

Edward Plunkett, 18th Baron Dunsany

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For the peerage, see Baron Dunsany.

**Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, 18th
Baron Dunsany**



Lord Dunsany, the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers

Pseudonym: Lord Dunsany

Born: July 24, 1878
London

Died: October 25, 1957 (aged 79)
Dublin

Occupation: Novelist

Nationality: Irish, British

Genres: High fantasy, Horror

Debut works: The Gods of Pegana

Influences: Herodotus, King James Bible, Keats,
Brothers Grimm, Hans Christian
Andersen, Algernon Swinburne

Influenced: H.P. Lovecraft, J.R.R. Tolkien, Michael
Moorcock, Neil Gaiman, David
Eddings

Website: <http://www.dunsany.net/18th.htm>

Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, 18th Baron Dunsany (24 July 1878 – 25 October 1957) was an Anglo-Irish writer and dramatist, notable for his work in fantasy published under the name **Lord Dunsany**. He was born to one of the oldest titles in the Irish peerage, lived much of his life at perhaps Ireland's longest-inhabited home, Dunsany

Castle near Tara, and died in Dublin.

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Biography

Edward Plunkett ("Dunsany") was the son of John William Plunkett, 17th Baron Dunsany (1853–1899) and his wife Ernle Elizabeth Ernle-Erle Drax, née Grosvenor.

From a historically wealthy and famous family, Dunsany was related to many other well-known Irish figures. He was a kinsman of the Catholic Saint Oliver Plunkett, the martyred Archbishop of Armagh. He was notably tall at 6' 4", taking after his mother, a cousin of Sir Richard Burton. The Countess of Fingall, wife of Dunsany's cousin, the Earl of Fingall, wrote a best-selling account of the life of the aristocracy in Ireland in the late 19th century and early 20th century, called *Seventy Years Young*. His brother was the noted admiral Reginald Aylmer Ranfurly Plunkett-Ernle-Erle-Drax.

Edward Plunkett grew up at the family property (Dunstall Priory) in Shoreham, Kent, and at Dunsany Castle in County Meath. He went to school at Cheam, Eton and Sandhurst, which he entered in 1896. The title passed in 1899, and

Dunsany returned to Dunsany Castle after war duty, in 1901.

In 1903, he met Beatrice Child Villiers (1880-1970), youngest daughter of the 7th Earl of Jersey, head of the Jersey banking family, living at Osterley Park, and they were married in 1904. Their only child, Randal, was born in 1906. Beatrice was supportive of and assisted Dunsany in his writing, typing his manuscripts, selecting work for his 1950's retrospective short story collection, and overseeing his literary heritage after his death.

Dunsany was a keen huntsman and sportsman, and was at one time the chess and pistol champion of Ireland, as well as provider of the local cricket ground near Dunsany Crossroads. He set chess puzzles for journals including The Times (of London), and also invented Dunsany's chess, an asymmetric chess variant which is notable for not involving any fairy pieces, unlike many variants which require the player to learn unconventional piece movements.

Dunsany served as an officer in the Coldstream Guards during the Second Boer War, in the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers in World War I and in the local defence forces of both Ireland and the United

Kingdom during World War II.

Dunsany's fame arose chiefly from his prolific writings, and he was involved with the Irish Literary Revival. Supporting the Revival, Dunsany gave money to the Abbey Theatre, and he traveled in Irish literary circles. He was well-acquainted with Yeats (who rarely acted as editor, but gathered and published a Dunsany selection), Lady Gregory, Percy French, "AE", Gogarty, Padraic Colum and others. Dunsany's own work and contribution to the Irish literary heritage was recognised with an honorary degree from Trinity College, Dublin.

In 1957, Lord Dunsany took ill while eating with the Earl and Countess of Fingall, in what proved to be an attack of appendicitis, and died in hospital in Dublin. Beatrice survived him, overseeing his literary heritage until 1970, and their son, Randal, succeed him to the Barony.

Writings

Dunsany was a prolific writer, penning short stories, novels, plays, and poetry. He began his publishing life in the late 1890's, with a few

published verses, such as "Rhymes from a Suburb" and "The Spirit of the Bog". But he made a lasting impression in 1905 when he burst onto the publishing scene with the, to most, extraordinary collection *The Gods of Pegana*.

Dunsany's most notable fantasy short stories were published in collections from 1905 to 1919. He paid for the publication of the first such collection, *The Gods of Pegāna*, earning a commission on sales. This he never again had to do, the vast majority of whatever he wrote selling.^[1]

The stories in his first two books, and perhaps the beginning of his third, were set within an invented world, Pegāna, with its own gods, history and geography. Starting with this book, Dunsany's name is linked to that of Sidney Sime, his chosen artist, who illustrated much of his work, notably up until 1922.^[2]

Dunsany's style varied significantly throughout his writing career. Prominent Dunsany scholar S. T. Joshi has described these shifts as Dunsany moving on after he felt he had exhausted the potential of a style or medium. From the naïve fantasy of his earliest writings, through his early short story work in 1904-05, he turned to the self-

conscious fantasy of *The Book of Wonder* in 1912, in which he almost seems to be parodying his lofty grave early style.

Each of his collections varies in mood; *A Dreamer's Tales* varies from the wistfulness of "Blagdaross" to the horrors of "Poor Old Bill" and "Where the Tides Ebb and Flow" to the social satire of "The Day of the Poll".

The opening paragraph of "The Hoard of the Gibbelins" from *The Book of Wonder* (1912), gives a good indication of both tone and tenor of Dunsany's style at the time:

The Gibbelins eat, as is well known, nothing less good than man. Their evil tower is joined to Terra Cognita, to the lands we know, by a bridge. Their hoard is beyond reason; avarice has no use for it; they have a separate cellar for emeralds and a separate cellar for sapphires; they have filled a hole with gold and dig it up when they need it. And the only use that is known for their ridiculous wealth is to attract to their larder a continual supply of food. In times of famine they have even been known to scatter rubies abroad, a little trail of them to some city of Man, and sure enough their larders would

soon be full again.

After *The Book of Wonder*, Dunsany began to write plays--many of which were even more successful at the time than his early story collections--while also continuing to write short stories. He continued to write plays for into the 1930's, including the famous *If* and a number for radio production.

At the beginning of 1920s Dunsany reduced his output of short stories considerably for over seven years, concentrated more on novels and poetry.

Dunsany's first novel, *Don Rodriguez: Chronicles of Shadow Valley*, was published in 1922. It is set in "a Romantic Spain that never was", and follows the adventures of Don Rodriguez, a young noble searching for his own castle, and of his servant. It has been argued that Dunsany's inexperience with the novel shows in the episodic nature of *Don Rodriguez*. In any case, in 1924 Dunsany published his second novel, *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, a brilliant return to his early style of writing, which is considered by many to be Dunsany's finest novel, and a classic of the fantasy field.

In his next novel, *The Charwoman's Shadow*,

Dunsany returned to the Spanish milieu and light style of *Don Rodriguez*.

Though his style and medium shifted frequently, his thematic concerns remained essentially the same. Many of Dunsany's later novels had an explicitly Irish theme, from the semi-autobiographical *The Curse of the Wise Woman to His Fellow Men*.

For a certain type of story, he created Joseph Jorkens, an obese middle-aged raconteur who frequented the fictional Billiards Club in London, and who would tell fantastic stories if someone would buy him a large whiskey and soda. From his tales, it was obvious that Mr. Jorkens had traveled to all seven continents, was extremely resourceful, and was well-versed in world cultures, but always came up short on becoming rich and famous. The *Jorkens* books, which sold well, were among the first of a type which was to become popular in fantasy and science fiction writing: "club tales", told at a gentlemen's club or bar, and often extremely improbable.

Dunsany's writing habits were peculiar. Beatrice said that "He always sat on a crumpled old hat while composing his tales." (The hat was

eventually stolen by a visitor to Dunsany Castle.) Dunsany never rewrote anything; everything he ever published was a first draft.^[3] Much of his work was literally penned with a quill pen; Lady Beatrice was usually the first to see the writings, and would help type them. It has been said that Lord Dunsany would often conceive stories while afield hunting, and would return to the Castle and draw in his family and servants to re-enact his visions before he set them on paper.

Influences

- Dunsany studied Greek and Latin, particularly Greek drama and Herodotus, the "Father of History". Dunsany wrote in a letter: "When I learned Greek at Cheam and heard of other gods a great pity came on me for those beautiful marble people that had become forsaken and this mood has never quite left me."¹
- The King James Bible. In a letter to Frank Harris, Dunsany wrote: "When I went to Cheam School I was given a lot of the Bible to read. This turned my thoughts eastward. For years no style seemed to me natural but that of the Bible and I feared that I never would become a writer when I saw that other

people did not use it."

- The fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen
- Irish speech patterns
- *The Darling of the Gods*, a stage play written by David Belasco and John Luther Long, first performed 1902-1903. The play presents a fantastical, imaginary version of Japan that powerfully affected Dunsany and may be a key template for his own imaginary kingdoms.
- Algernon Swinburne, who wrote the line "Time and the Gods are at strife" in his 1866 poem "Hymn to Proserpine". Dunsany later realized this was his unconscious influence for the title *Time and the Gods*.
- Dunsany's 1922 novel *Don Rodriguez: Chronicles of Shadow Valley* seems to overtly draw on Cervantes' *Don Quixote de la Mancha* (1605, 1615).
- Dunsany named his play *The Seventh Symphony* (collected in *Plays for Earth and Air* [1937]) after Beethoven's 7th Symphony, which was one of Dunsany's favourite works of music^[4]. One of the last Jorkens stories returns to this theme, referring to Beethoven's *Tenth Symphony*.

Writers influenced by Dunsany

- Francis Ledwidge wrote to Dunsany in 1912 asking for help with getting his poetry published. Dunsany was so impressed that he prepared the publication himself, and *Songs of the Fields* was received with critical success upon its release in 1915. Dunsany became friendly with Ledwidge, offering his support and trying to discourage him from joining the army in World War I. Ledwidge did sign-up, and was killed at the Battle of Passchendaele two years later, even as his second collection of poetry, also selected by Dunsany, circulated. Dunsany subsequently arranged for the publication of a third collection, and later a first *Collected Edition*.
- H. P. Lovecraft was greatly impressed by Dunsany after seeing him on a speaking tour of the United States, and Lovecraft's early stories clearly show his influence. Lovecraft once wrote, "There are my 'Poe' pieces and my 'Dunsany' pieces — but alas — where are my Lovecraft pieces?" [5]
- Fletcher Pratt's 1948 novel *The Well of the Unicorn* was written as a sequel to Dunsany's play *King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior*.

- Jorge Luis Borges included Dunsany's short story *Idle Days on the Yann* as the twenty-seventh title in *The Library of Babel*, a collection of works Borges collected and provided forewords to (not to be confused with his short story of the same name, "The Library of Babel").
- David Eddings has named Lord Dunsany as his personal favourite writer, and recommended aspiring authors to sample him.
- Ursula K. Le Guin, in her essay on style in fantasy "From Elfland to Poughkeepsie," wryly referred to Lord Dunsany as the "First Terrible Fate that Awaiteth Unwary Beginners in Fantasy," alluding to the (at the time) very common practice of young writers attempting to write in Lord Dunsany's style.^[6]
- Michael Moorcock often cites Dunsany as a strong influence.
- Peter S. Beagle also cites Dunsany as an influence.
- Arthur C. Clarke enjoyed Dunsany's work

and corresponded with him between 1944 and 1956. Those letters are collected in the book *Arthur C. Clarke & Lord Dunsany: A Correspondence*.

- Welleran Poltarnees, an author of numerous non-fantasy "blessing books" employing turn-of-the-century artwork, is a pen name based on two of Lord Dunsany's most famous stories.
- Filmmaker Guillermo Del Toro has cited Dunsany as an influence.
- Neil Gaiman has expressed admiration for Dunsany, and written an introduction to a collection of his stories.

Bibliography

The catalogue of everything that Dunsany wrote during a more than 50-year active writing career (he wrote his last story days before his death) is quite extensive, and is fraught with pitfalls for two reasons: first, Dunsany's many original books of collected short stories were later followed by numerous reprint collections, not all authorised, some of which included only previously published

stories and nothing new; and second, some later collections bore titles very similar to somewhat different original books.

In 1993, S. T. Joshi and Darrell Schweitzer released a bibliographic volume which, while making no claims to be the final word, gives considerable information on Dunsany's work.

The following is a partial list compiled from various sources.

Short-story collections

Original

- *The Gods of Pegāna* (1905) (Project Gutenberg Entry:[1])
- *Time and the Gods* (1906) (Project Gutenberg Entry:[2])
- *The Sword of Welleran and Other Stories* (1908) (Project Gutenberg Entry:[3])
- *A Dreamer's Tales* (1910) (Project Gutenberg Entry:[4])
- *The Book of Wonder* (1912) (Project Gutenberg Entry:[5])
- *Fifty-One Tales*, aka *The Food of Death* (1915) (Project Gutenberg Entry:[6])
- *Tales of Wonder* (1916) (published in

America as *The Last Book of Wonder*
(Project Gutenberg Entry:[7])

- *Tales of Three Hemispheres* (1919) (Project Gutenberg Entry:[8])
- *The Man Who Ate the Phoenix* (1947)
- *The Little Tales of Smethers and Other Stories* (1952)

Jorkens

- *The Travel Tales of Mr. Joseph Jorkens* (1931)
- *Jorkens Remembers Africa* (1934)
- *Jorkens Has a Large Whiskey* (1940)
- *The Fourth Book of Jorkens* (1948)
- *Jorkens Borrows Another Whiskey* (1954)
- *The Last Book of Jorkens* (2002), prepared for publication in 1957

Reprint Collections

- *Selections from the Writings of Lord Dunsany* (1912, edited by W.B. Yeats) (Project Gutenberg Entry:[9])
- *A Dreamer's Tales and Other Stories* (1917; collects *A Dreamer's Tales* and *The Sword of Welleran*)
- *Book of Wonder* (1918; collects *The Book of Wonder* and *Time and the Gods*)

- *The Sword of Welleran and Other Tales of Enchantment* (1954), selected by Lord and Lady Dunsany as a sampling of works to date

and later:

- *At the Edge of the World* (1970)
- *Beyond the Fields We Know* (1972)
- *Gods, Men and Ghosts* (1972)
- *Over the Hills and Far Away* (1974)
- *Bethmoora and Other Stories* (1993)
- *The Exiles Club and Other Stories* (1993)
- *The Lands of Wonder* (1994)
- *The Hashish Man and Other Stories* (1996)
- *The Complete Pegana* (1998)
- *Time and the Gods* (2000)
- *In the Land of Time and Other Fantasy Tales* (2004), a Penguin Classics volume

Novels

Fantasy

- *Don Rodriguez: Chronicles of Shadow Valley* aka *The Chronicles of Rodriguez* (1922) (Project Gutenberg Entry:[10])
- *The King of Elfland's Daughter* (1924)
- *The Charwoman's Shadow* (1926), second

part of the Shadow Valley Chronicles

- *The Blessing of Pan* (1927)
- *The Curse of the Wise Woman* (1933)
- *My Talks with Dean Spanley* (1936)
- *The Strange Journeys of Colonel Polders* (1950)

Science Fiction

- *The Last Revolution* (1951)
- *The Pleasures of a Futuroscope* (2003),
dating from the mid- to late 1950's

Other

- *Up in the Hills* (1935)
- *Rory and Bran* (1936)
- *The Story of Mona Sheehy* (1939)
- *Guerilla* (1944)
- *His Fellow Men* (1952)

Drama Collections

- *Five Plays* (1914)
- *A Night at an Inn* (full-length play) (1916)
- *Plays of Gods and Men* (1917) (Project Gutenberg Entry:[11])
- *If* (full-length play) (1921) (Project Gutenberg Entry:[12])

- *The Laughter of the Gods* (full-length play) (1922)
- *Plays of Near and Far* (1922)
- *The Queen's Enemies* (full-length play) (1922)
- *Alexander and Three Small Plays* (1925)
- *The Evil Kettle* (full-length play) (1925)
- *Seven Modern Comedies* (1928)
- *The Old Folk of the Centuries* (full-length play) (1930)
- *Mr Faithful* (full-length play) (1935)
- *Plays for Earth and Air* (1937)
- *The Ginger Cat and Other Lost Plays* (2005)

Poetry

- *Fifty Poems* (1929)
- *The Jest of Hahalaba* (1929)
- *Mirage Water* (1938)
- *War Poems* (1941)
- *Wandering Songs* (1943)
- *A Journey* (1944)
- *The Year* (1946)
- *The Odes of Horace* (1947) (translation)
- *To Awaken Pegasus* (1949)
- *Verses Dedicatory: 18 Previously Unpublished Poems* (1985)

Essays and sketches

- *Tales of War* (1918) (Project Gutenberg Entry:[13])
- *Nowadays* (1918)
- *Unhappy Far-Off Things* (1919) (Project Gutenberg Entry:[14])
- *If I Were Dictator* (1934)
- *My Ireland* (1937)
- *The Donnellan Lectures 1943* (1945)
- *A Glimpse from a Watchtower* (1947)

Omnibus

- *The Ghosts of the Heavyside Layer and Other Fantasms* (1980), a late gathering of uncollected stories, essays and a play

Autobiography

- *Patches of Sunlight* (1938)
- *While The Sirens Slept* (1944)
- *The Sirens Wake* (1945)

Books in print

Millennium Fantasy Masterworks

- *Time and the Gods* (contains *The Gods of Pegāna*, *Time and the Gods*, *The Sword of*

Welleran and Other Stories, A Dreamer's Tales, The Book of Wonder and The Last Book of Wonder, without the illustrations)

- *The King of Elfland's Daughter*

Penguin Classics

- *In the Land of Time: and Other Fantasy Tales*

Wildsidepress

- *Don Rodriguez: Chronicles of Shadow Valley*
- *Plays of Gods and Men*
- *The Book of Wonder*
- *Fifty-One Tales*
- *A Dreamer's Tales*
- *Tales of War: Expanded Edition*
- *Time and the Gods*
- *The Gods of Pegāna*
- *Unhappy Far-Off Things*
- *The Ginger Cat and Other Lost Plays*

Night Shade Books

- *The Collected Jorkens* (three-volume set, with some previously uncollected and

unpublished stories at the end of Volumes 2 and 3, including the last Jorkens story written, from 1957)

Cold Spring Press

- *Tales of God and Men* (contains Dunsany's first eight original short story collections, and all the related illustrations by Sidney Sime)

Del Rey

- *The King of Elfland's Daughter*
- *The Charwoman's Shadow*

Hippocampus Press

- *The Pleasures of a Futuroscope*

Forgotten Classics

- *The Dreams of a Prophet* (hardcover, with large print edition also available via the Lulu website; contains the collections The Gods of Pegana, Time and the Gods, The Sword of Welleran, and Fifty-One Tales)

Notes

Dunsany's literary rights passed from the author to a Trust, which was first managed by Beatrice Dunsany, and is currently managed by Curtis Brown of London. All of Dunsany's work is in copyright in most of the world as of 2007, the main exception being the early work (published before 1 January 1923), which is in the public domain in the United States.

Dunsany's primary home, over 820 years old, can be visited at certain times of year, and tours usually include the Library, but not the tower room he often liked to work in. His other home, Dunstall Priory, was sold to a fan, Grey Gowrie, later head of the Arts Council of the UK, and on to other hands. Dunsany's original manuscripts are collected in the family archive, including some specially bound volumes of some of his works; scholarly access is possible by application.

1. ^ L. Sprague de Camp, *Literary Swordsmen and Sorcerers: The Makers of Heroic Fantasy*, p 53 ISBN 0-87054-076-9.
2. ^ L. Sprague de Camp, *Literary Swordsmen and Sorcerers: The Makers of Heroic*

Fantasy, p 54-5 ISBN 0-87054-076-9.

3. ^ *Pathways to Elfland: The Writings of Lord Dunsany* (1989) by Darrell Schweitzer.
4. ^ *Lord Dunsany: Master of the Anglo-Irish Imagination* (p. 152)
5. ^ Letter to Elizabeth Toldridge, March 8, 1929, quoted in *Lovecraft: A Look Behind the Cthulhu Mythos*
6. ^ Ursula K. LeGuin, "From Elfland to Poughkeepsie", p 78-9 *The Language of the Night* ISBN 0-425-05205-2

References

- Bleiler, Everett (1948). *The Checklist of Fantastic Literature*. Chicago: Shasta Publishers, 104-105.
- Joshi, S. T. (1993). *Lord Dunsany: a Bibliography* / by S. T. Joshi and Darrell Schweitzer. Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1-33.

External links

- Lord Dunsany: the author's page in the official family site
- e-texts of works by Lord Dunsany
- Works by Lord Dunsany at Project

Gutenberg

- Dunsany Bibliography, including cover images and summaries
- The Book of Wonder LibriVox recording

See also

- List of horror fiction authors

Peerage of Ireland		
Preceded by John William Plunkett	Baron Dunsany 1899–1957	Succeeded by Randal Arthur Henry Plunkett

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