

From the Editor

Beginnings

It is difficult to say when, precisely, any literary genre truly begins. There are always antecedents and precursors, and intense scrutiny often reveals anything in art to be older than it seems. However, for science fiction, fantasy, and fairy tale, the nineteenth century serves as a useful time period in which to place the beginnings of these genres, at least in their modern iterations.

Several arguments have been made, for instance, that Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) is not actually the first sf novel, that Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World* (1666) or Johannes Kepler's *Somnium* (1634) or any number of works can lay claim to being pre-*Frankenstein* works of sf, but Shelley's novel in many ways established the genre as we know it today. Unlike many of its rivals that may be considered the first sf novel, *Frankenstein* is solely based on science and does not mix the real and the fantastic the way other works had. It was the first novel to look at humanity's advancing scientific knowledge and ask "what if?" in a way that truly questioned our relationship with science. Instead, it asked questions about humanity and what we might do given the new scientific powers we were accumulating. While *Frankenstein* and other sf novels came from Europe, sf was not entirely a European creation. Much recent scholarship has demonstrated how other regions of the world, such as India and the Middle East, were early contributors to the genre.

Fantasy, of course, did not begin in the nineteenth century. Its origins can be traced back to epic poems and stories of gods and supernatural creatures at the very beginnings of written stories, and no doubt goes back even further in oral traditions. However, like science fiction, many of the aspects of fantasy literature that we now take for granted have their beginnings in the nineteenth century, and many of the writers, such as George MacDonald or Margaret

Oliphaunt, gave rise to subgenres such as high fantasy or the ghost story that we so easily recognize today. In America, fantasy played a large role in giving rise to a new national literary tradition. Washington Irving's *The Sketch Book* (1819-20) provided a brand of American Romanticism with works such as "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." Edgar Allan Poe *pioneered the short story, detective fiction, and horror with his fantastic tales and poetry, creating distinctive types of fantasy that would continue to be developed well into the twentieth century.*

Fairy tales, too, go back much further, but they gained a special relevance in the nineteenth century, thanks to academics such as the Brothers Grimm who saw these stories as something more than children's tales. In the nineteenth century, writers such as Hans Christian Andersen and Charles Kingsley created new fairy tales, and even writers such as Charles Dickens or Charlotte Brontë were influenced in their realistic fiction by the genre. The academic study of fairy tales since then has grown into a major field within literary studies, with generations of scholars discovering new layers of depth and meaning in these classic stories. Likewise, writers from one generation to the next have found the form to be a flexible vehicle for commenting on society and culture.

These literary beginnings coincided with many other changes in the nineteenth century. The Industrial Revolution changed economies and class structures. Colonialism brought cultures into contact and conflict. The women's suffrage movement caused people to rethink long-held beliefs. Darwinism brought religious beliefs under question and sparked new interest in scientific explanations of the world. In many ways, the fantastic literature that emerged in this milieu was a reaction to these ground-shaking changes.

It is the goal of this journal to trace the origins of science fiction, fantasy, and fairy tale and explore how they developed into the familiar genres we know today. This journal is also interested in nineteenth-century reception today, how phenomenon from the steam punk aesthetic to Disney movies are constantly re-envisioning the nineteenth century and putting our time into conversation with this previous era. In all, this journal will endeavor to explore a century and its literature that were both truly incredible.