

## Original Paper

# On the Modern Literary Origins of American Fantasy

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### Abstract

*American fantasy, a genre of popular fiction born in the early 20th century, initially emerged under the impact of British fantasy. It continuously expanded its writing boundaries and forms of expression through the convergence with American popular culture and popular art, ultimately forming a more diverse and comprehensive system of fantasy with American national characteristics. In the process of the emergence and development of American fantasy, modern novels of different genres and countries exerted the most direct influence on American fantasy writers, and had a profound impact on the final shaping and prosperity of modern American fantasy.*

### Keywords

*American fantasy, Modern origins, European novels, American novels*

## 1. Introduction

Fantasy, like science fantasy, belong to the branch of modern fantasy literature. They were initially formed under the impact of the resurgence of mythology and anti-rationalist trends, depicting supernatural things and phenomena that contradict realistic norms. Today, as one of the two major strongholds of world fantasy, American fantasy have developed into a giant that spans various artistic fields such as literature, painting, gaming, and film, and have gradually become a remarkable literary and cultural phenomenon in contemporary literary creation and research. Throughout the history of American fantasy, Western modern novels have provided the most direct and practical creative experience, ultimately promoting the birth of American fantasy. In fact, as Gary K. Wolfe stated in *Fantasy from Dryden to Dunsany*, “In fact, the modern term 'fantasy novel', with its implication of a narrative which combines novelistic characterization and theme with the sort visionary imagination that Coleridge and Blake described” (Wolfe, 2012, p.11). For Western readers in the 18th and early 19th centuries, the term “fantasy” was likely a very contradictory one, as novels at that time were often

presented in the form of history. For example, in the *Robinson Crusoe* by British writer Daniel Defoe, it is stated in an editorial tone that the story originates from the private adventures of a man, and it is claimed to be “the thing to be a just History of Fact, neither is there any Appearance of Fiction in it” (Defoe, 2009, p.3). However, with the development of Western modern novels, fantasy narratives began to appear more frequently in different types of novels and gradually gained recognition and popularity among readers. Among many modern novel genres, European modern novels represented by children's novels, Gothic novels, and fantasy, as well as American native novels represented by children's novels, popular adventure novels, and supernatural horror novels, have had the most important and far-reaching impact on the birth and development of 20th-century American fantasy.

## 2. Modern European Novels

As the Romantic Movement progressed, we can observe a marked increase in the fantastical elements present in modern European novels, a phenomenon that first manifested in the realm of children's literature. As Wolff puts it, “If the nineteenth century began with a rediscovery of folk and fairy tale materials, largely influenced by German writers from Musaus to the Grimm brothers, it ended with a renewed interest in returning to these same materials” (Wolfe, 2012, p.18). Indeed, for a considerable period, “fantasy” was the prerogative of children, as people often associated it with the innocence and imagination of childhood. For young children, life itself was a belief and a miracle, while for adults, the urge to indulge in fantasy was often considered childish or immature. Therefore, from a certain perspective, modern fantasy are born amidst the transition from fairy tales to novels, and amidst children's yearning and fantasies about magic and supernatural powers.

On the one hand, European children's novels have provided numerous fantasy elements and narrative templates that modern fantasy can draw upon. For instance, in *The Elves* by German author Ludwig Tieck, a little girl accidentally crosses a bridge while playing and discovers herself in a wonderful world composed of beautiful elves and lively elemental fairies. The elves guide the little girl to visit their palace and take her on many exciting adventures. However, when the girl returns home, she is told that seven years have passed. The story told by Tieck not only heralded the birth of the writing form known as “Portal Fantasy” by Fara Mendelsohn, but also provided a paradigm for the narrative modes of children's fantasy and urban fantasy in 20th-century America. It also introduced the concept of time and space transformation, leading the content and narrative of novels to develop in a more free and open direction. Another example is *The Jungle Book* by Joseph Rudyard Kipling and *The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame, which broke through the limitations of traditional animal fables and fairy tales, shaping one three-dimensional and vivid animal image after another. These European novels not only paved the way for American anthropomorphic animal fantasy, but also brought new and diverse literary life to animal characters in modern fantasy.

On the other hand, different types of European children's novels not only reflect the varying creative intentions of their authors but also provide distinct references for American fantasy. Works represented

by *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils* and *The Water Babies* embody the authors' reflections on children's growth and family relationships, exhibiting a relatively strong tendency towards moral admonitions. Among them, the theme of *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils* fully aligns with the most important purpose of early children's literature: to educate children and socialize them, while the plot of *The Water Babies* revolves around a multitude of various moral admonitions: "the plot rotates around the various moral lessons that are of little use for the protagonist, but instructive for the reader" (Nikolajeva, 2012, p.51). Furthermore, works represented by *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*, and *What Alice Found There* clearly carry deeper, darker themes, symbolizing another exploration and attempt by children's writers beyond moral admonitions. As Maria Nikolajeva puts it: "Carroll, on the other hand, humiliates his young heroine, making her lose her mental capacity and control of her body, and subjecting her to unlimited power from creatures that would normally be inferior to her" (Nikolajeva, 2012, p.51). Lewis Carroll injected a grotesque and dark element into modern children's novels, providing valuable references for later writers such as Susan Cooper, Lyman Frank Baum, and Gregory Maguire, whose children's fantasy also exhibit a dual value and emotional orientation that combines innocence and darkness, joy and sorrow.

In addition to modern children's novels, the European Gothic novel, which originated in the mid-18th century, stands as one of the most distinctive genres in Western literary history, profoundly influencing modern fantasy. In 1764, British author Horace Walpole launched the trend of Western Gothic novels with *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story*. As David Punter points out, "When thinking of the Gothic novel, a set of characteristics springs readily to mind: an emphasis on portraying the terrifying, a common insistence on archaic settings, a prominent use of the supernatural, the presence of highly stereotyped characters and the attempt to deploy and perfect techniques of literary suspense are the most significant. Used in this sense, 'Gothic' fiction is the fiction of the haunted castle, of heroines preyed on by unspeakable terrors, of the blackly lowering villain, of ghosts, vampires, monsters and werewolves" (Punter, 1980, p.1). Gothic novels not only provide American fantasy with numerous supernatural elements to draw from but also nurture a gloomy, bizarre, and terrifying ideological core for them. Furthermore, Gothic novels' breakthroughs in previous literary traditions and their own fluid characteristics further nourish the inclusive and innovative creative spirit of American fantasy writers.

Adam Roberts, in his article *Gothic and Horror Fiction*, points out: "readers picking up fantasy titles in search of a 'magical' or 'Faerie' mood are acting upon a desire to be aesthetically sublimated into a state of mind that does not admit of rational reduction" (Roberts, 2012, p.26). Compared to relatively simpler children's novels, "Gothic is often genuinely horrific and full of terrors" (Roberts, 2012, p.28). Therefore, Gothic novels with a distinctly horror-inspired tone undoubtedly offer readers a more thorough liberation from the shackles of rationality. On the one hand, as a genre, Gothic novels provide American fantasy writers with rich and highly distinctive literary elements. In fact, many of the story props and elements employed by Walpole in *Castle of Otranto* make appearances in subsequent Gothic novels. Whether it's Clara Reeve's *Virtue: a Gothic Story*, Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk: A*

*Romance*, Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, or Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, they all encompass picturesque scenery, Byronic villains, concealed crimes, and, most importantly, supernatural elements. From this perspective, Gothic novels indeed share certain literary characteristics, and the novels' portrayal and enhancement of horror and mystery, as well as supernatural imagery represented by ghosts, vampires, and ghouls, have had a significant impact on American fantasy writers.

On the other hand, the existence of certain literary commonalities does not imply that Gothic novels are rigid, unvarying, and lifeless entities. On the contrary, Gothic style itself constitutes a "modern construct" (Watt, 1999, p.1). Consequently, the works often classified as Gothic novels exhibit significant differences and often manifest "antagonistic relations" (Watt, 1999, p.1) with each other. For instance, Radcliffe and Lewis infused Gothic novels with erotic elements, whereas Shelley, Stoker, and George W. M. Reynolds narrated the transformation of normal humans into barbaric, evil, and unrestrained monsters, deliberately exploring human alienation and metamorphosis. Evidently, nearly every successful Gothic novelist has, in their own way, infused fresh blood into this literary genre. It is precisely due to this ever-changing literary vitality that Gothic novels have transcended the limitations of geography and time, spreading from a fantasy writing mode confined to a small portion of land beyond the Nordic coastline to the entire European continent. They have overturned the cultural logic premised on orderly and stable classical models, bringing a disruptive and sometimes violent stimulus to Western literature. Roberts has even referred to the development and expansion of Gothic novels as a form of "cultural colonization" (Roberts, 2012, p.33). Compared to specific literary elements and narrative techniques, the literary vitality of Gothic novels, which seeks novelty and change, undoubtedly imparts deeper spiritual enlightenment to American fantasy. Writers such as H.P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, Thomas Ligotti, and Stephen King have all drawn inspiration from European Gothic novels and innovated within this genre, collectively propelling the "dark fantasy" subgenre in American fantasy to its pinnacle.

Regarding modern fantasy, Ursula K. Le Guin wrote in *The Child and Shadow*: "The great fantasies, myths and tales are indeed like dreams: they speak from the unconscious to the unconscious, in the language of the unconscious-symbol and archetype. Though they use words, they work the way music does: they short-circuit verbal reasoning, and go straight to the thoughts that lie too deep to utter" (Le Guin, p.57). In fact, humanity's pursuit of "imagination" has always existed in the deepest recesses of the human subconscious. It is so wonderful and so free-spirited. Although the light of enlightenment and technology has shielded supernatural forces from human rationality for a long time, fantasy elements have always stubbornly grown in literary works. As time progresses, children's novels and Gothic novels full of fantasy have finally allowed the power of imagination to reach its peak in modern literature. We can see that more and more writers no longer discriminate against mysticism and supernatural forces in novels. The fantasy elements in novels are increasing, the length is getting longer, and the themes are becoming more profound. Ultimately, fantasy as an independent modern novel genre were established in the late 19th century in Britain. The works of British fantasy writers represented by George MacDonald,

William Morris, Lord Dunsany, John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, and C.S. Lewis had the most direct impact on the emergence and development of American fantasy.

As the founder of modern fantasy fiction, the works of Macdonald, Morris, and Lord Dunsany provided the earliest templates and references for American fantasy writers. Firstly, Macdonald is known as a “key figure in Victorian fantasy” (Wolfe, 2012, p.14), and his creations demonstrated that fantasy elements could be successfully integrated into novels for adults. His past as a vicar also infused his novels with many Christian admonitions. In fact, his writing style once attracted criticism and ridicule: “The twenty-three novels that have passed the censorship are more or less didactic. However, we have not found any new theological ideas in these works” (Wolff, 1961, p.305). But it is undeniable that Macdonald did create a relatively pure fantasy world in his novels, and his writing practice of combining Christian beliefs with fantasy fiction deeply influenced contemporary and later fantasy writers. Secondly, after Macdonald, Morris took over the baton and “add substantially to the recipe for what eventually became modern fantasy” (Wolfe, 2012, p.15). Unlike Macdonald's reverence for Christianity, Morris mainly drew inspiration from Norse mythology and medieval heroic legends, and his translations of several Icelandic epics published between 1868 and 1870 had a crucial influence on fantasy writers such as Tolkien. Morris's greatest contribution to modern fantasy fiction lies in his efforts to recreate and restore the romantic spirit of the Middle Ages through his fictional stories, and to perfect a fantasy world with medieval overtones, paving the way for the emergence of epic fantasy and historical fantasy. Finally, Lord Dunsany was one of the earliest pioneers in modern fantasy literature to fully adopt a fictional world in his novels, and his works had a profound influence on the “Cthulhu Mythos”. As Lovecraft wrote in a letter to Smith, “The first paragraph arrested me as with an electric shock, & I had not read two pages before I became a Dunsany devotee for life” (Derleth, 1968, p.328). In Lord Dunsany's fantasy, indifference and warmth coexist, and romance and cruelty dance together. Beyond Christian beliefs and medieval romanticism, he added a more complex and modern spiritual connotation to modern fantasy fiction.

In *Tolkien, Lewis and the Explosion of Genre Fantasy*, Edward James pointed out: “Tolkien and Lewis stand together at the origins of modern fantasy” (James, 2012, p.62). As the twin stars in the development history of modern and contemporary British fantasy literature, the creations of Tolkien and Lewis not only herald the maturity and prosperity of modern and contemporary fantasy but also have a profound influence on fantasy writers worldwide. On the one hand, Tolkien is widely recognized as the leading figure in the field of modern fantasy, enjoying a reputation that is rare in the world. As James claimed, “From that short sentence (*The Hobbit*), one might claim, much of the modern fantasy genre emerged” (James, 2012, p.62). In fact, we can say that Tolkien almost single-handedly elevated fantasy to a status comparable to mainstream literature. Tolkien's greatest contribution to modern fantasy lies in perfectly practicing the “Secondary World” theory he proposed through his own creations, thus realizing the widespread application of the “Secondary World” in modern fantasy. As John Clute puts it, after 1955, fantasy writers no longer needed to explain their worlds by describing them as dreams or travelers' tales,

or by providing any fictional connection to our own world (Clute, 1999, p.951). If the “Secondary World” shaped by human imagination is compared to the crown of modern fantasy, then Tolkien is undoubtedly the one who first cast this crown. On the other hand, as Tolkien’s best confidant and rival, Lewis’s fantasy works represent the perfect fusion of Christian faith and modern fantasy. Unlike Tolkien, who claimed that “mythology is in itself almost devoid of religious significance” (Tolkien, 1966, p.51), Lewis, as “Britain’s best-known popularizer of Christianity” (James, 2012, p.70), never concealed his interpretation and promotion of Christian faith in his fantasy. For example, Aslan in “The Chronicles of Narnia” is clearly a symbol of Christ, and the story in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* implies Christ’s death and resurrection. However, unlike Macdonald, who also believes in Christianity, Lewis is fascinated by ancient Greek and Roman mythology. He believes that “God had given partial visions of the truth to Greeks and Romans” (James, 2012, p.70). Therefore, Lewis incorporates many elements of paganism into his fantasy, making his writing more vivid and lively, and thus avoiding rigid and dogmatic propaganda and admonitions about religious doctrines.

### 3. American Native Fiction

After the reemergence of fantasy elements in modern literature, this trend quickly spread from Europe to the United States and ultimately took root on this land. In this process, the development of modern American children's novels also began by shedding foreign influences. As Jin Yanyu pointed out, “For young American children's literature, its independence means no longer relying on European children's literature, forming a truly Americanized children's literature, and establishing self-identity is the primary task of the pioneers of American children’s literature” (Jin, 2015, p.7). In 1646, *Spiritual Milk for Boston Babes*, written by John Cotton, became “this slender volume was probably the first book especially prepared for North American youth” (Griswold, 1996, p.871). This slim book consists of catechisms and educational content targeted at North American children, mainly involving the doctrines of the Puritan Church and expounding on religious morality, etiquette, life, the Ten Commandments, and the Last Judgment. In fact, the essence of *Spiritual Milk for Boston Babes* is a children’s supplementary reading material prepared by the Puritans to propagate their doctrines. Although Cotton was the first to incorporate religious myths and miracles of saints with a fantasy tint into North American children’s books, due to the dull and tedious nature of his works, this rigid writing style tended to decline after American independence, replaced by more colorful and lively children’s literature. Among the many American writers who created children's novels, the works of Washington Irving and Frank Baum had the most significant impact on the birth and development of American fantasy.

On the one hand, Irving enjoys the reputation of the father of American Literature. He was the first American to achieve success in the field of professional writing, and his creations marked the independence of American literature. At the same time, Irving often blends realism and fiction in his works, making him an important figure in the development of American fantasy literature (Kincaid, 2012, p.37). In fact, Irving was not a writer specifically for children, but children’s literature was co-created by

literary figures and children's writers. From Irving to Cooper to Howells to Crane, "almost every major writer wrote for children. Many of them created authentic and believable children's worlds by combining memory and imagination" (Commager, 1988, p.49). In 1815, Irving moved to England and created his most successful literary work, *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, 1819-20*. The stories included in it, *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, provided the earliest masterpieces and templates for American children's fantasy. Both novels are based on German folklore, but the story settings were respectively moved to rural New York and the small town of Sleepy Hollow near Tarrytown. *Rip Van Winkle* tells a story similar to *The Elves*: Winkle is a simple, idle farmer who is often bullied. One day, while hunting in the mountains, he encounters a group of strange people and falls asleep under their influence for 20 years. Upon waking up, he finds that everything has changed. In these two novels, Irving cleverly filled the framework of German folklore with American social realities, transferring the cultural traditions shared by Americans to fictional fantasy stories. Through the interweaving of reality and fantasy, he expressed a negative and critical attitude towards historical writing and literary preaching. Irving's writing style and tendency laid the foundation for the popularization of American children's fantasy in later generations.

On the other hand, it was L. Frank Baum and his creation of *The Wizard of Oz* that truly marked the turn of American modern fantasy literature and propelled American children's fantasy towards prosperity. Since the beginning of his writing career, Baum had been striving to break away from the influence of European traditions and write more modern children's novels that embodied American cultural characteristics. As he stated in the *Introduction to The Wizard of Oz*, "for the time has come for a series of newer 'won-der tales' in which the stereotyped genie, dwarf and fairy are eliminated, together with all the horrible and blood-curdling incident devised by their authors to point afar some moral to each tale" (Baum, 1990, p.1). Among many local writers, Mark Twain and Christopher Pearse Cranch had the most significant influence on Baum. In fact, both Twain and Cranch had created fictional worlds filled with fantasy elements in their novels. For example, Cranch's *The Last of the Huggermuggers* tells the story of American boy Jacky Cable's adventure on Huggermugger Island. Under the guidance and demonstration of Twain and Cranch, Baum also began to experiment with creating fantasy worlds imbued with American cultural characteristics. Thus, in *The Wizard of Oz*, he successfully "put together a fairyland, like none before it, that we recognize as our own" (Attebery, 1980, p.84) in his own way, and some parts of Oz make it more American than Mark Twain's Camelot and Christopher Cranch's Huggermugger Island. There are some striking similarities between the magical Oz and Kansas in the novel. However, Oz is definitely not a carbon copy of Kansas. The story in *The Wizard of Oz* does not take place in Kansas, just as the Connecticut Yankees in King Arthur's court do not take place in Connecticut, it only starts there, and it is precisely this created nature that allows American writers to "honestly say that they have created a world" (Attebery, 1980, p.20). In addition, similar to Carroll, Baum explores issues related to power through the narration of Dorothy's adventures in *The Wizard of Oz*. As Nikolayeva pointed out, "While in the Land of Oz she was respected and even feared by adults,

including Oz the Great and Terrible himself, as a powerful witch, in Kansas she returns to the position of a child and female, doubly oppressed” (Nikolajeva, 2012, p.53) For Dorothy, Oz represents light, friendship, and endless possibilities; whereas Kansas signifies darkness, oppression, and a dull and boring life. It is precisely in this opposition that the beauty of Oz is revealed, and the theme of the novel is sublimated.

In fact, for a considerable period of time, many American novelists continued to create works in the European Gothic novel mode, with Charles Brockden Brown and Henry James being prominent representatives. On the one hand, although Brown’s novels did not feature overt supernatural elements, they were filled with Gothic oppression and mystery. His depictions of dreams, murder, and madness also inspired the novelistic creations of writers such as Mary Shelley and Edgar Allan Poe. On the other hand, as one of the pioneers of modernist literature, James brought new psychological techniques to the genre of ghost stories. For example, his novel *The Turn of the Screw*, which tells the story of a governess hired to care for two children, is imbued with the ambiguity and hesitation described by Todorov. How to break down the blurred boundaries between reality and supernatural forces became an important theme in American fantasy literature in the new century. In addition to Brown and James, the works of Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Robert W. Chambers had a particularly significant impact on 20th-century American fantasy.

Edgar Allan Poe’s works represent the pinnacle of American Gothic fiction. Under his pen, the conventions and techniques of Gothic fiction were taken to the extreme (Kincaid, 2012, p.38). To some extent, Poe even surpassed the shackles of the stereotypical writing of Gothic novels, broadening the scope of supernatural horror novels and even modern short stories into a broader, freer space. Lovecraft, for example, lavished praise on Poe, not only calling him a beacon of light in the literary world, but also believing that “this light not only directly changed the development of weird literature, but also influenced the future of the short story genre and indirectly shaped the development prospects and trends of a European aesthetic school” (Lovecraft, 2018, p.986). Poe’s creative style is ornate, intense, and extreme. His works established an elaborate model for American weird fiction and favored themes of death and madness. For example, *Ligeia* depicts the death of a beautiful woman driven by terror and despair. Later American fantasy writers who created dark fantasy, from Lovecraft to Stephen King, imitated these models and themes created by Poe.

Compared to Poe, Hawthorne’s attitude towards writing supernatural stories was “cool, controlled and subtle” (Kincaid, 2012, p.39) and this writing attitude was closely related to Hawthorne’s background. In fact, Hawthorne’s great-great-grandfather, John Hathorne, was a judge who presided over the Salem witch trials, which left him shocked and ashamed. Therefore, he added the letter “W” to his surname to indicate his desire to disassociate himself from his ancestors. However, this lingering issue of the historical legacy of American Puritanism always troubled Hawthorne, and he thus regarded elements with a fantastical flavor as an indispensable part of his works (Kincaid, 2012, p.40). In the process of creating novels, Hawthorne’s interest was not in describing the horror of death, but in revealing the evil

of human nature, especially the evil concealed by good intentions or social norms. For example, Professor Rappaccini in *Rappaccini's Daughter* is a hypocritical villain who tries to play God. However, despite Hawthorne's very detailed depiction of Professor Rappaccini's evil deeds and abnormal psychology in the novel, it did not exhibit the kind of chilling and profound horror found in Poe's novels. The romantic and melancholic tone in Hawthorne's novels also inspired the mysticism in 20th-century American fantasy.

In addition to Poe and Hawthorne, Chambers was also a writer who had a profound influence on 20th-century American fantasy, especially on the "Cthulhu Mythos". In fact, Chambers shifted from writing grotesque novels to historical novels, war novels, and adventure novels very early on. Therefore, in Lovecraft's view, Chambers is like Rupert Hughes and several other fallen titans—he has the right brain and education, but he has no habit of using them (Derleth, 1968, p.148). At the same time, he also believed that it is truly regrettable that he failed to continue to develop in this field—with his talent, becoming a world-renowned master of horror is not difficult. Nevertheless, *The King in Yellow* remains an immortal work in the history of American grotesque novels, fully demonstrating Chambers' extraordinary talent that sets him apart from ordinary people. Paul Kincaid believes that American grotesque novels may have originated with Chambers and his creation of *The King in Yellow* (Kincaid, 2012, p.40). Compared to traditional horror novels, *The King in Yellow* has a unique sense of fashion and decadence. The first four stories in the novel are all connected by a play titled *The King in Yellow*, which can drive readers insane. This concept of linking the pursuit of knowledge with madness later became one of the most important and common themes in American dark fantasy.

As Peng Yi pointed out in *On Western Modern Fantasy Literature*: "Ultimately, fantasy literature is not a serious form of pure literature, but rather popular literature (Peng, 1997, pp.62-63). In fact, during the development of American fantasy, the academic and aristocratic qualities originating from England in modern fantasy have been continuously diluted, gradually merging with American popular culture and evolving into a type of popular literature that is more accessible to the general public. In the process of the popularization of American fantasy, American popular adventure novels have also played a very important role. They not only provided many storylines for American fantasy but also demonstrated to many fantasy writers, through their own success, the feasibility and inevitability of the popularization of novels.

James Fenimore Cooper is considered the writer who most consciously established the tradition of nationhood in literature" in American literary history. His frontier adventure novels have had a significant impact on subsequent American fantasy. In fact, compared to his contemporary frontier adventure writers such as Robert Bird and William Simms, Cooper was more aware of the possibilities of American frontier life in novel writing and was able to utilize these possibilities to a greater extent. Both Bird's *Nick of the Woods* and Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans: A Narrative of 1757* depict the massacre of Native Americans by Americans, and both authors view the frontier as a cruel and violent place. However, their novels exhibit starkly opposite creative attitudes. Although Bird realistically

portrayed the life of Native Americans, he viewed the white people's massacre of Native Americans as a conquest of civilization over barbarism, exhibiting a thorough racist tendency. Cooper, on the other hand, expressed sympathy for the tragic fate of Native Americans and depicted and reflected on the tragic scenes of war and massacre. In comparison, *The Last of the Mohicans* naturally appears richer, more authentic, and more three-dimensional. At the same time, the "leatherstocker" novels showed a tendency to mythologize the American frontier, which gradually became a major feature of American fantasy (Kincaid, 2012, p.37). Lovecraft, for example, was deeply influenced by this trend. He not only enthusiastically depicted the New England region of the United States, especially his hometown of Providence, in the "Cthulhu Mythos", but also further fictionalized towns such as Arkham, Dunwich, Innsmouth, and Kingsport. These cities or towns were sparsely populated, eerie, and desolate, seemingly transformed versions of American border cities, where various bizarre and grotesque events occurred. They stood as landmarks between the human experiential world and supernatural forces, and this creative feature permeated Lovecraft's entire creative career.

Cooper's creations paved the way for American Western adventure novels, and his works, which combined seriousness with popularity, laid the foundation for various types of Western adventure novels in later generations. With the advent of cheaper paper and new printing methods, some American publishers began to mass-produce a series of popular books in order to capture the market, and the stories known as the "Wild West" were among the most popular novels. In fact, this type of popular story, even if not completely fantastical, had a strong fantasy element, thus laying the groundwork for the formation and development of American fantasy in the 20th century. Among the many Western novelists and their works, Edward S. Ellis and his novels are the most representative. "Seth Jones: The Captives of the Frontier", Ellis' earliest novel, tells the story of a hero, Seth Jones, who cleverly battles with Mohawk warriors in the frontier to rescue a beautiful and helpless white girl who is in distress. The novel is filled with elements of individual heroism and white racism, which may seem inferior today. However, Ellis used a rough writing style to outline an imaginative and completely different story space from reality, which also signified the replacement of historical elements in Cooper's novels with fantastical ones. In 1868, with the publication of *The Steam Man of the Prairies*, Ellis' Western novels began to shift towards complete science fiction and fantasy. In this novel, the story of a young boy named Johnny Brainerd who embarks on an adventure in a carriage pulled by a steam robot not only clearly reflects the color of science fiction, but also the mysterious and bizarre stories in the adventure add a layer of fantasy to the novel. Afterwards, Ellis consolidated the fantastical style in his novels with *The Forest Monster*, in which the whispers of the forest monster injected a sense of horror into the story beyond mystery. Since then, the adventure and fantasy elements in American popular novels have achieved a relatively mature and obvious fusion, laying the foundation for the development of fantasy in the future.

#### 4. Conclusion

As an emerging genre, fantasy spread from the UK to the US in the early 20th century. With the rise of the US in both economic and cultural terms, fantasy quickly took root and flourished on this land. For instance, Qu Chang believes that the current European and American fantasy worlds generally present a situation where American fantasy is dominated by British influence, and he asserts that the history of modern fantasy must first be the history of Anglo-American fantasy. From the perspective of the birth and development of the genre, as a type of novel centered around depicting supernatural phenomena and things, myths and legends originating from different civilizations undoubtedly provide the oldest and richest literary material for American fantasy writers. Therefore, we can regard myths and legends as the earliest literary origins of American fantasy. However, despite the very close kinship and inheritance relationship between the two, they are ultimately two different literary genres, and cannot be compared on the same level. Therefore, compared to the foundational role of myths, modern novels have a more direct impact on the birth and development of American fantasy. In fact, during the first 300 years of European settlement in the US, the settlers mainly identified themselves as British, French, or Spanish, rather than Americans. Consequently, the writing styles, themes, and emotions represented in European modern novels such as children's novels, Gothic novels, and fantasy inevitably had a significant impact on the birth and development of American fantasy. However, after the US gained independence, with its gradual rise, its productivity and cultural needs developed rapidly, making the development of literature with local cultural characteristics an urgent demand in the American literary and art world. In the development process of American modern novels, children's novels, supernatural horror novels, and popular adventure novels paved the way for the ultimate formation of 20th-century American fantasy, and the emotions and themes embedded in them will also be inherited by fantasy writers, thereby giving American modern literature a unique luster in a new literary form.

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