Fig. 1 *Weird Tales* cover for November 1944, illustrating Robert Bloch's story 'The Bat is my Brother'.

The American Fantasy Tradition

Tom Shippey

I have to begin this piece by, so to speak, biting the hand that fed me. I'm best known for having written three books on Tolkien, and of course I admire Tolkien's writing very much. On this occasion, however, I have to open by saying that I think Tolkien's domination of the fantasy scene from the 1960s was, in one respect, unfortunate. He distracted attention from a thriving American tradition of fantasy writing, and that tradition has never since quite managed to force its way into general awareness.

There is no doubt about Tolkien's domination of the scene, and the market. He inspired scores of writers, good and bad, and many of them have recorded the debt they owe him. Of such tributes, perhaps the simplest and most generous was that by George R.R. Martin, creator of the 'Game of Thrones' series, who declared: 'We are all still walking in Bilbo's footsteps'.[1] Just as important as his effect on writers, however, was his effect on publishers. Suddenly fantasy writing was mass-market, and publishers were looking everywhere – especially after they realised there was not going to be a sequel or a prequel to *Lord of the Rings* – for a 'new Tolkien' they could market. On at least one occasion, this resulted in the quite cynical promotion of a totally derivative writer: his publisher confessed to me, though not in these exact words, 'we didn't have to like it if we reckoned we could sell it'. In other cases, one can be sure that the path to publication was at least very much smoothed by any kind of similarity, real or fancied, to Tolkien's work. So the path was opened to writers as original as Stephen Donaldson, or Martin himself, or as derivative as the author whose name I have not mentioned, or the teenage author of *Eragon*. Fantasy came to dominate the movie industry as well, with the Tolkien films, the C.S. Lewis films, the 'Harry Potter' films, the G.R.R. Martin TV series – all but Martin, you notice, writers from east of the Atlantic.

In the process, though, another tradition was swept aside, which I think was a pity. Not totally swept out of existence, for fans are well aware still of the American fantasy tradition. But it hasn't reached the general public or the movie-makers. If I were a director, I wouldn't waste time trying to get three more films out of Tolkien's minor works, or *The Silmarillion*: I'd film Jack Vance's *Lyonesse* trilogy, of which more later. It contains far more material, and offers unlimited scope for special effects.

I don't know why this hasn't happened, especially as the Tolkien tradition, and the whole English tradition behind it, seem so ill-adapted to modern audiences. The English tradition and the American tradition differed from the start in intended audience, social expectations and, perhaps most obviously, in price.

I remember well how much *The Lord of the Rings* cost when it first came out. Not a pound a volume, but a guinea. (A guinea, for those who do not remember so far back, was 21 shillings, whereas a pound was only twenty. Pricing things in guineas was a way for retailers to add 5%, while at the same time making a covert statement about prestige.) Meanwhile my first pay packet, in 1960, was about £7, for a 44-hour week, so I was earning three shillings and sixpence an hour. So *The Fellowship of the Ring* would have cost me six hours' pay – at modern minimum wage for a 17-year old, that would be about £30. And that's just the first of three volumes. The same was true of British fantasy writers before Tolkien, like E.R. Eddison and William Morris. They were all educated men who wrote long, expensive books for other educated men and women.

The American tradition of fantasy, by contrast, came from the pulps. I should explain what the pulps were, borrowing heavily here from a recent study of them, John Cheng's *Astounding Wonder*.[2] In the interwar period, Cheng shows that American magazines were divided pretty clearly into the qualities, the slicks, and the pulps. The qualities, like *Atlantic Monthly*, just had writing on the covers. They were almost like modern learned journals. The slicks: well, the most characteristic of them was the *Saturday Evening Post*, and its most characteristic cover artist was Norman Rockwell. I have great admiration for Rockwell too – he really could paint – but his covers obviously promote a particular ideology, or meta-text, which I would sum up in one word: 'changelessness'. Boys will be boys, girls will be girls, parents will be both proud and anxious, domestic pets will be loyal, minor suburban scenes will be amusing (etc.). This is not to say that the *Saturday Evening Post* did not print good material, and even science-fictional material, for which see H. Bruce Franklin's demonstration that Harry Truman may well have been influenced in his decision to drop the Bomb by reading 'wonder-weapon' stories in the slicks to which he subscribed.[3] But the slicks' target audience was the affluent and contented, their aspirations channelled within the existing social and political system.

The pulps were different. They were called pulps because of the paper they were printed on – cheap, friable, not meant to last. They cost anywhere from ten to twenty-five cents. Before TV they were probably the main source of entertainment for the American public, and they existed in vast numbers. Every kind of niche was covered. Every newsstand had scores if not hundreds of them, all competing for the passerby's dime or quarter. There was *Air War*, *Gangland Stories*, *Western Romances*, *Black Mask*, *Mystery*, *Love Tales*, *Air Trails*, and many more, now all but forgotten (though Raymond Chandler, to name just one author, started off by writing for *Black Mask*).

There was accordingly a whole industry in writing for them, all done as piecework, usually at about two cents a word. Frederick Faust is said to have produced 1.5 million words a year for thirty years, and he got ten cents a word for his westerns, written as 'Max Brand'.[4] The pulps lasted from around the 1910s to the late 1940s and then went into a precipitous decline, nudged out by TV and radio advertising, and also the rise of paperbacks.

The important thing for me, however, is that one of the most successful niches exploited was fantasy and science fiction. The latter is often traced back to Hugo Gernsback, who founded the pulp *Amazing Stories* in 1926 – it kept going till 1991. *Astounding Stories*, a rival, is still going, retitled as *Analog: Science Fact/Science Fiction*, but it ceased to look like a pulp in about 1939. This was where the American tradition of fantasy started off.

To revert for a moment to the topic of meta-texts and cover art: if the Norman Rockwell meta-text is 'changelessness' – things are cute, things are funny, but basically safe; things are going to stay the same – then what is the meta-text of the covers of pulps like *Fantastic Adventures* or *Weird Tales*? (Fig. 1)

Pretty obviously, things can be different (much more exciting)! There are strange things out there, and other worlds. For people stuck out on the featureless prairie, or in the endless white-flight suburbs – well, their effect was like free oxygen (as the readers' letters often indicate).[5]

The first pulp to really make an impact in the fantasy area was *Weird Tales*. An editor had to build up a stable of writers, and the editor of *Weird Tales* relied on three, all of them influential and two of them still a presence in the field. They were H.P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith and Robert E. Howard (respectively 1890-1937, 1893-1963, 1906-36).

Howard is responsible above all for 'Conan the Barbarian'. Stories about him are set in the very far past, so far back the continents have changed, and the overall theme is that of the immensely strong barbarian from the north fighting his way to a throne, through adventures filled with hidden temples, snake-worshipping sorcerers, black magic, rescued maidens, etc. (Fig. 2)

Fig. 2

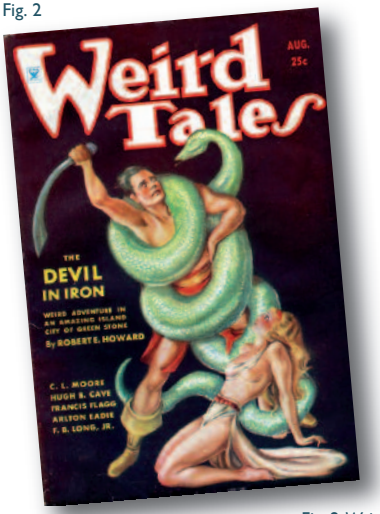


Fig. 3

Fig. 2 *Weird Tales* for August 1934, illustrating the Conan story 'The Devil in Iron'. Note the traditional threesome: hero/damsel/monster.
Fig. 3 *Weird Tales*: Lovecraft's story 'The Shadow over Innsmouth' was rejected by *WT* in 1933 for being too long, but they printed an unauthorised abridgement in May 1942, after Lovecraft had died.

Despite what I said at the start of this piece, Conan did in fact find his way onto the screen, in two movies (1982 and 1984, with a 2011 remake), though neither was a blockbuster, and they are remembered now mostly for the fact that Conan was played by Arnold Schwarzenegger. (Modern covers, by the way, like Frank Frazetta's, very much rely on bodybuilder images for Conan.) Note, though, that the book *Conan the Barbarian* was not written by Howard. It's the novelisation of the 1982 film script, done by Sprague de Camp, discussed below, who in 1951 had unearthed, edited and completed a number of Howard's unpublished or unfinished stories.

De Camp is only one of many authors who have continued writing Conan stories. Howard's own Conan oeuvre amounts to some twenty-plus short stories, now brought together in three fairly large volumes by Ballantine Books (2005). But there have been to date some 45 further Conan works, franchised by arrangement with his estate. Howard, who died very young, seemingly by suicide, basically created what is now called the sword-and-sorcery sub-genre (in which the rule, as sardonically pointed out by Larry Niven,[6] is that *the swordsmen always win*, not the sorcerers. Brawn beats brain every time).

The second big success for *Weird Tales* was H.P. Lovecraft, the pioneer of the modern horror story (Fig. 3). Lovecraft is now respectable enough to be edited by Oxford University Press, but he remains, to many, above all a 'cult writer'. The cult for which he is responsible is now called 'the Cthulhu mythos', and one reason for his and its cult status is the scope that this mythos left open for development and elaboration.

The basic idea of 'the Cthulhu mythos' is that there are still traces on Earth of ancient demonic powers, the Old Ones, which now lie dormant, but can be revived by those who manage to retrieve the knowledge hidden in ancient documents, of which the most prominent is the 'Necronomicon': as all followers of Lovecraft know, this was written by the Arab Abdul al-Hazred, who ended his life by being devoured in public by an invisible monster. The 'Necronomicon' has developed a life of its own. Terry Pratchett parodied it as 'the Necrotelicomnicon', Neal Stephenson wrote a bestseller called *Cryptonomicon*, and Wikipedia currently lists seven 'commercially available imitations' of the 'Necronomicon'.

One has to be careful in discussing features of the mythos, partly because of all the development and elaboration just mentioned, and also because of the way *Weird Tales* authors swapped names and ideas. Thus, when preparing this paper, I had intended to give a list of the many titles Lovecraft had invented, along with the 'Necronomicon', to add authority and a sense of mystery to his stories. But when I started looking, I discovered that some of the titles I remembered had actually been added to the mythos by Lovecraft's admirer and continuator, August Derleth – whose books I'd owned since I was a teenager. Another, Friedrich von Junzt's *Unaussprechlichen Kulten*, has an even more mixed ancestry, for the title comes from a Robert E. Howard story, while the author is a character found reading the 'Necronomicon' in another Howard story. (I suspect that Howard and Lovecraft thought that the title meant 'unspeakable cults', or 'nameless cults', though actually it means

'unpronounceable cults': not inappropriately for Lovecraft, who produced the invocation beginning 'Cthulhu fhtagn …', and invented gods called Yog-sothoth and Azathoth, as well as the planet Yuggoth. The *-en* ending on the adjective is mistaken too.)

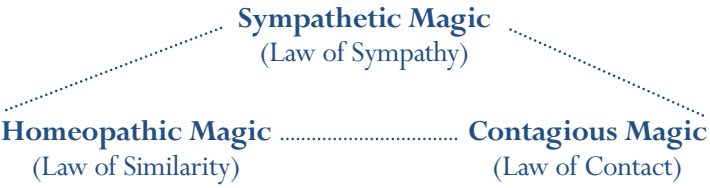
But these elements of 'paratext' were received with great enthusiasm, and copied, by even more authors than joined in the 'Conan' saga.[7] Lovecraft's story 'The Nameless City' has inspired many continuations, directly or indirectly. I've remarked elsewhere that its central image of a lost city (tenanted naturally by dormant demonic powers) was very credible when the story was written, in 1921, for lost and legendary cities, like Troy, Ur of the Chaldees, and King Minos's Knossos, had been repeatedly and dramatically excavated in the previous generation – while the Tomb of Tutankhamun, with its notorious curse, would be found only in the following year. What Lovecraft did was colonise the new province of archaeology (and mythology) for imaginative writing. And once again, many successors continued to expand the Cthulhu mythos, including August Derleth, Frank Belknap Long, Robert Bloch, Colin Wilson and even Stephen King.

The third in the *Weird Tales* triumvirate was Clark Ashton Smith, who – as is often the case of one member of a triumvirate – has been rather cast in the shade by the other two. His books have been reprinted, but his work is not a still-living force as are Conan and Cthulhu. Nevertheless I mention him here because he had one idea which was later to be fruitful: namely that, while Howard set his stories in the far past, and Lovecraft had incursions from the far past coming into the present, there was also a far future. And this need not be the future of between-wars science fiction, spaceships and ray guns, but could be an age in which science had reverted to being something like magic once again. This was an important and fertile idea.

Weird Tales first came out in 1923, and folded in 1954 after a period of decline from about 1940. The big break for the American fantasy tradition came with the foundation of a new magazine, *Unknown*. This only lasted for some 39 issues, 1939-43, but it changed the tone and direction of American fantasy, and also brought forward a new stable of writers. Much of the change came from the fact that it was edited by John W. Campbell Jr, editor also of *Astounding*, the most technocentric of the science-fiction pulps. The story goes that he set up the magazine to publish stories he liked, but which he regarded as insufficiently scientific for *Astounding*. Whether this is true or not, Campbell and *Unknown* did make American fantasy distinctive in two ways. One, it existed in close co-habitation with science fiction (many authors, perhaps most of the prominent science-fiction authors, wrote in both genres). Two, perhaps because of the lurking relationship with science fiction, American fantasy was distinctively funny: I won't say self-parodying, just comic, continually challenging and provoking the expectations of its readers, and appearing to take nothing very seriously.

Yet it had a serious intellectual source, which is, very obviously, J.G. Frazer's famous book *The Golden Bough*. One thing Frazer did in this was to put forward the idea that there were three forces in continuous opposition to each other (any two always similar to each other

and opposed to the third), Magic, Science, Religion: this was very welcome to science-fiction authors, especially the idea that Magic was a kind of Science. Furthermore, though Frazer's work eventually ran to twelve volumes, no-one had to read very far into it to grasp one especially influential idea. This was the diagram which appeared as early as page 54 of volume I, showing the various 'branches of magic':



This idea, that not only was magic a kind of science, but that it could be controlled by a proper understanding of physical laws like Newton's Laws of Motion, was just asking to be developed. The classic case is Randall Garrett's 'Lord Darcy' novels, in which the idea of 'Laws of Magic' (clearly Frazer's Laws) is taken all the way. Frazer stated his own Law of Contagion, rather vaguely, as: 'that things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed'. De Camp and Pratt, mentioned below, repeated this as 'Things once in contact continue to interact from a distance after separation'. Lord Darcy's sorcerer sidekick Master Sean, however, states the Law firmly and early as:

> any two objects which have ever been in contact with each other have an affinity for each other which is directly proportional to the product of the degree of relevancy of the contact and the length of time they were in contact and inversely proportional to the length of time since they have ceased to be in contact.[8]

Magic, one can see, has become Newtonian. And this created the idea of 'the world where magic works': a sub-genre written by a whole stable of authors born in the 1910s and 1920s, a generation later than Lovecraft or Ashton Smith.

See, for example, Robert A. Heinlein's *Magic Inc.*, which came out first as 'The Devil Makes the Law' in *Unknown* for May 1940. The lead character here is a businessman – whose name is Fraser, by the way – and the running joke is that he takes magic as normal and everyday; he deals with the Half World and the Little People; he takes magic as one of the tools and costs of the construction business, and like a practical man, he despises all forms of superstition. Quite out of place, as he says indignantly, in this day and age. Magic has become rule-bound – excitingly different, but also everyday, realistic, the kind of thing we know, something to be worked with.

The breakthrough story, however, for the *Unknown* tradition was one called 'The Roaring Trumpet', by Lyon Sprague de Camp (great name for a fantasy author) and Fletcher Pratt (not so great). It came out in *Unknown* for September 1940, and was illustrated on the cover (Fig. 4).

As usual, the cover artist seems to have been only vaguely briefed about the story. There's a dragon on the front, but no dragon in the story – the Midgard Serpent is referred to briefly, and maybe that's what the dragon is supposed to be. However, the red-headed figure in the background is the god Thor, and the ordinary-looking figure low right is an American psychologist called Harold Shea.

The basic idea is that Shea discovers a way to transport himself into mythical other-worlds, the first of these (there were several sequels) being the world of Old Norse myth. In 'The Roaring Trumpet' he accordingly finds himself in a freezing wasteland, where a one-eyed figure (Odin) directs him to a house. Here he joins the Norse gods Thor, Loki and their human servant Thjalfi on their trip to the king of the giants, Utgard-Loki – a story told at length in Snorri Sturluson's 13th-century *Prose Edda.* De Camp and Pratt nevertheless made several rather clever changes to the story – de Camp in particular was formidably well read and published several works of technological history, as well as successful historical novels – one of the changes being that the purpose of the story, never explained by Snorri, is to recover Thor's hammer, said in the poem 'Thrymskvitha' (from the *Poetic Edda*, not the *Prose Edda*), to have been stolen by the giants. This is urgent, because 'the Time' is approaching – 'the Time' being Ragnarok, the final conflict between gods and humans on the one side, giants and monsters on the other.

The ongoing comedy of the story is that Shea, to start off with, is completely incompetent. None of the modern equipment he has brought with him works – lighter, revolver, matches – and each attempt to use it makes him seem more and more inept. Nevertheless Shea has a modern analytic intelligence, and once he realises what is happening he starts trying to understand the laws of magic in the particular 'world where magic works'. His breakthrough is when he uses Frazer's Law of Similarity to shrink the enormous disfiguring nose of his troll-jailer Snögg, which pleases Snögg so much that he connives at the jailbreak by Shea and the god Heimdall, who has been incarcerated with him. In the end Shea, now a wiser and more self-confident person, is blown back to his own world by a curse from the spae-wife Grua, just before the 'roaring trumpet' blows to signal the onset of Ragnarok.

The story was so popular that there were several sequels, set successively in the worlds of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* – I said that de Camp was formidably well-read – followed by the Finnish *Kalevala* and the world of Irish myth, in each of which Shea and his companions have to work out the magical 'laws' of that particular universe: for Shea is always only an 'incomplete enchanter', whose spells work partially or with unexpected side-effects. A large part of the appeal of the stories is in fact the effort to

decode, or translate into modern terms, the underlying assumptions of the older or mythical universe: Shea using psychoanalysis to cure Roland's madness in 'The Castle of Iron' (the *Orlando Furioso* story) is a good example.

De Camp went on from the 'incomplete enchanter' stories to have a long, varied and successful career, which makes three points about the 'American tradition' of fantasy of which he was a pioneer and a pillar. Firstly, it's regularly funny: there is an ongoing comic contrast between the worlds where magic works, which are realistic and practical, and the idea we have of magic, which is romantic and incredible. Secondly, it uses archaeology and mythology, as Lovecraft did, but also history and even anthropology, especially the American variety of 'cultural anthropology', as developed by scholars including (and it's no coincidence) Alfred and Theodora Kroeber, parents of Ursula K-for-Kroeber Le Guin, whose 'Earthsea' stories are among the most distinguished examples of later American fantasy. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it is deeply entwined with its twin genre, science fiction. Its idea of magic never got very far away from the idea of science. They were both 'unknowns', as regards potential. Nearly all the prominent American authors of fantasy wrote science fiction too, and to some extent vice versa.

I should at this point make a rather damaging admission related to the point above. There was another offshoot of *Unknown*, which is surprisingly powerful still, and that is Scientology. L. Ron Hubbard was another *Unknown* author, writing science fiction rather than fantasy, but all in the well-established pulp tradition. I actually see L. Ron as the 20th century's answer to Don Quixote: just as the Don's mind was addled by reading poor-quality medieval and post-medieval romances, so Hubbard's mind was addled by reading and writing poor-quality pulp fiction. Both accordingly lost contact with reality, but Hubbard, once again like Don Quixote, was able to take people along with him. The Hubbard mythology underlying Scientology is pure pulp. But this was not true of de Camp and his colleagues.

Fig. 5, just as an example, is another de Camp cover, from many years later, which incidentally reinforces the three points made above. Note the *dramatis personae*: young hero, check. Old magician, check. Where is the damsel we would expect to find, if possible being rescued? Well, hero and magician are trying to do just that, using the demon-powered copper bathtub to carry her off in, but the magic is as usual running into complications (including the fact that the damsel is pregnant, by another lover, and does not want to be rescued; see point one above). As for the title of the novel, the hero is a reluctant hero, who really wants to be an engineer (see point three). But he was trapped by the kind of the-king-must-die ritual detailed once again in Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (point two). The citizens of Xylar have the custom of executing their king annually, and throwing his head into the crowd of spectators. Anyone who catches it becomes the new king. De Camp's hero Jorian, a stranger and quite unaware of the ritual, catches the head by reflex, finds himself both a king and doomed, and from then on exerts all his efforts, including hiring a magician, to stay 'unbeheaded'.

Fig. 4 'The Roaring Trumpet'.
Fig. 5 *The Unbeheaded King* is the third in a trilogy begun with *The Goblin Tower*. See list of recommended reading at the end.
Fig. 6 One of Leiber's 'Swords' series, now six volumes of collected stories, plus one novel. The first of them, 'Two Sought Adventure', came out in *Unknown* for August 1939.

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

Fig. 7 This cover illustrates 'Wherever You Are', by 'Winston P. Sanders' (one of the pen-names of Poul Anderson).
Fig. 8 The cover from *Astounding* July 1958, illustrating Vance's story 'The Miracle Workers'.

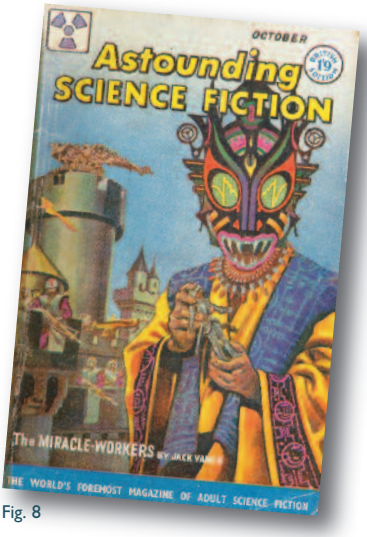


Fig. 8

Going on from there to de Camp's colleagues and successors, and introducing them briefly by way of cover art, another of the *Unknown* stable was Fritz Leiber. He picked up a different idea from Don Quixote, which is that of the paired heroes, in his case Fafhrd and Gray Mouser, shown on the cover of *Swords and Ice Magic* (Fig. 6). Fafhrd is the big one with the longsword, and he follows in Conan's footsteps by being a northern barbarian, though one a great deal more reflective than Conan. His colleague is Gray Mouser, slight, tricky, and much more urban than Fafhrd. Both heroes have tutelary magicians, but one of Leiber's added and influential notions was to set many of his stories in the city of Lankhmar – old, decadent, corrupt and complicated. This is a notably un-Tolkienian venue (Gondor is old and perhaps decadent, but not corrupt), but provided a model, as we shall see, for some prominent followers. *Swords and Ice Magic* is one of seven volumes in the 'Swords' series about the paired heroes (six story-collections and one novel). The long novella 'Ice Magic', which details the start of Fafhrd's career, exemplifies again several of the themes mentioned: a scientific element (Fafhrd escapes from his matriarchal society by using rockets to power his ski-jump), an anthropological element (Fafhrd is alerted to the narrowness of his own world by a team of 'Culture Dancers'), and of course a magical element, as indicated in the title.

A generation on from de Camp (1907-2000) and Leiber (1910-92) is Poul Anderson (1926-2001). Anderson was in his time the most commercially successful of all science-fiction authors, but he also wrote 'world where magic works' stories, collected as *Operation Chaos* and *Operation Luna*, as well as rewrites of medieval romance and Icelandic sagas, beginning with *The Broken Sword*, published in the same year as the start of *Lord of the Rings*, and rather similar to it in several ways without being in any way indebted to it. Anderson, like de Camp, was a very well-read person, who could speak Danish, had some knowledge of Old Norse, and based his late story *War of the Gods* not only on a story from Saxo Grammaticus's 13th-century *Gesta Danorum*, but also on the interpretation of it given by the scholar Mircea Eliade.

The cover I've chosen, from *Astounding* April 1959, illustrates one of his science-fiction stories rather than a fantasy, but I picked it out because it shows a characteristic amusement at what one might call the basic Robert E. Howard plot: man saves girl from monster (Fig. 7). If one looks at this diagrammatically, or algebraically, that is the ABC plot. But clearly there are five further permutations. Since Anderson's hero in this story, Didymus Mudge, is meek and shrinking, while his heroine, Ulrica Ormstad, is by contrast martial and aggressive, two of the six permutations (CBA, monster saves girl from man, and BCA, girl saves monster from man) are not required, but the story runs through all the other four. It opens with a timid low-rank monster, seen on the cover, running down a forest path, hoping the man will come and save him from the girl (ACB). We then switch to the girl saving the man from the high-rank, aggressive, head-hunting monster by engaging him in a sabre-duel (BAC). This is terminated when Mudge inadvertently settles the duel by releasing a giant Foucault pendulum, which he is using to try to work out their position on a strange planet (the standard, but here parodic, ABC), which so impresses Ulrica that she begins to take an amatory interest in him. The story ends with the CAB situation – the man hoping the monster will come and save him from the girl.

Anderson may have been outdone in learning, and in comedy, by his near-contemporary Avram Davidson (1923-93), who died in a Veterans' Administration hospital, despite being one of the great stylists of the 20th century. A glimpse of his talents can be seen by reading his 1962 short story 'The Singular Events which Occurred in the Hovel on the Alley off of Eye Street', included in my 1994 collection *The Oxford Book of Fantasy Stories* – it's another 'world where magic works' one, written with the traditional comic verve. But on the subject of learning, I boggled myself on realising that Davidson's novel 1981 *Peregrine Secundus* contained quite long stretches of an invocation in ancient Oscan (or perhaps Umbrian), a little-known language related to Latin rather as Welsh is related to Gaelic. Language humour also penetrates Davidson's 1990 collection *The Enquiries of Dr Eszterhazy*, set in a fantasy-world analogue of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Empire of Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania, whose official languages are ancient Gothic (by analogy with German), ancient Avar (paralleling Serbo-

Croat), and Vlox (I suppose, paralleling Italian, or perhaps Wallachian). Dr Eszterhazy himself is, like Randall Garrett's Lord Darcy, a Sherlock Holmes analogue, but Eszterhazy, unlike Darcy, is himself capable of magic – and furthermore holds five earned doctorates.

The great man of the American fantasy tradition, however, has to be Jack Vance, who died last year aged 96 (1916-2013), after a sixty-year writing career which began in the pulp magazine *Startling Stories*. Fig. 8 shows the cover from *Astounding* July 1958, illustrating Vance's story 'The Miracle Workers'. The medieval magic/modern science relationship is obvious. The masked sorcerers are sticking pins into voodoo dolls of men in armour. But their masks seem to show the kind of thing you would expect to see on an instrument panel, and in the background, on the castle wall, are futuristic cannon of some sort.

The joke in the story – though it also has a serious intention – is that in this Vancean world, orthodoxies are reversed. Sensible people, like Heinlein's businessman-hero Fraser, disregard superstition and put their faith in what works in practice. But in this world what works in practice is magic, or rather, a developed form of what we might call extra-sensory perception (discussed at some length). The trouble is that Vance's characters have run into something which their magic cannot handle, and are forced – in the person of a low-rank and open-minded sorcerer's apprentice – to start experimenting with the wild superstitions of their ancestors: which, we soon come to realise, means experimental science. He is naturally treated with the contempt most modern scientists would feel for an intern who started trying to affect experiments by ESP, but perseveres. The mirror-image scenario makes it impossible to tell who are meant by 'the miracle workers': to us, it's the magicians casting hoodoos and communicating telepathically. To the Vanceans, it's the mysterious ancestors who left them all kinds of strange artefacts, like the treasured blaster-cannon, which unfortunately (for lack of maintenance) no longer work. The story's serious point, one treasured by *Astounding*'s editor John Campbell – who also, remember, had edited *Unknown* – is that unorthodox theories also deserve to be probed, even in our reality.

Vance's work has had some brilliant covers in recent years, notably the covers done for the *Lyonesse* trilogy (see list at end) by Mike Van Houten. One feature of them is their unobtrusive crowdedness. Dominating the skyline there may be a fantasy castle, centre, a knight or quester leading a charger, but low down and hard to pick out, a gnome keeping watch. This parallels Vance's amazing fertility of invention in the books, about which I've written elsewhere:[9] magicians, fairies, trolls, yes, but also falloys, merrihews, darklings, sandestins, and in the 'Dying Earth' sequence, grues, erbs, pelgrane, deodands.

I can best sum up Vance's powers by saying that I feel myself fortunate to have had, in the past, what I immediately recognised as 'Jack Vance dreams': dreams where I knew I was in a Vance-type universe following a Vance-type plot. I always woke up

convinced that if I could just get this all down before it faded, I had a certain bestseller requiring only the write-up. They always did fade. But I can remember the name of one of the Vancean locations I invented for myself. One of the great forests of the modern imagination, along with Mirkwood and Fangorn, is Vance's Tantrevalles Forest in *Lyonesse*. My dream-parallel to that was Drumdramdrigill Wood, a name which I must have created by bringing together the Gaelic Drum- prefix (it means 'bridge', in places I knew like Drumnadrochit) and the old name for the great forest of central Caledonia, Melon Udrigil. Would that I could recreate the adventures I had there, in dream! Though whether even my dream-imagination could match Vance's fantastic detail must be doubtful.

So much, then, for the American tradition started by *Weird Tales*, given identity by *Unknown*, and passed on to many authors and many magazines, including *Astounding*, *Fantastic*, *Science Fantasy*, and *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. The last thing I have to say is that the current main continuator of that always comedic tradition is not American at all. It's Terry Pratchett.

As proof of this, I would note first that his great city of Ankh-Morpork is very like Leiber's Lankhmar, even in name; and second that his first Discworld novel, *The Colour of Magic*, is in four parts. In the first of these, set in Ankh-Morpork, we are met by Bravd the Barbarian, of whom Pratchett writes, 'If it wasn't for the air of wary intelligence about him, it might have been supposed that he was a barbarian from the Hubland wastes.' With him is his colleague The Weasel: 'much shorter, and wrapped from head to toe in a brown cloak . . . he moves lightly, cat-like'.[10] Any fan would recognise that we are in the presence of literary Fafhrd and Gray Mouser clones.

In the second part we meet Hrun the Barbarian, an obvious Conan-descendant. And when we find him robbing the temple of Bel-Shamharoth, we may well feel (remembering Yog-sothoth, Yuggoth, Azathoth) that we are now in Lovecraft-land. Part three, with its female dragon-riders and its Wyrmberg, clearly parodies Anne McCaffrey (1926-2011), whose 'Dragonriders of Pern' series began in *Analog*, just after Campbell had changed its name from *Astounding*. I have not been able to identify a source for part four, but it is possible that Pratchett started off by parodying Leiber, Howard, McCaffrey, and then found his own voice. This kind of parody of *Weird Tales* is a very *Unknown*/*Astounding* kind of thing to do.

And the final proof of my contention here is the (so far) *letzter Ritter* of the American heroic fantasy tradition, who is of course Cohen the Barbarian. Cohen is unquestionably a hero, even a Hero, but he is old, has no teeth, and sports a haemorrhoid ring on his saddle. Pressed by fierce nomads (who respect Cohen very greatly) to declare what are the three greatest pleasures in life – the arrow on the bowstring? The blood of one's enemies? The tears of his women? – Cohen thinks deeply and declares 'Hot water, good dentishtry, and shoft lavatory paper.'[11]

It's a great pleasure for me to be able to declare that the acme of the American fantasy tradition lives in Wiltshire. I should restate the main point of this piece, however, which is that while Pratchett certainly *does* know about Tolkien, and makes jokes about *Lord of the Rings* as about everything else, including at one point even *Beowulf*, he and his American models and predecessors developed *their* tradition of fantasy quite independently, and entirely successfully. I append a list of recommended works from this tradition. Most of them are readily available online, sometimes for pennies. I do not think one could possibly get more entertainment-value-per-pound than by investing in a dozen of them, or a score.

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Tom Shippey

Notes

1. Martin, 'Introduction' to Karen Haber (ed.), *Meditations on Middle-earth* (New York: St Martin's, 2001), 1-5 (5).
2. Cheng, *Astounding Wonder: Imagining Science and Science Fiction in Interwar America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).
3. Franklin, *War Stars: the Superweapon and the American Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 51-3, 153.
4. Cheng, *Astounding Wonder*, 25-9.
5. Ibid., 52-64, 217ff.
6. In his 1969 story, 'Not Long Before the End', collected in *All the Myriad Ways*, 1971.
7. For the idea of 'paratext', and the rise of Lovecraft fandom, see Michael Saler, *As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary History of Virtual Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 61ff., 130-57.
8. See respectively Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (2 vol. edition, London: Macmillan, 1890), vol. 1, 220; de Camp and Pratt, *The Incomplete Enchanter* (1941, New York: Pyramid Books reprint, 1960), 9; Randall Garrett, 'The Eyes Have It' (1964, reprinted in *Lord Darcy*, New York: Nelson Doubleday, 1979), 22.
9. Shippey, 'Jack Vance: *il ottimo fabbro*', forthcoming in *From Peterborough to Faery: essays in honour of Allan G. Turner* (Zurich and Bern: Walking Tree Press, 2014).
10. Pratchett, *The Colour of Magic* (1983, Corgi Book reprint 1997), 18.
11. Pratchett, *The Light Fantastic* (1986, Corgi Books reprint 1996), 48.

Recommended reading

In rough chronological order. Note that dates given are often of compilations, not necessarily first publication.

The *Weird Tales* Generation

Howard P. Lovecraft, *The Lovecraft Omnibus*, 3 vols, 1995.

Robert E. Howard, *The Coming of Conan the Cimmerian* (and two further vols), 2005.

The *Unknown* Generation

L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt, *The Compleat Enchanter* (1975: contains the first and best three Shea adventures).

The Goblin Tower (1968), *The Clocks of Iraz* (1971), *The Unbeheaded King* (1983).

Jack Vance, *The Compleat Dying Earth* (1998; 4 works, inc. *The Dying Earth* and *Eyes of the Overworld*).
Lyonesse: *Suldrun's Garden* (1983), *The Green Pearl* (1985), *Madouc* (1989).
Fritz Leiber, *Swords of Lankhmar* (1968, and five other vols, all with 'Swords' in title).
Poul Anderson, *Three Hearts and Three Lions* (1961).
Operation Chaos (1971).
Sterling Lanier, *The Peculiar Exploits of Brigadier Ffellowes* (1971).
Randall Garrett, *Lord Darcy* (1979; contains the novel *Too Many Magicians* and eight stories).
Avram Davidson, *Limekiller* (2003).
The Adventures of Doctor Eszterhazy (1990; a compilation volume).

Later Recommendations

Ursula Le Guin, *Earthsea* (1977; contains the first and best three of the 'Earthsea' stories).
Michael Shea, *A Quest for Simbilis* (1974; franchised continuation of *Eyes of the Overworld* above).
Nifft the Lean (1982).
John Brunner, *The Compleat Traveller in Black* (1987).
Michael Swanwick, *The Iron Dragon's Daughter* (1993), *The Dragons of Babel* (2007).
Neil Gaiman, *Neverwhere* (2001).
Kage Baker, *The Anvil of the World* (2003).