter Ramal', and gained recognition as a writer of fiction with the fantasy novel, *Memoirs of a Midget* (1921), which appeared after two other fantastic novels, *Henry Brocken* (1904) and *The Return* (1911). His well-known short stories, among them 'The Orgy: an Idyll', 'All Hallows', 'Out of the Deep', and 'The Recluse', were published in such volumes as *The Riddle and Other Tales* (1923), *Broomsticks and other Tales* (1925), *On the Edge* (1930), and *The Connoisseur and Other Stories* (1926). Among his contemporaries, Conrad Aiken alone comes close to the intensity of Walter de la Mare.

Unlike de la Mare, Algernon Blackwood (1869–1951), perhaps the most important







Opposite, *Out of the Deep*, cover for a Walter de la Mare collection by Hans Ulrich and Ute Osterwalder for the 'Bibliothek des Hauses Usher' issue, edited by Kalju Kirde. Right, Arthur Machen's pagan fantasy is well captured by an image of the god Pan, from a recent Panther Books collection of Machen stories.



British writer of the supernatural in this century, was a specialist in fantasy, and a mystic. In his study, *The Supernatural in Fiction* (1952), Peter Penzoldt quotes a letter which Blackwood wrote to him:

'My fundamental interest, I suppose, is signs and proof of other powers that lie hidden in us all; the extension, in other words, of human faculty. So many of my stories, therefore, deal with extension of consciousness; speculative and imaginative treatment of possibilities outside our normal range of consciousness.'

For a time Blackwood was, like Yeats and Machen, not to mention the 'Great Beast' Aleister Crowley, a member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, a loose organization of people interested in magic. After a repressed childhood and a strict, puritanical upbringing, Blackwood escaped at twenty to Canada, returning to his native England only after many years of exile. He then turned from journalism to fiction with his first book, *The Empty House* (1906), and this was followed by some twenty more, including *The Listener and Other Stories* (1907), *The Dance of Death* (1927), *Ancient Sorceries and Other Tales* (c. 1927), and several novels of fantastic adventure like *The Centaur* (1911) or *A Prisoner in Fairyland* (1913).

In Blackwood's stories, there can be no doubt about the intrusion of the supernatural into the ordinary. That is always the point of his stories, and he builds up to it slowly, starting in a perfectly natural, unsinister, often even idyllic manner. His unspectacular, unobtrusive style is just of sufficient quality to generate the desired effect of awe and meta-

physical wonder. Most often the supernatural appears as something frightening, but not always so; in some cases it is a helpful, benevolent agency. Blackwood's writing reveals an allegiance to some sort of pantheism or panpsychism, all nature being spiritual. He is skilled at presenting various *genii loci*, be they of the Canadian wilderness (a truly original and horrible monster in 'The Wendigo'), the Alps, the Caucasus, ancient Egypt, or the watery landscapes of the Danube (in 'The Willows', where the trees wake to buzzing, threatening life). Especially effective is his treatment of haunted houses, which he depicts as soaked in the evil emanations of crimes or warped wills. A strong and persistent atmosphere suffuses his tales, and the culmination is often some kind of almost mystic experience, offering a glimpse into another, spiritual world.

In Dr John Silence Blackwood has created the most memorable of all psychic detectives. The earlier Dr Hesselius of Le Fanu's *In a Glass Darkly* (1872) is too smug and infallible, while Hodgson's Carnacki or Seabury Quinn's Jules de Grandin often verge on self-parody. John Silence, on the other hand, is a fully rounded and believable human being, no less assailed by doubts than other humans, and occasionally forced to admit his helplessness, as in 'Ancient Sorceries', which is probably the best of the series.

Arthur Machen (1863–1947), a contemporary of de la Mare and Blackwood, but very different in approach, was born Arthur Llewelyn Jones, the son of a Welsh clergyman. In fantasy terms his inspiration was Celtic, though he spent most of his life in London, where he was a comparatively well-known translator and man of letters. Commercially never very successful, he achieved brief fame when his story, 'The Bowmen' (1914), gave rise to the legend of the 'Angels of Mons', spectral warriors who were believed to have actually fought on the side of the Allies during World War I. Lovecraft warmly commended 'the elements of hidden horror and brooding fright' in his stories, which 'attain an almost incomparable substance and realistic acuteness', but other critics have shared Philip Van Doren Stern's opinion that 'a taste for his work has to be acquired'.



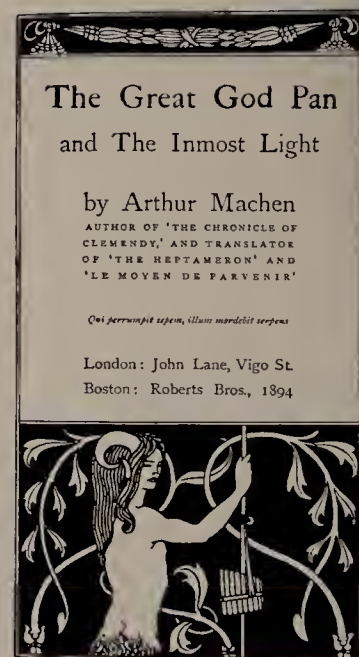


Many readers have been put off by the sheer volume of horrible events in Machen's stories, the frequent transformations of his characters into beasts (or something even worse), and his concern with Sin, spelt with a capital S, as manifested in vague sexual transgressions. Retribution tends to be swift and gruesome. Francis Leicester, for instance, the hero of 'The Novel of the White Powder' (despite its title not a novel), accidentally drinks wine prepared for a Black Mass, after which his personality changes, and he becomes a lecher and a sensualist. His punishment is to be transformed into a living horror:

'There upon the floor was a dark and putrid mass, seething with corruption and hideous rottenness, neither liquid nor solid, but melting and changing before our eyes, and bubbling with unctuous oily bubbles like boiling pitch. And out of the midst of it shone two burning points like eyes, and I saw a writhing and stirring as of limbs, and something moved and lifted up that might have been an arm.'

Unfortunately, Machen's writing sometimes raises a smile rather than a shiver. *The Great God Pan* (1894), usually considered his masterpiece, describes an attempt to penetrate the veil of shadows and dreams which compose the physical world, in order to glimpse the real world behind it; an experiment known to the

ancients as 'seeing the god Pan'. To this end an operation is carried out on a girl, Mary, who subsequently becomes an idiot. Further episodes describe the wicked activities of a certain femme fatale, who drives a number of men to suicide before retribution overtakes her, and she undergoes Machen's favourite transformation into beast. Finally it is revealed that this woman is none other than the offspring of Mary and the great god Pan. Machen also wrote several stories about 'the Little People', the viciously evil creatures of Welsh folklore, notably 'The Novel of the Black Seal' and 'The Shining Pyramid'. Machen's occasional lapses apart, he was the author of a charming book of memoirs, and a number of fantasies which make elegant use of his Welsh heritage. As Stern points out, in his best novel, *The Hill of Dreams* (1907), and also in *The Great Return* (1915), the 'writing is polished and elaborate, the thinking is subtle, and the imagery rich with the glowing colour that is to be found in medieval church glass'. *The Hill of Dreams* may perhaps be taken as a poetic metaphor for the writer. Its impractical and unwordly hero, an aspiring writer, becomes immersed to the exclusion of all else in a number of vivid dreams, the most memorable of which take place in the Roman city of Isca Silurum, the ancient name for the author's own birth place, Caerleon-on-Usk.



Top, 'The Wendigo', Algernon Blackwood's potent and original creation from the Canadian wilds, illustrated by Fox for Famous Fantastic Mysteries, June 1944. Above, Aubrey Beardsley's title-page for *The Great God Pan* (1894).





## Horror in the USA

Bierce and the inheritance of Poe/  
The demonic vision of H. P. Lovecraft/  
Horror publishers: Arkham House and others/  
The Cthulhu Mythos/The magazines: *Weird  
Tales* and others.





## Bierce and the inheritance of Poe

In 1913 Ambrose Gwinnett Bierce, after Poe probably America's best writer of the supernatural, disappeared in the turbulence of the Mexican civil war when he was over seventy years old, never to be heard from again. Even the date of his death is unknown.

Born in 1842 of farming parents in Neigs County, Ohio, Bierce left home at the age of fifteen. During the Civil War he fought on the Union side, being wounded twice, and was promoted for bravery in the field of battle. His war experiences provided material for the stories which appear in the collection *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* (1891), better known under its later title, *In the Midst of Life*.

Bierce settled in San Francisco, where for many years he was an influential literary journalist, including among his friends Mark Twain and Bret Harte. He spent the years from 1872 till 1876 in England, where he published his first book, *The Fiend's Delight* (1872). But full recognition came only after his death, when that supreme arbiter of literary excellence, H. L. Mencken, singled him out as an exemplary writer.

'Bitter' Bierce's misanthropy was less an affectation than the result of a disappointed idealism, and many of his masterpieces of black humour and macabre irony derive their effect from the incongruity between an objectively unbearable reality and its appearance when seen through innocent eyes. None of these tales is bleaker than 'Chickamauga', in which a deaf-mute boy, who is normally afraid even of the rabbits, gleefully rides upon the backs of horribly wounded soldiers as they crawl away from the battlefield to their deaths. His freedom from fear is the result of his failure to understand what is really happening, and he takes it all for a game. Another famous story, 'An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge', describes the extended hallucinations of a man about to be hanged. In his vision he has escaped, reaching safety and the arms of his wife at the moment when, in actuality, the rope tightens around his throat and his neck snaps.

Like Poe, Bierce was a master of the short story, which he used with a journalist's economy to achieve quite complex effects. Many lead up to a startling climax after the initial presentation of a considerable amount



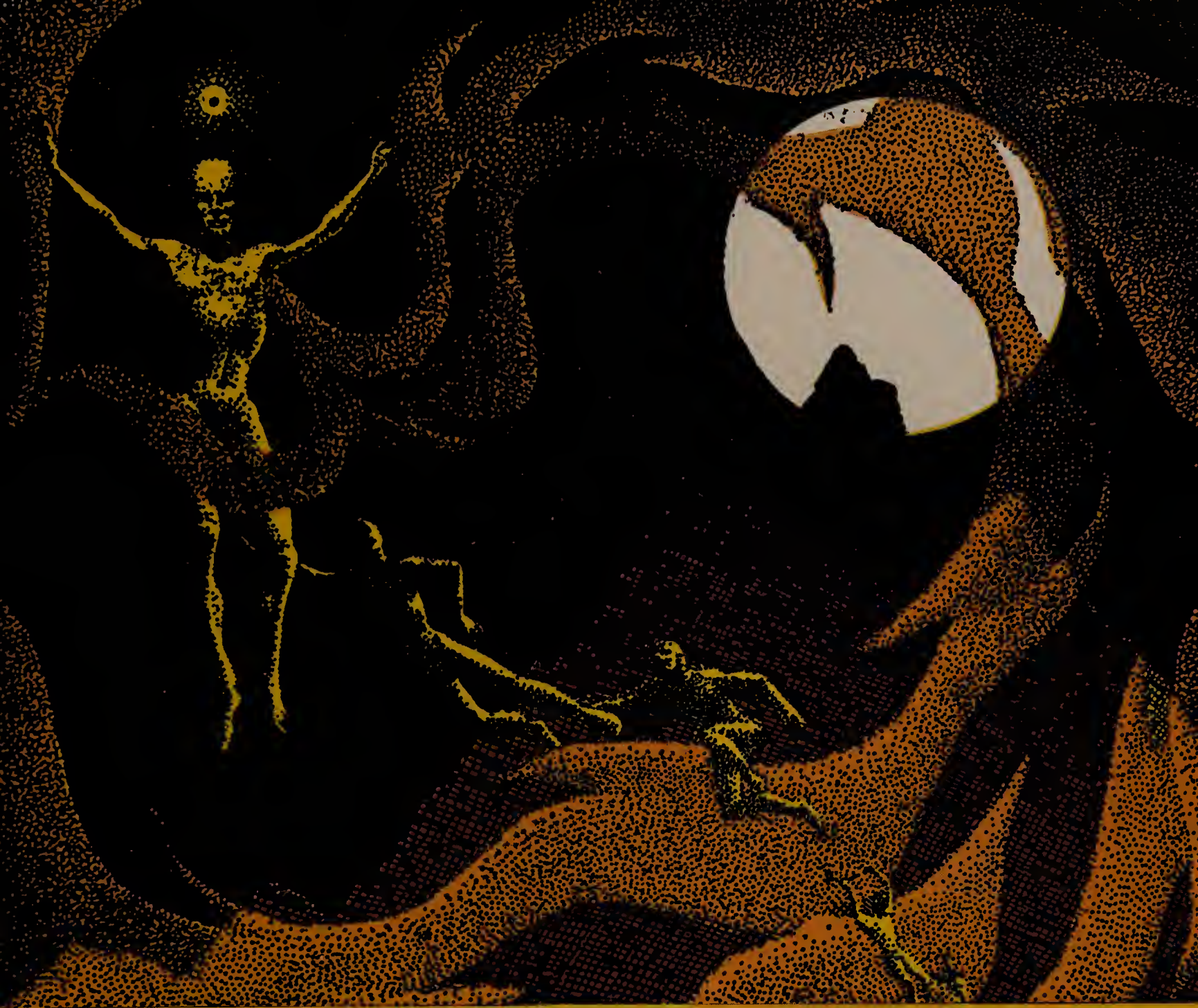
of circumstantial material. But Bierce was more interested than Poe in the psychology of fear. In several stories fear is the actual cause of death, as in 'One of the Missing' or 'The Suitable Surroundings'. Elsewhere, games with the supernatural may abruptly become reality, as in 'The Middle Toe of the Right Foot', in which a light-heartedly invoked ghost actually appears. In other stories, such as 'The Death of Halpin Frayser', events which seem to indicate the supernatural turn out to be the work of murderously inclined humans.

Bierce was a genuine moralist who eschewed moralizing, preferring to make his impact by pretending to applaud crime; his works are mined with irony. Collections of his sardonic humour may be found in *Fantastic Fables* (1899) and *The Devil's Dictionary* (originally *The Cynic's Notebook*, 1906), while 'Negligible Tales' and 'The Parenticide Club' in his collected works contain many tall stories. Paradoxical, antithetical, understated, these are put across in a remarkable style. Bierce's influence may perhaps be seen in a passage in L. P. Hartley's 'The Travelling Grave', where one speaker thinks the subject under discussion is perambulators, while the other knows that it is coffins. The French surrealists were particularly impressed by Bierce's work.

Another American writer, Robert W. Chambers (1865–1933), was in his lifetime an enormously popular author of historical and

*Tales of Soldiers and Civilians (1891): vignette from a modern edition of Ambrose Bierce's harsh stories, many of which were influenced by his Civil War experiences.*





'I thought of the King in Yellow, wrapped in the fantastic colors of his tattered mantle...': scene from Robert W. Chambers' 'The Mask', illustrated by Hannes Bok in *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, December 1943.

society novels, but today he is totally forgotten save for a small volume of supernatural fiction, *The King in Yellow* (1895), and a handful of other fantasies. This is a good example of the way in which fantastic fiction, even when not particularly successful in commercial terms, may be kept alive for a long period through the enthusiasm of a small circle of devoted readers. The sinister book which gives its title to the collection, *The King in Yellow*, features largely in the stories entitled 'The Yellow Sign', 'The Mask', and 'The Repairer of Reputations', but whether the metaphysical evils to which it refers have actual reality remains deliberately ambiguous. These fantasies by Chambers have had an enormous influence on later pulp fantasy.

Other popular American novelists of this period who sometimes ventured into the realm of the supernatural include Edith Wharton (1862–1937), Mary E. Wilkins-Freeman (1852–1930), and F. Marion Crawford (1854–1909).

Wilkins-Freeman's stories, collected in *The Wind in the Rose Bush, and Other Stories of the Supernatural* (1903), include some excellent examples of the uncanny form, especially the gruesome vampire story, 'Luella Miller'.

F. Marion Crawford's style of horror is more robust and straightforward, featuring such events as decaying bodies which come to life, like the clammy corpse in 'The Upper Berth' (1894). Also worth mentioning are his 'The Screaming Skull' and 'The Dead Smile' (both from *Uncanny Tales*, 1911), which may frequently be found in anthologies. But it was Edward Lucas White (1866–1934) who was responsible for one of the most terrible acts of revenge to appear in the pages of supernatural horror, in the story 'Lukundoo' from *Lukundoo and Other Stories* (1927). In this repulsive tale a reckless explorer is cursed by an African witch-doctor, with the result that small human bodies grow out of his skin. Even when cut off, they continue to grow until the wretched man dies.



## The demonic vision of H. P. Lovecraft

Published during his lifetime almost exclusively in pulp magazines, and dying virtually unknown, Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890–1937) has only recently become world famous. A number of films, several records and a play, *Lovecraft's Follies*, are based on his works, and his paperbacks now sell in the hundred thousands. He has often been compared to Poe, whom he admired, and has sometimes even been called his superior.

Whatever the truth of this, Lovecraft resembles Poe in one respect: his literary reputation was initially greater abroad, especially in France, Italy, Spain and West Germany. He has been highly praised by Jean Cocteau and the eminent Austrian poet H. C. Artmann, and, as with Baudelaire's translations of Poe, German translations of Lovecraft by Artmann or Rudolf Hermsstein have been said to be better than the originals. Lovecraft has found appreciative European critics, such as Italy's Giorgio Manganelli, but the few English-language critics who have paid attention to him, such as Edmund Wilson and Colin Wilson, have dealt rather harshly with him. Colin Wilson, however, later admitted that he had been unfair to Lovecraft, and indeed himself wrote some novels in the same vein, e.g. *The Mind Parasites* (1967) or *The Philosopher's Stone* (1969). In America, Lovecraft has become a cult figure, especially among the young, and the subject of a somewhat pedantic and schoolmasterly biography by L. Sprague de Camp (*Lovecraft: A Biography*, 1975). Recently, however, he has also received much academic attention.

Lovecraft was born on August 20, 1890, the son of a travelling salesman subject to fits of madness, who was to die of paresis of the brain. His mother (who also died insane, in 1921) and his two aunts pampered him during his childhood and adolescence. Shy, over-protected and mentally precocious (he is said to have read at the age of three), Lovecraft became the bookish 'recluse of Providence', remaining for all his life an outsider who was more at home in the classical world and the eighteenth century than in his own time. But his avoidance of social intercourse (although he could be quite charming) was compensated for by a voluminous correspondence which took up much of his time. It has been estimated



The Lovecraft image: above, a 1925 silhouette; opposite (top left to right), portraits by Duane Rimel, Philippe Druillet and (in periwig) Virgil Finlay. Opposite (left), Finlay's illustration for 'The Shunned House', and (right) Lovecraft's own sketch for his tombstone, drawn on the back of an envelope.





that he wrote at least 100,000 letters, some of them running to 60–70 closely written pages. A ‘gentleman’ in his outlook and standards, he showed no interest in the commercial aspects of writing. At the age of eight he came under the spell of E. A. Poe, and then went on to discover other writers of weird fiction. Their work is evaluated in his impressive critical essay ‘Supernatural Horror in Literature’, the result of eight months’ work, which was first published in 1927 by W. Paul Cook in his

amateur magazine, *The Recluse*.

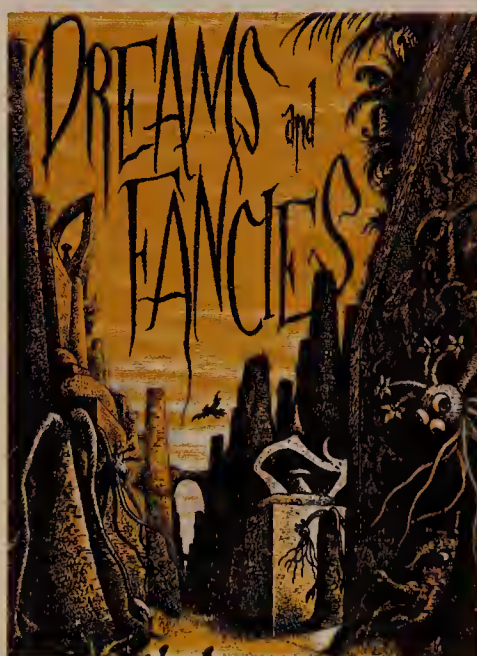
Lovecraft began writing at an early age, corresponding with amateur journals and pulp magazines on subjects ranging from literature, chemistry and astronomy to racial theory. He shared some of the ethnic prejudices common in his day, but he married a Jewish girl, Sonia H. Greene, in 1924, and numbered many Jews among his friends. A bundle of contradictions, Lovecraft’s proclaimed beliefs were oddly at variance with his personal actions. One writer



has described him as a complex blend of neurasthenic invalid and Nordic superman; of arrogant poseur and lonely misfit; of cosmic fantasist and rigorous scientist-materialist; of scholar, scoffer and seeker; of life hater, and lover who never found an object worthy of his love, or who never found himself worthy to offer love, save in the indirect guise of these torrential, compulsive letters.

His nocturnal habits, Victorian prudishness and reticence, his unwillingness to leave his beloved New England, and his inability to provide a steady income, led eventually to the breakdown of his marriage. Lovecraft was doubtful about the quality of his own writing, submitting his work to publishers only reluctantly, and then often in almost illegible form. Some of his stories were sent in by friends without his knowledge. The only magazine which he considered of sufficient literary standing for his work was *Weird Tales*, whose erratic editor Farnsworth Wright turned down many of Lovecraft's best tales (some of which he bought later), providing him with only a small and irregular income. Most of his money came from rewriting, for negligible sums, the manuscripts of truly illiterate writers. But Lovecraft had inherited some money, and he was extremely modest in his needs, claiming that he managed to subsist on 19 cents a day.

Lovecraft died of cancer on 15 March 1937, virtually unnoticed in his own time but a legend in the present, 'his own most fantastic creation' (Vincent Starrett). Many have called him a bad writer, and it is easy to laugh at his stereotyped gods and Great Old Ones, whose impact is sometimes ridiculous rather than frightening, and his excessive use of such epithets as 'unholy', 'unspeakable', 'horrible', 'eldritch' and 'blasphemous'. 'Surely one of the primary rules for writing an effective tale of horror is never to use any of these words,' admonished Edmund Wilson. And at worst his stories read like parodies. It is also true that Lovecraft couldn't write dialogue, and tended to present the same character again and again: a frightened representative of mankind. Evil entities from beyond are seen to break through into his own landscape, preferably somewhere in New England, in the fictitious towns of Arkham, Kingsport or Dunwich,



Top, *The Thing on the Doorstep*: cover by Hans Ulrich and Ute Osterwalder for the Insel edition of Lovecraft stories. The title story was inspired by a nightmare. Above, two early

Lovecraft collections, jacket illustrations by Richard Taylor and Frank Utpatel (right), under the Arkham House imprint, which was established to put Lovecraft's work into book form.





Above, Lovecraft's *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*: Ulrich/Osterwalder cover for the 'Bibliothek des Hauses Usher' edition. Right, Helmut Wenske's illustration for 'The Music of Erich Zann', considered by the self-critical Lovecraft as one of his most effective stories.

presenting a danger not only to the sanity and actual existence of Lovecraft's narrators, but also to mankind in general.

This timeless global threat is typical in Lovecraft's main stories, such as 'Pickman's Model', 'The Colour Out of Space', 'The Dunwich Horror', 'The Shadow Over Innsmouth', *At the Mountains of Madness*, *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, and especially 'The Shadow Out of Time', which even Colin Wilson praised in his *The Strength to Dream* (1962) as Lovecraft's best story, saying that the final effect of the tale is to produce an authentic impression of awe and mystery, resting on the evocation of vistas of time and space. Some minor stories were influenced by Lord Dunsay's sonorous writings, while others explore themes from the traditional repertoire of weird fiction, but in his major stories Lovecraft is very much his own man, creating a unique effect of cosmic horror.

It was the Polish Lovecraft scholar, Marek Wydmuch who pointed out that Lovecraft achieves his characteristically dense effects



by the introduction of the frightened narrator, an ordinary human who reflects and multiplies the horrible events which he witnesses but is hardly able to believe, acting as it were as a sounding-board in a world hideously different from the normal. Lovecraft's fiction is typically the opposite of the understated and restrained style of a traditional ghost story writer like M. R. James, who gradually increases the tension, slowly and carefully building up to the climax. James's stories begin leisurely, much like a normal story, with the supernatural gradually creeping in. Lovecraft, on the other hand, while hardly less careful in his build-up to the climax, suggests the horrible from the beginning; his heroes are barely coherent as they tell the reader, almost against their own inclinations, but driven by a sense of duty to mankind, what horrors they have witnessed. These horrors are then confirmed in what is usually a powerful climax.

Lovecraft gives his inventions credibility by means of scholarly references to books, diaries, newspaper clippings, interviews, and other quasi-documentary, carefully accumulated evidence, and by inserting his fictitious sources among real books and facts of history. His heroes are usually familiar with the occult, and resemble classical scholars rather than experimental scientists; what they report on is a matter of discovery rather than invention. Lovecraft's demonic visions lead to a veritable orgasm of horror, and indeed Giorgio Manganelli has called him 'a pornographer of horror'. But whatever his failings as a writer, Lovecraft's labyrinthine demonology has an enormous psychological attraction, articulating a kind of dread which, while archaic, yet has a surprisingly modern application in its total effect.



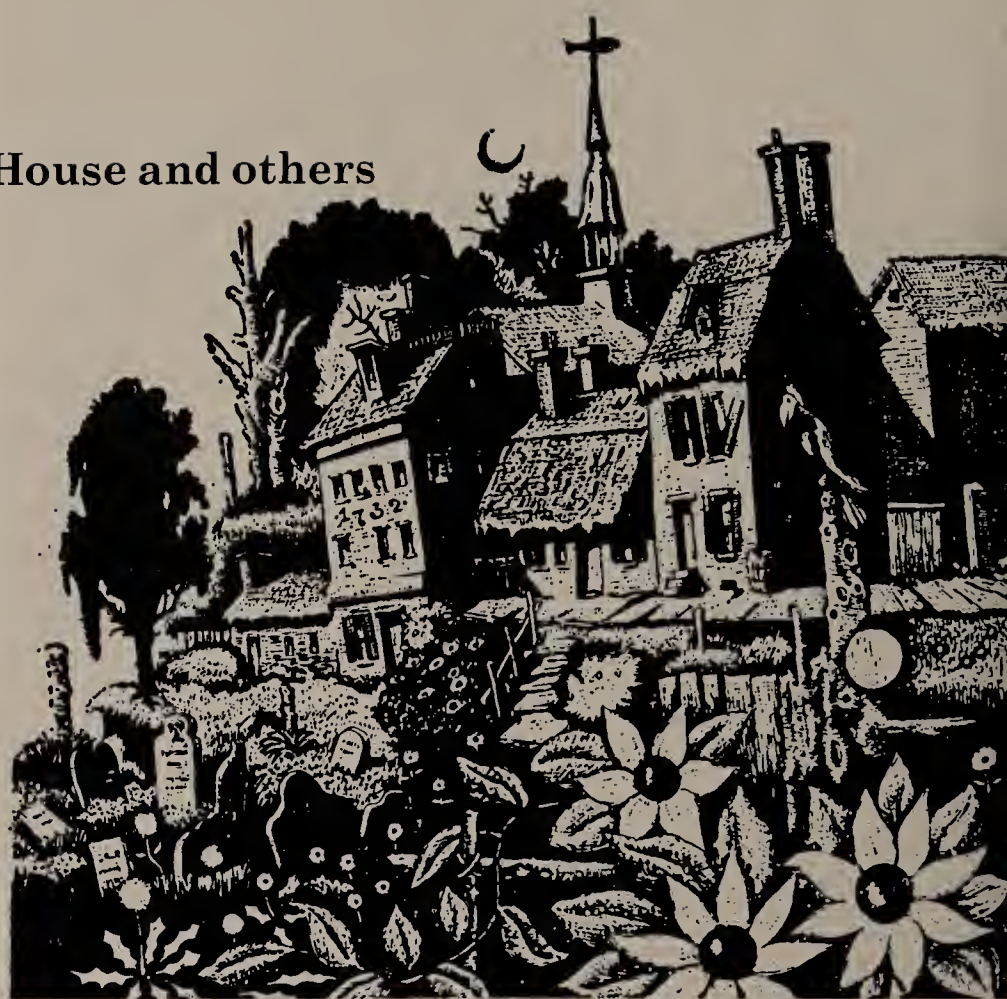
## Horror publishers: Arkham House and others

Various publishers, at different times and in different countries, have had a specialist interest in fantasy; Georg Müller, for instance, in Germany, during the years preceding and following World War I; and in more recent times Insel with their 'Library of the House of Usher' (1969–74) and Carl Hanser with their 'Bibliotheca Dracula' (1967–74), as well as Zsolnay's current series entitled 'Fantastic Novels'. In Belgium Marabout has published more fantasy than any other French-language publisher. In the USA there has been the 'Adult Fantasy' series from Ballantine, and Dover Books' distinguished list of nineteenth-century fantasy writing. One might also mention the 'Library of the Occult', edited by Dennis Wheatley for Sphere Books in England. But one publisher undoubtedly stands supreme in its dedication to fantasy: Arkham House in Sauk City, Wisconsin, USA, founded by the energetic and prolific August Derleth (1909–71), with help from Donald Wandrei.

It was not Derleth's intention to become a publisher, but he was a good friend and admirer of H. P. Lovecraft, and, when Lovecraft died in 1937, Derleth sought a way to preserve his best stories in book form. During Lovecraft's lifetime only one of his books was published, *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* (1936), as a privately printed volume of which only a very small number of copies were bound. So Derleth put together a collection entitled *The Outsider*, that being both the title of a popular Lovecraft story and a description of Lovecraft's role in life.

Derleth's own publishers, Scribner's, reluctantly rejected the book, as did Simon and Schuster, and it was suggested to Derleth that he should publish it under his own imprint. Late in 1939, Derleth's dream became a reality, thanks to the personal sacrifice of himself and Wandrei – they raised the necessary funds themselves – and Arkham House was born with the publication of *The Outsider and Others*. The book was published in a limited edition of 1268 copies for \$5.00 (the pre-publication price had been \$3.50), a sum considered outrageous by some readers, who later were glad to pay far more for the same book (it sells now at about \$300.00.)

Although at first founded solely to put



Lovecraft's best stories into book form, Derleth later added many other books and writers to his list, all in the domain of fantasy fiction. Besides Lovecraft, the best *Weird Tales* writers were published by Arkham House, as well as a number of well-known British authors: Algernon Blackwood, L. P. Hartley, Lady Cynthia Asquith, A. E. Coppard, H. Russell Wakefield, William Hope Hodgson, J. Sheridan Le Fanu and Lord Dunsany. All Arkham House books become valuable collector's items as soon as they go out of print, and, apart from Lovecraft's fiction and letters, no book has ever been reprinted under the Arkham House imprint. Among the rarest Arkham House books are, *Beyond the Wall of Sleep* (1943), *Marginalia* (1944), *Something About Cats* (1949), all by H. P. Lovecraft; *Out of Space and Time* (1942) and *Lost Worlds* (1944) by Clark Ashton Smith; *Jumbee and Other Uncanny Tales* (1944) and *West India Lights* (1946) by Henry S. Whitehead; *The Opener of the Way* (1945) by Robert Bloch; *The Hounds of Tindalos* (1946) by Frank Belknap Long; *The House on the Borderland and Other Novels* (1946) by William Hope Hodgson; *Skull-Face and Others* (1946) by Robert E. Howard.

In 1948 and 1949 Derleth also published eight issues of the literary magazine, *The Arkham Sampler*, which combined fiction, poetry and

Above, Lovecraft's fictional city of Arkham (Salem, Mass.), here recreated by Lee Brown Coye, was to provide the name for August Derleth's celebrated fantasy imprint. Opposite (top), early Arkham House covers by Ronald Clyne, Frank Wakefield, Frank Utpatel. Opposite (right), *The Shadow over Innsmouth* (1936), illustrated by Frank Utpatel, was the only book by Lovecraft to be published in his lifetime.





criticism in the fields of fantasy and SF. But the venture took up too much of his time, and it folded after two years. Then from 1967–71 Derleth published ten issues of a similar, if more modestly produced, house magazine, *The Arkham Collector*.

Arkham House set an example that was eagerly emulated after World War II, when many small fantasy presses sprang up; but since few of their owners had Derleth's idealism, literary discrimination, determination, and sound business sense, most disappeared as quickly as they had arisen, although some newer outfits are still operating on a smaller scale. Admittedly, Derleth published many books of his own which are not of the first quality, such as *The Mask of Cthulhu* (1958) and *The Trail of Cthulhu* (1962), and put into print a number of posthumous 'collaborations' with Lovecraft based only on the most scrappy of outlines, or a few hundred words of text, (such as Lovecraft's 1,200 words for the novel *The Lurker at the Threshold*, 1945 – which is, by the way, the best of Derleth's Lovecraft imitations), but the dedication of the man to Lovecraft's literary cause is undeniable.

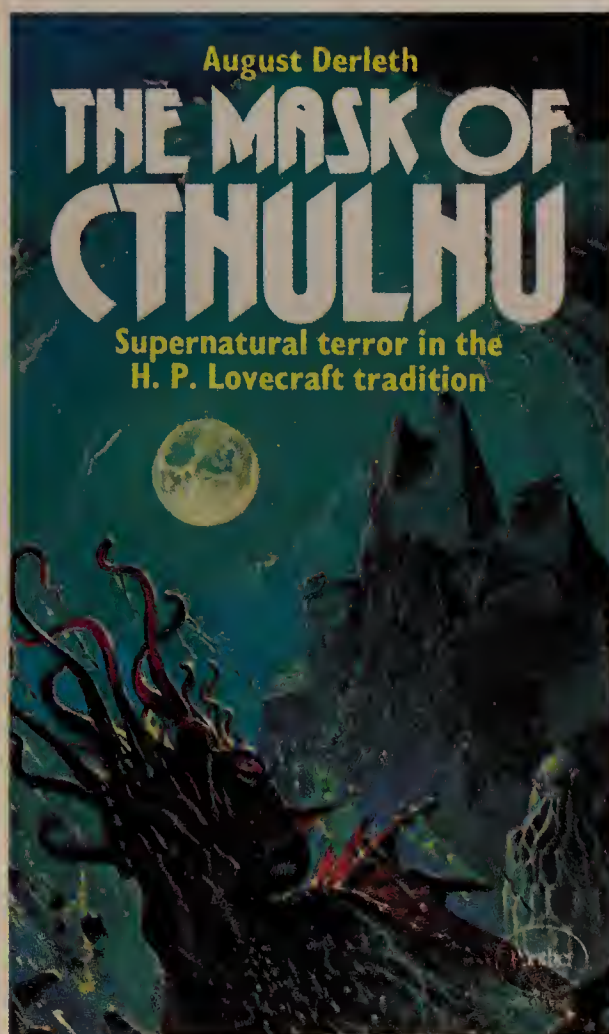
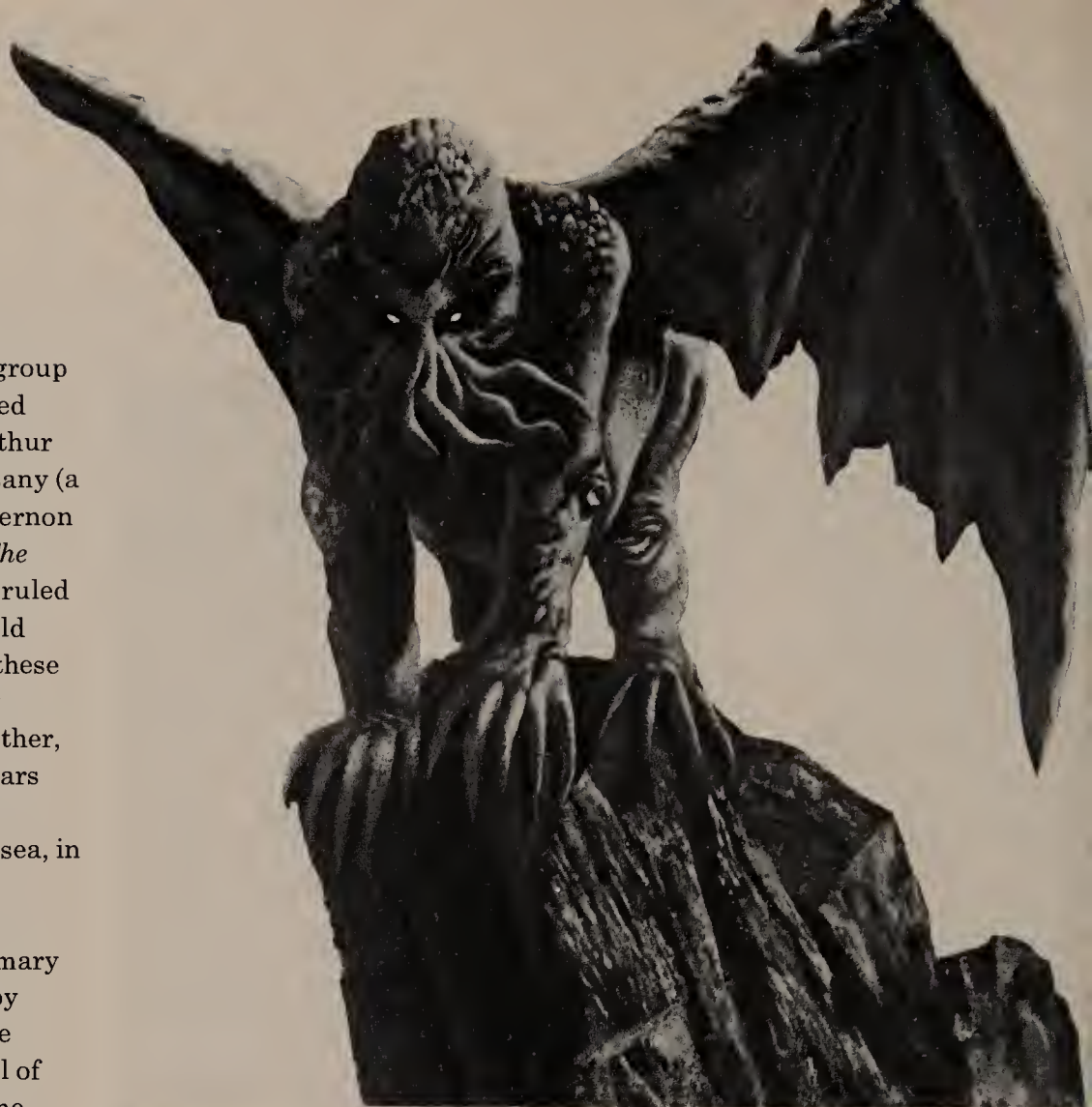
Although not an important writer of fantasy, Derleth was a regional novelist of some repute, the author of over a hundred books, and for decades Arkham House was only kept afloat with money from Derleth's more profitable writings. But whatever his failings, Derleth deserves credit for having saved Lovecraft from oblivion and set him on course to his present world fame. To a very large degree the literary reputation of Lovecraft is the result of Derleth's work, and seldom has a writer had a more loyal disciple. It says much for the solid base of Derleth's enterprise that Arkham House is very much alive even after the death of its founder, and that its most ambitious undertaking, the publication of five volumes of Lovecraft's instructive and frequently charming letters, was completed in 1976.



## The Cthulhu Mythos

The basic idea underlying a prominent group of H. P. Lovecraft's stories, partly derived from features of stories by E. A. Poe, Arthur Machen (his 'Little People'), Lord Dunsany (a pantheon of gods), Ambrose Bierce, Algernon Blackwood and Robert W. Chambers (*The King in Yellow*), is that Earth was once ruled by hideous creatures called the Great Old Ones, who were finally driven out. But these beings from beyond, who are invariably hostile to man, and frequently to each other, still exist in dormant form on various stars and planets, from Pluto to the farthest galaxies, while others lurk beneath the sea, in Antarctic ice fields, or in subterranean caverns.

According to August Derleth, the primary stories of the Cthulhu Mythos written by Lovecraft were thirteen in number: 'The Nameless City', 'The Festival', 'The Call of Cthulhu', 'The Colour Out of Space', 'The Dunwich Horror', 'The Whisperer in Darkness', 'The Dreams in the Witch-House', 'The Haunter of the Dark', 'The Shadow over





Innsmouth', 'The Shadow Out of Time', 'At the Mountains of Madness', 'The Case of Charles Dexter Ward' and 'The Thing on the Doorstep'. Others have prepared different lists. The publication of 'The Call of Cthulhu' in *Weird Tales*, February 1928, though not the first story in the cycle, brought about the existence of what later came to be called the 'Cthulhu Mythos' (although not by Lovecraft himself). Nobody at that time could have guessed what proportions the phenomenon would attain. Not only were Cthulhu stories written by Lovecraft and his circle of close friends – Frank Belknap Long, August Derleth, Robert Bloch, C. A. Smith, or Robert E. Howard – but by many others, even in the present time, including Colin Wilson.

Newer writers like J. Ramsey Campbell or Brian Lumley have transferred the locale from Lovecraft's beloved New England to their native Great Britain. But few, if any, of these disciples have achieved the intensity of Lovecraft's tales, and for the most part they do little beyond adding their own monstrosities and books of evil lore to Lovecraft's. Thus C. A. Smith created Tsathoggua and the *Book of Eibon*, while Robert Bloch added *De Vermis Mysteriis*, by 'Ludvig Prinn', to Lovecraft's own evil tomes, such as the *Pnakotic Manuscript*, *R'lyeh Text*, *Book of Dzylan* and above all the famous *Necronomicon*, supposed to have been written by the mad Arab, Abdul Alhazred (a name affected by Lovecraft in some of his childhood pranks). Robert E. Howard contributed the *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* of Von Junzt, suggestive of unspeakable evils well conveyed by the title's grammatical assault on the German language. And of course there were many more.

The ever generous Lovecraft gave his seal of approval to some of these creations by incorporating them in his own later stories, and he even expressly allowed Robert Bloch to annihilate him in a story called 'The Shambler from the Stars', killing off Bloch (in his guise of Robert Blake) in his own story, 'The Haunter of the Dark', by way of reprisal. Many of these exchanges and additions are somewhat puerile, of interest mainly to those fans of the genre who like to compile glossaries and concordances, a breed especially common in the United States. Cult

figures like Edgar Rice Burroughs, James Branch Cabell, J. R. R. Tolkien, Robert E. Howard or H. P. Lovecraft seem to invite this superficial sort of approach. For example, Lin Carter in his popular book, *Lovecraft: A Look Behind the 'Cthulhu Mythos'* (1972), while presenting veritable mountains of literary gossip and cult lore, together with biographical as well as bibliographical data, never says a word about the essence of the Cthulhu Mythos, or the reasons behind its undeniable psychological attraction. For, beside their cosmic trappings, decaying cities and sinister landscapes of regression and decadence, beside these monstrosities assailing the olfactory and visual senses of man – effects which betray a certain touch of irony – there is much psychological substance to Lovecraft's creations. Unlike Poe, he was trying not just to write stories of human beings in extreme conditions, but to create a system of horror, a gigantic and thorough-going projection of subconscious fears upon the cosmos, reaching from subterranean tunnels, symbolizing the human unconsciousness, to the very stars; a cosmic connection not just of the past or of the future, but of the eternal now, brief moments of light and sanity in an ocean of darkness:

'We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age.' ('The Call of Cthulhu'.)

This is perhaps the psychological basis of the Cthulhu Mythos, the feeling that, whatever horrors are described, even greater horrors lurk beyond the feeble light of our reason; and all his evil-smelling Great Old Ones, the idiot god Azathoth, Yog-Sothoth, Nyarlathotep, Great Cthulhu and Shub-Niggurath, 'the black goat of the woods with a thousand young', and many lesser deities, represent the symbols by which Lovecraft expounds the tormented visions of his own unconsciousness.

*The Cthulhu Mythos, first formulated by Lovecraft but sustained long after his death, presupposes the existence of evil forces expelled from the Earth but always scheming to return. Opposite (top), detail from Daw Books' The Disciples of Cthulhu, by Edward P. Berglund; below, two titles by August Derleth himself: left, Panther Books' The Mask of Cthulhu, by Bruce Pennington, and Neville Spearman's The Trail of Cthulhu, by Stanislaw Fernandes.*



## The magazines: *Weird Tales* and others

*Weird Tales* (1923–54), the famous American pulp magazine specializing in the macabre, is usually considered the first all-fantasy magazine in the world. But in fact neither this nor Street and Smith's fantasy-oriented *The Thrill Book* (1919) can claim to be the very first, which was almost certainly the Swedish *Hugin* (1916–20), an unattractive little publication, outstanding neither for its story content nor for its artwork.

In addition there was the obscure and now rather rare German magazine, *Der Orchideengarten*, which flourished for only three years, from 1919 till 1921. This large-format magazine (similar to the pulp 'bedsheet') must surely rank as one of the most beautiful fantasy magazines ever published. Its 51 issues, 17 in 1919 (but numbered 18, 16–17 having been combined), 24 in 1920 and only 10 in 1921 (again with the last two counted 9–10 and 11–12 respectively), featured an impressive gallery of fantastic art, ranging from reproductions of medieval woodcuts, and the work of established masters of macabre drawing like Gustave Doré or Tony Johannot, to contemporary German artists like Rolf von Hoerschelmann, Otto Linnekogel, Karl Ritter, Heinrich Kley or Alfred Kubin. For a time the publishers issued, in addition to the standard magazine, a collector's edition printed on good book paper and containing some fold-up original art. The fiction however, was mixed; the new German fantasy stories were usually somewhat pedestrian, although contributing authors included Karl Hans Strobl, H. H. Schmitz and Leo Perutz, but the magazine also printed a wide selection of fantastic stories by famous foreign authors such as Dickens, Pushkin, Charles Nodier, Maupassant, Poe, Voltaire, Gautier, Washington Irving, Hawthorne, Valerii Briusov, H. G. Wells, Karel and Josef Čapek, Victor Hugo, and others equally prominent. The editors of the journal were the well-known fantasy author, Karl Hans Strobl, and Alf von Czibulka. Although two issues of *Der Orchideengarten* were devoted to detective stories, and one to erotic stories about cuckolds, it was a genuine fantasy magazine.

*Weird Tales* did not appear until four years later, its first issue being dated March 1923, but it lasted for 279 issues and well over 30



years, until it gave up its long struggle in the issue of September 1954. In the summer of 1973, publisher Leo Margulies made an attempt to revive *Weird Tales*, with Sam Moskowitz as editor, using a fair quantity of reprint material, but after only four issues he had to give up.

It has been claimed that 'The Unique Magazine', as it was called in its subtitle, never made a profit throughout its long and





Opposite and above, *Der Orchideengarten*: two covers from the elegant but short-lived (1919–21) fantasy magazine from Germany, featuring the work of contemporary and earlier fantastic artists and writers.

sometimes illustrious career, but was kept alive by the enthusiasm of its editors. Most of its stories tended to the horrible and the gruesome, but it also featured a fair sample of SF, following the advent of the SF magazines, and usually avoided the excesses of the sex-and-sadism supernatural pulps like *Horror Stories* (January 1935 to April 1941), *Thrilling Mystery* (October 1935 to 1942, thereafter continued as a detective magazine) or *Terror Tales* (September 1934 to March 1941).

Nevertheless, its typical contents may be gauged from some of the titles of the stories in the first issue: 'The Grave', 'The Ghoul and the Corpse', 'The Thing of a Thousand Shapes', and the frequently reprinted 'Ooze'. Up to the first anniversary issue of May–June–July, 1924, Edwin Baird was the magazine's editor. Then, after a hiatus of several months, *Weird Tales* appeared again in November, 1924, with

Farnsworth Wright as the new editor. He directed the magazine during its heyday, until he retired for reasons of health early in 1940, and Dorothy McIlwraith succeeded him at his desk.

The first issues of *Weird Tales* already featured the work of contributors who became famous in the Thirties, the golden age of *Weird Tales*: Robert E. Howard, Seabury Quinn, Henry S. Whitehead, and especially H. P. Lovecraft, the most important *Weird Tales* author, if not the most popular. That distinction belonged to Seabury Quinn, who had – as editor of *Casket* and *Sunnyside*, a trade journal for morticians – a singularly appropriate profession for a writer of weird fiction. His most popular creation was a psychic sleuth named Jules de Grandin, a pompous investigator ineptly patterned after the Sherlock Holmes stories. When not eating (de Grandin's favourite pastime), he is usually busy saving some damsel in distress from such creatures as werewolves, vampires and zombies, or from some mad scientist or sadistic doctor; and this for 93 stories. The prolific August Derleth was almost as bad, although less offensive as well as less popular with the readers.

More impressive were the stories written by the Episcopalian minister Henry S. Whitehead (1882–1932), who had spent part of his life in the West Indies, and had grown to know the customs and superstitions of the people. He made good use of these in many of his contributions, such as 'The Tree-Man' (Feb.–March 1931). Slowly building up to the climax, his stories convey a feeling of sympathy for the people he writes about and their daily lives.

Another contributor was Clark Ashton Smith (1893–1961), the Californian poet, painter and writer. His work has often been called unreadable, and it is certainly very artificial, with its weakness for uncommon and obsolete words, and its 'decadent' themes featuring plenty of torture and painful death, but from this morbid world-view it manages to achieve a dense atmosphere of pseudo-oriental exoticism. Indicative of the spirit of Smith's writing is the fact that he attempted to add new episodes to Beckford's *Vathek*.

Robert E. Howard wrote a number of normal weird stories, such as 'Wolfshead' (April 1926),









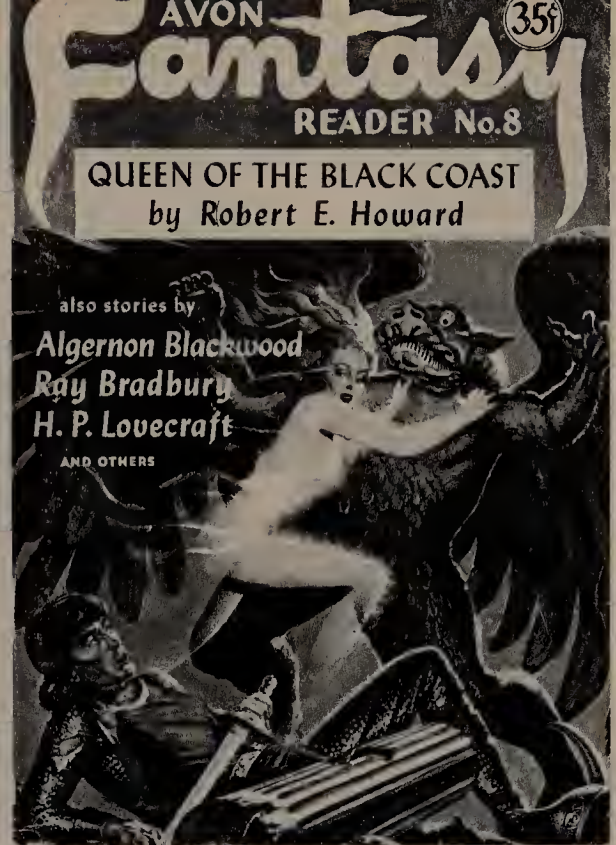
the  
grotesque  
the  
fantastic  
the shades  
of night!

*The Weird Tales flavour: opposite, details from the work of two regular illustrators, Boris Dolgov and Hannes Bok. Above, the final issue of Weird Tales, July 1954, the 'unique magazine' which ran for over thirty years. Above (right), the Avon Fantasy Reader (1947-52), edited by Donald A. Wollheim, was for a time a worthy competitor.*

*Overleaf, cover for Weird Tales, July 1933, when the magazine provided almost the only outlet for Lovecraft's stories. The 'nude' cover by Mrs Avery Brundage infuriated many readers, including Lovecraft himself.*

but he is best loved by his readers for stories of barbarous heroes from prehistoric times, like Conan the Cimmerian, Bran Mak Morn, and King Kull, or his hardly less bloodthirsty seventeenth-century Puritan, Solomon Kane. While Howard had an undeniable gift for vivid, if crude, description, most of his stories, especially those about Conan (who has long since become a cult figure), rely heavily upon coincidence, and soon degenerate into carnage, with supernatural creatures providing just another class of foe to be slain. Nevertheless, sometimes Howard did come up with some impressive fiends.

*Weird Tales's* principal claim to fame is of course the fact that it was the main, and almost only, market for Lovecraft's stories, although its editor Farnsworth Wright rejected quite a number of them, and there were others that he had no chance to reject, because the diffident Lovecraft never submitted them professionally. But *Weird Tales*



did publish 'The Call of Cthulhu', 'The Whisperer in Darkness', 'The Strange High House in the Mist', 'The Rats in the Walls', 'The Outsider', 'Pickman's Model', 'The Haunter of the Dark' and 'The Thing on the Doorstep', as well as many revisions by Lovecraft of stories written by others. After Lovecraft's death, the magazine featured material by him, both new work and reprints, in seventeen consecutive issues.

In the Forties and Fifties the quality of the new fiction was less good than in the Thirties, and the contents were less varied. But in addition to the work of Robert Bloch, the magazine was printing some of Ray Bradbury's best early stories, when Bradbury was still writing good stories.

The end came in 1954, when Short Stories Inc. filed for bankruptcy. *Weird Tales* had had, aside from the sex-and-sadism pulps, some competition during its long life, but it survived them all, including *Strange Tales* (1931-33), edited by Harry Bates, and *Strange Stories* (1931-41).

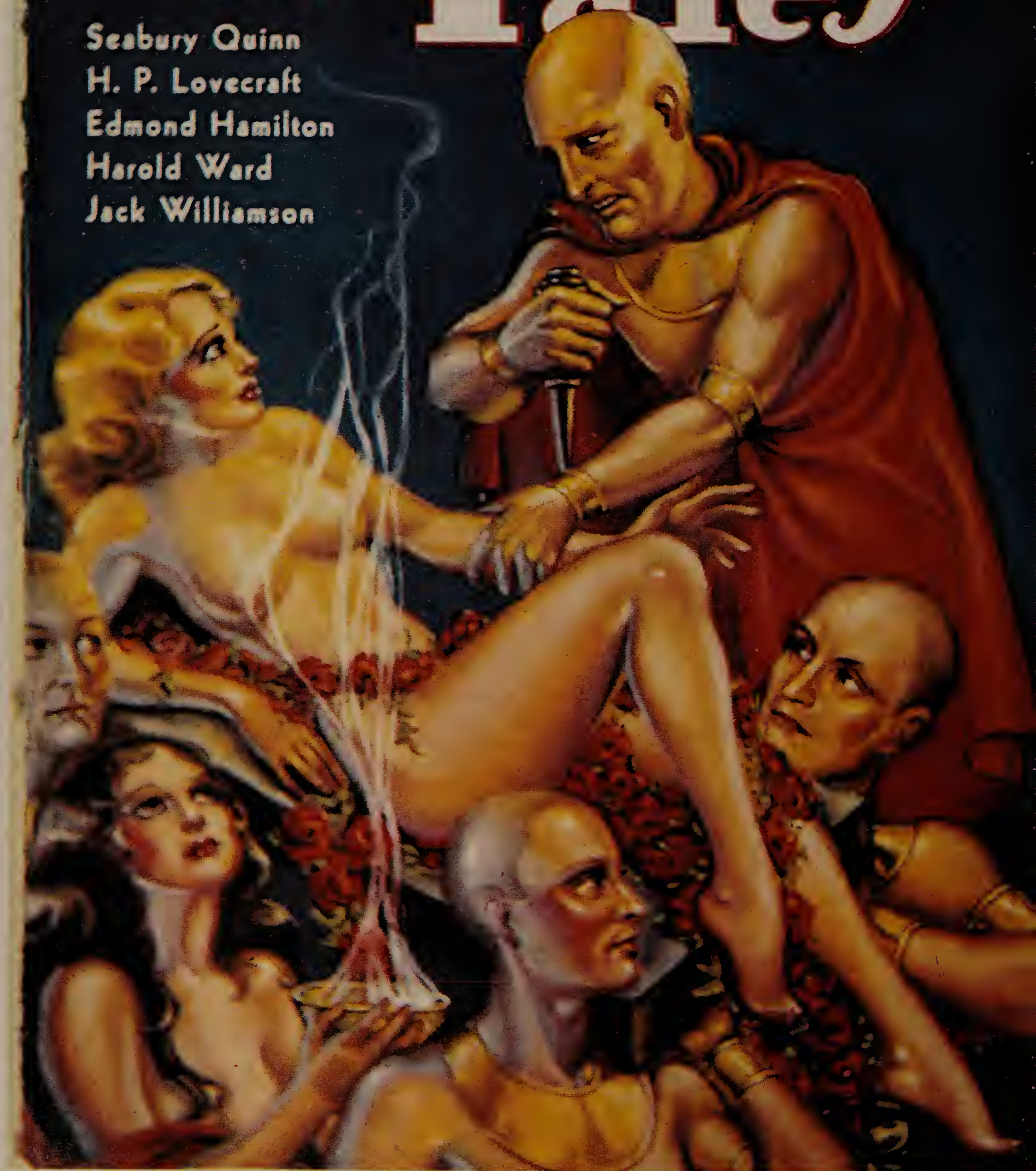
Also worthy of mention are some fantasy reprint magazines, in particular the 18 issues of the *Avon Fantasy Reader* (1947-52), perhaps Donald A. Wollheim's best editorial work. In more recent times there was a group of magazines operated by Robert A. W. Lowndes on a shoestring budget: *The Magazine of Horror* (36 issues, 1963-71), *Weird Terror Tales* (3 issues, 1969-70), *Bizarre Fantasy Tales* (2 issues, 1970-71) and *Startling Mystery Stories* (18 issues, 1966-71). Still extant are the magazines *Fantastic* (1952- ) and *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* (1949- ), which publish almost exclusively new material, but mostly science fiction.



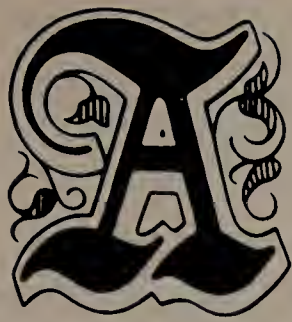
# Weird Tales

JULY—25c

Seabury Quinn  
H. P. Lovecraft  
Edmond Hamilton  
Harold Ward  
Jack Williamson







# lternative worlds

Imaginary lands: William Morris, Lord  
Dunsany and others/Sword and sorcery/  
J. R. R. Tolkien and the realms of Middle-earth.





## Imaginary lands: William Morris, Lord Dunsany and others

William Morris (1834–96), social reformer, poet, artist, designer, manufacturer and publisher, has been proclaimed by modern enthusiasts as the originator of that form of the fantastic which is typically set in an imaginary, quasi-medieval world. Disgusted with the ugliness and inhumanity of the industrial age, Morris in later life turned back to an idealized version of the Middle Ages, producing medieval designs for his books, and writing romantic novels in a beautifully archaic, simple and forceful style.

In 1856 he had founded, with some friends, the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, in which he published his first romantic stories such as 'The Hollow Land', 'Golden Wings', and his earliest narrative, 'The Story of the Unknown Church'. But decades were to pass before he returned to this territory with the long novels which have made his name a byword among enthusiasts of the form: *The Glittering Plain* (1891), *The Wood beyond the World* (1895), *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* (1895), and, the work which is generally regarded as his masterpiece, *The Well at the World's End* (1896).

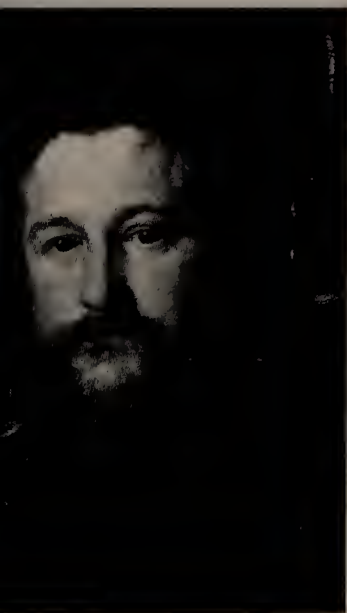
Morris, however, was perhaps not the first in this field. George MacDonald (1824–1905), formerly a Scottish minister and author of several celebrated children's books, such as *The Prince and the Goblin*, had written the extraordinary *Phantastes* in 1858; but here the medieval setting is in the context of a dream world not intended to be real, so perhaps neither *Phantastes* nor his later novel, *Lilith* (1895), quite fits the category. The first tale, which reveals the influence of Bunyan, makes its impression at a symbolic as well as at a narrative level, with many allegorical meetings and adventures. In *Lilith*, a young student back from Oxford discovers, in the labyrinthine library of his ancient home, a doorway to another world of waking dream. George MacDonald, a friend of Lewis Carroll, was particularly admired by the Christian fantasy writer C. S. Lewis, who counted these two novels among the most important influences of his life.

Another world-creator, the eighteenth Baron Dunsany, Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett (1878–1957), has often been imitated, but seldom successfully. Lord Dunsany wrote





Imaginary medieval-type worlds: opposite, *The Beguiling of Merlin* by Edward Burne-Jones (1833–98), who worked closely with William Morris (below), and shared his interest in 'other worlds' imagery. Below (right), George MacDonald, Scottish minister and pioneer of 'other worlds' fantasy, photographed by Charles Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) in 1863 with his daughter Lily. Above (right), Lord Dunsany's *The Gods of Pegana* (1905): in Sidney Sime Dunsany found an illustrator who well complemented his own style.



in a rolling, lyrical style, and obviously relished sonorous words and names, as befitted an aristocrat living in a thirteenth-century castle in County Meath, Ireland. He is said to have used a quill pen in writing most of his books (he wrote more than sixty), and this quality certainly comes through.

Lord Dunsany was a rich man who followed the dictates of his fancy, choosing to write about heroic (and often ironic) events in countries of the imagination. He started by creating a mythology of his own in *The Gods of Pegana* (1905), a collection of very short prose pieces, from which he moved on to heroic legends, whimsical anecdotes, and conventional stories in *Time and the Gods* (1906), *The Sword of Welleran* (1908), *A Dreamer's Tales* (1910), *The Book of Wonder* (1912), *Fifty-one Tales* (1915), and *Tales of Three Hemispheres* (1919). Many of these were illustrated by Sidney H. Sime, whose work is as close to Dunsany as Tenniel's is to Carroll.



Dunsany's stories are usually very short, and somewhat limited in scope and subject matter; but in addition he wrote a number of longer novels, such as *The King of Elfland's Daughter* (1924), also set 'beyond the fields we know'. In later life his fantasies came closer to the real world, as in his Jorkens stories. But Lord Dunsany's work is something of an acquired taste, and his mannered prose may have been overpraised. Nevertheless, it has a unique flavour, and Dunsany is undeniably an interesting minor writer.

Like Lord Dunsany, Eric Rucker Eddison (1881–1945) made no claims to any deeper meaning in his work, and in the Foreword to his magnificent epic, *The Worm Ouroboros* (1922), he wrote that 'it is neither allegory nor fable but a story to be read for its own sake'. Along with many writers of fantastic romances, Eddison was not at ease in his own time, preferring the age of chivalry with its heroic values. His heroes are straightforwardly heroic, uninfected by self-doubt, and unconcerned with introspection.

In *The Worm Ouroboros* Edward Lessingham, an English gentleman, is transported to a world called Mercury which has nothing in common with the planet of that name, and is soon forgotten in the developing narrative of a gigantic war between King Gorice XII of Witchland and the lords of Demonland. The three brothers of Demonland, Lords Juss, Goldry Bluszco and Spitfire, and their cousin Lord Brandoch Daha, are a truly splendid group of heroes, and their foes are hardly less formidable and grandiose. The novel abounds in epic battles, high rhetoric, elaborate intrigues and incredible physical feats, and, when the powers of Witchland have been overthrown, the story comes round again in full circle. For Eddison, victory is less important than the experience of the fight. His story is told in a rich, rhythmical language closer to the seventeenth than to the twentieth century.

Also impressive, but perhaps not quite so good as *The Worm Ouroboros*, is the 'Zimiamvian trilogy', consisting of *Mistress of Mistresses* (1935), *A Fish Dinner in Memison* (1941), and the unfinished *The Mezentian Gate*, published posthumously in 1958. Here Edward Lessingham, who makes a brief appearance in





Opposite, *Lilith* (1895) by George MacDonald, whose work impressed the Christian fantasy writer C. S. Lewis. Right, detail from Lord Dunsany's *At the Edge of the World* collection. Covers from two recent Ballantine editions.

*The Worm Ouroboros*, dies in the first book at the age of ninety, to return as a young captain in Zimiamvia, where he is soon involved in the intrigues and wars which pervade Eddison's novels. But unlike *The Worm Ouroboros*, the Zimiamvian trilogy is based on a unifying philosophical principle, an ultimate dualism of Masculine-Feminine, expressed in the supreme figures of Zeus and Aphrodite, who appear in disguised form as various characters in the novels.

Among more recent writers in the same form, Fletcher Pratt is worth attention. His *The Well of the Unicorn* (1948), stylistically much simpler, but warmer in tone, is one of the few modern novels which has not devalued the high aims of artists like William Morris or Eric Rucker Eddison.





## Sword and sorcery

'Sword and sorcery', also known as 'heroic fantasy', is defined by L. Sprague de Camp, a leading theoretician of this kind of writing, as 'the name of a class of stories laid, not in the world as it was or will be, but as it ought to have been to make a good story. The tales collected under this name are adventure fantasies, laid in imaginary prehistoric or medieval worlds, when (it's fun to imagine) all men were mighty, all women were beautiful, all problems were simple, and all life was adventurous. In such a world, gleaming cities raise their shining spires against the stars; sorcerers cast sinister spells from subterranean lairs; baleful spirits stalk crumbled ruins; primeval monsters crash through jungle thickets; and the fate of kingdoms is balanced on the bloody blades of broadswords brandished by heroes of preternatural might and valor.' (Introduction to *Swords and Sorcery*, 1963.)





*Fantasy and the comix: a miscellany of sword and sorcery illustration.*



Apologists of this kind of entertainment trace its development back through Eric Rucker Eddison and Lord Dunsany to William Morris, while others even derive its origin from the sagas and legends of antiquity, in which case the form could be said to be as old as literature itself. But in fact it is not even the debilitated offspring of these sagas, but rather a misbegotten child of our own technological civilization, offering a quick escape from an oppressive world. In recent years it has achieved enormous success in the paperback market, and not long ago *Publisher's Weekly* reported that \$300,000 had been paid by one American paperback publisher for twenty titles by Robert E. Howard – many times more than the author had earned during his lifetime.

Howard (1906–36) was the true creator of the sword and sorcery type of fantasy. Barbarism, he believed, was 'the natural state of mankind. Civilization is unnatural. It is a whim of circumstance. And barbarism must always ultimately triumph.' Howard was a Texan, a friendly giant of a man who shot himself when he learned that his dying mother would never recover consciousness; an indication, perhaps, of his own precarious grasp on life. He created a number of heroes with massive physiques and moderate brains, the most famous of whom is Conan the Cimmerian.

Conan first appeared in the pages of the fantasy pulp magazine *Weird Tales*, but went on to become the centre of a large cult when his adventures were published in paperback, selling millions of copies. Howard located his hero in the 'Hyborian Age', some time before the fall of Atlantis, and described him as 'black-haired, sullen-eyed . . . a thief, a reaver, a slayer, with gigantic melancholies and gigantic mirth,' whose intention was to 'tread the jewelled thrones of the Earth under his sandaled feet'. And this Conan continued to do long after his creator's death, in stories by Bjorn Nyberg, L. Sprague de Camp and Lin Carter. But the Conan stories of Howard's imitators lack the crude vigour of the original.

Yet more exotic and bizarre were the numerous sword and sorcery stories of Clark Ashton Smith (1893–1961), set in the distant future on earth, various stars, and the mythical worlds of Atlantis and Hyperborea. These



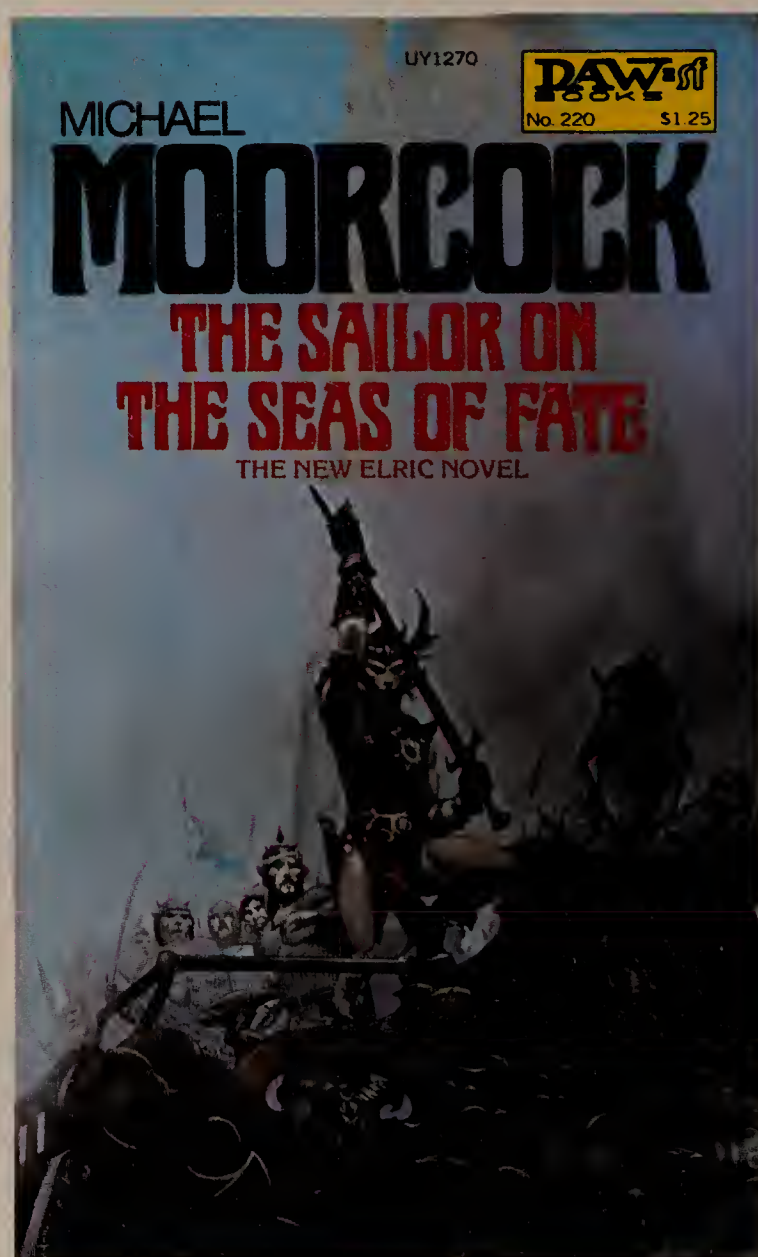
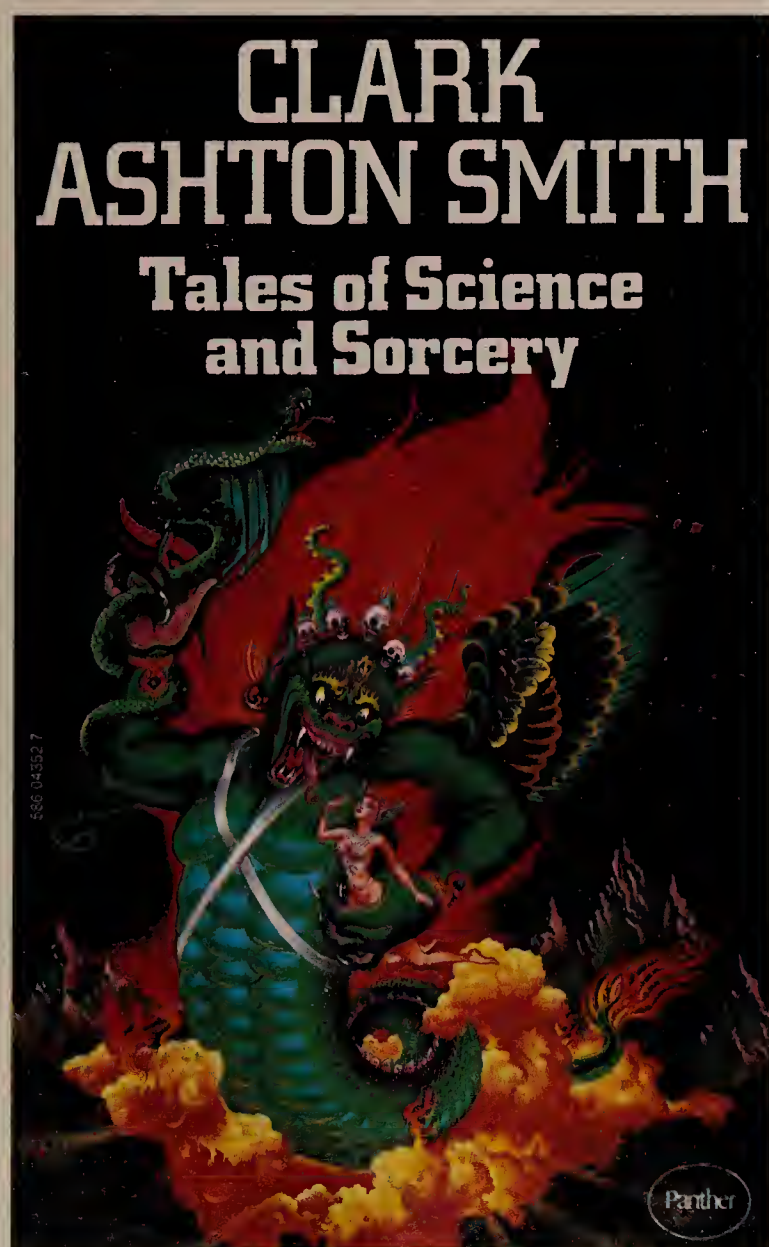
stories, like Howard's, appeared in *Weird Tales* in the 1930s, as did a series by C. L. Moore featuring Jirel of Joiry, an interesting heroine of the same type.

At the present time there is a veritable flood of sword and sorcery fiction, with fan magazines and whole books devoted to the subject. Michael Moorcock, Fritz Leiber, L. Sprague de Camp and Jack Vance are among the better writers of this type, while many others have contributed a great deal that is worthless. Michael Moorcock's Elric of Melniboné, the albino warrior with his half-sentient 'runesword', Stormbringer, to which he talks 'as another might talk to his horse', is often involved in situations which raise philosophical questions of identity and existence, though couched in melodramatic form.

Moorcock has gone on to create more sword and sorcery than anyone else, repeating his previous success in the cycles of Dorian Hawkmoon, Corum, and many others.

A sense of humour, not to say a tongue-in-cheek quality, distinguishes Fritz Leiber's tales about his rascally heroes, Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser, while two of de Camp's novels, *The Goblin Tower* (1968) and *The Clocks of Iraz* (1971), reveal qualities of real wit. In fact L. Sprague de Camp has claimed that sword and sorcery tales furnish the purest *fun* to be found in fiction today. Others might complain that the form's very limited range of plot and character makes ultimately for dullness. A type of fiction which aims at nothing more than entertainment usually fails even in that objective.

*Opposite, Conan the Barbarian, conceived by Robert E. Howard (1906-36), has long outlived his creator, trampling ever onwards through a multitude of books, magazines and comics. Below, covers for titles by Michael Moorcock and Clark Ashton Smith, two sword and sorcery writers whose work combines ideas and action. Illustrations by Michael Whelan (left) and Bob Habberfield.*





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THE BARBARIAN

TWIN TITANS--  
TOWERING ABOVE A WORLD  
OF FIRE AND FURY, IN  
TWO OF THEIR GREATEST,  
MOST-REQUESTED  
ADVENTURES!

ALSO STARRING:  
KING KULL!





**J. R. R. Tolkien and the realms of Middle-earth.**





Right, J. R. R. Tolkien, creator of the fantastic world of Middle-earth. Opposite, a scene from *The Hobbit* (1937), the author's illustration for his compelling children's fantasy.



The essence of fantasy, as it is often understood in English-speaking countries, is to be found in the work of J. R. R. Tolkien (1892–1971), though in fact this type of 'alternative world' creation represents only one, albeit a very important, aspect of fantastic literature.

Tolkien was born in South Africa, but returned with his mother to England in 1896 because of his poor health. He was educated at King Edward VI School, Birmingham, and Exeter College, Oxford, where he took his B.A. in 1915. He then served in Flanders with the Lancashire Fusiliers till 1918.

At that time he was already making notes for *The Silmarillion*, material for which is to be found in the appendixes of *The Lord of the Rings*, though the publication of the final work itself, eagerly awaited by Tolkien enthusiasts, did not occur till 1977. In 1939 he offered a version of the book to the publishers Allen and Unwin, who rejected it as 'too dark and Celtic'. By then he had already published *The Hobbit* (1937), a fairly successful children's book, and was of course well advanced in a distinguished academic career which culminated in the Merton Professorship of English Language and Literature (1945–

1959). As a scholar, Tolkien was particularly respected for his Beowulf studies.

*The Silmarillion* continued to be revised up to the author's death, but after its rejection in 1939 he returned to a project which had occupied his imagination even before *The Hobbit*, namely *The Lord of the Rings*, on which he was to spend fourteen years. Tolkien's deep involvement with language may have prompted his later declaration that the book was written to provide a world for the language, rather than the reverse. Chapters from the work in progress were read to 'the Inklings', a group of writers based in Oxford which included C. S. Lewis and Charles Williams.

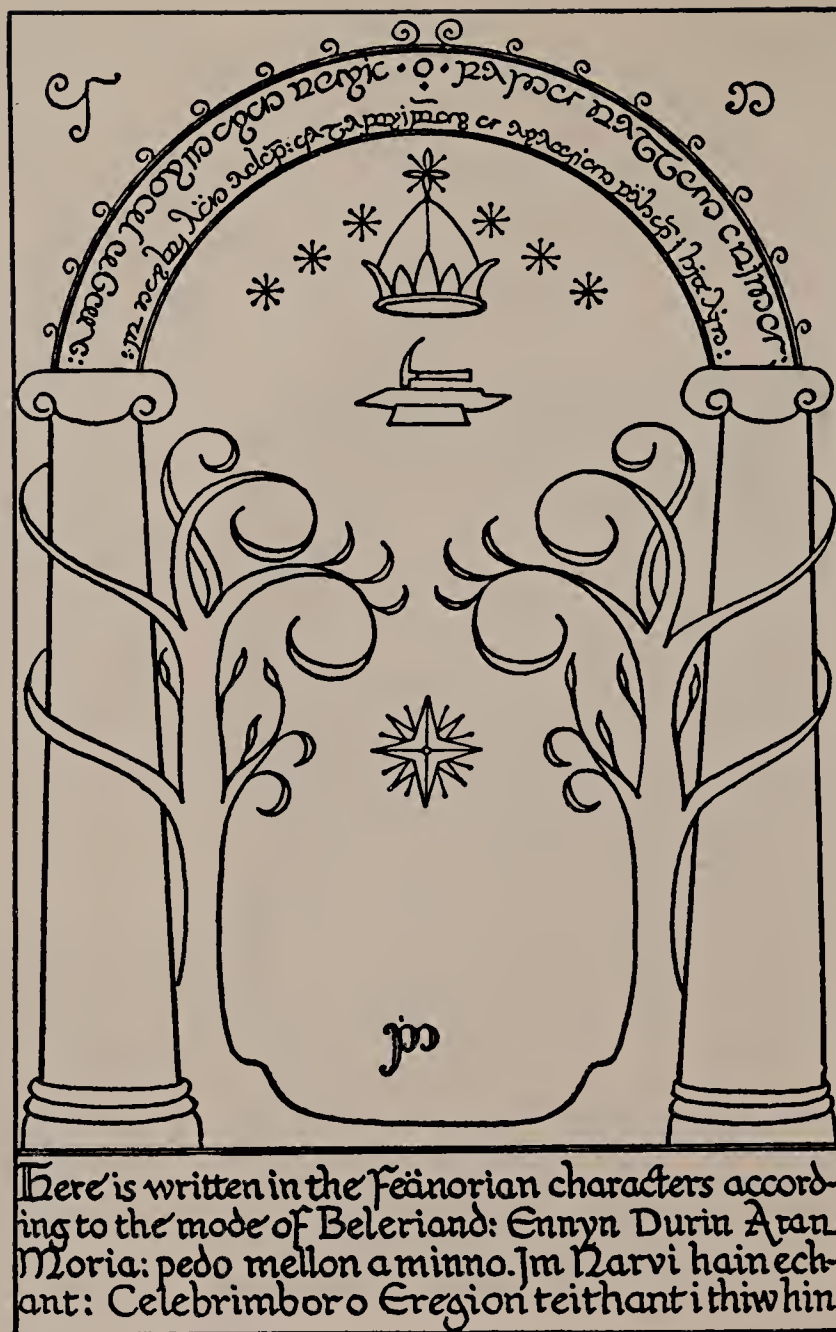
*The Lord of the Rings* was eventually published in 1954 and 1955, in three large volumes. It went on to achieve enormous paperback success when, in 1965, Ace Books in the USA published an unauthorized, cut version, whereupon Ballantine issued the authorized edition. Tolkien subsequently became the centre of a large cult, of particular appeal to the young.

This tremendous enthusiasm for his books surprised the author, who claimed that he wrote 'just for my own amusement'. But his vision of an ideal world close to the roots of life, where natural values are contrasted with the brutal, dehumanizing tendency of the arch-enemy Sauron, was bound to appeal to a generation increasingly at odds with the facts of technological society.

*The Lord of the Rings* resembles a fairy tale in that it posits a straightforward contest between clearly defined good and absolute evil. Though individual characters may shift their allegiances, the basic moral position is never in doubt. The power of evil is so great that it seems certain to endure for ever, yet in the end it is laid low, while good stumbles on to victory, helped by many lucky accidents, and it may sometimes appear that, as in the fairy tales, this success is a foregone conclusion.

The story describes the struggle of the Free Peoples against Sauron, the Dark Lord, whose power overshadows the whole realm of Middle-earth. The only sure way of overthrowing Sauron is through the destruction of the Ring of Power, the source of all his might,





The Lord of the Rings: Tolkien's drawing of the Gate of Eregion, inscribed with Elvish runes, carefully transliterated, reveals the author's fascination with language.

and this can only be done by throwing it into the Cracks of Doom in Mount Orodruin, deep within Sauron's black land of Mordor, where it was originally forged. Frodo Baggins, cousin of the hobbit ('halfling') Bilbo – the hero of Tolkien's earlier book, *The Hobbit* – is the chosen Ring-Bearer, and he is supported by a fellowship representing the Free Peoples: other hobbits, an elf, two men (one of whom, Aragorn, is later revealed as the rightful king), a dwarf, and the white wizard, Gandalf. The journey to the Cracks of Doom is described in epic terms, and as the story unfolds the reader is introduced to the whole panorama of Middle-earth, with its regions and peoples, human and non-human, malevolent and benign, established in a richly detailed history going back thousands of years. When Sauron is destroyed and the rightful order restored, the time of the 'Dominion of Men' is at hand, and Tolkien's other world of elves, orcs, ents, hobbits and wizards is destined to dwindle and die.

One of the chief attractions of the trilogy is Tolkien's ability to conjure up this fully

realized other world, with its own peoples, languages, traditions, histories and genealogies. An alternative nature, consisting of plants and minerals as well as animals, is skilfully interwoven with our own, and presented as a single reality. But opinions are divided as to the literary merit of Tolkien's work: praise for his power of invention has been mingled with condemnation of its moral and philosophical basis. Edmund Wilson in particular has castigated him in his article, 'Those Awful Orcs', but many others, including W. H. Auden and C. S. Lewis, have responded with enthusiasm.

On the whole, the trilogy's success at a mass level has made a real assessment difficult. But it seems probable that, though its present reputation may well be temporary, *The Lord of the Rings* will eventually be included in the long list of works of fantastic literature which will always be cherished by some connoisseurs; not, perhaps, a major work, but never to be entirely forgotten – a book like J. B. Cabell's *Jurgen*, Eddison's *The Worm Ouroboros*, or Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*.





# antasy and popular fiction

Exotic adventure: Rider Haggard and others/  
Fantasy thrillers





## Exotic adventure: Rider Haggard and others

Among writers of fantastic adventure stories set in exotic lands, with strong touches of the occult, Henry Rider Haggard (1856–1925) is probably the best, though he was not a craftsman of the calibre of Robert Louis Stevenson or even of John Buchan. Nevertheless, C. S. Lewis, Graham Greene, D. H. Lawrence and Henry Miller are among those who have praised him highly, and he was a favourite author (for what it is worth) of King Edward VII.

Rider Haggard was the eighth child in a family of ten, the son of a country squire from

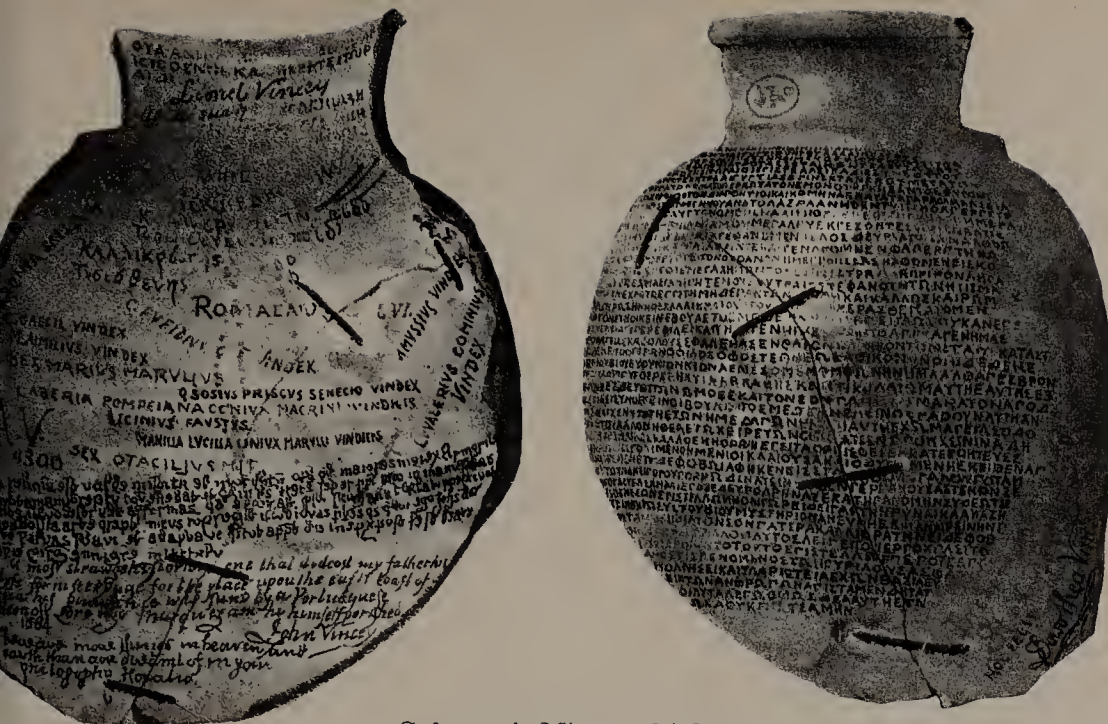
whom he escaped at a comparatively early age to go to South Africa. There he started his career as secretary to the governor of Natal, going on to become English clerk and then master and registrar at the high court in Pretoria. Later he ran an ostrich farm for a time, before returning to England to study for the bar. As a result of his experiences in South Africa he tended to be critical of the Boers and respectful of the Zulus.

His first writing consisted of short articles about South Africa, together with an account of the situation there, entitled *Cetywayo and his White Neighbours*, in which he made some shrewd conjectures about the future of the country. This was followed by two long and involved romances, *Dawn* (1884) and *The Witch's Head* (1885), which seem to have been little more than a diversion. In that same year of 1885, however, came the publication of *King*

*Below, Ursula Andress as She (in the 1965 British film), Rider Haggard's supposedly immortal queen of a lost African realm.*







Above, She: the 2000-year-old Sherd of Amenartas (front and back) which provided the clues leading to Ayesha's hidden world. Below, illustration for the sequel, Ayesha, The Return of She (1911 edition), by Maurice Greiffenhagen.

Solomon's Mines, which was an enormous and immediate success; and as a result he decided to become a full-time writer. The book owed its existence to a bet with one of his brothers who maintained, following a discussion about Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, that he could not write anything half as good. Rider Haggard took up the challenge.

Related in 'a plain straight manner' by the veteran explorer and adventurer Allan Quatermain, the narrator of many subsequent

novels, the book describes an exciting treasure hunt in Africa, with a number of remarkable characters like the one-eyed giant Twala, king of the Kukuanas, and Gagool, the shrivelled witch. The landscape, the natives and their speech and customs, the details of the adventures, the equipment, all are described with such engaging and successful realism that the book has remained in print ever since.

Even more of a success was *She* (1886) which, like *King Solomon's Mines*, was also written in just six weeks. The vividly described background is once again set in darkest Africa: an unexplored region, isolated by swamps and mountains, where there is an ancient city ruled by an apparently immortal white goddess, Ayesha, or She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed (a name originating, strangely enough, from one of the dolls of Haggard's childhood). To this place come Holly (the narrator) and Leo Vincey, the last of an extremely ancient line which, though now English, is traced back to an Egyptian priest, Kallikrates. Two thousand years before, Kallikrates was slain by Ayesha after failing to reciprocate her love. Now, after waiting for two millennia, she resumes her love affair with his reincarnated double, Leo, and shows him the secret of her immortality, a pillar of flame-like vital energy in which she once bathed. To assure Leo of its life-bestowing power, she enters the flame again, but the second contact hideously and instantaneously reimposes on her the full burden of her years, and she dies, turning before our eyes into a grotesquely wizened hag.

C. G. Jung has interpreted *She* as a classic example of the *anima*, the feminine force in man, projected onto the exterior world. Ayesha is a dream-woman, combining unsurpassable beauty, eternal youth, and ancient wisdom; and she is doomed to perish when confronted with harsh reality. Henry Miller,











Above, frontispiece for *The Moon Pool* (1919) by Abraham Merritt, an American writer in the Rider Haggard tradition.

Opposite, a scene from *The Gray Mahatma* by Talbot Mundy (1879–1940), often considered a better exotic adventure writer than Haggard himself. Illustration by Virgil Finlay for the *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* reprint of December 1951.

one of *She*'s greatest admirers, has written that Ayesha occupies a position in his mind 'comparable to the sun in the galaxy of immortal lovers', to whom 'Helen of Troy is but a pale moon'.

Others have been less enthusiastic. The book is certainly a superbly conceived blend of anthropological, cultural and ethnic elements, but it is written in a somewhat slipshod fashion. Haggard was not interested in the perfection of his prose, which is often careless. His descriptions tend on occasion to be naive, his plots repetitious, his characterization two-dimensional, and his dialogue wooden. But he has a fine insight into the workings of the primitive mind, and is capable of achieving moments of true heroism and epic, if gory, grandeur.

Among Rider Haggard's fifty-eight romances, others stand out, especially the Viking saga *Eric Brighteyes* (1891), and *Nada the Lily* (1892) which deals with Chaka, the Zulu hero. *She* and its sequel, *Ayesha*, have been imitated

in countless novels featuring priestess queens, and there has also been no shortage of parodies. Among the fantasy writers to have been influenced by Rider Haggard we may mention the American author Abraham Merritt (1884–1943). *The Moon Pool* (1919), *The Ship of Ishtar* (1926), *The Face in the Abyss* (1931), and *Dwellers in the Mirage* (1932), all of which were first published in pulp magazines, probably represent his most popular work.

Talbot Mundy (1879–1940) perhaps comes closest to Rider Haggard as a master of the exotic adventure novel. Born in London, he worked for nearly ten years in the service of the British administration in India, and finally settled in California, coming first to the USA in 1911. Mundy studied local folklore and belief in magic during his journeys to Africa, Australia, Mexico, Egypt, and even Tibet, and later became a member of the Theosophical Society in California. These influences are especially apparent in *OM, the Secret of Ahbor Valley* (1924).

Just as Rider Haggard gave his imagination free rein against the exotic background of Africa, so Mundy used India and the surrounding regions to portray select groups of individuals possessing magic powers. His secret service heroes, Athelstan King and the American James Schuyler Grim (Jimgrim), are typically shown at work frustrating anti-British rebellions or, on occasion, the plots of evil wizards and bands of wizards against the world. His heroes are characterized by a sense of duty so strong that not even the occult powers can sway them from their dedication to the British Empire.

Nevertheless, Mundy is in many respects superior to Rider Haggard, although he never achieved the latter's popularity. He has a better sense of character, his plots are much tighter, and his style is smoother. Most of his work was originally published in the pulp magazines, especially in *Adventure*, before appearing as books. The best known are probably *King of the Khyber Rifles* (1916), *The Nine Unknown* (1923), *The Devil's Guard* (1926), *Jimgrim* (1931), and his straight adventure (i.e. non-fantastic) series about a giant warrior in the days of Rome, *Tros of Samothrace* (1934), *Queen Cleopatra* (1929), and *Purple Pirate* (1935).



## Fantasy thrillers

John Buchan (1875–1940), the Scottish clergyman's son who became governor-general of Canada, is best known for his suspense fiction – *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915), *Greenmantle* (1916), *Mr Standfast* (1919) – but he also wrote a number of exciting fantasy thrillers. Of these, *The Gap in the Curtain* (1932) consists of a series of six connected short stories, each of which describes the career of one of six characters who have been allowed a glimpse into the future, gleaning what they can from a page of some future issue of a daily paper. All fail in various ingeniously invented ways to make proper use of their limited knowledge, which in fact turns out to be more of a burden than a blessing. Two other novels, *The Dancing Floor* (1926) and *Witchwood* (1927), both deal with the survival of sinister ancient rites into the modern world; the first is set on an Aegean island, the second in the dark wood Melanudirgill near the Lowland Scottish town of Woodilee.

Of an altogether more sensational nature are the works of Arthur Sarsfield Ward (1883–1959), who wrote under the name of 'Sax Rohmer'. In the Twenties and Thirties, when he was at the height of his fame, he was one of the most widely read and highly paid writers of popular fiction in the world. A genuine believer in the occult, he was a member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn along with Yeats, Machen and others, and compiled in *The Romance of Sorcery* (1914) a history of sorcery and magicians that has on the whole not been taken very seriously. His fans attribute to him an inside knowledge of the outlandish practices he describes in his novels, and claim that he completely fabricated very little; but it is hard to believe that his depictions of exotic lands have any but the most tenuous relationship with reality. His creation of the celebrated oriental villain, Dr Fu Manchu, made him a fortune:

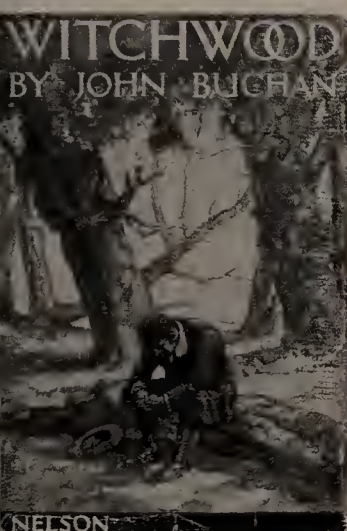
'Imagine a person, tall, lean and feline, high-shouldered with a brow like Shakespeare and a face like Satan, a close-shaven skull, and long, magnetic eyes of the true cat-green, invest him with all the cruel cunning of an entire Eastern race, accumulated in one giant intellect, with all the resources of science past and present. Imagine that awful being, and you have a mental picture of Dr Fu Manchu.'



Thus is he described by Nayland Smith, the Englishman whom Sax Rohmer pitted against this arch-enemy of mankind in some fourteen books. Sax Rohmer is supposed to have modelled his villain on the Chinese leader of a drug ring, a Mr King whom he once met in Limehouse, London's now vanished Chinatown. The original volume in the series, the first to carry the Sax Rohmer by-line, appeared in 1913 (*The Mystery of Dr Fu-Manchu*, then still hyphenated; the American title was *The Insidious Dr Fu-Manchu*); the thirteenth and last, *Emperor Fu Manchu* (1959), was pub-

*Sax Rohmer's The Bat Flies Low (1935), illustrated by Lawrence for the Famous Fantastic Mysteries reprint of October 1952.*





Above (right), *Fu Manchu* as played by Christopher Lee, photographed on location with Sax Rohmer's widow. Above, *Witchwood*, John Buchan's fantasy thriller set in Scotland.



lished shortly before the author's death; since then *The Wrath of Fu Manchu* came out in 1973 with some previously uncollected Fu Manchu stories.

The first three books in the series are collections of short stories which appeared originally in the magazines; the others, which are technically more accomplished, are full-length novels which the author continued to turn out in response to popular demand, even after he had grown tired of his creation. Fu Manchu combines archaic and modern features, being simultaneously the mad scientist and the master of ancient sorcery; altogether a rather quaint figure, especially as his career extended over so long a time that he ran into difficulties with China's new Communist government. Plagues, spiders, zombies, and a variety of poisons are some of the devices he usually employs in his plots. Sax Rohmer also invented a frequently disrobed but sexually quite restrained villainess, Sumuru, a sort of female edition of the fiendish doctor.

Better than this wildly improbable series are some individual supernatural novels, sometimes verging on science fiction or straight mystery. The best of these is probably *Brood of the Witch-Queen* (1914, book 1918), the story of an infant Egyptian mummy which is restored to life in modern England. The final sorcerous battle in the tombs of the pyramid is described with chilling effect, and in general Rohmer's intimate knowledge of magic procedures is well employed here. *The Bat Flies Low* (1935) concerns an interesting secret process for generating power, an anticipation of nuclear technology, guarded by an ageless Egyptian society. In *The Quest of the Sacred Slipper* (1919), the Hashishins descend upon London with a series of atrocities. These and other novels are fast-paced, sensational but enthralling, while some of Rohmer's shorter narratives in *Tales of Secret Egypt* (1918), *Tales of Chinatown* (1922), or *Tales of East and West* (1932), build up a considerable atmosphere.

Dennis Wheatley (1897–1977), whose books



are said to have sold some twenty-six million copies, even more than Sax Rohmer's, was perhaps his closest equivalent in contemporary popular fiction of this type. Wheatley wrote thrillers and spy novels of every kind, but those which deal with black magic are the best. Their main virtue is fast-paced action and continual suspense, though sometimes sententious warnings against dabbling in black magic strike an incongruous note. Wheatley's most prominent hero, the Duke de Richleau, is constantly at war with Satanists of various kinds. In the first of the Duke de Richleau novels, *The Devil Rides Out* (1935), his opponent is the black magician Mocata, who is looking for the lost talisman of Set. In *Strange Conflict* (1941), a Haitian sorcerer helps German submarines by revealing to them the routes of the Allied convoys. Richleau fights him on the astral plane, all his friends having been transformed into zombies, and calls upon the god Pan to destroy him. Much the same quaint idea appears again in *They Used Dark Forces* (1964). Other novels indicate that, for Wheatley, the October Revolution was also the work of Satanic powers.

Wheatley always denied ever having participated in any ceremony connected with magic – black or white – but he was an avid student of occultism, and this is an advantage in his elaborate descriptions of magic rites, even though these sometimes have an unfortunate tendency to make one smile when they should be at their most horrifying.

*Detail from John Buchan's  
fantasy 'No-Man's-Land',  
illustrated in a 1949 reprint  
by Leydenfrost.*







# he lighter side of fantasy

Lewis Carroll/Fantasy for children/Fantasy  
and humour/*Unknown (Worlds)*





## Lewis Carroll

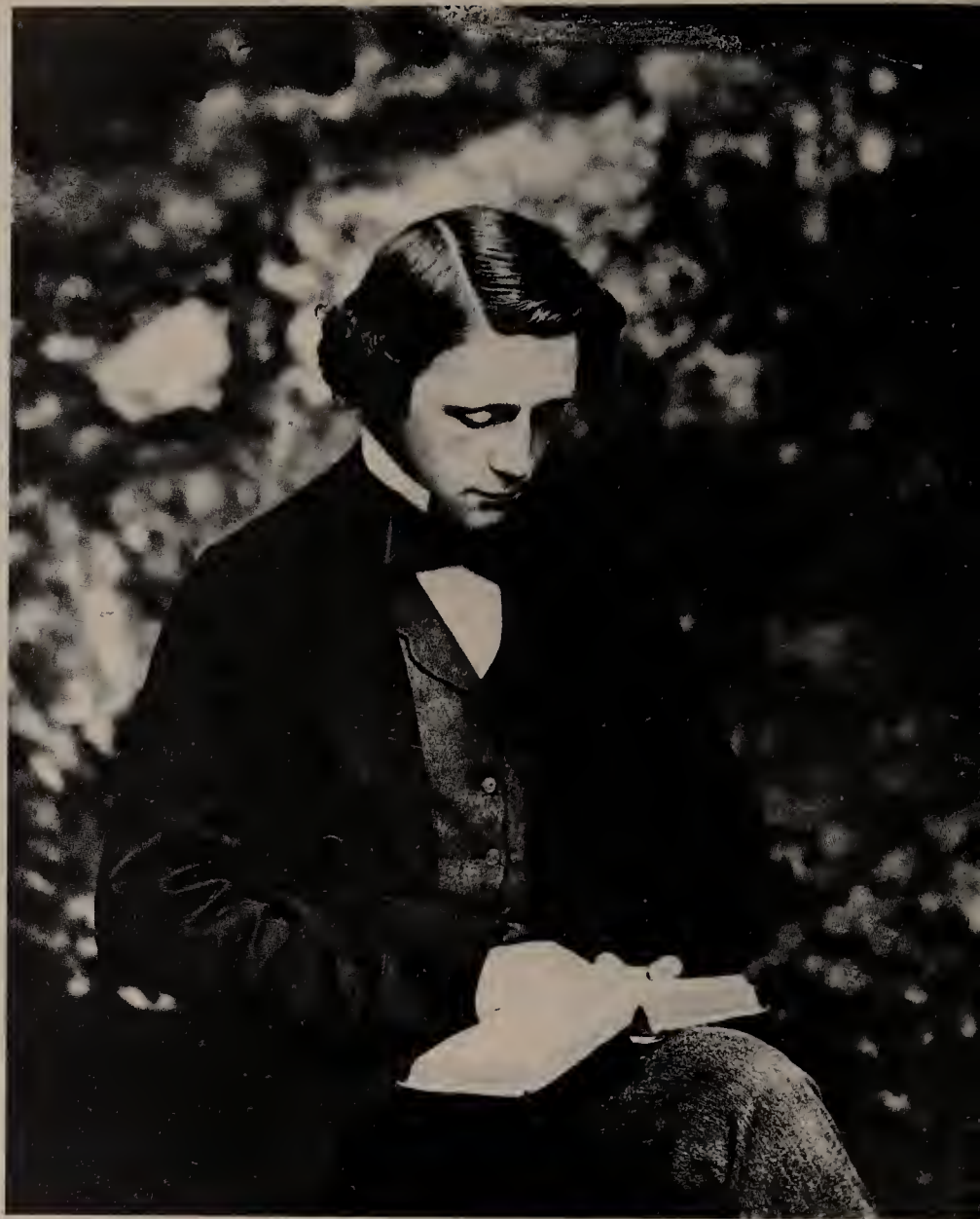
There is a deep divide, as many commentators have pointed out, between the character of the Reverend Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (1832–98), an Oxford mathematics don for forty-seven years, and his alter ego Lewis Carroll, author of *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) and its sequel, *Through the Looking Glass* (1871).

Dodgson was shy, stammering, reserved, pedantic, quirky, and full of eccentricities; and Alexander Woolcott's description of him as 'a puttering, fastidious, didactic bachelor' is accurate enough. A prodigious letter writer, he kept a careful tally of his correspondence up till his last note, written six days before his death, which was numbered 98,721. His life was tightly organized around timetables, registers and indexes, with every detail minutely ordered in advance. Instructions to his publishers included the type of knot to be used in fastening packages, and he expected them to see to such non-literary matters as the repair of his watch. As a mathematician, however, he was not in the front rank, and his work as a teacher lacked inspiration and personal commitment.

Dodgson was also one of the first great amateur photographers, considered by Helmut Gernsheim as 'probably the most distinguished amateur portraitist of the mid-Victorian era' after Julia Margaret Cameron, and, even more importantly, as 'the most outstanding photographer of children in the nineteenth century'. For, in his photography as in his fantasy, girl children were his main source of inspiration.

In the company of little girls, Dodgson became completely transformed, entirely at his ease, and a fascinating talker and storyteller. His affection did not extend to boys ('I am extremely fond of children,' he once wrote, 'except boys'), but for his chosen girl friends he extemporized wonderful stories, often sketching illustrations on the spot, and invented ingenious new puzzles and word games. With them he lost his stutter, his shyness and reserve, creating endless Wonderland for their benefit.

It was in this way that *Alice in Wonderland*, the story which has made him immortal, first took form, in the course of a boat trip up-river from Christ Church on July 4, 1862. The story was addressed to the ten-year-old Alice



Lewis Carroll at Oxford, aged twenty-five.

Liddell, daughter of the Dean of Christ Church, and her two sisters, whom Carroll often took on outings of this sort. Afterwards Alice begged him to write it down, and he gave her a beautifully illustrated manuscript version, *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*, as a Christmas present in 1864. The book was published the following year, to immediate acclaim. But Dodgson tried to keep separate his two existences, being apparently quite upset when he received mail addressed to 'Lewis Carroll, Christ Church'.

*Alice in Wonderland* begins with a fall down a rabbit hole, into a dream world where chaos rules. Her entry into the land of the Looking-Glass is achieved in a slightly more complex way, by passing through a mirror, and again Alice encounters a world whose laws (here the rules of chess) are far outside her experience. But in both books Alice is characterized as a straightforward, sensible and courageous girl, nicely brought up, who is plunged into a crazy world, and confronted with bewildering, often nightmarish, situations. The tone is set at the beginning of *Wonderland* with abrupt changes of size, as a result of which she almost drowns in tears shed by herself a moment before, when she was extremely tall.





Above, Lewis Carroll with the MacDonald children: a photograph set up by Carroll, with an assistant to uncap the lens (c. 1863). Right, Carroll in later age, a sketch by Harry Furniss, one of his long-suffering illustrators.

Overleaf, a miscellany of Alice incidents, poems and characters: illustrations by Tenniel and by Carroll himself.

The situations and characters of the two Alice books have become a part of the English vocabulary, appearing in the most unlikely contexts (Woodrow Wilson, for instance, once compared himself to the Red Queen). The narrative flows easily, following a dream logic of its own, and providing a magical experience for the reader. But the real hero of the book is language itself.

Carroll is constantly playing with nonsense and deeper meaning. Conventional expressions and phrases are typically given new and unexpected interpretations as Carroll invests logical principles with imagination, and casts a strange light on the meaning of words or the function of names. Ordinary conversation is usually made up of stock phrases whose exact meaning is rarely considered, and Carroll reveals the pitfalls and possible other meanings hidden in language:

'“The rule is, jam tomorrow and jam yesterday – but never jam today,” [says the Red Queen].

“It must come sometimes to ‘jam today’,” Alice objected.

“No, it can’t,” said the Queen. “It’s jam every *other* day: today isn’t any *other* day, you know.”’

Some of these games with words are pure fun, but often entertainment turns into nightmare, not only in the many metamorphoses of the books, or in the violent and repeated threats of the Queen to ‘chop off his head’, but in the meaning of language itself. In



the generally more sombre *Looking-Glass*, Humpty Dumpty’s justification for his use of words gives us a glimpse of the world of brute power:

““When *I* use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in rather scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master – that’s all.”’









In the Alice books, the categories of time, space and causality cease to function in the accustomed way, acquiring a troubling relativity in their distortions; and language serves to divide intelligent beings, not to join them in communication. At every step, the fairy-tale world reveals abysses and hidden chasms. Disturbing questions are raised about the nature of reality, of time, of space, and of identity. The ordered world withdraws, and chaos takes its place. As one commentator has claimed, it is probable that Carroll's fantasy was not an escape from the dull routine of Victorian academic life, but, rather, that the pedantically ordered world of the Rev. Charles Dodgson, with his compulsion to regulate and interpret in mathematical terms, was a desperate attempt to escape the chaos revealed in the *Alice* books, and to exorcize the demons present in their metaphysical confusion. Others have suggested, leaving aside the inevitable psychoanalytical interpretations, that Alice's adventures may be a symbolic way of describing how a child experiences the puzzling world of the adults, which must appear to an innocent eye to be governed by a logic as incomprehensible as any dream.





## Fantasy for children

Some of the greatest classics of children's literature, books such as *Gulliver's Travels*, *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Arabian Nights*, were of course not written for children at all, but can be enjoyed by both children and adults alike. Books like these are really inexhaustible. *Alice in Wonderland* is such a book too, although it was first designed for children and later found favour with adults. Among contemporary fantasies, Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, and Richard Adams's animal sagas, *Watership Down* (1972), *Shardik* (1974), and *The Plague Dogs* (1977), may survive principally as stories for children, if survive they do. But the twentieth century's main contribution in this area has been a rich variety of fantastic stories written expressly for children at an age when they are first discovering the delights of the imagination.

These stories are not 'written down' to the child's supposed mental level in a patronizing or didactic way, but show a fine understanding of their needs and natures, and are intended to give pleasure rather than to teach or educate. Some such stories were already being written in the previous century: Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies* (1863) for instance; George MacDonald's *The Prince and the Goblin* (1872) and *The Prince and the Curdie* (1873); and, towards the end of the century, the fantasies of Oscar Wilde, with undertones of religious allegory, collected in *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (1888), and *A House of Pomegranates* (1891).

It was not until the twentieth century, however, that writing for children really came into its own, and many of the best children's stories are fantasies. Rudyard Kipling was one eminent author who showed his readiness to write for children of all ages, and his talents as an originator approach genius. In his *Just So Stories* (1902) he told 'Darwinist' fairy tales for little children – 'How the Elephant got his Trunk', for instance – and these stories are ideal for reading aloud, with phrases like 'the great grey-green greasy Limpopo River' lodging permanently in the memory. In *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906) and its sequel, *Rewards and Fairies* (1910), the good-natured spirit of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* befriends two young children, and shows them scenes from their country's past. In his *Jungle Books*

(1894–5) he initiated a totally new way of writing about animals, and the creation of his young hero, Mowgli, brought up and nurtured by wolves, and educated in the law of the jungle by Baloo the bear and Bagheera the black panther (with assistance from the giant python, Kaa), inspired a number of imitations, mostly banal, among whom we may single out Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan*.

Another universal children's classic is *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) by Kenneth Grahame, with its poetic feeling for the English countryside and its delightful animal characters, especially the generous, reckless and self-indulgent Mr Toad. This typically English tradition was continued in A. A. Milne's two volumes of stories, *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926) and *The House at Pooh Corner* (1928), whose hero is of course the famous Bear of Very Little Brain, assisted by a number of other charming nursery animals. Grahame wrote his book as a labour of love for his small son Alistair, and Milne created his animal characters from the toys of his own son.

The Wizard of Oz (1900): opposite, an illustration by W. W. Denslow for Frank L. Baum's masterpiece. Below, Judy Garland as Dorothy in the eternally popular film version.











Among creators of fantastic animal worlds for children, however, Beatrix Potter (1866–1943) perhaps occupies the supreme place. Her *Peter Rabbit* series, beginning with *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1902) describes the adventures of various little creatures in sympathetic but unsentimental terms, and each page of the stories is interleaved with the author's delicate, perceptive illustrations. *The Tailor of Gloucester* (1903) is possibly her masterpiece, and was the author's own favourite.

*Peter Pan, or, The Boy who would not Grow up*, by James Matthew Barrie (1860–1937), is even better known as a story told by others than in its original version. Initially a five-act play for children, it was first staged in London in December 1904, while the 1911 book version, *Peter and Wendy*, became particularly well known abroad. An earlier book was *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (1906), an excerpt from *The Little White Bird* (1902), which brilliantly captures the psychology of small children, and was beautifully illustrated by Arthur Rackham.

Still delightful reading, although perhaps not quite so outstanding, are the many books of Edith Nesbit (1858–1924), who published her first work in 1899, and continued to write children's books regularly till her death. E. Nesbit's talent for creating family settings and

characters of immediate appeal is combined with a sure ear for natural dialogue, and she is equally at home in both fantastic and realistic description. In fact, fantastic incidents arise naturally out of everyday settings, and never seem inappropriate or out of place. Her finest books are possibly *The Phoenix and the Carpet* (1904), *The Story of the Amulet* (1906), and *The Wonderful Garden* (1911), but much of her best work is to be found in a volume of short stories selected from her four collections and published under the title of *Nine Unlikely Tales* (1901).

*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (later shortened to *The Wizard of Oz*), appeared in 1900 and sold a million copies within a year. Its author, Frank L. Baum (1856–1919), has been described by Martin Gardner as America's greatest writer of juvenile fantasy, 'as everyone knows except librarians and professional critics of children's literature'. The *Oz* books – *The Wizard of Oz* was followed by fourteen others – do not share the complex logical paradoxes, linguistic depths and profound implications of Carroll's work, even though Baum's central character is, like Carroll's, a nice but ordinary little girl. The spirit of the *Oz* books is a 'happy, sunny one' (Martin Gardner again), containing few nightmarish episodes, but rich in imagination, inventiveness and

Above (left), Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies*, illustrated by J. Noel Paton (1863). Above, the picnic scene from K. Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) by E. R. Shepard. Below, Beatrix Potter's cover for *The Tailor of Gloucester* (1903).







*J. M. Barrie's Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens (1906) illustrated by Arthur Rackham.*

humour, and presenting an assortment of characters that have been favourites with American children for several generations now. If one wishes to find a 'message' in the stories, it may be in the emphasis on the distinction between real qualities and their mere outer symbols. Thus the Cowardly Lion longs for courage, the Scarecrow for brains, and the Tin Woodman for a heart – virtues which of course they all already possess.

Baum's heroine, Dorothy Gale, a Kansas orphan, is swept into the magical land of Oz by a cyclone. The geography, history, and social customs of this land are told with such engrossing attention to detail that they have acquired an actual reality in the minds of many children. Oz is divided into four regions, each of a different colour; and it is an utopia of happiness. Everyone is happy, unselfish and

contented with his or her lot, and there are no social or material distinctions of rank or possessions. Only in the outskirts are there any dangers lurking, which of course are necessary or there would be no adventures.

The stories are well and simply written, with a tendency towards puns. Memorable characters include Tik-Tok, a robot made of copper; the Nome King; the Hungry Tiger, who has an appetite for small babies but is prevented by his conscience from indulging it; and H.M. (Highly Magnified) Wogglebug, T.E. (Thoroughly Educated), a caricature of school-masterly pedantry. The creator of this magical world died in May 1919 at Ozcot, the house which he had had built in Hollywood.

The seven *Narnia* books by C. S. Lewis (1893–1963) represent one of the most remarkable achievements in children's fantasy since the war. But although Lewis always denied that he was primarily motivated by a desire to bring Christianity to the young, he was nevertheless a formidable Christian propagandist, and it may be more convenient to consider the *Narnia* cycle elsewhere, as part of his total oeuvre (see p. 126). Alan Garner's work comes close to Lewis in its imaginative power, notably *Elidor* (1965), or *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (1960), but if Lewis has a rival in this field it is the American science fiction writer, Ursula K. Le Guin, with her *Earthsea* trilogy.

This describes an archipelagic world where wizardry is a noble science, and the hero of all three books is the magician Sparrowhawk, or Ged. Rich in imaginative detail, if occasionally somewhat simplified, the first book of the trilogy, *A Wizard of Earthsea*, (1968) describes the pains of growing up and coming to terms with oneself, or one's own shadow. The second, *The Tombs of Atuan* (1971), is about love and deprivation, and takes place in a labyrinth beneath an ancient temple. The last of the trilogy, *The Farthest Shore* (1972) is about death, and includes a memorable account of a journey into the waterless land of the dead. The *Earthsea* trilogy shares the warmth and balanced unity of feeling and intellect which characterize Le Guin's other work, but it is in my opinion superior to her rather more celebrated science fiction stories.



## Fantasy and humour

In literary terms, horror and humour often share the same roots, for the unknown and unexpected may either induce fear or be resolved in laughter. One of the functions of humour is to provide a way of coping with things which might otherwise be unbearable. A very successful writer of fantasy humour was F. Anstey (pseudonym for Thomas Anstey Guthrie, 1856–1934), who became instantly popular with his first novel, *Vice Versa* (1882), in which father and schoolboy son exchange bodies after a rashly uttered wish is fulfilled by a magic stone. The father, a successful businessman with little love for his son or understanding of his problems, continues to behave in his usual manner, totally and outrageously inappropriate though it is to his new situation, and incurs the hostility of both fellow pupils and teachers, while the son enjoys himself spending his father's money.

*Vice Versa* deserved its success. The author's inventiveness is unflagging, and the pompous speeches of the father, understandable in a man used to obedience, sound extremely comic when apparently uttered by a small boy. Anstey continued his success with other humorous novels and plays (not all fantasy), six of which were collected in the huge omnibus volume, *Humour and Fantasy* (1931).

Humour and wit may also of course be used to disguise more serious intentions. Anatole France (1844–1924) was engaged throughout his life in a struggle against established religion, which he thoroughly satirized from the standpoint of a wise sceptic. In *Penguin Island* (*L'Île des pingouins*, 1908) a saintly but short-sighted and absent-minded cleric baptises some penguins by mistake, thus endowing them with souls. They are thereby launched on the course to civilization, described by the author as the product of vice, justified by elegant theory and rhetoric, and inevitably attended by misery. The first part, which outlines the mythic-heroic prehistory of penguin civilization, contains one of the funniest dragon hunts to be found in fiction.

Another attack on Christian doctrine is advanced in *The Revolt of the Angels* (*La Révolte des anges*, 1914). Here the angel Abdiel comes to Earth to organize an uprising of angels against God who, he claims, is not in



fact the creator of the world, but an unimportant, vain and empty demiurge. Other angels are described as leading busy lives on Earth, having emigrated there to engage in activities, impossible in Heaven, of an amorous or financial nature. When, after many comic adventures and misadventures in Paris, the storming of Heaven seems imminent, Satan refuses to consummate the empty victory, preferring to continue as a free and independent spirit though physically confined to Hell, than to overthrow God and become,





Opposite and above, illustrations by Frank Papé for James Branch Cabell's *The Cream of the Jest* (1927). Right, scene from a film version of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1917).



through the victory, as vain, corrupt and pompous as he. The Catholic Church retaliated against France by banning all the works of this elegant blasphemer.

Fantasy and fin-de-siècle wit are combined in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), a novel much influenced by Huysmans's *A rebours*, the Decadents' bible. (This was in fact the mysterious 'yellow book' referred to in Wilde's novel.) The story of the transformation of an innocent, beautiful young man into an evil sensualist is well known. Apparently immune from the ravages of time and dissipation, his beauty remains unimpaired while the physical signs of his misdeeds are manifested

on a portrait concealed in the attic. At the time of its appearance the book was considered immoral, but it seems tame enough today. *Dorian Gray* hardly emerges as a tragic figure, although he unwittingly kills himself when he destroys his portrait, and the book as a whole suffers from Wilde's weakness for the apparently profound, witty and iconoclastic epigram, which often seems merely contrived.



James Branch Cabell (1879–1945), a gentleman from Virginia, was a writer of urbane, polished books which sold only moderately well until his fifteenth book, *Jurgen* (1919), succeeded in arousing the wrath of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, and its secretary John S. Sumner. *Jurgen* landed in court on a charge of obscenity, but the judge finally ruled that it contained nothing obscene, lewd, lascivious, filthy, indecent or disgusting, and added that 'it is doubtful if the book could be understood or read at all by more than a very limited number of readers . . .' The resulting publicity catapulted *Jurgen* to bestseller fame, and Cabell's next books also enjoyed good sales. After the 1930s, however, his fame declined, and he died virtually unknown. In recent years he has enjoyed a modest revival.

It was Cabell's high intention to write 'perfectly of beautiful happenings', and to achieve in his work 'distinction and clarity, beauty and symmetry, and tenderness and truth and urbanity'. Of Cabell's fifty-two books, many are fantasy, with some eighteen or twenty (accounts vary) concerned with the 'Biography of the Life of Manuel' – his Dom Manuel, swineherd turned prince, who lived in the imaginary medieval French province of Poictesme. Cabell went on to create a whole cosmogony and a universe, eclectic and erudite, overflowing with learned allusions and names borrowed from obscure mythologies and folklores, intermingled with Cabell's own inventions, complete with heavens and hells, gods and devils.

Cabell was a sharp critic of American provincialism, and his habitual attitude was that of a disillusioned and sceptical conservative. When the author's irony has run its course, and men, gods and societies have all been found wanting, Cabell's heroes settle into a complacent acceptance of life as it is, seeking comfort in material ease and the pleasures and memories of the past: the middle-aged pawnbroker Jurgen, for instance, a 'monstrous clever fellow', who gets a chance to escape from his nagging wife and to return to his youth. Jurgen has a series of adventures, many of them of an amorous nature, and visits various mythical realms, including Heaven. But, as in France's *Revolt of the*







Opposite (above), 'Suddenly the table began to whirl, as if at an insane séance': G. K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, illustrated by Lawrence for a magazine reprint of 1944. Opposite, an illustration for Cabell's *The Silver Stallion* (1927, reprint 1969) by Papé, with whom the author shared a fruitful collaboration. Above, *The Circus of Dr Lao* (1934): Charles G. Finney's comic extravaganza found an able illustrator in Boris Artzybasheff.

Angels, God turns out to be a big disappointment.

Cabell is certainly elegant and witty, but somehow his vast erudition seems wasted. Too much exposure to his work can lead to boredom as the reader discerns, behind the glittering verbal surface, a nihilistic emptiness; an ability to arouse intellectual curiosity, but not to sustain it.

Less ambitious is the work of another American writer, Thorne Smith (1893–1934), whose individual brand of humour has won him a wide readership. His supernatural entertainments include the coming to life in a museum of Greek and Roman statues, who go brawling in pubs (*The Night Life of the Gods*, 1931); a swimming pool which rejuvenates the bathers (*The Glorious Pool*, 1934); husband and wife finding themselves in each other's body (*Turnabout*, 1931); and the haunting of a timid character by the ghost of a mischievous girl and her jealous husband, who torment him by appearing in the most embarrassing situations (*Topper*, 1926).

G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936) was a joker of cosmic proportions, whose mirth and playfulness conceal disturbing paradoxes about God and the world. His quite unclassifiable novel, *The Man Who Was Thursday* (1908), subtitled 'A Nightmare', is rich in absurd and comic situations, and unexpected twists of plot,

including some hilarious chases and escapes by car and balloon. On the surface it is a detective story about a man recruited as a police agent to infiltrate a group of anarchists codenamed according to the days of the week. Each anarchist has been sworn in by the mysterious leader, Sunday, and thus Sime becomes 'the man who was Thursday'. The final pursuit of the anarchists goes beyond all bounds as each of them is in turn revealed as a police agent. But beneath the knockabout comedy deeper issues may be detected, existential paradoxes, and the novel ends with a metaphysical query when the real anarchist appears in the final vision. This impressive finale may be seen as an explanation and defence of the senseless suffering which God permits in the world, 'this whole cosmos turned into an engine of torture'.

Less well-known, perhaps, are the urbane miniatures of John Collier (b. 1901). His brief, pointed little stories detail the cruelly ironic fates of his rather unlikable characters, who tend to be either scoundrels or, at least, fools. In 'Bottle Party', for instance, from the collection *Presenting Moonshine* (1941), the hero summons a wish-fulfilling jinn from a bottle, but finishes up in the bottle himself: 'In the end, some sailors happened to drift into the shop, and, hearing this bottle contained the most beautiful girl in the world, they bought it



up by general subscription of the fo'c'sle.

When they unstoppered him at sea, and found it was only poor Frank, their disappointment knew no bounds, and they used him with the utmost barbarity.' Precision of language, force of imagination, and inventiveness are the characteristics of John Collier's outrageously amoral little stories, in which supernatural punishments are usually quite out of proportion to the crime or failure which may have provoked them.

A serio-comic treatment of the Arthurian theme is provided in *The Once and Future King* by Terence Hanbury White (1906-64). His principal source was Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, and T. H. White's simple, forceful style is in keeping with the great original. The work consists of four volumes: *The Sword in the Stone* (first published in 1938), *The Queen of Air and Darkness* (a heavily revised version of *The Witch in the Wood*, 1939), *The Ill-made Knight* (1940), and the previously unpublished *The Candle in the Wind* (1958). A posthumous fifth volume, *The Book of Merlyn*, finally came out in 1977, with a Foreword by Sylvia Townsend Warner.

Like Mark Twain in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, T. H. White introduces plenty of anachronisms, and in fact makes a point of it. Malory himself placed the epic in his own time, the England of the Late Middle Ages, with all its details of armour, accoutrements and the rules of chivalry, rather than in the sixth-century Britain of the historic Arthur. In White's version, Robin Hood and his men make an appearance, the sorceress Morgan le Fay occupies a castle with neon lights around the gate, psycho-analysis is referred to, and Merlyn is depicted as a time traveller able to remember the future (and thereby often confused in the present).

This use of anachronisms adds to the fun, but it serves also to illustrate the deeper concerns of the work, particularly the relationship between might and right. *The Sword in the Stone* deals with Arthur's childhood under the tutorship of Merlyn, who awakens him to the wider world of nature, and enlarges his consciousness by turning him into various creatures, such as a hawk, a fish, or a badger. T. H. White, a strange and complicated personality, had a deep love of animals, and

this sympathy gives an extra dimension to the transformation scenes.

*The Queen of Air and Darkness* describes Arthur's early manhood, the inauguration of the Round Table as a means of combating the supremacy of brute force, and the machinations of Queen Morgause of Orkney and her brood, ending with her seduction of Arthur. The subject of the third book is the involved relationship of Launcelot, Guenever and Arthur, while the fourth describes the revenge of the 'Orkney' Mordred and his brothers, children of Morgause, against Arthur and his court.



Unlike Twain, T. H. White treats the Middle Ages with compassion. His books are beautifully written, and full of practical wisdom and fascinating information. The author delights in descriptions of hunts, jousts and the armoury of the time, and his physical descriptions are richly realistic. The fifteenth-century world which he depicts is nevertheless an imaginary one, concerned as it is with the ideals of peace and good government, but the humane spirit of the whole is persuasive. What he describes is a world which never was, but should have been.

Above, T. H. White's own drawing for *The Ill-Made Knight* (1941), the second volume of his Arthurian cycle, *The Once and Future King*.

Opposite and overleaf, Unknown (Worlds), a magazine which brought comic fantastic themes to the mass market, was greatly enlivened by the illustrations of Edd Cartier.



FROM

# UNKNOWN WORLDS

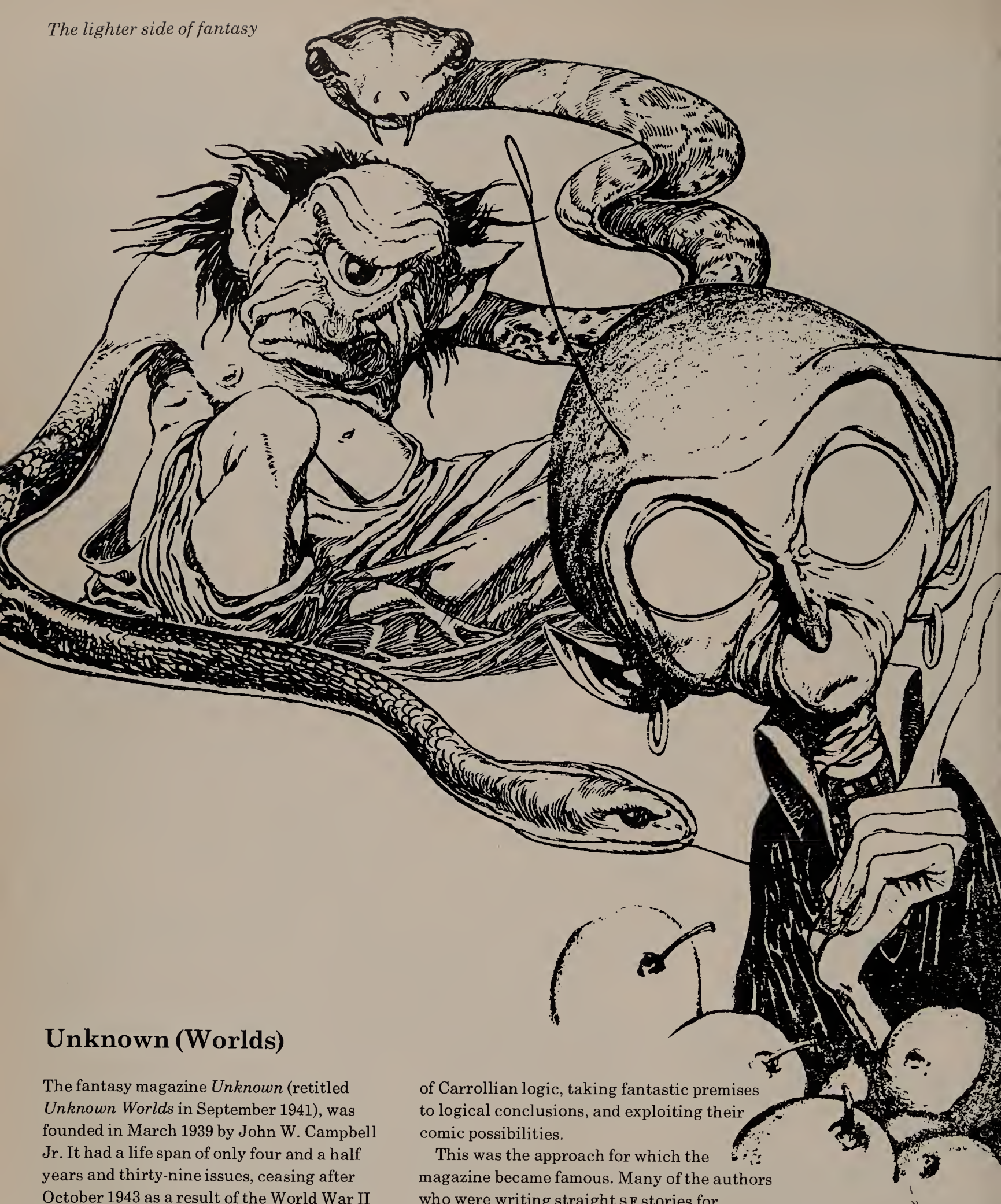
An Anthology of Modern Fantasy for Grownups

BRITISH  
EDITION  
128  
PAGES



A STREET AND SMITH PUBLICATION





## Unknown (Worlds)

The fantasy magazine *Unknown* (retitled *Unknown Worlds* in September 1941), was founded in March 1939 by John W. Campbell Jr. It had a life span of only four and a half years and thirty-nine issues, ceasing after October 1943 as a result of the World War II paper shortage. Considered by many fans to be the best of all the magazines, it did not feature straightforward horror stories, but had a flavour of its own. Almost all of its stories were humorous; some poked fun at werewolves, vampires, and various creatures of conventional fantasy, while others made use

of Carrollian logic, taking fantastic premises to logical conclusions, and exploiting their comic possibilities.

This was the approach for which the magazine became famous. Many of the authors who were writing straight SF stories for *Astounding Science Fiction* (Campbell had founded *Unknown* as a monthly companion to *Astounding*, the leading SF magazine of its day) took part in the entertainment, including L. Ron Hubbard, Theodore Sturgeon, Robert A. Heinlein, A. E. van Vogt and Anthony Boucher. But the most successful exponents of





this type of absurd logic were L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt, who collaborated on a series of novels featuring the bungling psychologist Harold Shea.

Shea's clumsy forays into magical science are the cause of misadventures in various fantastic territories: among the gods and giants of the Norse Eddas, in the world of Spenser's *Faery Queene*, and, finally, in the setting of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*. The first two stories, 'The Roaring Trumpet' and 'The Mathematics of Magic', were published together as *The Incomplete Enchanter* (1942).

They contain some excellent jokes, but the level went down as the series continued. Best of the de Camp/Pratt collaborations is perhaps *The Land of Unreason*, a zany variation on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in which an American diplomat is abducted by drunken fairies on St John's Eve while vacationing in Ireland.

*Unknown's* quality was certainly high by mass market standards, but its stories are more ingenious than profound, and its contributors lacked the inventiveness and originality of the true masters of fantastic

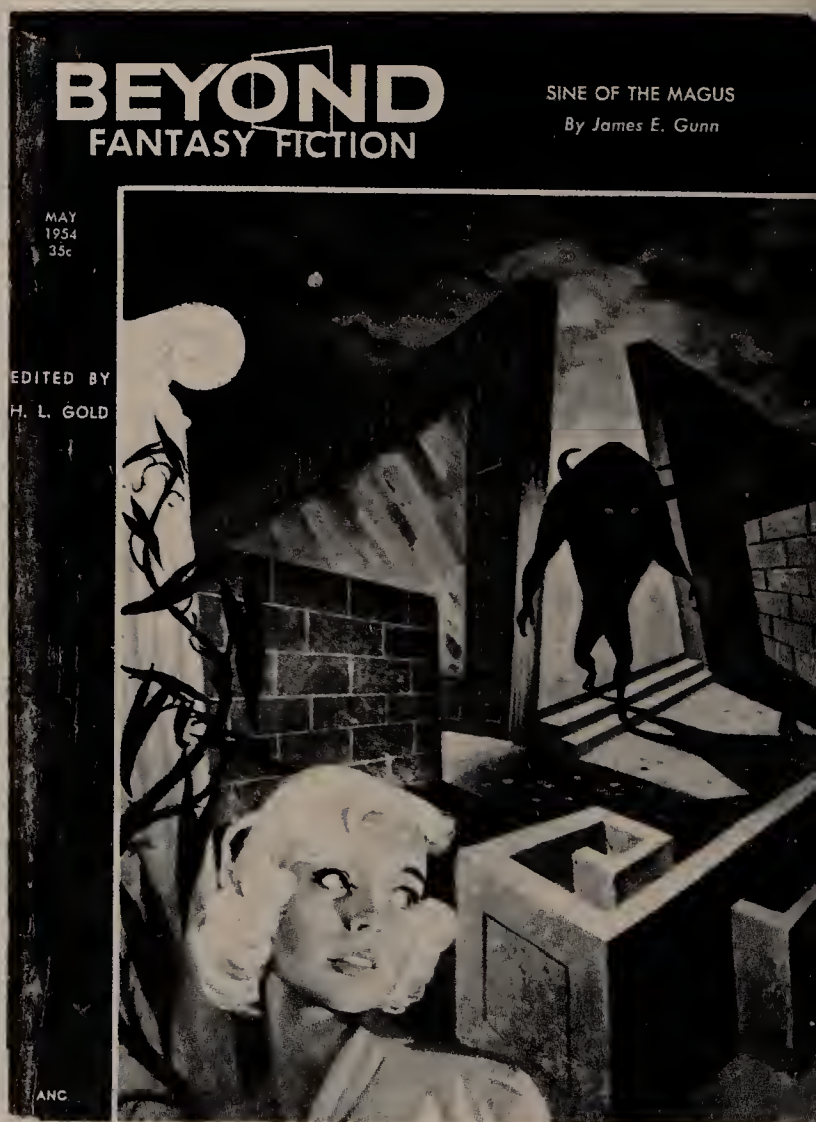




literature, such as Hoffmann or Gogol. The jokes wear thin, the clichés of pulp literature are too often in evidence, and the logical paradoxes often seem simplistic compared with Carroll's.

*Fantasy Magazine*, started in February 1953, and retitled *Fantasy Fiction* with its second issue, was a later attempt to create a fantasy magazine in *Unknown*'s image, but it failed after only four issues. It was edited by Lester del Rey, and featured a newly discovered Conan novella by Robert E. Howard, a new Harold Shea story by de Camp/Pratt (with the hero transported into the world of the Finnish Kalevala), and many mildly amusing short stories by writers like John Wyndham, L. S. de Camp, Robert Sheckley and Philip K. Dick. The covers were all done by Hannes Bok.

Hardly more successful was *Beyond Fantasy Fiction*, editor Horace L. Gold's attempt to establish a fantasy companion to *Galaxy Science Fiction*. Ten issues appeared, starting in July 1953, the last two being numbered and undated, and the title shortened to *Beyond Fiction*, dropping the fateful 'Fantasy'. Its contributors were recruited from the same writers who made *Galaxy* so successful: Isaac Asimov, Theodore Sturgeon, Richard Matheson, Ray Bradbury, and many others.







# antasy and the search for meaning

Christian fantasy: C. S. Lewis and Charles  
Williams/Franz Kafka: the complexity of  
nightmare/Mervyn Peake: the world as castle





## Christian fantasy: C. S. Lewis and Charles Williams

C. S. Lewis (1898–1963), writer, literary scholar, critic, and Professor of Medieval and Renaissance English at Cambridge, was also a great fantasy enthusiast and defender of 'story'. He disliked his own age and preferred to think of himself as the survivor of a much richer medieval culture. Lewis used fantasy as a vehicle for conveying Christian doctrines, especially in his interplanetary trilogy, *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938), *Perelandra* (1943), and *That Hideous Strength* (1945). In these books, a materialistic, evil science is confronted with a supernaturally confirmed religion in struggles on the planets of Mars, Venus and Earth, and such issues as innocence, original sin, and the possibility of unfallen states on other planets, provide themes for the narrative. Much of the attraction of these novels lies in the creation of another world, what Lewis calls the 'mythopoeic' aspect of fantasy, and his Mars and Venus are perhaps the most beautifully and richly described planets in fantasy – artistically much superior to David Lindsay's strange creation, *A Voyage to Arcturus* (1920), which partially served as Lewis's inspiration.

Lewis's *Perelandra* (Venus) is even more beautiful than his Mars, but the obtrusive theology of an averted Fall on Venus, which takes up much of the book, may prove heavy going for those readers who don't share Lewis's religious position. The translation of Christianity into science fiction myth is a failure in *That Hideous Strength*, which is set on Earth and therefore lacks the beautiful descriptive imagery of the other books. The tone of the book is also far more overtly propagandist.

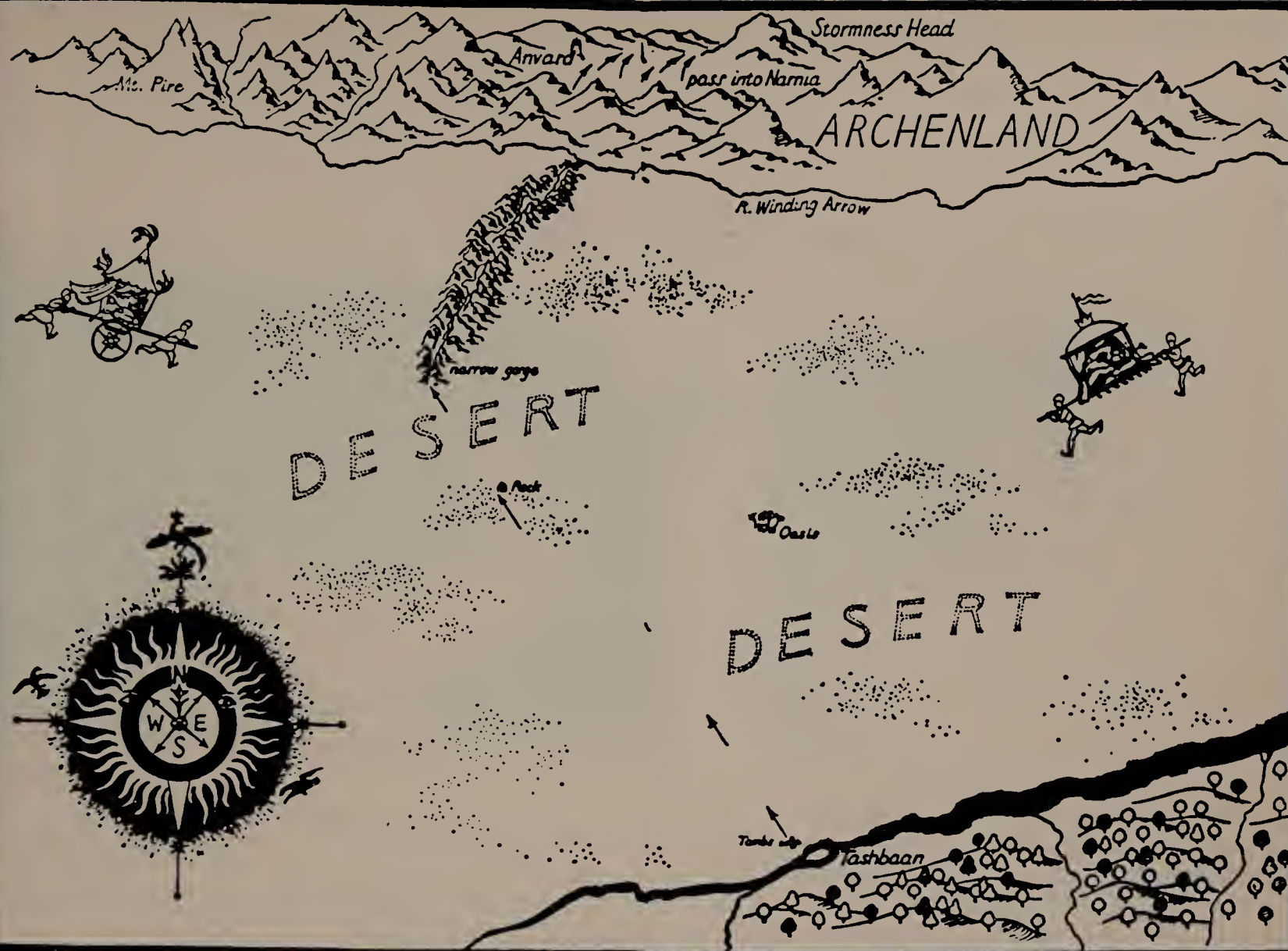
The Christian allegory is less obtrusive in Lewis's *Narnia* series, seven children's books which were published each year from 1950 to 1956. Lewis claimed that he did not set out with the aim of making Christian doctrine palatable to the young: 'Everything began with images; a faun carrying an umbrella, a queen on a sledge, a magnificent lion. At first there wasn't even anything Christian about them; that element pushed itself in of its own accord. It was part of the bubbling.' The fairy tale presentation suggested itself to him because it seemed the ideal form for what he had to say, and because its irreducible resistance to analysis appealed to him.

The fantastic setting is as important as the story, for the beauty of Narnia and the interplanetary worlds is perhaps designed to awaken an unrecognized desire in the reader, which may be turned into a mystic experience of divine presence. Narnia is a world of primal innocence, into which evil enters only through the foolishness of good. A wardrobe provides access to this snowy land, in a manner reminiscent of George MacDonald (another major influence on Lewis). In their adventures the White Witch and Stuff the Ape represent evil, while Aslan, Lord of the Wood, a friendly lion, is a symbol of Christ. The most impressive of the books is perhaps the third, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, with its beautiful and memorable description of a journey to the end of the world.

Lewis's friend Charles Williams (1886–1945), an editor with the Oxford University Press for thirty-six years, wrote poetry, theological treatises, and seven supernatural thrillers full of theological complexities and propagandist intent. Williams's fundamental theme is the warfare between good and evil, raised to cosmic dimensions. His novels are laid in the present, usually in everyday urban surroundings. The story may begin with a murder, as in *War in Heaven* (1930), but gradually it becomes apparent that much larger issues are at stake, involving the fundamental problems of salvation and damnation. The human characters concerned in the struggle fall into various classes: mythical, legendary, and supernaturally gifted figures like Prester John and Simon Magus; or ordinary and conventional people who find themselves caught in a vortex of events, and only slowly begin to understand the nature of the conflict and their own role in it. Gradually the ignorant and the humble may gain a power unsuspected at first, drawing strength from their faith and the conviction of their rightness. Good endures even after early setbacks, until fortunes begin to change; and however formidable evil may seem at first, it is eventually overcome, sometimes with the help of supernatural forces.

In *Shadows of Ecstasy* (1933) the magus-figure Considine, who is over two hundred years old, and an adept of many sorceries, engineers an invasion of the civilized world by means of African jungle tribes. In *All Hallow's*





Above, the way to Narnia, C. S. Lewis's series about 'a world of primal innocence'. Map by Pauline Baynes from *The Horse and His Boy* (1952). Right, *Many Dimensions*, Charles Williams's metaphysical thriller: cover for a recent paperback edition.



*Eve* (1945) a satanic plot for the possession of souls is detected and destroyed. In *The Greater Trumps* (1932) a pack of Tarot cards controls the events and destiny. The plots of other books centre on the possession of an object of power: the Holy Grail in *War in Heaven* (1930), a magical stone from the crown of Suleiman in

*Many Dimensions* (1931). In *The Place of the Lion* (1931), abstract philosophical concepts are brought to vivid life.

In Williams's work the commonplace and the sensational, the miraculous, the mythical and the everyday, co-exist side by side, for there is really only one state of existence. As T. S. Eliot wrote, 'For him there was no frontier between the material and the spiritual world. . . . To him the supernatural was perfectly natural. . . . And this peculiarity gave him the profound insight into Good and Evil, into the heights of Heaven and the depths of Hell, which provides both the immediate thrill and the permanent message of his novels.'

It must be said, though, that Williams's attempts to convey theological issues to the reader often turn into didacticism, and that his style and characterization do not always successfully fuse imaginative philosophy with everyday realism. He achieves passages of unworldly strangeness and great force, but is unable to sustain this impression throughout his novels. On the whole, his writing isn't up to the grandiose problems he wishes to discuss.



## Franz Kafka: the complexity of nightmare



Kafka's fictional world strikes the reader as out of joint and disarranged; yet at the same time none of his characters speculate about it. They passively submit to whatever happens to them, accepting it as part of life. Kafka distorts the ordinary appearance of the world to expose its madness; and by treating this madness as perfectly normal, he implicitly emphasizes the paradox.

In 'The Metamorphosis' ('Die Verwandlung', 1916) Gregor Samsa wakes one morning to find himself transformed into a giant beetle; but he experiences none of the fright that one might expect. It is his cool aloofness, his apparently objective consideration of the situation, his petty anxiety about trifles (to avoid confronting the appalling reality), which make the story so frightening. Samsa's transformation is not seen as something amazing, but only as a nuisance, and a minor nuisance at that, something to be glossed over by himself and his relatives. 'In the Penal Colony' features a horrifying machine of torture and execution which kills its victims in the vilest way, tattooing their crimes into the skin. The tone of the story is neutral, detached, disinterested, coolly understated, as if a rather curious but otherwise not unexceptional phenomenon were being described. 'In the Penal Colony' looks forward to a time when, in the heart of central Europe, millions of human beings were to be systematically destroyed, and scientists were systematically to investigate processes for doing away with the greatest number of people by the most

efficient method.

In *The Castle* (*Das Schloss*, 1926) K., a land surveyor, arrives at the castle – a small administrative centre. He has been ordered to appear; but nobody there knows of his summons, and though he is not dismissed, neither is he admitted to the castle. Throughout the book he desperately tries to get accepted into an indifferent, uncaring world governed by bureaucratic rules incomprehensible to himself, to the people who apply them, and even to the people who ordain them. Throughout the book he tries, as it were, to get born into this world, but without success; everybody seems to avoid him, nobody is competent to deal with his case. In *The Trial* (*Der Prozess*, 1925) the central figure, Joseph K., is tried and eventually executed for a crime, while he attempts in vain to find out what it is that he has been accused of.

Kafka's work has the quality of absolute nightmare, though there are overtones of comic absurdity. Where writers of horror stories resort to bizarre exaggeration and hyperbole, piling detail upon gruesome detail, Kafka succeeds by understatement. He never raises his voice, writing in a strangely subdued tone, carefully avoiding any affectation, and by this means he achieves an effect of latent intensity unsurpassed by other writers. Kafka had no leanings towards the supernatural, preferring simple and ordinary things, and he was shocked by the enthusiasm of his friend, Max Brod, for the occult excesses of a writer like Gustav Meyrink.

*Above, the eyes of Franz Kafka. Opposite, Kafka's vision of man into dung-beetle: from Yosl Bergner's cover for the Penguin edition of Metamorphosis and Other Stories.*





Kafka was not, at least primarily, a myth-maker, symbolist or surrealist, but a realistic narrator of fables and parables. The surface fabric of his stories is always lucid, oblique, deceptively natural, and firmly anchored in the commonplace world. His writing sometimes resembles diaries, memoranda, or official protocols; he is coldly objective and scrupulously, pendentically exact in all particulars. But his final meaning is ambiguous, offering a deep riddle, a complexity that can never be exhausted by interpretation, suggesting a frightening, unreal world. These qualities have provoked a large body of critical commentary, from Max Brod's own religious interpretation as a search for God to the inescapable psychoanalytical readings.

Kafka's short life (1883–1924) invites such

interpretations. Intimidated by his forceful father, a Jewish merchant of Prague who admired only success, he tried all his life to assert his own values as a writer against this overpowering figure. His particular situation ensured that he would write from an alienated viewpoint: as a Jew he didn't belong with the Christians; as a German-speaking Jew born in Prague he didn't belong with the Czechs; as a middle-class Jew he didn't quite belong with the poorer Eastern Jews; nor did he belong with the dominant Austrians. Finally, as the son of a well-to-do citizen he didn't belong with the workers, though he was employed for many years by the Workers' Accident Insurance Institute for the Kingdom of Bohemia. Everywhere he experienced alienation, and the literary universe he created, this world of language, reflects his painful estrangement. It is a world governed by social laws inaccessible to reason.

All of Kafka's work is motivated by a desire for knowledge and experience, and tinged with despair over the futility of the search for them. Powerless, unable to affect their own destinies, Kafka's heroes can only try to interpret the world, and this gives his work its many-levelled meaning. Kafka's stories are almost a fictional version of scientific experiments: having established the experimental situation, he tests his abstract characters to find out something about them and their world. Cognition is his goal, a goal both desperately striven after and unattainable. Therefore Kafka's novels move in a circle, and their helpless heroes are caught in the fabric of a world that is ever elusive to them. They are mere cogs in a senseless social machine, and the voyage of self-discovery ends in the bitterness of disappointment.

When Thomas Mann gave Albert Einstein a Kafka novel to read, the scientist returned it after a few days, unfinished. 'The human mind,' he declared, 'isn't that complex.' Whatever the truth of this, Kafka's intellectual dreams certainly do express a very modern philosophy: the inscrutability of the world, the inescapable solitude of man, and the unbridgeable gulf between the two. And this philosophy is given a form, a world frozen in symbolic pictures, which is an integral part of the subject.



## Mervyn Peake: the world as castle

It is the image of Castle Gormenghast itself, inward-looking, archaic, brooding, self-sufficient, and totally isolated from the rest of the world, which dominates Mervyn Peake's trilogy of that name, consisting of *Titus Groan* (1946), *Gormenghast* (1950), and *Titus Alone* (1959). This massive, sombre and impressive work is a canalization of the author's chaos, pouring out 'through the gutters of Gormenghast'.

Born in China in 1911, the son of a mission doctor at Tsientsin, Peake led a nomadic life before returning with his family to England in 1922. After completing school in Kent he went on to study art at the Royal Academy schools until 1933. At the outbreak of war he was called up for military service, but his independent spirit ensured that he would be a complete misfit. He died in 1968.

Gormenghast is a world immeasurably old, almost timeless, weighed down by tradition and ritual, decaying, yet self-perpetuating in decay:

'The left hand pages were headed with the date, and in the first of the three books this was followed by a list of the activities to be performed hour by hour during the day by his lordship. . . .

'The second tome was full of blank pages and was entirely symbolic, while the third was a mass of cross-references. If, for instance, his lordship, Sepulchrave, the present Earl of Groan, had been three inches shorter, the costumes, gestures and even the routes would have differed from the ones described in the first tome, and from the enormous library another volume would have had to have been chosen which would have applied. Had he been of a fair skin, or had he been heavier than he was, had his eyes been green, blue or brown instead of black, then, automatically, another set of archaic regulations would have appeared this morning on the breakfast table. This complex was understood in its entirety only by Sourdust – the technicalities demanding the devotion of a lifetime, though the sacred spirit of tradition implied by the daily manifestations was understood by all.'

Everything in the castle is governed by a complex ritual, the origins and final meaning of which have been lost in the abysses of history; Sourdust, as Lord of the Library and







Opposite, the people of Gormenghast portrayed by the author include the evil Steerpik (above) and his victim Barquentine, and (below) Bellgrove the pompous schoolmaster. Above, Peake's illustration for the lost *The Three Principalities* (1930) may show the influence of his Chinese childhood.

Master of Ritual, ensures that it is adhered to.

Outside this vast castle, huddled under its walls, is a sprawl of mean hovels where the 'outer' folk, dejected subjects of the Groans, live in squalor. Beautiful in their youth, these people wither after some twenty years into a premature old age, though their life spans are of normal length. During the year they produce elaborate, stylized carvings, the best three of which are annually chosen to be preserved in the castle's dusty Hall of Bright Carvings, where they are seldom seen by anyone except the curator. The rest are burned.

*Titus Groan* opens with the birth of the new heir (the future Titus the Seventy-seventh),

and the first Machiavellian schemes of the kitchen-boy Steerpik against the inhabitants of Gormenghast. Rising to a position of favour and power, Steerpik eventually drives the old Earl of Sepulchre into madness and death, starves the two sisters, Cora and Clarice, until they die from exhaustion, and murders Barquentine, the successor of Sourdust, to secure the powerful office of Master of Ritual for himself.

Titus discovers Steerpik's crimes. But only when torrential rains flood the castle and force Steerpik, like the others, to seek shelter in the higher towers, does he sight and kill him. During all this time Titus Groan has developed away from Gormenghast, and after slaying the family foe he becomes an apostate himself, leaving his small empire in search of new horizons. In *Titus Alone* he finds a technological world much like ours, where few believe in the existence of Gormenghast. In the end he decides to return home, but in sight of the castle he changes his mind, having no longer any need for it, 'for he carried his Gormenghast within him'.

Gormenghast abounds in curious yet fascinating and fully rounded characters: the Count and Countess of Groan, Steerpik, Irma, and Doctor Prunesqualor, the mad twin sisters Cora and Clarice, Barquentine, Flay, Swelter, and countless others. But the most important character in the book is the castle itself, a mass of towers and walls of stone and mortar, splendidly isolated from the world as we know it, a place where change is anathema.

The *Gormenghast* trilogy stands in lonely splendour in postwar British fiction, the product of an autonomous imagination able to create the entire richly decorated fabric of a world paralleling our own. Seriously intended, yet with its self-mockery revealed in the grotesqueness of its names and characters, it is perhaps the kind of literature which appears with the end of empire. At any rate, some works that were written in the territory of the former Austro-Hungarian empire, by writers like Herzmanovsky-Orlando or Bruno Schulz, seem close to it in spirit, while Franz Kafka's *The Castle* (1926), with its gulf between the inhabitants of the bureaucratic castle and the surrounding world, may have been a direct influence. Schulz's world of *The Cinnamon*



*Shops* is equally timeless, with events sometimes taking place in a temporal backwater, or in the course of, say, a false thirteenth month.

Peake was a poet and talented illustrator of books, in addition to his *Gormenghast* achievement. But when real success came with the paperback issue of the trilogy, publication of his drawings, and the appearance of more volumes of verse, he was unable to enjoy it. Suffering from encephalitis, he was hospitalized from 1962 till his death in 1968.



*Above, Peake by Peake (c. 1931), a self-portrait in oil. Right, his Ancient Mariner (1943) was described by C. S. Lewis as possessing 'a disquieting blend of the venerable, the pitiable, and the frightful'.*







Latin America/France/Germany/Austria/  
Belgium and the Low Countries/Poland/Japan





## Latin America

In most countries fantasy is only an undercurrent of the literature, and often held in low regard; but this is not the case in modern Latin America, where it is an important part of the literary scene. The Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier (b. 1904) has called it 'magic reality', and this quality achieves an incomparable expression in the Latin-American world, because of its youthful culture, its undeveloped, aboriginal background, and the creative presence of the Indio and the Negro. Young and vital, Latin-American literature is gifted with an abundance of characters, themes, situations, and possibilities.

Carpentier himself, in his *The Kingdom of This World* (*El reino de este mundo*, 1949) made use of the magic folklore of the negroes of Haiti.

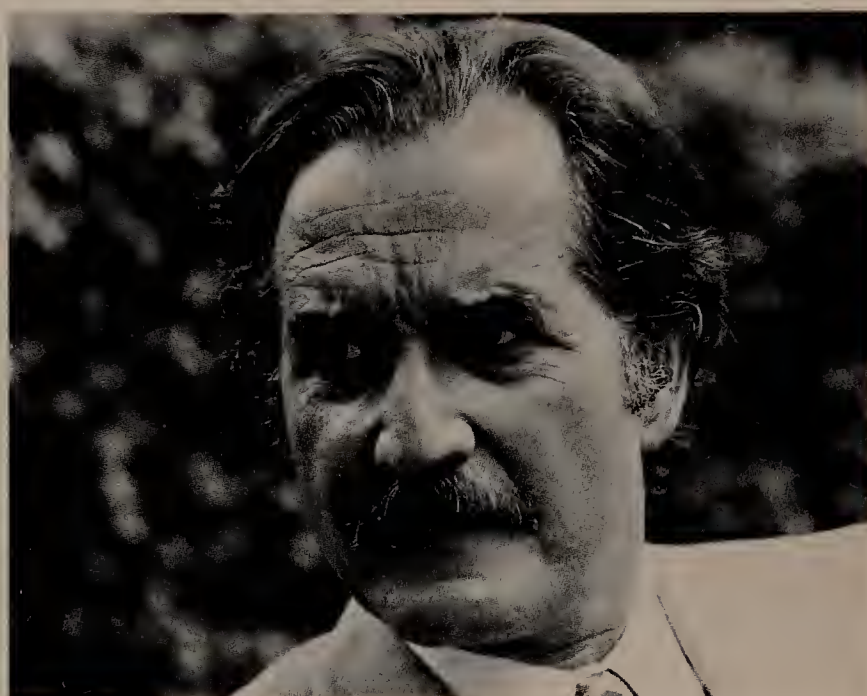
This kind of literature is close to the roots of myth and magic. Its superabundant fantasy consists, not in an opposition to everyday reality, but in a heightened awareness of its true nature. The borders between the human, the natural, and the supernatural world disappear, and the laws of time and space are frequently suspended. In Gabriel García Márquez's great novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (*Cien años de soledad*, 1967), the marvellous is always present and accepted as commonplace, not felt as a disorder in nature. His fantastic history of the fictional village of Macondo in Columbia is a mythical recreation of the reality of his country, located in an imaginary time. Much the same is true of Augusto Roa Bastos's *Hijo de hombre* (*Son of Man*, 1960). In both, the chronological lines of the narrative often dissolve and, in both, the authors seem to be obsessed with the question of time.

This is also true of the Argentinian Jorge Luis Borges (b. 1899), the most European of the Latin-American writers, a man of stupendous range of reading. His stories draw on the philosophical thought of mankind, especially the more bizarre, obscure and heretical beliefs, and evoke a feeling of metaphysical curiosity and wonder. The labyrinth, the mirror, eternity, these are recurrent symbols in his paradoxical work, combining authentic if little-known scholarly sources with his own inventions. 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius', for instance, is a construct of an idealist universe,

taking literally Berkeley's dictum that nothing exists save in perception. Within the context of a highly abstract fantastic philosophy, Borges's stories tend to have as their themes certain philosophical and theological propositions of a contradictory or heretical nature. 'The Lottery in Babylon' considers the interplay of statistical chance and pre-determined necessity. 'The Library of Babel' discusses the idea of a universal library containing everything that can be expressed in orthographic symbols. 'Three Versions of Judas' puts forward the blasphemous notion that Judas, not Jesus, was the true Redeemer. An attack on the uniqueness of artistic creation is advanced in 'Pierre Menard, Author of Quixote', in which is described an attempt to write *Don Quixote* anew, without copying it. Like the philosophers of Tlön, Borges doesn't seek truth, only amazement; philosophies and religions are of interest to him only for their esthetic value, and he uses and distorts them without qualms in his eclectic tales. Aside from several volumes of essays, Borges's fame rests principally on his two short story collections, *Ficciones* (1944, English edition 1962), and *El Aleph* (1949); his principal English collections are *Labyrinths* (1962), *Ficciones* (1962) and *The Aleph and Other Stories* (1970). Together with Samuel Beckett, Borges was awarded the important *Prix Formentor* in 1961.

Often considered a mere disciple of Borges, with whom he collaborated on a number of detective stories under the joint pseudonym of H. Bustos Domecq, Adolfo Bioy Casares (b. 1914) is nevertheless important in his own right. His fantastic stories and novels derive their special ironic effect from the discrepancy between his characters' pathetically self-important interpretations of the situation, and the actual nature of things. For Bioy Casares every man is an island, and no communication or cognition is possible. But his sharply observed stories are richly textured and much less general and abstract than those of Borges. His best novel is a perfectly plotted piece of writing, *La invención de Morel* (1940) – the title is a bow to H. G. Wells's *The Island of Dr Moreau*. The hero, a fugitive from the law, meets a group of people on a remote island, and falls in love with one, Faustine, only to





Two masters of Latin American 'magic reality'; Julio Cortázar (left) of Argentina, and the Mexican Carlos Fuentes.

find that she refuses to speak to him. Like the others, she is a mere projection of Morel's apparatus, and in order to get close to her he chooses to undergo this artificial immortality by himself becoming one of the projections: an ironic error, it would seem. Much the same problem of human identity is treated in *Plan de evasión* (*A Plan for Escape*, 1945) and *Dormir al sol* (*Sleep in the Sun*, 1973).

Another important Argentinian fantasy writer is Julio Cortázar (b. 1914). Influenced by writers like Borges, Bioy Casares, Horacio Quiroga, and Felisberto Hernandez, Cortázar has discarded the whole paraphernalia of Gothicism, aiming instead at a type of fantasy arising out of the everyday world – a 'fantasy of high noon' as he calls it – which relies on suggestion and understatement rather than on explicit horror. In 'Casa tonádo' (*The House Taken Over*) for instance, strange noises cause the typically bourgeois inhabitants of a house to close down whole areas of it, and finally to flee it altogether. In 'Lejana' (*Distances*, 1951), the heroine establishes a strange psychic relationship with an old beggar woman in Budapest. She eventually travels to Hungary, where the two meet on a bridge, and their consciousnesses are exchanged.

Cortázar's heroes are all living witnesses of the impotence of reason in the face of a reality which is sinister, since it is neither comprehended nor comprehensible. It is his opinion that the twentieth century has replaced 'the

psalm with the formula, vision with sober description, and magic with science'.

Novels like *The Winners* (*Los premios*, 1960), *Hopscotch* (*Rayuela*, 1963), or *Sixty-two: A Model Kit* (*62 modelo para armar*, 1968) are highly complex linguistic structures. *Hopscotch*, for instance, may be either read straightforwardly from Chapter 1 to 56, or 'hopscotchedly', by mixing the chapters 57 to 155 under the first 56, according to the instructions of the author. Cortázar's short stories, on the other hand, are compact, poetic structures, offering the reader a distinct, highly significant segment of reality, and obeying strict intellectual and formal criteria. Everything superfluous has been left out, and tension is provided by a gradual development of the theme. Cortázar's stories are more concise than reality; they are 'windows, openings for words', through which there can be seen a sinister universe where the principles of causality and psychological laws are not applicable, and where widely separated places and times may be imaginatively connected.

Cortázar's short fantasies have been collected in the volumes *Bestiario* (1951), *Final de juego* (1956), *Las armas secretas* (1959), *Todos los fuegos el fuego* (1966), and *Octaedro* (1974). The story 'Las babas del diablo' (1959; English edition *End of the Game and Other Stories*, 1967) served as the inspiration for Antonioni's film, *Blow up*.



*Jorge Luis Borges (below) with his Book of Imaginary Beings, cover for the Penguin edition (1969) by Peter Goodfellow. Opposite, Avatar by Théophile Gautier: an illustration by Marek Pietrzak for a 1976 Polish edition.*

The Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes (b. 1928), in addition to his long novel *Terra Nostra* (1975), has written two impressive complementary novellas. The first, 'Aura' (1962), is a fairly straightforward weird story, though suggesting deeper metaphysical mysteries. A young historian is commissioned to edit the memoirs of a dead general, working in a dark old house inhabited by an old woman (the general's widow) and her young niece, Aura. The young man falls in love with the girl but, in a climax reminiscent of Poe, finds himself making love to the hag – for Aura is only a fleeting projection of the old woman.

Much more complex is 'Compleānos' (1969) which, taking up the earlier story's themes, ranges through space and time, with the hero assuming various identities, and becoming lover and voyeur at the same time. This 'great metaphysical poem' (Juan Goytisolo) raises questions about physical and psychological time, and revolts against 'our ephemeral rationality', aiming at a totality of timelessness, where everything is present. The puzzling, inexplicable transformations of the figures and settings together make up an absurd totality transcending the limits of reason. This is an extremely difficult story, taxing the intellectual resources of the reader.





## France



France has produced such an abundance of fantasy, sometimes influenced by Hoffmann, the Gothic writers and, later, Poe, that any short summary must of necessity be inadequate. France is also, according to the critic P.-G. Castex, 'the very initiator of the modern fantasy story' with *Le Diable amoureux* (1772) by Jacques Cazotte (1719–92), a tale which combines the themes of feminine sweetness and charm with diabolical elements, in a form which has since proved most effective.

Among the great French authors, Balzac wrote a number of fantasies, including a sequel to *Melmoth the Wanderer* called 'Melmoth reconcilié' (1835), and *La Peau de chagrin* (1831), the famous study of a man who possesses a magic piece of shagreen leather with power to grant his wishes – but at each wish the leather shrinks, and, with it, the owner's life. Naturally the Romantics, such as Charles Nodier (1780–1844), Théophile Gautier (1811–72), and Gérard de Nerval (Gérard Labrunie, 1808–55), have also made important contributions.

Mention has already been made of Gautier's remarkable vampire story, 'La Morte amoureuse' (1836), but many others also contain striking ideas: in 'Omphale', for instance, a beautiful figure in a tapestry comes seductively to life, while 'Arria Marcella' describes fantastic incidents against the background of ancient Pompeii. Gautier often makes use of folk superstitions in his work, as when he introduces the motif of the evil eye in *Jettatura* (1856). In *Avatar* (1856), he combines linguistic awareness with erotic elegance in his account of a young man in love with a Polish countess. The young man's soul is transferred into her husband's body, but his love remains unconsummated because of his inability to speak Polish.

Gérard de Nerval's work fluctuates between dream and reality, and the point where they merge. Dream reveals a truer, higher reality, an ideal formed from the impressions and experiences of de Nerval's childhood, but the drabness of everyday life always reasserts itself, and the final result is disappointment. 'Sylvie' (1853), a beautiful evocation of early days, and the visionary 'Aurélia' (1855), probably represent the high point of this remarkable writer's talent.



Eroticism and sexuality are powerful ingredients in French fantasy, from Cazotte, through Gautier and his femmes fatales, on to the Decadents (notably Barbey d'Aurevilly's *Les Diaboliques*, 1874), and up to such moderns as Julien Green and Claude Seignolle. Few supernatural lovers can compare in horror with the ancient bronze statue of Venus in Prosper Mérimée's well-known 'La Vénus d'Ille' (1837), which comes to life and chokes the imprudent young man who has dared to put his ring on its finger.

Among popular French nineteenth-century writers, fantasy has played a considerable part. Eugene Sue, Alexandre Dumas (*Les Mille et un fantômes*, 1849), and Paul Féval (*La Ville-vampire*, 1875) should be mentioned in this context, as well as the Alsatian writers Erckmann-Chatrian (Émile Erckmann, 1822–99, and Alexandre Chatrian, 1826–90), whose *Contes des bords du Rhin* (1862), and *Contes populaires* (1866) are well worth attention.

Jean-Marie Mathias Philippe-Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam (1838–89), scion of an ancient family, arrived in Paris in 1862 as a contender for the Greek throne. He remained there, living in great poverty, and finally achieved for his glorious house the only fame which his age was able to offer him, that of a writer, although as a romantic he was little understood in an era which increasingly favoured scientific materialism and empiricism. Villiers de l'Isle-Adam tirelessly attacked 'progress', 'common sense', and the smug self-satisfaction of his society. The subject matter of his stories is the strange, the *outré*, the curious, even the pathological, in which he reflected the undeniable influence of Poe (in 'Véra', for example, a morbid story of love beyond death, or in the few Spanish Inquisition stories of *Contes cruels*, 1883). Villiers de l'Isle-Adam was a master of form, and his stories have an icy beauty. He avoids loud gestures, and in his works the passions are always coolly under control. He is an aristocrat among writers, striving after immaculate purity of form, searching always for the fresh or original expression. The content of his stories is often quite slight, however, and his concern for beauty of expression often leads to a lofty disregard for facts. Indian fakirs, for instance, are described as 'minstrels', and the







Opposite, *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925), a film based on Leroux's horror story. Right, two images from French fantasy: Gautier's *Avatar* (right), and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *Contes cruels*.

waters of the Euphrates are said to flow gently around Indian cities.

Guy de Maupassant (1850–93), perhaps the greatest master of the short story that France has ever produced, was obsessed by the fear of going mad, and he did indeed die insane. This obsession colours his supernatural stories – only a handful among a total of about 300 – which depict the situations of over-sensitive and neurotic people on the edge of sanity. The terrors which threaten them are of their own making, but to the participants no less real for that: An intangible dread of the unknown is Maupassant's most effective technique of terror, and this sensation is most impressively described in 'Le Horla' (1886), the intermittently kept diary of a man apparently haunted by an invisible blood-sucking monster. There is no direct connection, however, between these stories and Maupassant's eventual insanity, since the former were all produced during his successful writing career, and there is no pathological development apparent in his later work.

Maurice Renard (1875–1939) was a pioneer of science fiction, and is best known for his visionary novel *Le Péril bleu* (1910), in which creatures from beyond the stratosphere cause strange phenomena on Earth, and use human beings as guinea pigs for their experiments. Renard's first novel, *Le Docteur Lerne* (1908) is

a variant of H. G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1898), in which a mad scientist transplants human brains into animal bodies. The book has a strong erotic content, and this, combined with its innovative, hectic language, gives it a special quality.

A tense and brooding atmosphere characterizes the work of Julien Green (b. 1900), a novelist of American parentage writing in French. His subject matter is passion and suffering, and he rejects the usual trappings of fantasy, preferring to create out of the stifling normality of French urban life his modern versions of hell, hardly less terrible in their way than Dante's. His heroes, who suffer torment as a result of their failure to understand or to come to terms with their surroundings or their own complicated natures, are usually young, naive, and dominated by some obsession. They tend to be beset with sexual desires and temptations, inhibited by notions of sexual purity, and haunted by the phantoms of their strict upbringing and of their own feverish minds. A typical example is Daniel O'Donovan, the hero of 'Le Voyageur sur la terre' (1927); or the central character of *Le Visionnaire* (1934), who builds himself a castle of the imagination to escape from the real world. In Green's philosophy, life is a burden to be borne, and death is a release; only the imagination promises freedom.



The stories of André Paul Edouard Pieyre de Mandiargues (b. 1909) are similarly poised between dream and reality, with surreal rather than uncanny overtones. Influenced by surrealism, mysticism, and 'black' romanticism, they often consist of uninterrupted sequences of phantasmagoric visions. Dream holds a central position in his work, enabling him to expand the ordinary universe, liberating it from the tyranny of logic and physical reality in order to illuminate a hitherto concealed reality. His visions create a mythic but brutal world, in which his passive heroes serve as the central point of remembrance and recollection. Loss of virginity, connected with images of blood, is a frequent theme in his stories, and these may actually be constructed according to a geometrical figure, as in 'Le Diamant' (in the collection *Feu de braise*, 1959), where the heroine loses her maidenhead inside a diamond-shaped area of spiritual purity and geometrical symmetry. Eros and Thanatos, love and death, are the twin poles around which the author's work revolves, combined in fantastic myths and dreams.

A sexual element is also very prominent in the work of Claude Seignolle, who has been highly praised by Lawrence Durrell: 'The devils, the werewolves and vampires . . . appear in his novels as disturbing realities, and the attitude he adopts towards them is so matter-of-fact that the reader rapidly finds himself believing in them. . . .' His stories are frequently based on local folklore, and he has an intimate knowledge of the superstitions of the French countryside. Evil often takes the form of sexual desire breaking out in destructive impulses: for example, *La Malvenue* (*The Accursed*, 1965), where a pagan stone figure exerts its evil influence upon some simple-minded peasants. The nature of Seignolle's stories is indicated in the titles of the collections: *Récits cruels* (1967), *Contes macabres* (1966), *Histoires maléfiques* (1965), *Contes sorciers* (1974).

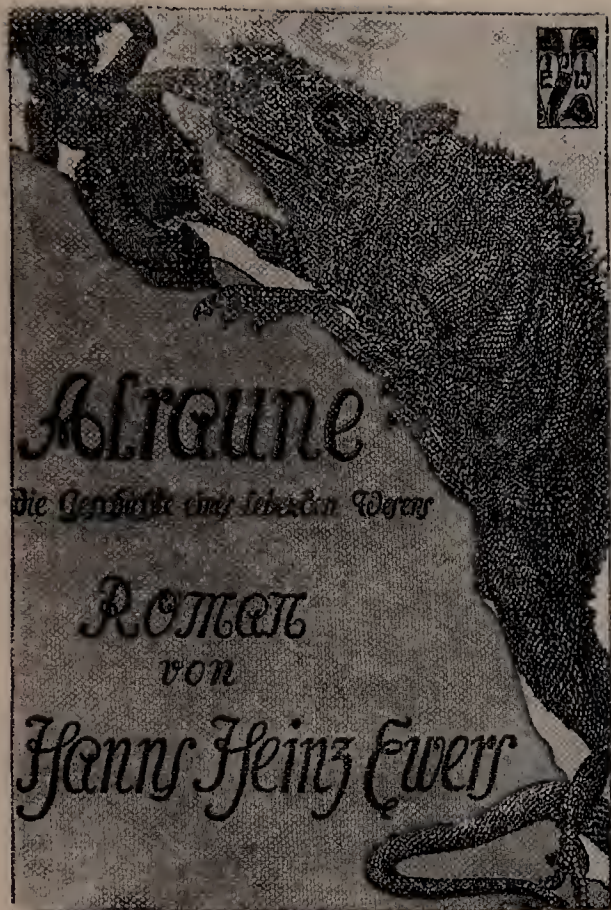


*Hands in fantasy: above, Mad Love (1935), based on a novel by Maurice Renard; right, Seignolle's Contes Sorciers, cover from the Marabout edition (1974).*





## Germany



Above, two covers from Georg Müller, the celebrated German fantasy imprint: Hanns Heinz Ewers' *Alraune* (1911), by Ilna Ewers-Wunderwald, and *Das lustige Gespensterbuch* (1915), edited by Felix Schloemp and illustrated by Kurt Szafranski.

As author, editor or translator, Hanns Heinz Ewers (1871–1943) was the most important figure in the German fantasy revival following the turn of the century. Ewers translated Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Théophile Gautier and F. Boutet, and from 1912 to 1922 he edited the important series, 'Galerie der Phantasten', for Georg Müller in Munich, the leading fantasy publisher of his day, and Ewers' own publisher. The series ran to eight illustrated volumes, with tales by Hoffmann, Poe, Oscar Panizza, K. H. Strobl, Alfred Kubin, Honoré de Balzac, the Spaniard Adolfo Gustavo Becquer, and of course Ewers himself, with *Mein Begräbnis* (1917).

Ewers' early work consisted of children's tales and satirical pieces, but he became successful only with his fantasies, which were fashionably erotic and decadent, exploiting the prurient tendency of his public. Ewers liked to play the part of a well-travelled and sophisticated man of the world, and usually referred in his stories to the exotic places where they happened to have been written. He produced an idealized portrait of himself in the figure of the immoral Frank Braun, hero of a trilogy of novels: *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*

(*Der Zauberlehrling oder Die Teufelsjäger*, 1909), *Alraune* (1911), and *Vampir* (1920). In the first, Braun's manipulation of a remote community's religious fanaticism culminates in a crucifixion. In the second, which is still in print in several countries, Frank Braun is the *spiritus rector* in the creation of an artificial being, an *alraune* of folklore. This creature emerges as a kind of *belle dame sans merci* who destroys every male she comes in contact with until, at last, Braun puts an end to his 'little sister'. *Alraune* may not be a psychological masterpiece, but it is certainly an effective piece of writing, perhaps of the same order as Stoker's *Dracula*, and it was indeed acclaimed by the early psychoanalysts. *Vampir*, on the other hand, is a shapeless, sprawling book in which World War I is seen as a gigantic vampiric feast. The novel includes passages which read like a diluted version of de Sade.

Ewers' short stories share this sensationalism, with hints of perversion and an emphasis on bloodlust, and he has a tendency to make up in explicitly gruesome details what he lacks in subtlety of characterization. He was a great admirer of Poe, on whom he wrote a long essay, but the similarity of the two men



is more one of subject matter than of artistic purpose or accomplishment. As one might expect, Ewers took a close interest in the unhappy fate of Oscar Wilde, which he described in his story 'C.3.3.'. His many short stories were collected in *Das Grauen* (1907), *Die Besessenen* (1908), *Grotesken* (1910), *Nachtmahr* (1922), and others. Whatever the general quality of these, in at least one story, 'Die Spinne' ('The Spider', 1908) Ewers did achieve genuine greatness. In this story of fatal attraction, various men are persuaded to their deaths by a woman appearing in a window opposite their room – apparently sitting like a spider awaiting her male prey.

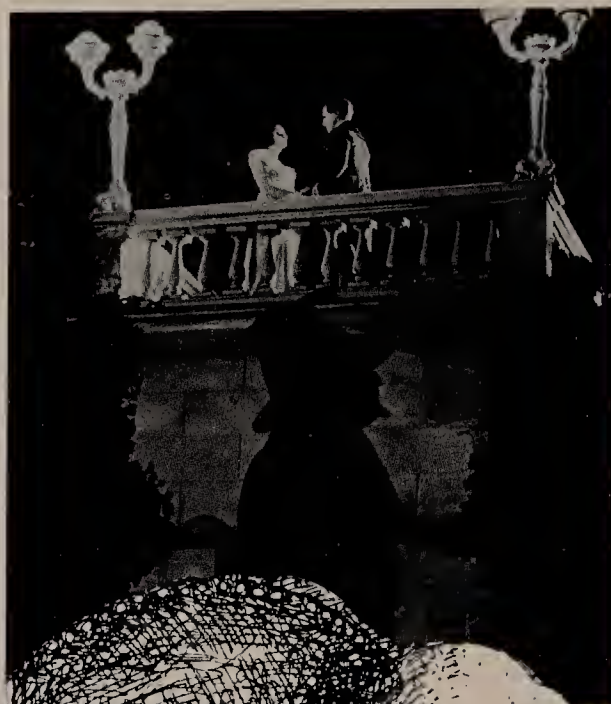
Ewers in later years came under the influence of the Nazis – his hatred of the Americans dated from their treatment of him as a prisoner in World War I – and he wrote two novels glorifying their cause: *Reiter in deutscher Nacht* (1932) and *Horst Wessel* (1933). But as soon as the Nazis rose to power they suppressed his writings. For all his failings, Ewers could hardly be styled a Nazi.

Other German fantasists include Oscar A. H. Schmitz, Oskar Panizza, Alexander Moritz Frey, Paul Madsack, Georg von der Gabelentz, and H. H. Schmitz, who are all almost unknown today. The most interesting of them may be Oskar Panizza (1853–1921), a psychiatrist by profession who died insane. The dark side of fantasy seemed to possess a very real power for Panizza, though his satires rely overmuch on shrill exaggeration. In his *Liebeskonzil*, (Council of Love, 1895), for which he served a prison sentence for blasphemy, the Devil fathers a girl child on Salome, who is then sent to Earth to tempt, first, Pope Alexander II, then all the cardinals, then the archbishops and papal legates, then all the bishops and monks, and finally the rest of mankind. Panizza's best short tales were collected in *Visionen der Dämmerung* (Visions of Darkness, 1914). His work displays a curious mixture of banal and original ideas, the latter executed with great force and sharply critical of the Catholic church.

Also of interest is the deliberately plain writing of Paul Scheerbart (1863–1915), who created a cosmic fairy-tale world wholly freed from the gravity of reality. Bizarre and wonderful events are described, gigantic

metamorphoses of stars, peculiar life forms, and so on, all in a language of almost childish simplicity.

Among contemporary German fantasy writers, Kurt Kusenbergr and Herbert Rosen-dorfer are outstanding. Kusenbergr's short, ironic, highly polished tales call to mind the work of John Collier, while Rosendorfer's forte is story-telling, with remarkable force of imagination. Particularly noteworthy is his *Der Ruinenbaumeister* (1969), a novel of baroque style and great inventiveness.



Left, scene from the film, *Der Student von Prag* (1926), based on a story by Ewers. Below, Szafranski's illustration for Hoffmann's *Die Königsbraut*, Georg Müller edition (1915).





## Austria



Jacket for Paul Busson's *Die Wiedergeburt des Melchior Dronte* (1921).

In publishing terms, Austria has always been part of the much larger German market, but her literary contribution has nevertheless proved distinct and important. Austrian writers played a leading part in the German fantasy revival after 1900, if one includes the German-speaking writers from the territory of the former Austro-Hungarian empire. Of these, Alfred Kubin (1877–1959) is undoubtedly the outstanding fantasy artist, and his demoniac, obsessed drawings have enhanced many an anthology of horror stories. His novel *The Other Side* (*Die andere Seite*, 1908) is a modern fantasy classic. It tells of an artist invited by an immensely wealthy friend, Patera, to live in the Dream Kingdom, a sequestered city-state he has established in Asia. This place, familiar yet weirdly incomprehensible, is attacked by strange epidemics, culminating in an apocalyptic catastrophe, a graphically vivid orgy of subconscious symbols. It was illustrated by Kubin himself, who included some illustrations intended for Meyrink's *Der Golem*. The novel has been translated into many languages, and marks an important contribution to fantastic literature.

The most famous as well as the most successful of Austrian fantasists is Gustav Meyrink (1836–1932), a banker from Prague who turned to writing when he went bankrupt. He first appeared in print in the celebrated German satirical magazine *Simplicissimus*, to which he sold a number of outrageously mad stories. These and others were combined into *Des deutschen Spiessers Wunderhorn* (1913), a volume which is still in print today. Meyrink's stories are full of gruesome events, occult happenings, corporeal, psychical and spiritual abnormalities, and a generally pathological tone. Especially prominent are the motifs of the amputated limb or organ, the mummified corpse and the mask. Pseudoscientific experiments are often described, as are alleged secrets from the Orient.

Meyrink's best novel is *The Golem* (*Der Golem*, 1915), which was an instant success when it was published in the middle of World War I. The writer brilliantly succeeds in evoking the atmosphere of the Jewish ghetto in Prague, and his book has found favour with Cortázar and Borges. Meyrink really believed in the occult, and his later and weaker novels increasingly became a vehicle for his occult ideas. They are, in order of publication: *Das grüne Gesicht* (1916), *Der weisse Dominikaner* (1921), *Walpurgisnacht* (1927), and *Der Engel vom westlichen Fenster* (1927), a novel about the Elizabethan alchemist, John Dee. In 1976 the distinguished French periodical *L'Herne* devoted an issue of 300 pages to Meyrink and his work (as it had already done to Lovecraft and Borges).

Even more prolific was Karl Hans Strobl (1877–1946), in his time a very popular writer, though his huge fantasy novel *Eleagabal Kuperus* (1910), once much acclaimed, is all but unreadable today. But *Gespenster im Sumpf* (1920), and *Umsturz im Jenseits* (1920), contain some vivid scenes, and his short stories are really inventive. A good mix of supernatural horror and comedy is achieved in the uncompromisingly grotesque fantasies of *Die Eingebungen des Arphaxat* (1904), *Die knöcherne Hand* (1911), *Lemuria* (1917), and several others, all of which feature well visualized scenes and characters. Strobl was an extreme nationalist, and considered the ability to laugh in the face of horror to be a



specifically German trait. Whatever the truth of this, and whatever one may think of Strobl's political opinions, there is no doubt that he was a gifted writer of weird fiction. He also did much as an editor and reviewer to propagate fantasy. Some of his stories are fictional versions or equivalents of the paintings of Böcklin.

Leo Perutz (1882–1957) was primarily a story-teller and weaver of intricate plots, whose novels reflect the workings of a demonic fate. His books skilfully merge authentic historic detail with visionary events, so that the reader is often uncertain where reality fades into fantasy. His heroes are frequently the victims of an implacable destiny, almost in the style of a Greek tragedy. In *The Master of the Day of Judgment* (*Der Meister des Jüngsten Tages*, 1923) and *The Virgin's Brand* (*St Petri Schnee*, 1933), Perutz uses the surprisingly modern device of the consciousness-expanding drug to bring about the fantastic events he is describing. The Wandering Jew makes a brief but devilish appearance in *The Marquis de Bolibar* (*Der Marques de Bolibar*, 1920), while the strange destiny of some German soldiers in Napoleon's army fulfils itself. *Nachts unter der steinernen Brücke* (1953) is set in the Jewish ghetto of Prague at the time of Rudolf II and the Rabbi Loew, and consists of a number of skilfully interwoven novellas of high and low life. *Das Mangobaumwunder* (1916) is more comic than mythic, a delightful fantasy about oriental mysteries, written in collaboration with Paul Frank. Some of the novels of Alexander Lernet-Holenia (1897–1976) are similar in atmosphere and impact, especially his famous novella 'Baron Bagge' (1936).

A rather naive eroticism mars the novels of Franz Spunda (1889–1963), such as *Der gelbe und der weisse Papst* (1923) and *Baphomet* (1930), but *Das ägyptische Totenbuch* (1924) at least is a good popular fantasy in the manner of some of Sax Rohmer's oriental books. Worth mentioning, too, is Paul Busson's reincarnation novel, *The Man Who Was Born Again* (*Die Wiedergeburt des Melchior Dronte*, 1921), an *Erziehungsroman* of a man's journey through various strata of eighteenth-century society, ending up on the guillotine during the French Revolution.



The baroque fantasies of Herzmanovsky-Orlando (1877–1954) were for the most part too scurrilous to be published before his death, but his two novels, *Der Gaulschreck im Rosennetz* (1928) and *Maskenspiel der Genien* (1958), are masterpieces of whimsical fantasy. In his work the Austro-Hungarian monarchy is transformed into the strange dreamland of 'Tarockanien', ruled by the kings of the Tarot cards.

Contemporary Austrian literature has a gifted fantasy writer in Peter Daniel Wolfkind, with his *Mondnacht* (1972) and *Die Boten des Frühlings* (1975). Mention should also be made of H. C. Artmann, an extraordinary poet, who has interested himself in popular literary forms such as the detective story and the horror tale. Artmann has produced a number of parodies of the genre, featuring Dracula, Frankenstein and other stock fantasy figures, and he has also translated Stoker's *Dracula* and a number of stories by H. P. Lovecraft.

Die andere Seite (The Other Side, 1908), Alfred Kubin's extraordinary novel; the author's portrait of Patera, Lord of the Dream State.



## Belgium and the Low Countries

Jean Ray (1887–1964) is now generally considered to have been the most important modern writer of fantasy in Belgium and the Low Countries, yet he is almost completely unknown in the Anglo-Saxon world, despite the fact that he had a small paperback published in English (*Ghouls in My Grave*), and contributed a number of stories (as John Flanders) to the legendary *Weird Tales* magazine in the Thirties.

Ray's real name was Raymundus Johannes Maria de Kremer, but he wrote under the pseudonyms of John Flanders (in Flemish) and Jean Ray (in French). His life is surrounded by legends: he is said to have been an adventurer, a pirate and a smuggler. All this makes for colourful book jackets, but the reality is less exciting; he was at first an employee of the city of Ghent, writing in his spare time, and later became a journalist for *Cinemablad*, *Journal de Gand*, *La Revue belge* and *De Dag*, rising to the position of editor-in-chief. He travelled only in his imagination, never visiting even London, the city which he

describes so often in his tales. His first story appeared in 1919, his first collection, *Les Contes du whisky*, in 1925.

Ray was a prolific writer, publishing dozens of books and hundreds of stories, often in obscure journals and for dubious publishers, so that even today there exists no complete bibliography of his works, despite his popularity, let alone a complete edition: *Les Oeuvres complètes de Jean Ray* (Paris, 1963–66) contains only a selection. More has been published by Marabout, that indefatigable Belgian firm concentrating on fantasy, run by the fantasy enthusiast Jean-Baptiste Baronian. This firm has published sixteen volumes of the Harry Dickson stories alone, with numerous other books, such as *Les Derniers contes de Canterbury* (1963), *Les Contes noirs du golf* (1964) and *Le Livre des fantômes* (1966). In his Harry Dickson tales Ray shows the strong influence of dime novels like *Nick Carter*, with the hero, assisted by his young and reckless friend, engaged in battles with monsters, occultists and devil worshippers in subterranean caverns and labyrinthine passages of nocturnal London and the English countryside.

Jean Ray was hardly a great artist. He wrote far too much and too fast, his style is often careless, his plots repetitious, and his favourite structural device is to pile frightening happenings and inexplicable phenomena upon each other. On the other hand, he has a vivid and grotesque imagination, and remarkable powers of invention. His stories abound in fascinating and monstrous images, especially in his novel *Malpertuis* (1943), which is usually considered his masterpiece.

Consisting of a series of supposedly ancient manuscripts, the novel begins with a memorable scene: the death bed of the Rosicrucian Cassave, with relatives and servants clustered around. Their inheritance is based upon an unusual condition: they all must spend the rest of their lives in the ghostly, oppressive building of Malpertuis, and the last survivor is to inherit everything. The whole story is not so much complex as confused, with insertions of newly found manuscripts, disclosures of family affairs, stories of expeditions, and nightmarish sequences. The characters have exotic names, the plot is dream-like and a-

Michel de Ghelderode's  
*Sortilèges*: cover for the  
Marabout edition, 1962.





logical, an arbitrary sequence of grotesque, inexplicable scenes, and the author takes care to tell the reader frequently that there are many mysteries not meant for human beings to know. Pink rats with human limbs are featured, and a ghost which goes around extinguishing lamps. Finally it is divulged that the figures are meant to be the gods of ancient Greece, returned, but even after this dénouement the whole affair remains as mysterious as ever.

Jean Ray is good at sketching in the atmosphere of a place with a few strokes of the pen – a sinister house, a deserted town, a graveyard – but writing towards a meaningful end was not his forte. Similarly, his short stories have memorable scenes and vivid dialogue, but his effects are often crude, and, unlike writers such as H. P. Lovecraft, Ray made no attempt systematically to create a supernatural order.

An artistically superior writer is Thomas Owen, (pseudonym for the lawyer Gérard Bertot, b. 1910) who with Gérard Prévot (b. 1921) is the most important living Belgian writer of fantasy. A conscientious craftsman, he is a poet writing in prose, and his usually very short stories are small gems, masterpieces of the sombre. Melancholic in atmosphere, they are characterized by the mood of human pity which connects his villains with their victims. The evil nature of the former is not so much deliberate malice as an inescapable sinister fate, often connected with a morbid eroticism. 'Fear, love, and death are omnipresent in my stories,' wrote the author. Firmly based in the real world, into which the supernatural subtly intrudes, Owen's stories are complex miniatures of the moral and emotional ambivalence of human beings. They have appeared in such collections as *Les Chemins étranges* (1943), *La Cave aux crapauds* (1945, 1963), *Cérémonial nocturne* (1966) and *Pitié pour les ombres* (1973).

Any listing of other important fantasy writers, whether they wrote in French or Flemish, will have to include the baroque work of the dramatist Michel de Ghelderode (1898–1962), especially his *Sortilèges*, as well as Franz Hellens (pseudonym for Franz von Ermenghem, b. 1881), Hendrik Conscience (1812–1883), symbolists and surrealists like



Maurice Maeterlinck, Marcel Thiry and Hugo Raes (b. 1929), not to mention the magic realism of Johan Daisne (pseudonym for Herman Thiry, b. 1912) or Hubert Lampo (b. 1920). In the work of Daisne, a staircase of stone (reality) and clouds (magic, dream) merge, leading up to a Platonic heaven, and life emerges as a parapsychological, metaphysical and mystic phenomenon.

The writing of the Flemish fantasists has a very marked visual quality, relying more on atmosphere and description than on fantastic occurrences and turns of plot, and their imagery is reminiscent of the great painters of the fantastic in that region, Bruegel, Bosch, and especially James Ensor.

Skeletons by James Ensor (1860–1949), whose work was an important influence on Flemish fantastic literature. Opposite, Polish fantasy: Bohden Butenko's illustration for Diabli Wiedza Co..., an anthology of stories and poems about the Devil (1972).



## Poland



Although fantasy has always been a somewhat neglected aspect of Polish literature, there nevertheless exist a number of remarkable Polish excursions into the fantastic. In *Polska nowela fantastyczna*, a representative anthology in two volumes, compiled by Julian Tuwim, and published by Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy in 1953, there are not only tales by classic writers like Jan Potocki, Józef Maksymilian Ossoliński and Bolesław Prus, but also two stories by Stefan Grabiński (1887–1936).

Grabiński may be considered the most important modern writer of weird fiction in Poland. A teacher by profession, he was a withdrawn, lonely, unhappy man who suffered from tuberculosis. Like Lovecraft, he was married for only a short time. The literary recognition he longed for didn't come, although his first volumes of short stories had a friendly reception. But Grabiński was always regarded as merely a specialist in horror stories, not as a general writer. This caused him to engage in a bitter campaign against his critics, and to attempt to elevate his stories to 'poetic' heights by the insertion of overly lyrical passages. But as a writer of weird short stories he was highly original and gifted.

Some of these stories introduce new fantastic entities like the White Wyrak, a monster inhabiting factory chimneys, while others open up new backgrounds for the horror form. In several, the action takes place in trains, which seem to have exerted a powerful hold on his imagination. Grabiński's outstanding quality is his gift for fusing the natural with the supernatural. Many of his stories have sinister settings like graveyards, mortuaries, ill-lit hospitals, lonely old houses and the like, but his landscapes in general are infused with a sense of brooding evil and imminent supernatural manifestation, suggestive of fantastic forces lying dormant in nature, and waiting for an opportunity to emerge. It really seems as though he believed in his fire demons and earth spirits.

Grabiński's stories also have a strong erotic content, though the author seemed to have feared women and their fatal powers. In his tales, women tend to appear as demons who, while remaining unchanged themselves, act as



catalysts of disaster for the males encountering them. One of his best stories is 'Dziedzina' (The Area), in which the imaginary creations of a writer of weird fiction come to life and kill their creator, whom they hate for having conceived them without giving them flesh. Often Grabiński's heroes are lonely, peculiar characters, outsiders misunderstood by the world, like Grabiński himself. His best stories were collected in the volumes *Na wzgórzu rói* (On the Hill of Roses, 1918), *Demon ruchu* (The Traffic Demon, 1919), *Szalony pątnik* (The Frenzied Pilgrim, 1920), *Księga ognia* (The Book of Fire, 1922), and *Niesamowita opowieść* (An Uncanny Story, 1922). He also wrote a number of fantastic plays and mannered, rather weak novels. In 1958 a new collection, *Niesamowite opowieści*, was issued, and in 1971 and 1974 respectively, the German 'Library of the House of Usher' presented two collections of Grabiński's stories: *Das Abstellgleis* (The Railway Siding) and *Dunst* (Fume).

The mythic fantasy of Bruno Schulz is radically different from Grabiński's Gothicism. Schultz's attitude is well summed up in a letter written in 1936:

'... I believe that the kind of art that is dear to me is a regression, a childhood returned. If it would be possible to reverse our development, to sneak back into childhood, to experience again its fullness and boundlessness – that would be the realization of the "epoch of genius", the "Messianic era" promised by all mythologies. It is my idea to "mature" towards childhood; only this can be called true maturity.'

Schulz was born in 1892 in the small provincial town of Drohobycz in Galicia, then part of the Austro-Hungarian empire under the seemingly permanent rule of Emperor Franz Joseph. The son of a poor Jewish merchant whose business deteriorated progressively with the changing times, Schulz earned his living as an art teacher, producing his phantasmagoric tales only in his spare time. These were published in two volumes: *Sklepy cynamonowe* (1934) and *Sanatorium pod klepsydra* (1937), translated into English as *Cinnamon Shops and Other Stories* (London, 1963), and *The Street of Crocodiles* (New York, 1963). Bruno Schulz was shot down by an SS







Opposite and left, illustrations for Julian Tuwim's *Czary i czarty polskie* (1960 edition). Below, detail of title-page by Marian Stachurski for *Polskie opowiesci dreszczykiem* (1969).



man in 1942. His body was left in the street all day, but during the night he was secretly buried by friends in an unknown grave.

Schulz's work, small in volume but of great importance, is a stringent cosmogony, a poetic mythology, in which his father's little shop and his provincial home town represent a model of the whole universe. With these constituents he creates a totally fantastic world, divorced from everyday reality. The stories are located between dream and waking, and the treatment is both highly intellectual and highly sensual.

Schulz's universe is one of constant and surprising changes, based on his own relation-

ship with his father. The latter is depicted as a condor, a cockroach, or a crab, always retreating as his business fails and his authority is challenged. Time itself may expand or contract, or the events may take place outside time altogether, in one of its 'byways'. The surreal, visionary character of Schulz's creations is always a prominent feature. The language is sensual, ornamental, ambivalent, alternating between baroque description and crisp, almost scientific statements. The whole represents the recreation of a lost paradise, and an escape from the dreary life of a Polish provincial town into a transient, mythic beauty.



## Japan

The exotic world of Japanese fantasy became known to the West largely through Lafcadio Hearn (1850–1904), himself an exotic figure who spent the last fourteen years of his life in Japan, married a Japanese wife of Samurai lineage, and even became naturalized under the name of Yakumo Koizumi. Hearn was born on a Greek island, the son of an Irish father and a Greek mother, and went to the USA in 1869, where he became a reporter with a knack for writing up grisly stories. He arrived in Japan in the winter of 1890, having taken on an assignment to write a series of studies on the country. He expected to spend just time enough to be able to write a book, but he fell in love with the country, and remained.

Hearn's chief interest was the study of the customs and beliefs of the Japanese, and he continued to draw on Japanese folklore for his books, interpreting this world for his readers. His first book on Japan appeared in 1894, followed by ten more during his lifetime. Many of them contained fantasy, among them *In Ghostly Japan* (1899), *Shadowings* (1900), *A Japanese Miscellany* (1901), *Kotto* (1902), and the posthumous collections, *Japanese Fairy Tales* (1918) and *Karma and Other Stories* (1921). His books gained him a reputation in discerning circles as a master of English prose, and as a skilled interpreter of Japan to the West. He was also, as professor of English literature at Tokyo University, instrumental in interpreting English literature to the Japanese. One of his best books, *Kwaidan* (Weird Tales, 1904), a collection of Japanese ghost stories, was taken from old Japanese books, including a few stories of Chinese origin (a country which also has an interesting tradition of ghost stories). These stories have the simplicity and force of folk-tales, but they are quite different from what the West regards as ghost stories. These tales are informed by a belief in the unity of all being, and a oneness with the world and the will of the gods. Malevolent ghosts are rarely found; they are, rather, gentle beings communicating with the living, and giving signs of their love. This attitude towards the supernatural is also to be found in some stories by Ueda Akinari (1734–1809), who wrote a collection of fantastic tales.

Japanese fantasy was at its best in the work

of Ryunosuke Akutagawa (1892–1927), a pupil of Natsume Soseki, who started his career as a writer of short fiction with the Samurai tale 'Rashomon' (1915), and gained a reputation with 'Hana' (The Nose, 1916). A master of the short story, and an artist of the stature of Maupassant, his work fluctuates between the sharply realistic and the marvellous and demonic. But it is always clearly observed and psychologically precise. His most popular work may be the satirical story 'Kappa' (1927), in which a mental patient in an asylum believes himself to be in the realm of the water spirits. Akutagawa wrote it shortly before he committed suicide.

A specialist in fantasy and mystery stories was Hirai Taro (1894–1965), who admired the work of Edgar Allan Poe so much that he adopted the pseudonym 'Edogawa Rampo', a Japanese version of the master's name. A selection of his stories appeared in 1956 in English under the title *Japanese Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, and they are so good that several of them ('The Human Chair', 'The Hell of Mirrors') have been included in the anthologies of the leading British anthologist of weird fiction, Peter Haining. Like his exemplar Poe, Rampo is more interested in extreme psychical states than in the supernatural, and this tendency is even more pronounced in the internationally renowned Kobo Abé (b. 1924), some of whose novels and stories are on the borderline of science fiction and fantasy. The theme of one novel, *Tanin no kao* (*The Face of Another*, 1964) is the problem of identity, symbolized by the mask that the hero is forced to wear. Another, *Motsukita chiza* (1967), describes the solitude and the labyrinthine chaos of modern cities. The protagonist, asked to investigate a sudden disappearance, gradually loses his own self during his search in the 'desert of the others'.

In his novella 'Kabe – S. Karuma-shi no hanzai' (1951), for which he was awarded the Akutagawa prize, Abé tells the story of a man who has forgotten his name upon awakening. He loses all human contact with other men and with his environment, and thus becomes a symbol of modern man lost in an industrial society. In his novel *Suna no* (*The Woman in the Dunes*, 1962), which was made into a successful film, the people of a lonely village imprison a stranger in a giant hole in the sand, in which a woman lives. But later, when he has an opportunity to escape, he chooses to remain in his prison. The horrors and hells presented in Kobo Abé's dense stories are not those of the conventional supernatural canon, but those which man makes for himself.

*Opposite, fantasy on record: detail from the sleeve of Seventh Wave's Things to Come (1974), designed by David Howells, illustrated by Michael Priddle, and recorded by Gull.*





antasy now





## Fantasy now

Tzvetan Todorov prophesied the death of fantasy in general, on the grounds that its role had been superseded. Julia Briggs, in her excellent *Night Visitors, The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story* (1977) predicts the same fate for a subgenre of fantasy, the ghost story. 'More recently,' she claims, 'attitudes to the inner life have changed, and we have been invited to appreciate the freedom that irrational impulse confers, the authentic character of spontaneous and uninhibited action, the value of subjective vision, however eccentric. In such a context the ghost story has no place, except as a mode of nostalgia, because it depends for its effect on a sense that certain experiences are aberrational, dangerous, and cannot stand close inspection. It also depends on a certain superstitious dread both of ourselves and our surroundings, and once such feelings have been neatly tidied away, its *raison d'être* has gone' (p. 212).

And yet, although there is a certain truth in this – Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) must certainly be considered a piece of nostalgia – excellent ghost stories continue to be written, in England and elsewhere. Kingsley Amis's *The Green Man* (1969) and Marie Luise Kaschnitz's 'Ghosts' ('Gespenster') are two recent examples, and their quality has seldom been higher. All signs point to the conclusion that fantasy is as vigorous as ever, both in popular and in highly literate forms. Apart from the ubiquitous fantasy and horror films, some of which have had an extraordinary success at the box office, fantasy has spread to the comic strips, to rock music record sleeves, and (the ultimate triumph, perhaps) even to advertising.

In Latin-American literature fantasy is, as we have pointed out, an integral part of the literary scene, and in other parts of the world fantastic elements or outright fantasies are increasingly to be found in the current work of important writers. In Germany, Herbert Rosendorfer's realistic stories often contain fantastic scenes and episodes, as does the work of the French Rumanian Mircea Eliade, better known in English-speaking countries for his contributions to comparative religion and social anthropology (e.g. *The Sacred and the Profane*, 1957). In Italy, too, the work of Italo Calvino, one of the most notable of contempor-







Opposite, detail from an issue of *Heavy Metal*, probably the most accomplished of contemporary fantasy comics. Above, record sleeve for *Brain Salad Surgery* by Emerson Lake & Palmer. Design by Fabio Nicoli from a painting by H. R. Eiger. Issued by Manticore Records.

ary writers, makes great use of fantasy.

Calvino's fantasy includes *Il Visconte dimezzato* (*The Cloven Viscount*, 1952), the story of an Italian aristocrat whom a cannonball has split into good and bad halves. This fantastic premise serves as the basis for a very complex and sophisticated story. In *Il Barone rampante* (*The Baron in the Trees*, 1957), an alienated, fantastic perspective of ordinary life is provided in the story of a nobleman of the Enlightenment who takes to an arboreal existence. In the brilliantly funny *Il Cavaliere inesistente* (*The Nonexistent Knight*, 1959), one of Charles the Great's knights-at-arms turns out to be an empty suit of armour operating mechanically. The knights involved in the quest for the Holy Grail are revealed as a sorry lot, and the author is most entertaining on such chivalrous ideals as virginity and honour.

Dino Buzzati (1906–72) is another Italian with a strong sense of the surreal and of the absurdity of existence. Most of his stories are short, paradoxical constructions offering a glimpse of an ironic and absurd reality. His best stories are probably the melancholy 'The Slaying of the Dragon', and the absurd 'Seven Floors', both in *Catastrophe* (1965), a collection of his stories in English translation. In the second, a man enters hospital in perfectly good health, and gradually moves down seven floors until he is among the dying. His novel, *Il deserto dei Tartari* (1940), is the disturbing

account of a colonel in a lonely fort who lives in expectation of an invasion, and, when the feared event actually occurs, falls ill and dies.

In recent American and English literature there have been some remarkable contributions, including the stories of Donald Barthelme, John Barth, William Kotzwinkle, John Fowles, and many others. Fowles's *The Magus* (1966), a novel in which a visitor to a Greek island comes under the influence of its strange owner, seemingly a magician with power over life and death, has suggestions of the romantic doppelgänger motif. It is never quite settled whether or not the man is really a magician or a swindler, a wise man or a crank.

On a somewhat lower level there is the work of Roald Dahl (b. 1916), a worthy successor to John Collier, whose collections, *Someone Like You* (1953) and *Kiss, Kiss* (1960), have both been bestsellers. Most of his work consists of slick, elegantly constructed mysteries, with the occasional fantastic story. Fate usually has ironic intentions with his heroes, and good does not always triumph.

A novel which successfully combines science fiction and fantasy is Richard Matheson's *I am a Legend* (1954). The author's 'scientific' explanation of vampirism doesn't hold water, but the book provides an original twist to the vampire motif, with the last true man on Earth besieged in his house by the creatures. The novel was twice adapted for the screen, the second time under the title of *The Omega Man*. Before he became a script writer, Richard Matheson was the author of a number of chilling short stories; *Born of Man and Woman* (1951) is the first and best collection of these. Another author in the same vein is



Charles Beaumont (*The Hunger and Other Stories*, 1957).

Two noted science fiction writers, Brian Aldiss and James Blish, have also made contributions of some importance to modern fantasy. In *Frankenstein Unbound* (1973) Brian Aldiss retells the story of Frankenstein in a stock SF context of temporal displacement, and introduces Mary Godwin and Shelley as characters. The book is really an extension of his survey of SF, *Billion Year Spree*, in which he claimed *Frankenstein* as the first genuine science fiction, a doubtful contention. Aldiss cannot resist the temptation to provide Frankenstein's monster with a female companion, which Mary Shelley had wisely refrained from doing. Although well written, this is a book with a borrowed life, so to speak, and hardly equal to the force of the original; it is more of a vehicle for some 'modern' literary reflections and observations.

In *Black Easter* (1968), and its sequel, *The Day after Judgement* (1972), James Blish mixes black magic, nuclear armageddon, and theological speculation. Theron Ware, a modern magician, sets free all the demons on Earth, and their modern manifestation proves to be atomic holocaust. His disastrous action is made possible only because 'God' is dead (described in the shock ending of the first book), and the white magicians therefore lack a supporting authority for their opposing spells. The first novel is a quite effective shocker, despite the author's tendency to quote in full the dullest and most pedantic incantations, sometimes for whole pages.

The sequel, however, is a mistake, with the characters of the first book acting as mere spectators in the second, and another entity taking God's place in order to keep the world in balance. The victorious Satan Mekratrig is described as assuming 'God's Burden' unwillingly, but this explanation is hardly convincing since it comes from the mouth of his replacement (and in bad verse too, to heighten the effect!), who was the Father of Lies previously and for all we know may be lying still. The ending seems to have been influenced by Anatole France's far superior *La Révolte des anges*, but France's solution is much more profound, with his victorious Devil's refusal to consummate his victory and

to submit to the corruption that is heaven.

It would be easy to compile long lists of authors actively writing fantastic literature today. Mention should perhaps be made of the stories of Robert Bloch, who started out as a member of the Lovecraft circle of *Weird Tales* contributors. It was there that he published his most famous short story, 'Yours Truly, Jack the Ripper' (July, 1943), later to be anthologized and dramatized countless times. Bloch's fame was confirmed when Alfred Hitchcock filmed his psychological crime novel, *Psycho*, in 1960. He wrote a large number of film scripts and short stories, and although his work tends towards rather crude shock effects, it is commercially effective prose, if lacking in psychological subtlety. Stylistically superior are the fantasy horror stories of some other important SF writers such as Ray Bradbury, Theodore Sturgeon, Fritz Leiber, or even Harlan Ellison. Ellison's favourite mode of expression is shouting at the top of his voice, but his best stories, 'Shattered Like a Glass Goblin', for instance, have real emotional power; at his worst he is merely childish.

Recent times have seen the revival and metamorphosis of the Gothic novel as a particularly silly branch of women's fiction. In these lachrymose works the heroine is usually a governess, secretary, or newly-wed bride, who discovers the uncomfortable fact that somebody is bent on killing her – frequently her husband.

Whatever one may think of these excesses, there can really be no question about the death or otherwise of fantasy. It is very much alive, at all levels of literary accomplishment, from the crudest comic books to the most highbrow literature. As long as a literature exists, writers will avail themselves of the unique freedom which that literary expression offers, and create worlds governed by their own fictional laws, and imagine things which have no basis in actuality and fact. At some times fantasy may play a more central role, at others it may be a minor subcurrent, the product of outsiders and eccentrics, depending on the spirit of the age and its intellectual climate. But it certainly will always exist as a part of imaginative literature, in revolt against the immutable order of the real world.



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