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Guest Editors' Introduction

Sam George and Bill Hughes

The essays in this special issue of *Gramarye* emerged out of a conference organised by the Open Graves, Open Minds Project (OGOM) at the University of Hertfordshire, 8-11 April 2021: 'Ill met by moonlight': Gothic encounters with enchantment and the Faerie realm in literature and culture.¹

OGOM began by unearthing depictions of the vampire and the undead in literature, art and other media, then embraced werewolves (and representations of wolves and wild children), fairies, and other supernatural beings and their worlds. The project extends to all narratives of the fantastic, the folkloric and the magical, emphasising that sense of Gothic as enchantment rather than simply horror. Through this, OGOM is articulating an ethical Gothic, cultivating moral agency and creating empathy for the marginalised, monstrous or othered, including the disenchanting natural world.

The conference was uniquely situated at the intersection between folklore, fairy tale and the Gothic. We celebrated the darker aspects of fairies and their kin and marked the centenary of the publication by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle of the infamous Cottingley Fairies photographs in *Strand Magazine* (December 1920). We voyaged into the history of the fae, exploring a diversity of media and genres: early modern burlesque poetry, Victorian fairy painting, fairies on stage, recent cinematic interpretations of the Cottingley Fairies, paranormal romance, steampunk, fairy fashion, the 21st-century fae of Young Adult fiction and TV's *Carnival Row*.

The OGOM Project shares the goals of the Chichester Centre in our exploration of the interconnections between folklore, myth and the literature of the fantastic, and so we are very pleased to be collaborating with them on this special issue of *Gramarye*.

Gothic Faerie

As Prof. Dale Townsend has observed, the concept of the Gothic has had an association with fairies from its inception; even before Walpole's 1764 *Castle of Otranto* (considered the first Gothic novel), 18th-century poetics talked of 'the fairy kind of writing' which, for Addison, 'raise a pleasing kind of Horror in the Mind of the Reader' and 'and favour those secret Terrours and Apprehensions to which the Mind of Man is naturally subject'. Samuel Johnson, in his *Preface to Shakespeare* (1765), talks of 'the loves of Theseus and Hippolyta combined with the Gothic mythology of fairies'. 'Horror' and 'terror' are key terms of affect in Gothic criticism; Townsend urges us, however, to move away from this dichotomy. While we are certainly interested in the darker aspects of fairies and

the fear they may induce, this issue also pays attention to that aspect of Gothic that invokes wonder and enchantment.

Fairies in folklore, unlike the prettified creatures we are familiar with, are always rather dangerous. Old ballads such as 'Tam Lin' and 'The Daemon Lover' reveal their unsettling side. The darker aspects of fairies and their kin may be glimpsed in the early modern work of Michael Drayton, Edmund Spenser, Robert Herrick and, of course, Shakespeare. They have found their way into the Romanticism of Keats and Shelley, modulated by the Gothic. Fairies blossomed in the art and literature of the Victorians; though it is here perhaps that they are most sentimentalised, there is also much darkness. The paintings of Richard Dadd and John Anster Fitzgerald are tinged with Gothic, as are classic works of fairy literature such as Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market* and J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*. The 19th century also saw a surge in the dramatisation of fairies with the 'féerie', or fairy play, which set the scene for fairy ballets such as *Les Sylphides* as well as cinematic productions. Following the rise of the vampire lover in contemporary paranormal romance, dark fairies (alongside pixies, trolls and similar creatures from the world of Faerie) have also been found in the arms and beds of humans. The original menace of traditional Faerie has been restored in the form of ambivalently sinister love objects. This has emerged from precursors such as Hope Mirrlees' *Lud-in-the-Mist* (1926), Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Kingdoms of Elfin* tales from the 1970s, and the pioneering urban fantasy of Emma Bull's *War for the Oaks* (1987), to more recent works like Neil Gaiman's *Stardust* (1997) and Elizabeth Hand's *Mortal Love* (2004). Young Adult writers such as Holly Black, Maggie Stiefvater, Julie Kagawa and Melissa Marr have all written fairy romances with more than a tinge of Gothic darkness, and there are excellent adult paranormal fairy romances such as Jeanette Ng's *Under the Pendulum Sun* (2017). Gothic Faerie has manifested in other media: Gaiman's *Stardust* has been made into a feature-length film; cinematic interpretations of the phenomenon of the Cottingley Fairies have been made (with *Photographing Fairies* giving it a Gothic twist), and, recently, the dark fairies of *Carnival Row* have appeared on TV.

Max Weber, and subsequently the Frankfurt School, discerned a state of disenchantment in modernity, whereby industrialisation and instrumental rationality had erased the sense of the sacred in life with ambiguous effects. The appeal of fairy narratives in the modern era may be their power to re-enchant our desecralised world. Fairy narratives in the alienated world of modernity often represent untamed nature and lead us to explore environmental concerns. The Land of Faerie, *Tír na Nóg* or the Otherworld can be a setting for Utopia. These tales may also uncover the repressed desires of inner nature, emancipatory yearnings, the spirit of revolution, creative inspiration, pure chaos, or otherness in general. Yet often this is ambivalent; the Gothic darkness of enchantment may evoke a hesitancy over surrendering to nature or the irrational as well as having a restorative allure.

The essays below are concerned with these themes in various ways, exploring Gothic Faerie texts that incorporate folkloric motifs into more self-consciously literary forms and even, in the case of Francesca Bihet's essay, tracing the Gothic mode in the early development of the study of folklore itself. The fairy as dark and dangerous lover or abductor recurs through the essays, as does the 'fairy way of writing' as a source of (re-)enchantment, agency, and creativity.

Francesca Bihet conducts a detailed survey of the research by the London Folklore Society (FLS) in the late 19th century. The FLS sought rationalist theories of origins of the belief in fairies. It struggled, too, against the rise of spiritualism, with its convictions that fairies were real presences (as manifested in the Cottingley Fairies affair). Yet, despite this ostensible rationalism, the notion that archaic entities still survived in 'civilised' Britain, potentially resurfacing, has a Gothic character itself.

Greta Colombani looks at Laetitia Elizabeth Landon's poem 'The Fairy of the Fountains' (1835), a retelling of the medieval romance of the serpentine fairy Melusine. Colombani draws on the Gothic aspects of Landon's fairy story to subvert the domestication of women that is suggested in the original versions. Landon's fairy, rather than yearning for assimilation into human norms, expresses her agency by aspiring towards the values of Gothic fairy enchantment.

Tatiana Fajardo also analyses a Gothic fairy narrative poem. Her essay is a close reading of the contemporary poet Clay F. Johnson's 'A Ride Through Faerie' (2019). Fajardo sees the poem as employing Gothic motifs, especially the darker aspects of Faerie, to expose environmental destruction and critique the relationship between humanity and nature. She reveals the construction of the poem through its reworking of older Gothic themes in 19th-century Romantic art and literature.

Catherine Greenwood traces the Gothic Faerie heritage in another contemporary narrative poem, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn* (1987), by the Canadian Stephen Scobie. She shows the presence of Gothic motifs and narrative structures from the traditional ballad 'The Daemon Lover' and related supernatural ballads such as 'Tam Lin' and 'Thomas the Rhymer'. But these are employed to make powerful political points about colonial history and exploitation by retelling the real-life story of the Scottish migrant worker Isobel Gunn, who disguised herself as a man in the early 19th century in order to find work in Canada.

Like Greenwood, Jeremy Harte also turns his attention to the historical lives of the labouring classes, this time in 19th-century Ireland. He uncovers associations between the real abductions of women in bride-capture and slavery, and the Gothic narratives of women taken by fairies, revealing how the latter may dramatise the psychological consequences of the former.

Michaela Hausmann focuses on the Gothic fairy Maid of the Alder-tree in George MacDonald's fantasy novel *Phantastes* (1858). This seductive, sinister spirit is a manifestation of the *femme fatale*, and has origins in European folklore. For Hausmann,

this figure, as a Gothicised and malevolent image of a feminised Nature, reveals the ambivalence of our relationship with the natural world.

Finally, turning to the origins of Gothic literature itself, Györgyi Szirákiné Kovács looks at the fairy poetry in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). The poem 'The Glow-worm', embedded in the novel, is supposed to be composed by the heroine, Emily St Aubin. Kovács shows how the representation of fairies as observed by the titular glow-worm illustrates the creative power of Emily through an adaptation of Addison's aesthetic of 'the fairy way of writing' – an extension of the Gothic which informs this collection and the conference from which it emanated. This is further theorised in Radcliffe's essay-dialogue 'On the Supernatural in Poetry' (1826), which was extracted posthumously from her last novel, *Gaston de Blondville* (1826), and is a foundational text of Gothic poetics.

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Sam George and Bill Hughes

Notes

1. 'Ill met by moonlight 2021', Open Graves, Open Minds, <https://www.opengravesopenminds.com/ill-met-by-moonlight-2021/>, accessed 20 September 2022.

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A. Forestier's illustration for 'Pallinghurst Barrow' by Grant Allen,
The Illustrated London News, Christmas 1892.

The origin of the sprites: The Folklore Society's late-Victorian fairy science

Francesca Bihet

When the London Folklore Society (FLS) was founded in 1878, Victorian culture was flourishing with a fairy fascination, seeing swarms of sprites bounding through artwork, children's picture books and literature.¹ Against the backdrop of this elven enchantment, early FLS members forged the new science of folklore, mixing antiquarian enthusiasm with anthropology as inspired by Edward Burnett Tylor in *Primitive Culture* (1871). This cultural archaeology, drawing upon collected folklore and printed folktales, attempted to reconstruct the origin of the fairies as primitive ancient beliefs or folk memories of ancient populations driven to the margins by civilising forces. Folklore, like the fairies themselves, lingered in culturally marginal rural areas and temporally ancient eras. These works evoked Gothic fears of ancient and primitive beliefs returning in contemporary Britain. Despite folklorists' attempts to rationalise the fay folk, they continually haunted the margins of this embryonic discipline, challenging materialist theoretical narratives. Academic folklorists repeatedly struggled to reconcile their historicised model of fairy-lore with contemporary fairy beliefs held by some occultists.

Alfred Nutt's *The Voyage of Bran* (1895-7) represented Irish fairy belief as a dark sacrificial fertility cult, still lingering as fragmentary folklore among the Gaelic population. David MacRitchie's *Testimony of Tradition* (1890) portrayed fairies as a global, yet ancient, mound-dwelling population who were diminutive and hirsute. Edwin Sidney Hartland's *The Science of Fairy Tales* (1891), an analysis of folktales about fairies, proposed that primitive supernatural beliefs lay behind the origins of such stories. Despite attempts to rationalise these otherworldly beings, contemporary fairy beliefs and sightings continually resurfaced. Writers of the Celtic Dawn, such as William Butler Yeats in *The Celtic Twilight* (1893) and Walter Evans-Wentz in *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries* (1911), claimed the fairies as a potent occult force in contemporary Celtic culture. Literature such as Grant Allen's ghost story 'Pallinghurst Barrow' gave voice to ancient terrors resurfacing in educated, middle-class Victorian Britain. Andrew Lang, the folklorist and psychical researcher, fiercely debated with the staunchly rationalist Edward Clodd over 'psycho-folklore', a disciplinary strand which aimed to conjoin folklore with psychical research. The fairies' occult nature continually encroached upon attempts to rationalise them. They manifested in abundance in dainty

colourful picture-book illustrations and even supernatural photography, creating an uncanny cyclical reoccurrence. Resurfacing upon the same controversial theoretical ground as folklore's late-Victorian fairy science, the Cottingley Fairies photographs challenged the boundary between materialism, Spiritualism and childhood imaginary play.

Fairies stalked the Victorian era, reoccurring in abundance and excess. As Tom Hillard, drawing on the work of Fred Botting, points out, 'the Gothic is at heart a literature of fear, of excess'.² The corpus of scholarship formed by the late-Victorian FLS is overrun and teeming with fairies. The anthropological theory of survivalism, which underpinned many attempts to historicise fairy-lore, can be viewed as a deeply uncanny theory of ancient beliefs resurfacing. The prevailing theory of knowledge that dominated FLS members' writings focussed on 'a science devoted to reconstructing the world view of prehistoric savages from the contemporary lore of peasants'.³ Tylor's work *Primitive Culture* proposed an evolutionary cultural model moving along a 'measured line', where humankind goes through developmental stages from 'savagery' to 'barbarism' to 'civilisation'.⁴ Lang described folklore in terms of cultural archaeology: '[t]he Science of Folklore, if we may call it a science, finds everywhere, close to the surface of civilised life, the remains of ideas as old as the stone elf-shots, older than the celt of bronze'.⁵ Just as fossils could be embedded in the landscape, so 'cultural fossils' could be found in the 'cultural landscape' and could theoretically be compared to help 'reconstruct the history of mankind'.⁶ The folkloric theme that fairies were continually in 'the process of vanishing', as Jason Josephson-Storm shows, complemented the theory of survivalism and also 'provided an embryonic version of the myth of disenchantment'.⁷ However, despite being framed as ancient, fossilised beliefs facing extinction, fairies persistently resurfaced in the academic spaces that were attempting to disenchant them. Fairies became 'That which Returns', which Julian Wolfreys discusses in relation to Victorian hauntings as 'manifestation or persistence of the past in the present, though never as a presence as such'.⁸ Folklorists tried to map out their historicised vision for fairy origins, yet contemporary fairies continued to manifest between the gaps in their folkloric scientific rationalism.

The pervading fairies represented a lack of control over nature, the primitive and savage, a resurgence of everything that Victorian imperial so-called civilisation tried to control. Simon Estok argues that '[u]npredictable and uncontrolled nonhuman agency is troubling. The ecophobic loathes the unpredictable. Ecophobia emanates from anxieties about control', especially the reclamation of civilisation by nature.⁹ Many educated folklorists feared the loss of carefully ordered civilisation to uncivilised and animistic fairy beliefs still ossified in folk practice. The landscape was haunted by the horror and fear of the unpredictable ancient fairy, which became conflated with nature itself. Emily and Percival Arland Ussher's 'Waterford Folk-Tales' describes a barren, rural landscape of 'purple desolation', 'consumption', 'empty stomachs' and 'insanity', where livelihoods are eked out of the ground.¹⁰ From their 'starved life of struggle with the stubborn soil', the population took 'refuge in imaginings of unseen

and supernatural beings.¹¹ Locals would attempt to relieve their sufferings by stealing from the small *Clutharacán* who carried a purse called a '*sparán na scillinge*'.¹² Estok explains how the 'sheer unpredictability' of the natural environment 'threatens to entrench', resulting in 'madness'. Nonetheless, industrialisation also appeared to be destroying the natural world.¹³ Fairies concurrently represented the idealised lost natural landscape. Laurence Talairach-Vielmas explains that fairies conjured up a 'nostalgia' as 'extinct creatures'; they were 'the victims of massive industrialism'.¹⁴ Fairies, as representatives of nature, sit at the cusp of tensions over controlling the natural environment in late 19th-century modernity. Folklorists' writings on fairies, and their interactions with supernatural fairy manifestations, reveal the fairy as an uncanny spectre, stalking the boundary between reality and the supernatural, the natural world and human-controlled industrial development.

Fairies at the Celtic Dawn

The publisher Alfred Nutt's fairy scholarship sits on the periphery of Irish cultural nationalist revivals, negotiated from his position at the centre of London's literary elite. *The Voyage of Bran* (1895-7) was a two-volume exploratory essay on the Celtic 'Happy Otherworld', the 'Doctrine of Re-birth' and contemporary Gaelic fairy-lore, accompanying Kuno Meyer's translation of the old Irish saga. In *Bran*, Nutt traces the origin of peasants' oral fairy-lore far back into history through medieval fairy romance into a proposed pre-Christian migratory religion. For Nutt, Ireland exemplified a unique case study, containing both 'ancient record' and 'modern folklore'.¹⁵ *Bran* employs a fashionable fertility cult theory, as also hypothesised most famously in James Frazer's *Golden Bough* (1890). Nutt proposed that the mythological *Tuatha De Danann* were developed from primitive vegetation spirits who provided fertility and were connected to agricultural festivals. Ecstatic sacrificial fertility rites were performed to 'strengthen the life of the vegetation' by 'infusing into it the vital energy of a specially selected victim'.¹⁶ In the final chapter of *Bran*, Nutt explores contemporary 'peasant lore' as the fragmented remnants of his ancient agricultural belief system.¹⁷ Peasants are presented as 'credulous and sceptical' and 'tenacious of old custom'.¹⁸ Nutt argued that the mythological characters, fairy spirits, smaller gods, and deities, the sources of fertility which he termed the Powers of Increase, 'change as they might', 'retained to the last the marks of their origin'.¹⁹ The 'older powers' the peasants cherished were the 'ruder prototypes' of their poetical mythological counterparts.²⁰ Among the Irish rural population, ancient rites, changed but a little, lived on beside newer Christian practices. Josephson-Storm, on Frazer's work, claims that while elite magic could be tolerated, among the masses magic could evoke Gothic terror, the 'slumbering kernel of savagery' and 'occult murders'.²¹ This fear also lies at the heart of Nutt's fairy thesis.

Nutt presented the ancient pagan festivals as deeply horrific, modified over time and made milder by Christianity. However, the peasant was continually at risk of regressing to these potent yet bloody rituals:

Much, on the other hand, in the older faith was in itself fierce, monstrous, obscene, though in using these words we must recollect that they convey to us a sense of reprobation which was totally lacking at the time. The bloody sacrifice, the frenzied and orgiastic spring and harvest festival, were expressions of religious fervour as were, to cite similar instances, the sacrifice to Moloch and the midnight worship of Dionysus. It is these intense and awful rites that are really potent, it is to them, when the milder agencies of Church or fairy prove of no avail, that the peasant has recourse.²²

Despite Christianity's censorship of the 'fierce and horrible' elements of these festivities, for Nutt the 'dominant conceptions' continued 'substantially unaltered'.²³ Nutt takes as an example the tradition of Áiné's hill near Loch Gur in Munster, where men would gather on St John's Night for a torchlit procession.²⁴ After this they ran through the cultivated fields and cattle to bring luck for the following year. Nutt asserted that only in 'Gaeldom' could such a close connection between fairies and the fertility deities be found and performed for 'countless ages'.²⁵ Likewise, tales of night-time fairy revels, where mortals were swept up into joyous dancing, were a legacy of the frenzied agricultural rites where participants passed into a 'wonder-land of ecstatic joy where time and space were not'.²⁶ For Nutt the dark pagan past still lingered in the background of late 19th-century Irish folk beliefs, continually at risk of recurrence.

The sacrificial agricultural rites described by Nutt appeared to readers as omnipresent in modern Irish farming communities, lying under the surface threatening to re-emerge. Nutt even suggested that the death of Bridget Cleary in 1895, who was murdered by her family as a fairy changeling, was a remnant of human sacrifice to these fertility deities.²⁷ When Bridget went missing, rumours circulated of her abduction by the fairies living in nearby Kylegranagh Hill.²⁸ Nutt emphasised how this 'potent' belief was connected to the 'antique conception of life and sacrifice', causing her cousins 'to slowly roast' her to death.²⁹ Furthermore, both Lang and Clodd wrote to *The Times*, making a paternalist case to mitigate Michael Cleary's guilt, owing to his genuine superstitious beliefs.³⁰ Lang argued that the crime was the result of 'invincible ignorance', and that 'pity' might be exercised to one 'already punished' by the discovery of 'his own horrible and all but incredible error'.³¹ It appeared to Nutt, and other folklorists, as if disturbing atavistic beliefs were waiting to well up, thus playing into English imperial sensibilities that the Irish, like other colonial subjects, were incapable of self-rule. Josephson-Storm notes that fairy belief was a 'lightning-rod issue' for Home Rule debates: 'Did the Irish really believe in fairies and magic? If so, did this disqualify them from self-governance?'³² Just beneath the cultural surface fairy-lore sat as a disturbing fragmentary legacy of paganism, waiting to resurface and overwhelm. Nutt's theoretical

conceptions pre-empt familiar features in folk horror plots as defined by Adam Scovell. Scovell asserts that 'Folk Horror treats the past as a paranoid, skewed trauma; a trauma reflecting on the everyday' and the 'recognisability of darker ages that are beginning to reoccur'.³³ He focuses on the concepts of landscape isolation and '[t]he halting of social progress', resulting in 'skewed belief systems and morality'.³⁴ Nutt's Irish fairy-lore sits on the Celtic fringe, in isolated rural settlements, lurking under a veneer of civilisation. His folkloristic notions of survivalism open up the possibility of 'That which Returns'.³⁵

William Butler Yeats's poem 'The Host of the Air', about a bride stolen by the fairies, mirrors beliefs surrounding the sad murder of Bridget Cleary.³⁶ For the writers of the Celtic Dawn, fairies became powerfully linked to concepts of Irish cultural nationalism. Carole Silver argues that, for Irish-Celtic revivalists such as Yeats, "belief in fairies was a political and cultural necessity".³⁷ This nationalist dialogue, at an extreme, could descend into a debate over who had the finest and most authentic fairies, the English or the Irish.³⁸ Fairy-lore, embraced by Irish nationalist folklorists such as Yeats as an emblem of the Celtic Dawn, might be perceived as a resistance to imperialist agendas or conversely, for some imperialist folklorists in London, a worrying resurgence of an uncivilised past. Whilst Yeats became connected to London folklore circles, his only contribution to *Folklore* was some 'memoranda' regarding the fairies in the region, added to the folklore collected by Bryan J. Jones in County Louth, which Clodd had passed onto him for comment.³⁹ Yeats replied confirming that he had also encountered similar folklore. In response to a tale where a man was taken 'with the gentry' at night to the Hill of Faughart, Yeats reports that he too was carried 'four miles in County Sligo'.⁴⁰ Yeats himself, the educated writer, had personally experienced being away with the fairies and thus confirmed the reality of folk belief. This is strengthened by a report of his Sligo relation, who had a black lamb placed into their flock as a warning by the fairies after a sacred bush was cut.⁴¹ Edward Hirsch argues that by narrating personal experiences from his own supernatural beliefs, Yeats 'takes responsibility for their truthfulness', exposing himself as a collector turned informer; a native performer.⁴² Fairy belief, as portrayed by Yeats, is not ossified fragmentary folklore, but a threatening and active occult force in Irish society.

For Yeats, the rural Irish countryside, with its belief in fairies, became a tonic to the modern industrialised, namely British, steam-powered world. In *Irish Fairy Tales*, Yeats emphasises that fairy belief is active amongst the Irish rural population, despite 'great engines and spinning-jinnies'.⁴³ He asks, 'Do you think the Irish peasant would be so full of poetry if he had not his fairies?'⁴⁴ Edward Said argues that Yeats was able to harness 'Ireland's backwardness as the source of its radically disturbing, destructive return to spiritual ideals that had been lost to an overdeveloped modern Europe'.⁴⁵ Yeats's pivotal work *Celtic Twilight* (1893) combined Irish folklore with his own personal visionary experiences.⁴⁶ In *Celtic Twilight*, Yeats stresses that he was 'at no pains to separate my own beliefs from those of the peasantry, but have rather let my men and women, dhoulds and faeries, go their way unoffended or defended by any argument of mine'.⁴⁷ Yeats relates personal mystical

experiences, such as longing for a 'message' from beings 'who inhabit the world of spirits', eventually seeing two weasel-like dogs, one black and one white, 'two faery dogs', representing good and evil.⁴⁸ Yeats's fairies are powerful occult beings, an active part of Celtic culture, diametrically opposed to the benign domesticated English flower fairy. Indeed, in 'The Hosting of the Sidhe', the Irish fairy-folk are presented as fearsome, wild and natural. Amidst the 'rushing band' with 'Caolte tossing his burning hair', their 'breasts are heaving', 'arms are waving', 'eyes are a-gleam' and 'lips are apart'.⁴⁹ The *Sidhe* ride over the landscape unbounded, representing a loss of control. Castle argues that in Yeats the 'other-worldly is simultaneously *this*-worldly; and magic, far from being an eccentricity of the Celtic imagination, lay at the heart of Yeats's Revivalist project'.⁵⁰ Even the title *Celtic Twilight* underpins Yeats's vision. Twilight sits in a liminal space between light and dark. Like the fairies, it can express the peripheral nature of the Celtic, sitting under the gloom of an English oppression, waiting to emerge as the day breaks. For Yeats, fairies are not an object of decayed Irish culture, as studied by British anthropologists, but an active presence embedded in the Irish landscape. Yeats inverts fears regarding the Celtic supernatural held in volumes such as Nutt's *Bran* and employs them as a potent source of cultural revival.

Walter Evans-Wentz, who studied at Oxford under John Rhys and Andrew Lang, also considered fairies as an active supernatural component in contemporary Celtic culture.⁵¹ *The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries* was strongly influenced by, and dedicated to, Yeats, who brought Evans-Wentz the 'first message from fairyland'.⁵² Evans-Wentz travelled round Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Brittany, Cornwall and the Isle of Man collecting fairy-lore. While employing established folkloric methodologies, Evans-Wentz concluded that the 'ordinary non-Celtic mind must readjust itself to a new set of phenomena' and stop treating fairies as 'fanciful', 'non-real' and 'absurd'.⁵³ He asserted that 'Fairyland exists' as a 'super-normal state of consciousness' and 'fairies exist' as intelligent forces recognised by psychical research.⁵⁴ Evans-Wentz strongly engaged with folkloric fairy scholarship. His chapter 'The Celtic Doctrine of Re-Birth and Otherworld Scientifically Examined' references Nutt's *Bran*.⁵⁵ He also analysed Lang's psychical research relating to fairies and the theory that fairies were an historical race.⁵⁶ *Fairy Faith* is a work of scholarship with an esoteric conclusion, challenging the often materialist conclusions of anthropological folklorists. This unsurprisingly attracted scholarly criticism. Hartland felt that Evans-Wentz's argument was only supported by the 'weak, hesitating, and tentative conclusions' of scientific men, who 'indulged' in psychical research.⁵⁷ Eleanor Hull felt another conclusion might have been more 'convincing'.⁵⁸ Her review quotes Douglas Hyde's contradictory introduction in *Fairy Faith*, noting that if the 'real objective existence' of the 'banshee' were admitted, then 'where are we to stop? for any number of beings, more or less well authenticated, come crowding on her heels'.⁵⁹ Evans-Wentz opened up the possibility of innumerable supernatural beings resurging through Celtic culture in crowding abundance. Evans-Wentz's *Fairy Faith* shifted the debate from a consideration of fairy origins into a scientific discussion of their objective reality.

Contemporary fairies continued to re-haunt folklore studies, an alternative voice countering theoretical attempts to situate fairies in an archaic past. Fairies of the Celtic Dawn created a sense of horror as they challenged from the margins, conjuring up an alternative voice beyond the supposedly ordered Victorian industrialised world.

Fairies as an ancient population

Grant Allen's chilling tale 'Pallinghurst Barrow' appeared in the *Illustrated London News* in 1892. Rudolph Reeve, a journalist, visits a country house and encounters terrifying, primordial, subterranean hill folk in the nearby barrow. The popular anthropological euhemerist theory that fairies were the remnants of an ancient race lingering in remote and liminal places is twisted into an eerie Gothic tale. Mixing scholarly theory with horror, Allen makes direct reference to David MacRitchie, who advocated that fairies originated as an ancient historic race.⁶⁰ Reeve also reads 'Childe Rowland' from Joseph Jacobs's *English Fairy Tales* (1890), a tale which Jacobs used to support MacRitchie's thesis.⁶¹ In 'Pallinghurst Barrow', similarly to more recent works of folk horror, 'era and temporality are linked by esoteric, inexplicable events; things that unnerve through a sheer recognisability of darker ages that are beginning to reoccur'.⁶² The fairy-like child Joyce recounts some gypsy-lore about Pallinghurst Barrow lighting up on St Michael's night to the room full of educated rationalist adults, including her disapproving mother.⁶³ Reeve, in a 'strange semi-mesmeric state', goes to the barrow and re-enacts the method of opening the hill from 'Childe Rowland', walking round the hill three times widdershins and declaring 'Open door!'⁶⁴ When Reeve enters the barrow, he is imminently 'aware that the age had gone back upon its steps ten thousand years'; he stood facing 'a remote antiquity'.⁶⁵ Gothic qualities of excess, exaggeration and wildness are conjoined to MacRitchie's rationalist theory of fairy origin.⁶⁶ Inside the barrow Reeve encounters 'a ghostly throng of naked and hideous savages'.⁶⁷ These beings are a 'unreal throng of angry and disappointed creatures', 'unearthly foes' with 'unknown tongue'.⁶⁸ The illustrations accompanying the story show Reeve in a smart evening suit being clawed at by the hoard of naked cave-dwellers, dragging him into the 'grim black hole'.⁶⁹ Dawn Keetley and Matthew Sivils also draw attention to the sense of claustrophobia and entrapment, as in a labyrinth, that the Gothic genre often employs.⁷⁰ The intensity of this tale is palpable, with the ancient race, now remembered as fairies, coming back to stalk the modern journalist.

David MacRitchie forged an all-encompassing thesis of fairy origins, claiming fairies were an ancient primitive population. His two main works on the topic, *Testimony of Tradition* (1890) and *Fians, Fairies, and Picts* (1893) are supported by dozens of periodical articles espousing the same theory. His work employs a blend of ethnology, etymology, history and folklore to construct his theory of an international ancient fairy race driven into liminal regions. MacRitchie's articles repeat his thesis in sheer abundance; each new pre-historic burial mound or barrow gives testimony to his theory. These archaeological remains

provided MacRitchie's theory with physical evidence for supposed earth houses, pinning fairy-lore to monuments in the landscape. This provided a tangible materiality to ancient fairy peoples. *Testimony of Tradition* contained sectional view diagrams of the chambered Maeshowe in Orkney.⁷¹ MacRitchie explained that, despite a thousand-year lapse, residents knew that Maeshowe 'was no ordinary grassy mound', but a habitation.⁷² *Fians, Fairies and Picts* is also replete with archaeological diagrams of these so-called mound dwellings. Furthermore, by tracing reports of various groups, such as Picts, Trows, and Feens, MacRitchie hoped to garner evidence of his wide-spread ancient fairy-race. Adam Grydehøj notes that MacRitchie used an 'etymological sleight of hand' and passing similarities, such as being hirsute, to conflate various legendary and historical groups together as part his fairy race.⁷³ Despite their precarious connections, at first glance MacRitchie's theories scientifically explained the supernatural, manifesting fairies as historical cavemen.

MacRitchie's theory of an historical race driven into marginal landscapes parallels the core motif of the fairies' flit, mentioned in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale*.⁷⁴ Such fairies as last of their kind frequently emerged in children's literature. In Rudyard Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill*, Puck explains '[u]nluckily the Hills are empty now, and all the People of the Hills are gone. I'm the only one left.'⁷⁵ Puck is unhappy about being confused with the 'paint-winged, wand-waving, sugar-and-shake-your-head set of imposters' from children's picture books.⁷⁶ Puck explains how the Old Things became diminutive: firstly they were gods, then they were People of the Hills, before finally leaving England.⁷⁷ Kipling's Puck, as a character, is deeply historically aware of English fairy-lore motifs and the declining fate of his kind, which at the turn of the 20th century was mainly consigned to the nursery. Likewise, the Psammead in E. Nesbit's *Five Children and It* (1905) is also the last of his race, recalling that 'as soon as a sand-fairy got wet it caught cold, and generally died. And so there got to be fewer and fewer.'⁷⁸ He relates a time when children ate pterodactyls.⁷⁹ Talairach-Vielmas argues that Nesbit provided 'an ecological discourse on extinction.'⁸⁰ The Psammead evokes 'mankind's ancestry', like MacRitchie's cave-dwelling fairies, edging into extinction.⁸¹ The Psammead's eyes were on long horns like a snail's eyes' and his 'tubby body was shaped like a spider's and covered with thick soft fur' with 'hands and feet like a monkey's.'⁸² Like the humanoid creatures haunting Pallinghurst Barrow, the Psammead conjured notions of the evolutionary past of primitive mankind, which became supernaturalised.⁸³

Ironically, the theory that fairies represented an ancient population was carried into 20th-century Paganism and witchcraft via the controversial Egyptologist turned witchcraft historian, Margaret Murray. In *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (1921), Murray argued that early modern European witchcraft trials represented the legacy of a Palaeolithic fertility cult, which was persecuted by Christianity. Fairies fit into Murray's witch-cult thesis as an aboriginal population, who were driven into marginal areas by invaders, but kept enough contact with the outside world to transmit their religion. Murray proposed that the cult survived for several centuries under a veneer of Christianity, and then later as folk festivals. Her ideas reflect

concepts of ancient fertility cults as advocated in Frazer's *Golden Bough* (1890) and also Nutt's *Bran* (1895-7). Jaqueline Simpson recognised that Murray, like MacRitchie, glided through the supernatural evidence of witchcraft, devising 'a natural explanation, however implausible'.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, Ronald Hutton shows how her thesis appealed to 'emotional impulses of the age', which considered the 'English countryside as a timeless place full of ancient secrets', with Christianity as a 'vener' covering the 'persistence of paganism'.⁸⁵ Murray's witch-cult appeared to be the manifestation of folkloric survivalist theory; beliefs and rituals from her putative ancient pagan fairy race had continued tenaciously into the modern era.

It was 'Murray's ironic fate', as Grydehøj notes, that her ideas were eventually incorporated into Gerald Gardner's Wiccan movement and disseminated to future generations of neo-pagans.⁸⁶ In 1954, with *Witchcraft Today*, Gardner outlined the supposed origins and practices of his ancient witch religion. Acting as the 'godmother of Wicca', Murray wrote an introduction for the volume, her expert status attaching credibility to the book.⁸⁷ Gardner's religion appeared to be a re-invocation of those ancient beliefs and practices, survivals that had been hiding for so long. Mirroring Murray, *Witchcraft Today* also included a chapter on the 'Little People' as a wider background, promoting the theory of fairies as an ancient race.⁸⁸ For Gardner this ancient race was human, but their witchcraft religion was a real supernatural force surviving into modernity. A materialist idea is completely subverted. Gardner in the 20th century was still practising the religion of the Little People, Britain's ancient fairy population. This Victorian theoretical idea has a long haunting echo. Gardner's work resummoned the theoretical past, confronting the disciplinary boundaries of folklore with the contemporary supernatural.

Science and the supernatural

Folklorists viewed fairy and folktales as stories originating in mankind's primitive past and examined them for evidence of ancient belief systems. These tales sat in a theoretical space straddling childhood entertainment and anthropological evidence. Edwin Sidney Hartland's volume *The Science of Fairy Tales* (1891) modelled the new anthropological-comparativist approach to folktale, attempting to reconstruct ancient philosophy and find the origins of fairies. He compared various tales, tracing themes such as fairies' human midwives, changelings, the supernatural time-lapse in fairyland, and swan-maidens. By comparing fairy tales in this way, Hartland traced general traits and common themes of fairy-lore, hoping to expose facets of archaic thought, beliefs and practices encapsulated within the tales – a fairy mythology. The 'survivals' of fairy-tales which were 'unintelligible if regarded singly' could be better understood 'only by comparison with other survivals'.⁸⁹ Hartland argued that fairies have the same origin as ghosts and witches, all deriving from the same core of ancient beliefs, which over time became 'fragmentary' and 'differentiated'.⁹⁰ The volume reads as a series of abstracts in which similar narratives and motifs are connected together to forge a network of interconnected motifs. These stories are cyclical, as if one were reading

a similar narrative repeatedly, with slightly different contexts and minorly altered plots. *The Science of Fairy-Tales* notably resembles the methods and style employed by fellow folktale scholars, such as Edward Clodd in his *Tom Tit Tot* (1898) and John Rhys in *Celtic Folklore, Welsh and Manx* (1901). An eerie sense of déjà vu is produced whilst reading these repetitive comparative folktale texts, a sense of excess and abundance of tale. Wolfreys, discussing the tropes of haunting in Victorian literature, points to 'the configuration of universal recurrence, the sense that events leave their imprint on time only to recur' as a 'different manifestation'.⁹¹ Like literary ghosts, Hartland's stories, remnants of ancient beliefs, re-occur again and again throughout history, spanning wide geographical regions and in different configurations. Each story represents a spectre of ancient beliefs that continually haunts in new ways.

The folktale scholar Andrew Lang's *Coloured Fairy Books* (1889-1910), like Hartland's work, appeared to demonstrate 'the sameness of the stories everywhere', caused by 'the uniformity of human fancy in early societies'.⁹² Lang recognised the propensity of individuals in Victorian Britain to continue holding similar supernatural beliefs and experiences. As Josephson-Storm, who challenges the 'myth of disenchantment', points out, 'over the course of "modernity," many people continued to believe in the reality of spirits, moral forces, and demons'.⁹³ Lang, creating a vision for psycho-folklore, felt that the study of contemporary psychical occurrences would make a useful addition to the field of folklore. Psychical research attempted to render the supernatural verifiable within modernity by using scholarly methods, thus stretching the limits of scientific knowledge. Lang noted that so long as a belief 'rests only on tradition it interests the folklorist', but as 'soon as contemporary evidence of honourable men avers that the belief reposes on a fact, Folklore drops the subject' and psychical research takes it up.⁹⁴ Lang's method of psycho-folklore compared contemporary and historical manifestations of ghosts to provide 'a long-range view on ghost-lore, and appreciate its universal rather than temporal features'.⁹⁵ Through this method, Richard Dorson notes, Lang hoped to 'scientifically' 'distinguish the folklore tale from the factual phenomenon, the magician's tricks from the real event'.⁹⁶ Lang felt that the comparative methods, as used by Hartland, could be extended to consider contemporary supernatural accounts, the supernatural emerging repetitively in similar guises throughout different eras.

Lang's introduction to the 17th-century Scottish minister Robert Kirk's *Secret Commonwealth* (1893) exemplifies his comparative psycho-folklore method, demonstrating 'his desire for a scientific approach to the supernatural'.⁹⁷ In the section 'Fairies and Psychical Research', Lang focuses on the aspect of fairy belief 'concerned with Brownies and house-haunting Pixies', which he felt originated in ghostly activity and experiences.⁹⁸ He takes modern examples recorded by psychical researchers and compares them with historical cases. Lang felt that all supposedly supernatural phenomena, whether ancient or modern, deserved to be scientifically analysed for

possible explanations. Lang's comparative psycho-folklore mirrors folkloric methodologies applied by Clodd and Hartland to folktales. For instance, Clodd's *Tom Tit Tot* (1898) extensively traced the anthropological beliefs underlying the Rumpelstiltskin tale type by comparing narratives and beliefs containing similar motifs. The name-guessing motif in 'Tom Tit Tot' is considered the 'most archaic element' of the story, containing the idea 'that to know the name is to put its owner, whether he be deity, ghost, or mortal, in the power of another, involving risk of harm or destruction to the named'.⁹⁹ In Clodd's argument, the fear of being harmed through possession of a name is extended to material items such as nails, saliva, and hair. However, whilst Lang took contemporary supernatural phenomena potentially seriously, Clodd, as the FLS's chief rationalist, assumed that such accounts merely represent primitive beliefs.

Folklorists generally considered it imprudent to investigate psychical occurrences. Katherine Briggs, discussing the Cottingley Fairies with the investigator Joe Cooper, considered it 'unwise to delve too deeply into fairy expeditions and to concentrate more upon recorded folklore'.¹⁰⁰ Gillian Bennett argues that no one would 'tackle' supernatural folklore because it was 'disreputable'.¹⁰¹ Lang's attempts to incorporate psychical research into the FLS remit were unpopular. Clodd attacked Lang in his presidential address, stating that '[a]nalyse[d] under the dry light of anthropology, its psychism is seen to be only the "other self" of barbaric spiritual philosophy "writ large"'.¹⁰² For Clodd, psychical phenomena represented a modern-day eruption of 'savage' beliefs from a lower stage of culture. Lang, in a 'Protest' against Clodd's speech, isolated himself as the only member of the psycho-folklorist 'sect'.¹⁰³ He portrayed Clodd's opinion as one of distaste regarding the belief of the 'community of the living and the so-called dead', rather than a valid academic criticism.¹⁰⁴ Lang re-iterates that 'folklore and psychical research have much common ground'.¹⁰⁵ Clodd replied to Lang's 'Protest' arguing that the Society for Psychical Research's methods were 'pseudo-scientific'.¹⁰⁶ For Clodd, psychical research was 'a state of feeling', yet folklore was 'an order of thought'.¹⁰⁷ Bennett notes that Clodd, 'secure within the dominant tradition of disbelief', did not engage in 'serious discussion' about ghost 'twaddle'.¹⁰⁸ The arena of Clodd and Lang's debate involved the 'illicit "delving" into the unknown', engaging the 'greatest taboo, and the greatest silence'.¹⁰⁹ Lang's psycho-folklore was seen as a threat, not just to folklore as a burgeoning science, but to the wider materialist anthropological cause which was trying to dispense with 'primitive' supernatural beliefs. As Richard Sugg notes, 'fairy encounters wriggle in this unsettling way across the borders of folklore and reality'.¹¹⁰ For folklorists, the contemporary supernatural spectres continually resurfaced; the ancient past returned to re-haunt the present.

The materialist Tylorian theories that sought to historicise fairies were continually challenged by the contemporary presence of the supernatural fairy in modernity, as we have explored in the works of Yeats and Evans-Wenz. However, this was most notable in the Cottingley Fairies photographs, in which the imaginative world of childhood fairy play became intermingled with adult Theosophical beliefs. On a summer's afternoon in 1917,

armed with a 'Brownie' box camera, hat pins, and delicate tracings of fairy pictures from Alfred Noyes's poem 'A Spell for a Fairy', two girls were about to bring disruption upon the adult world with figments of their imaginary play. By the Christmas of 1920, the writer Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, of Sherlock Holmes fame, revealed these photos to *Strand Magazine* readers. Doyle announced that the images 'represent either the most elaborate and ingenious hoax' or an 'epoch-making' event.¹¹¹ In the wake of World War I, Doyle hoped that 'recognition of their existence will jolt the material twentieth-century mind out of its heavy ruts in the mud, and will make it admit that there is a glamour and mystery to life.'¹¹² He anticipated that the Cottingley photographs would extend humankind's 'mental horizon' and prove that 'matter as we have known it is not really the limit of our universe'.¹¹³ Catherine Wynne argues that, while the fairies do not relate directly to Spiritualism, Doyle hoped that the Cottingley evidence of 'lower spirit forms' would provide a small opening to 'lend credence to a belief in the higher spirit world'.¹¹⁴ Spectrality, as Wolfreys argues, 'appears in a gap between the limits of two ontological categories', which can be 'between life and death, though neither alive nor dead'.¹¹⁵ These tiny bottom-of-the-garden miracles, garnered from a children's book iconography, were employed to challenge the materialist narrative of disenchantment, rendering the fairies as benign spectres of the imagination coming to re-haunt early 20th-century Britain.

By announcing a new epoch, *The Coming of Fairies* (1922) sought to invert and challenge the theme of the fairies' flit, confronting folklorists with the contemporary supernatural in a materialised form. The Cottingley fairy photographs, like Evans-Wentz's work, challenged folkloric conceptions that fairies were historic survivals heading for extinction. Like a haunting, the photographs also kept returning again and again in newspapers and magazines. Wolfreys argues that 'the promise of the gothic was – and still is – a promise of a certain return, a cyclical renaissance'.¹¹⁶ Indeed, even survivalist theories left open the opportunity for revival. However, the resultant response from folklorists was primarily silence. Stewart Sanderson, in his FLS presidential speech, felt that the case should have elicited 'a lively contemporary interest'.¹¹⁷ Yet creeping between the boundaries of reality and the supernatural, the fairies presented a challenge around the 'taboo' subject of supernatural belief: the same boundary that characterised Clodd and Lang's ferocious debate. Unsurprisingly, Clodd was the only FLS figure to discuss the Cottingley photographs during the 1920s. In *Occultism in Two Lectures*, Clodd attacked Doyle, noting that 'some of us think that 'Credulity' and 'Conan Doyle' are equations'.¹¹⁸ He asserted that the two-dimensional 'fairies have been copied from some illustrated book, cleverly cut out of thin cardboard'.¹¹⁹ Regarding Theosophical explanations for the fairy photographs, he remarked that the 'average person will find it difficult to extract any sane meaning from this balderdash composite of wind and fog'.¹²⁰ Clodd merely shuts the photographs down as a hoax without engaging in any discussion. A generation later, Katherine Briggs in *The Fairies in Tradition and Literature* claims that 'any folklorist' would hold 'a very strong aesthetic resistance' to

these 'butterfly-winged, gauze-clad fairies of the children's magazine illustrations'.¹²¹ Whilst Briggs noted that the 'type of people' promoting the case were 'cranks' involved with Theosophy, she acknowledged that labelling them this way made dialogue problematic.¹²² The opportunity for dialogue or analysis of the photographs was greatly troubled by personal belief structures. The fairies sit on the highly controversial theoretical juncture between psychical research and the Tylorian model of survivalist folklore.

The gauzy fairies of Victorian pictorial culture had the whole hopes of an afterlife pinned upon them by Doyle. Bown claims that the case of the Cottingley photographs 'is a terribly sad story because it bears witness to the impossibility of return, and the hopelessness of longing'.¹²³ Fairies, while still holding some of their dark cachet, were transformed by picture books and became increasingly benign by 1920. Purkiss also agrees that the Cottingley Fairies represent the 'apotheosis' of the cute fairy and struck 'the last great blow against the fairy'.¹²⁴ These gauzy beings from the world of childhood picture books could no longer easily be conflated with the dark Gothic hordes of folkloric fairies and their underworld fraternity from Robert Kirk's *Secret Commonwealth* (1893). Walter Taylor Field, in 'A Plea for the Fairies', complained that 'a fairy that can be photographed is no fairy at all', finding its place amongst other small creatures as 'essentially commonplace'.¹²⁵ Nineteenth-century folklorists had attempted to shine the torch of knowledge upon Fairyland, denuding fairies of their traditional mystery and menace. The Cottingley photographs, likewise, had attempted to materialise the fairy as a virtually powerless psychical humanoid insect. Field felt that the 'charm of a fairy is that it is not real', that it was a 'delightful, irresponsible creature of the imagination'.¹²⁶ Bemoaning the 'fact-mongers', who had 'grown too wise to appreciate the miracle of nature', he suggested a role for fairies in re-enchantment, conjuring up a sense of divinity and awe in the natural world.¹²⁷

Sabina Magliocco points out how modern Pagan concepts of the fairy owe much to the benign fays of Victorian and Edwardian children's literature.¹²⁸ For many contemporary Pagans, fairies are now benevolent nature spirits, protecting the threatened natural world. She explains how even today fairies continually re-emerge and re-haunt, offering a potential counter for the 'loss of enchantment', especially in an era of environmental crisis.¹²⁹ Magliocco emphasises the fairy's peculiar cultural position, like cats, undomesticated, 'dwelling perpetually in a liminal state at the edge of human society, interacting intimately with humans yet belonging to a seemingly separate and at times unpredictable and potentially dangerous order'.¹³⁰ Fairies, as non-human others, provide an uncanny human-like face within nature. As Sugg suggests, 'they are very like you, and yet, not *quite* like you'.¹³¹ Fairies now, just as in the 19th century, give voice to human fantasies and fears as spectres of imaginary processes, haunting the humans who conjure them.

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Notes

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5. Andrew Lang, *Custom and Myth*, new edn (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1893), 12.
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7. Jason Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity and the Birth of the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 136. Max Weber, in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), mooted a theory of disenchantment occurring during the Reformation. He focused on the role of Protestantism disenchanting the otherworldliness of Catholicism, with the latter's intercessional saints and miracles. He argued that this led to rationalised thinking in the West, causing a decline in magical world views. Jason Josephson-Storm's work seeks to frame Max Weber's theory of disenchantment as a myth by evidencing that belief in magic continued in the modern era.
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9. Simon Estok, 'Theorising the EcoGothic', *Gothic Nature* 1 (2019): 34-53 (46).
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12. Ussher and Ussher, 'Waterford Folk-Tales I', 111. The *Clutharacán* stories are attributed to elderly informants. These fairy creatures are described as small figures, with red caps and moustaches, who carry a purse of shillings. The authors translate the name as 'one who lives in the shade'.
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18. Nutt and Meyer, *The Voyage of Bran*, 204.
19. Nutt and Meyer, *The Voyage of Bran*, 244.
20. Nutt and Meyer, *The Voyage of Bran*, 204.
21. Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 146.
22. Nutt and Meyer, *The Voyage of Bran*, 207.
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24. Nutt and Meyer, *The Voyage of Bran*, 218-21.
25. Nutt and Meyer, *The Voyage of Bran*, 219.
26. Nutt and Meyer, *The Voyage of Bran*, 225.
27. Nutt and Meyer, *The Voyage of Bran*, 232.
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29. Nutt and Meyer, *The Voyage of Bran*, 232.
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31. Lang, 'The Irish Changeling Burners'.
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‘Human passion – fairy power’: Gothic rewriting and queer subversion of the Melusine legend in Letitia Elizabeth Landon’s ‘The Fairy of the Fountains’

Greta Colombani

Originally published in the annual Fisher’s Drawing Room Scrap Book of 1835, ‘The Fairy of the Fountains’ is ‘one of Letitia Elizabeth Landon’s most enigmatic and disturbing poems’ and a fascinating retelling of the medieval legend of Melusine, the serpentine fairy that inspired more famous Romantic tales such as Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué’s *Undine* (1811) and John Keats’s *Lamia* (1820).¹ Though Landon was presumably somewhat familiar with both, her most direct – and explicitly acknowledged – source is ‘The Story of Melusine’ in William J. Thoms’ *Lays and Legends of France*, published in 1834 and based on one of the earliest and most influential literary versions of the tale, the 14th-century prose romance *Roman de Mélusine* by Jean d’Arras.² In its basic outline, the plot of Landon’s poem is faithful to the original: Melusina is a half-human, half-fairy princess who lives in exile with her fairy mother after her human father violated a promise to his wife and committed an irremediable transgression.³ After some years, Melusina decides to avenge her mother by entombing her father inside a mountain through a spell. Rather than being grateful, however, her mother curses her to turn into a snake from the waist down every Saturday. When Melusina falls in love with the human knight Raymond, she makes him promise never to see her on those days, otherwise they will be parted forever. But Raymond breaks his oath and spies on his wife while she is in her serpentine form. Melusina must therefore leave him, ultimately becoming a sort of banshee, a spectral presence that returns only to announce the impending death of a member of Raymond’s family.

Though Landon has undergone a fundamental reappraisal over the past few decades, Adriana Craciun is right when she observes that ‘Landon scholarship consistently focuses on the same early poems, most notably ‘The Improvisatrice’ (1824), ‘Erinna’ (1827), ‘The Lost Pleiad’ (1829), and ‘A History of the Lyre’ (1829), and on the themes of female (hetero)sexuality, love, and poetic identity.’⁴ Other works, especially later ones, that move away from Landon’s ‘persona of heartbroken, beautiful femininity’ and make forays into different

territories, such as the Gothic, have been far less explored.⁵ 'The Fairy of the Fountains', with its fairy theme and its Gothic tones, falls into this category.⁶ The poem has received somewhat extensive attention only by Craciun, Kari Lokke, Anne DeLong and Michelle O'Connell and has been overlooked by most studies focusing on the afterlives of the Melusine legend. In *Melusine's Footprint: Tracing the Legacy of a Medieval Myth* (2017), an ambitious volume which aspires to trace 'Melusine's changing role in the French, Germanic, Dutch, Spanish, and English literary traditions', for instance, 'The Fairy of the Fountains' is only cursorily mentioned by Melissa Ridley Elmes and blatantly absent from Misty Urban's chapter on the fate of Melusine in English literature.⁷ The present essay aims to help fill this gap by exploring the innovative, even subversive, ways in which Landon reinterprets the story of Melusine with special attention to her emphasis on the darker, Gothic aspects of her fairy theme.

On closer inspection, Landon's retelling is far less faithful than it first appears. In a brief introductory note to the poem, Landon herself warns the reader that she has taken some liberties with the original tale in accordance with its genre: 'I have allowed myself some licence, in my arrangement of the story: but fairy tales have an old-established privilege of change.'⁸ Although they have never been systematically or comprehensively taken into account by critics, the changes that Landon introduces to the story constitute the ideal – and in a way designated – starting point to illuminate how 'The Fairy of the Fountains' rewrites the Melusine legend. Besides removing any references to specific places – and with them the political, dynastic subtext related to the medieval House of Lusignan – as well as eliminating secondary characters like Melusine's sisters or Raymond's cousin, Landon alters more central aspects of the story. First and foremost, she omits Melusine's monstrous progeny in spite of the key role it plays in the other versions of the tale, so that her Melusina never becomes a mother, a relevant point to which I will return in due course.

A subtler, but potentially even more meaningful, change concerns the curse that Melusina's mother inflicts on her daughter. In Thoms's version and in the long-established tradition behind it, the curse comes with a condition that can break it: Melusine is condemned 'to become every Saturday a serpent, from the waist downwards, till she should meet a man who would marry her under the condition of never seeing her on a Saturday, and should keep his promise.'⁹ For this reason, Melusine goes 'rambling through the world in search of the man' who could 'deliver her' from her mother's spell.¹⁰ In 'The Fairy of the Fountains', instead, the curse is accompanied by no indication of a possible remedy:

Spirit of our spirit-line,
Curse for me this child of mine.
Six days yield not to our powers,
But the seventh day is ours.
By yon star, and by our line,
Be thou cursed, maiden mine.¹¹

When describing the weekly transformation of Melusina, the narrator wonders: 'Hath she then complaint to make, / Is there yet some spell to break?'¹² The implicit answer is no: 'come what will',¹³ a spell there is but not to break. No way of undoing the curse is provided in the poem, but, more interestingly, Melusina does not seem to be looking for one, just as she does not seem to be looking for a human lover: Her encounter with Raymond is fortuitous: the 'youthful warrior'¹⁴ comes across Melusina and her fairy court while they are dancing 'by a lovely river's side'.¹⁵ She 'prays his stay awhile'¹⁶ but the text does not give any clue that she has been waiting or searching for him. She has no pressing reason to do so, for in Landon's tale her fate does not depend on finding a man. This significant detail has been overlooked in the few existing readings of the poem, probably because Raymond is nonetheless forbidden to see Melusina when she transforms. The prohibition remains, but it is not a condition of her mother's curse. She mentions that 'the seventh day is ours',¹⁷ that is, 'yield[ing]' to fairy 'powers',¹⁸ but she says nothing about whether her daughter must not be seen on that day. When Melusina tells Raymond that 'the seventh day must be / Mine, and only known to me' and that 'never must thy step intrude / On its silent solitude',¹⁹ she does so on her own initiative, and his promise (if kept) would have a different outcome than the end of the spell. Her half-serpent body must be kept 'hidden from each mortal eye, / Until seven years pass by'²⁰ and then, she states, 'all my secrets may be known'.²¹ If Raymond respects the taboo, Melusina will finally reveal her serpentine form rather than being freed from it.

In 'The Fairy of the Fountains', Melusina's aspirations and motives differ from those that are traditionally ascribed to her character insofar as she does not seek a remedy to her curse and does not find it in a human husband, but this fundamental difference can be fully understood only in relation to the choices leading her to be cursed in the first place. Melusina's decision to 'avenge the wrongs / Of my mother exiled here'²² by casting a spell against her own father is presented by Landon as the consequence of another fateful decision, that of embracing the fairy side of her hybrid nature at the expense of the human one. Right before announcing her plans for revenge, Melusina asserts:

*It is my right;
On me let the task devolve:
Since such blood to me belongs;
It shall seek its own bright sphere.*²³

The blood she is talking about is not merely her mother's. It is specifically fairy blood, and indeed it is only after claiming that she belongs to this 'bright sphere'²⁴ that she feels her magical powers for the first time: 'When the maiden felt her powers, / Straight she sought her father's towers'.²⁵ By punishing her father through fairy magic, Melusina is not simply avenging her mother out of filial love, as she is believed to do in the original legend. She is also, more specifically, asserting her 'right'²⁶ to fairy power by bloodline, and her revenge 'task'²⁷ appears to derive primarily from such right.

Melusina's choice to reclaim her fairy heritage represents a major departure from the source, not only because it is absent from earlier versions of the story, but also because it subverts one of its central tenets. The legend of Melusine, in fact, typically revolves around the desire of the titular half-fairy to become fully human. For her, finding a man who will comply with the prohibition means not only breaking her curse but also being able to live as a woman perfectly integrated into human society. This appears to be her ultimate aspiration, which she already fulfils, albeit only temporarily, while she is married to Raymond. As long as he keeps his promise, Melusine successfully performs the role of woman according to cultural norms: she is a wife, a mother, an able administrator, and an accomplished courtly lady. As Chera Cole points out in her insightful reading of the Middle English *Melusine*, '[a]s a result of her mother's curse, Melusine's salvation is contingent upon how well she, as a fairy, can "pass" as human, and how well she can convince her human community that she is fully integrated into human society'.²⁸ Cole borrows the concept of 'passing' from queer and race studies, in particular the works of Judith Butler and Suki Ali, where it means being perceived 'as one gender or race other than one's own'.²⁹ More in general, it is a sociological notion indicating the ability of a person to be regarded as a full member of an identity category to which they do not actually belong or belong only in part. It can be effectively applied to Melusine, who attempts to 'pass' as fully human in spite of her hybrid nature and who actually manages to do so for a limited period of time. Melusine's aspiration to pass as, and then actually become, human is often intertwined with her concern for salvation in its Christian sense. Only by marrying a man and renouncing her fairy nature will she be able to acquire the human soul that will allow her to be saved. Melusine's longing for a soul is a recurring theme in medieval and other popular variants of the tale, including 19th-century rewritings such as de la Motte Fouqué's *Undine* and even Hans Christian Andersen's 'The Little Mermaid' (1837).

In all these versions of the Melusine legend, as Cole puts it, 'human society is depicted as both a privileged and desired place to be in the world – the "right" place to be', so that in the end, 'for all of fairy's beauty and allure, humanity is the privileged race in this paradigm'.³⁰ It is precisely this traditional paradigm that 'The Fairy of the Fountains' boldly challenges by telling the story of a Melusina who chooses fairness over humanity. While Melusine typically 'elevates her human heritage above her fairy nature' in the hope of achieving full humanity, her counterpart in Landon's poem does the exact opposite: she reclaims her fairy powers 'with passionate resolve'³¹ and shows no interest in becoming human.³² Throughout the poem, Melusina never attempts to pass as human or integrate into human society, and she never even interacts with any other human being but Raymond. In other words, contrary to the other retellings, 'The Fairy of the Fountains' does not present humanity as an object of desire. Before Melusina proclaims her decision to avenge her mother, the poem seems to suggest the possibility that she might want a taste of human life ('there rose before her sight / The loveliness of life untried. / Three sweet genii, – Youth, Love, Hope')³³ only to immediately discard it. 'But far other thoughts than these',³⁴ the narrator clarifies, 'were, with Melusina

now.³⁵ The syntactic movement of the lines re-enacts Landon's engagement with her source by evoking an aspect of the original tale but then openly departing from it, indeed subverting it, as Melusina proceeds to embrace her fairy heritage instead of her human one.³⁶ In conventional renditions of the story, Melusina's ability to pass as a human woman may be seen to destabilise – and 'queer' – humanity and womanhood by raising the suspicion that they are a 'performance' rather than innate and stable identities, but her wish for assimilation into human society ultimately upholds its normative values.³⁷ Landon's poem offers a more radical queering insofar as it challenges the naturalness and inevitability of humanity's position at the pinnacle of the hierarchy of worth and desirability.

The subversiveness of Melusina's preference is foregrounded from the very beginning of the poem, which opens with the enigmatic line: 'Why did she love her mother's so?'³⁸ The possessive has baffled critics for centuries and Victorian editors often amended the line by substituting 'mother's' with the less problematic 'mother'. I follow Jerome K. McGann and Daniel Riess in maintaining the spelling of the first published version, even though, as Craciun points out, it 'creates more (not entirely undesirable) ambiguities'.³⁹ The ambiguity of the opening line has also been highlighted by DeLong, who considers it a 'cryptic introduction' and wonders: 'her mother's what? Lineage, legacy, religion, race?'⁴⁰ What exactly of her mother did Melusina love? Ya-feng Wu writes that the 'possessive case, "her mother's", refers to her mother's belongings which may include her mother's power and fate', but her insight must be taken a step further.⁴¹ The possessive refers to anything that is 'her mother's' rather than to a specific mysterious thing that the reader is expected to uncover. The point is that Melusina loves whatever her mother has because she loves what her mother is, that is, a fairy. It is being a fairy that Melusina loves – and desires – in a way that the human narrator finds so inexplicable. By introducing her predilection for fairness through a 'why' question, in fact, the narrator presents it as something that requires an explanation, namely an 'accountable action'. According to the sociologist Harvey Sacks, 'what one does with "Why?" is to propose about some action that it is an "accountable action"', that is, an action for which one can be held accountable and asked to provide an explanation or justification, in other words, an 'account'.⁴² Marvin Scott and Stanford Lyman define an 'account' as 'a statement made by a social actor to explain unanticipated or untoward behavior'.⁴³ It is called for 'when activity falls outside the domain of expectations' and deviates from the norm.⁴⁴ The *why* at the beginning of the poem is thus functional to stress from the outset that Melusina's love of fairness is a 'deviant behavior' – one might say, a queer behaviour – defying commonly held expectations about the privileged and desirable status of humanity.⁴⁵

In Landon's poem, such expectations are shared not only by the puzzled human narrator but also by Melusina's own mother, who gives voice to the value system underlying traditional versions of the tale in spite of being herself a fairy.⁴⁶ When she reveals to her the transgression of her father, Melusina's mother repeatedly lays emphasis on her hybrid nature: she calls her '[d]aughter of a kingly line, – / Daughter, too, of race like mine'⁴⁷ and explains

that 'his race is mixed in thee, / With mine own more high degree'.⁴⁸ In spite of this claim of superiority, however, she encourages Melusina to renounce the fairy side of her nature in favour of the human one:

Now thou hast a mingled dower,
Human passion – fairy power.
But forfend thee from the last:
Be its gifts behind thee cast.⁴⁹

She too associates humanity with a chance for Christian salvation and invites her daughter to turn to Christ, so that her 'soul yet saved may be; – / Saved by Him who died to save / Man from death beyond the grave'.⁵⁰ In 'The Fairy of the Fountains', the aspirations that usually motivate Melusine are ascribed to her mother; and when the time comes, Melusina does the opposite of what she advises. She turns from humanity in an unprecedented way and, by turning from humanity, she also turns from the possibility of salvation.

Her rejection of Christian faith aligns her with the demonic connotations that typically characterise both of her non-human aspects: her fairy blood and her serpentine body. As Michael Ostling puts it in the title of his edited volume, fairies and demons have long existed together 'at the margins of Christendom', often overlapping. The widespread demonisation of fairies and 'conflation of devils with local small gods' are the expression of a common 'theological mode of collapsing the distinction entirely into its infernal component'.⁵¹ Snake-women share a similar longstanding association with the devil, which, as many critics point out, extends to the figure of Melusine.⁵² Her demonic aspects are usually countered by 'Melusine's image as an exemplary Christian wife and mother', but this is not the case in Landon's poem where Melusina undergoes no such domestication.⁵³ Her refusal to regard being human as the ultimate object of desire is threefold: it entails the rejection not only of Christianity and of the notion of humanity as the privileged race but also of women's prescribed role in human society. As already mentioned, Melusina is never shown playing such a role as she does in other versions of the story, including coeval ones like de la Motte Fouqué's *Undine* with its transformation of the titular character 'from supernatural figure to domestic housewife'.⁵⁴ Seen in this light, the omission of Melusina's children acquires special significance in that it erases her motherhood, that is, what was supposed to be the ultimate fulfilment of womanhood at the time. It thus contributes to creating an image of Melusina that is distant from the reassuring domesticated half-fairy who desperately longs to be human and is instead far more troubling insofar as it eludes and challenges human societal standards. Even at the end of the poem Melusina resists the narrator's attempt to impose a Christian frame on her story by asking 'our Lady'⁵⁵ to '[p]ardon with her love divine / The fountain fairy'.⁵⁶ The prayer, in fact, does not really seem to seal her fate. In the Gothic setting of an 'ancient tower',⁵⁷ Melusina remains a lingering presence, spectral ('Wringing sad her shadowy hands')⁵⁸ but enduring ('Still is heard that lady's wail'),⁵⁹ a disquieting reminder of unassimilable otherness.

So far particular attention has been paid to Melusina's lack of desire for humanity and its implications, but it is now time to consider what it means for her to embrace fairiness. The specifically fairy dimension of Landon's poem has been neglected by critics, who usually read Melusina as a mermaid figure and lay more emphasis on her hybrid body than on her hybrid lineage.⁶⁰ Her physical hybridity, however, is nothing but the manifestation of her pre-existing double nature. When her mother curses her, she tells her that the seventh day is 'ours',⁶¹ that is, reserved for the fairies, thus implying that there is a relation between 'yield[ing]' to fairy 'powers'⁶² and Melusina's transformation into a half-snake. In Landon's poem, fairiness is consistently associated with power. Melusina's mother had earlier presented her daughter's 'mingled dower'⁶³ in the following terms: on the one hand 'human passion',⁶⁴ on the other 'fairy power'.⁶⁵ While the human side of Melusina's nature is etymologically linked to passivity, the fairy one evokes agency. It is reminiscent of the 'mystery and might'⁶⁶ that Melusina is said to possess from the beginning but that she fully unlocks only by reclaiming her fairy heritage: it is after she magically entombs her father that her 'lot'⁶⁷ is '[c]ast in mystery and power'.⁶⁸ Such fairy power has disruptive and dangerous qualities in that it empowers a daughter to rebel against her own father, thus threatening the patriarchal family hierarchy. As Barbara Leavy points out, 'the anxiety that woman will exercise an ever-present potential for widespread destruction of the social order' is a common concern in animal bride tales, to whose genre the legend of Melusine belongs.⁶⁹ Landon further strengthens this point by focusing on the mysterious and troubling side of fairiness and by drawing on a well-established tradition associating fairies with social threat or deviance.⁷⁰ Her emphasis on the darker aspects of fairy nature, however, does not result in Melusina's demonisation, quite the opposite: if it is true that Melusina's transgression is punished in the story, it is also true that she is presented in a sympathetic light throughout the poem.

Melusina suffers punishment at the hands of her own fairy mother, who acts as guarantor of the human social order. When she encourages her daughter to embrace humanity and Christianity, she does so in terms which emphasise passivity and submission: she should '[k]eep . . . a timid eye'⁷¹ and '[b]end [. . .] with a suppliant knee'.⁷² She also explains that if Melusina had followed the human and Christian path from the beginning, her fairy component would have been something very different from threatening magical powers:

Hadst thou at Christ's altar stood,
Bathed in His redeeming flood;
Thou of my wild race had known
But its loveliness alone.⁷³

If Melusina had been baptised, her *fairiness* would be nothing but *fairness*. She would be reduced to merely something beautiful to look at, an object of the human – and presumably male – gaze: that is to say, the epitome of another facet of what women were expected to be in Landon's time. If being human (more specifically, being a woman) equates to occupying

a passive, submissive position, the only version of a fairy that the human world can accept is the disempowered and objectified image of the supernaturally fair woman. That is how Raymond perceives Melusina when he first looks at 'the lovely scene'⁷⁴ of the fairy court and 'its lovelier queen':⁷⁵ 'He but sees she is so fair.'⁷⁶ This inoffensive version of fairness is reminiscent of the 'mostly female, tiny and beautiful' fairies that, as Nicola Bown points out, started to emerge in the Romantic period and became extremely popular during the Victorian era, when they embodied the 'ideal of Victorian femininity'.⁷⁷

Melusina, however, refuses to be objectified as a lovely sight and have her *fairness* reduced to *fairness*. What she asks of Raymond is precisely not to be seen, to keep 'hidden from each mortal eye'⁷⁸ the visible manifestation of her fairy otherness, which is her serpentine form. When transformed, Melusina is a 'monstrum' according to the polysemous meanings of the term: both a monstrous, frightening creature and a prodigy, a marvel. She likewise encompasses both aspects of the longstanding association between fairies and the Gothic, as defined by Dale Townshend: not only fear and horror, but also wonder and enchantment.⁷⁹ Melusina's half-serpent body is a 'strange and fearful sight',⁸⁰ yet the description foregrounds its dazzling and creative nature:

Bright with many-coloured dyes
All the glittering scales arise,
With a red and purple glow
Colouring the waves below!⁸¹

It is not a passive object to admire: it actively affects what surrounds it by colouring the water with its own hues. It is beautiful but of a different kind of beauty – wondrous, awful, creative beauty – which is the opposite of objectified 'loveliness'.⁸² The latter is embodied by the image of the still, colourless statue, to which Melusina is repeatedly compared: she is '[l]ike an idol in a shrine'⁸³ and '[l]ike a statue, pale and fair'⁸⁴ with a 'marble brow'.⁸⁵ As both Wu and Richard Cronin observe, Landon's poetry abounds in images of statues, 'especially when it refers to the female body'.⁸⁶ Their meaning can be quite complex and multifaceted, but here they primarily represent a nonthreatening, passive type of fairness which stands in contrast to the disquieting yet riveting image of the moving and colourful snake. A statue is *par excellence* something beautiful to look at, an object that cannot reciprocate the gaze. Yet this is exactly what Melusina does when Raymond discovers her monstrous body: 'Melusina sees him there.'⁸⁷ This detail constitutes another meaningful change from the original story. As DeLong points out, 'Landon's climax occurs not when Medusa [that is, Melusina's monstrosity] is revealed, but when Medusa looks back at the viewer'.⁸⁸ While in the traditional versions of the tale Melusine is compelled to leave Raymond because he sees her, in 'The Fairy of the Fountains' she must leave because *she* sees *him*: 'to see him is to part / With the idol of her heart'.⁸⁹ Just as the prohibition was not imposed by someone else but was Melusina's own initiative, so is her final departure.

Once again Landon alters the legend to increase Melusina's agency. She occupies the position of the subject of the gaze that is usually reserved for her husband and, as a matter of fact, is represented in the act of looking from the beginning of the poem, when the reader is told that '[o]nce she saw an armed knight'⁹⁰ and '[w]atching there, saw it all.'⁹¹ Not only does she see but she sees it *all*. Melusina's mother seeks to limit her unbridled gaze after noticing that it reaches beyond the borders of her domain (and power): 'she marked her daughter's eyes / Fix'd upon the glad sunrise'⁹² and 'far off, a world more fair / Outlined on the sunny air.'⁹³ Her attempt, however, fails. Melusina is unwilling to keep 'a timid eye'⁹⁴ and actually tries herself to exert control over Raymond's gaze by means of her interdiction:

if, with suspicious eye,
Thou on those dark hours wilt pry.
Then farewell, beloved in vain,
Never might we meet again.⁹⁵

Similar efforts to escape the eyes of the other or to impose one's gaze upon them are a recurring theme in Landon's poetry, which Harriet Linkin aptly calls 'the competition of the gaze.'⁹⁶ While exploring how Romantic women poets critically engage with 'the manifestation of the beautiful for male Romantic poets as the silent or objectified female', Linkin identifies a tension in Landon's poetry between the objectifying male gaze and the woman's attempts to resist and control it through her poetic performances: 'for Landon, the female in performance initially silences the admiring gazer, whose admiration then fixates the performer as object.'⁹⁷ Cronin makes a similar point when he argues that 'Landon consistently represents the poet as both subject and object, as seeing eye and as object of another; always male, gaze.'⁹⁸ Although Linkin and Cronin both focus on those poems of Landon's that revolve around the figure of the poetess or improvisatrice (such as those mentioned in this essay's introduction), the competition of the gaze and the ambiguous coincidence of passive and active roles can also be found in 'The Fairy of the Fountains'. Melusina's mother attempts – yet ultimately fails – to limit her daughter's all-seeing gaze, while Melusina attempts – yet ultimately fails – to elude Raymond's objectifying one. He violates her prohibition and pries on her while in her 'silent solitude',⁹⁹ but when he does, she looks back at him in his 'mute despair'.¹⁰⁰

The correspondences between the present poem and the ones analysed by Linkin and Cronin actually come as no surprise, for Landon's Melusina is commonly believed to stand for the woman poet.¹⁰¹ Such readings of 'The Fairy of the Fountains' are founded on the fact that Melusina's father is not prohibited from seeing his wife while she is in childbed, as in the original tale, but rather from 'listen[ing] to the word, / Mortal ear hath never heard'.¹⁰² As Lokke points out, Landon substitutes 'the secret of women's biological creativity' with another kind of creativity depending on words, thus suggesting that 'Melusine's magical lineage is that of the female poet'.¹⁰³ Melusina's hybridity would then reflect that of the female Romantic poet who struggles to

reconcile her poetic vocation with her prescribed role as woman.¹⁰⁴ They indeed share the same disrupting potential: as Glennis Stephenson argues, 'the woman poet' posed a threat through 'her very desire to write', for 'her pen could, potentially, be empowered to disturb comfortably established social roles.'¹⁰⁵ Landon herself claims that '[g]enius places woman in an unnatural position.'¹⁰⁶ The dichotomy poet vs woman may thus be added to the other ones that have been identified so far: fairy vs human, power vs passion, subject vs object, snake vs statue.

These polarities, however, are not as clear-cut as they may seem, and 'The Fairy of the Fountains' is less concerned with the antithesis between the two conflicting sides than with their inescapable inextricability. The very monstrous body that should allow Melusina to avoid the objectifying reduction of *fairness* to *fairness*, for example, is described in such a 'decorative' language that, according to Craciun, it actually 'stabilizes [its] dangerous incongruity.'¹⁰⁷ Unlike her, I do not believe that one aspect cancels out the other, just as I do not believe that Landon's wilful choice to 'commodif[y] herself as a purchasable icon of female beauty' through her poetic production means that she is 'entirely complicit in her culture's construction of female beauty', as Anne Mellor maintains.¹⁰⁸ Rather, Landon is aware of the contradictions she inhabits as well as of the impossibility of existing outside of them and explores this painful condition in her poetry, including 'The Fairy of the Fountains'. The image of the fountain is a prime example of how Landon gives poetic shape to the complexities and collapsing of duality. The fountains that are associated with Melusina from the poem's title are not simply an instance of the traditional 'identification of fountains as thresholds between the human and the supernatural'.¹⁰⁹ They are, more specifically, a symbol of the co-existing opposites that define Melusina's hybridity, as the fountain combines the colourless marble of the statue ('In a white and marble bath')¹¹⁰ and the flowing water associated with the snake ('Pours beneath its crystal tide').¹¹¹ This very opposition, however, is complicated and undermined by the fact that the boundary between the two is actually confused: the water is like 'crystal'¹¹² and the marble is nestled in nature ('Far within the forest shade, / Where the mournful fountains sweep').¹¹³ As Craciun argues, Landon's poems are set in landscapes that evoke 'binary distinctions' but are ultimately 'distrustful' of them.¹¹⁴

This questioning and queering of binary oppositions is best conveyed by another dichotomy that runs through the poem: life vs death. The isotopy – that is, the recurring motif – of death is remarkably pervasive in 'The Fairy of the Fountains' and probably constitutes the main contributory factor to its overall Gothic tone. The poem opens with a scene that is as conventionally Gothic as its ending: the night is 'pale sepulchral',¹¹⁵ 'a voice is on the gale, / Like a lost soul's heavenward cry',¹¹⁶ and there is a 'loud and hollow bell'¹¹⁷ that sounds 'like a Christian's knell'.¹¹⁸ Melusina's mother is described in equally deathly terms: she has a 'funeral flame' in 'her dark eyes',¹¹⁹ a 'cheek as pale as death',¹²⁰ and 'black hair, like a shroud'.¹²¹ Melusina appears to have inherited her cadaverous traits, especially when she assumes her serpentine form. Not only does she have '[d]amp and heavy' hair,¹²² a 'fevered cheek',¹²³ and 'hectic blushes',¹²⁴ but she is also lying in a sort of sepulchre:

the gloomy branches spread,
As they would above the dead,
In some church-yard large and drear
Haunted with perpetual fear
...
[d]ark and still like some vast grave,
Near there yawns a night-black cave.¹²⁵

The place is shrouded in 'spectral darkness'¹²⁶ and, even when a light appears, it is

like that strange lamp
Which amid the charnel's damp
Shows but brightens not the gloom
Of the corpse and of the tomb.¹²⁷

Since Melusina shares her deathly qualities with her mother and manifests them mostly when she transforms, drawing a connection between her 'bear[ing] the otherness of the grave and the corpse' and her fairy otherness, as Craciun does,¹²⁸ seems almost a foregone conclusion, a conclusion that is further supported by the longstanding association of the fairies with the dead.¹²⁹

The poem, however, destabilises such a straightforward correspondence. When Melusina decides to reclaim her fairy heritage, her choice could be read as one of life over death. 'Must she be her own dark tomb?',¹³⁰ the narrator wonders, but it is not entirely clear whether the 'dark tomb' refers only to Melusina's state while the 'loveliness' of human 'life' is still 'untried'¹³¹ or may also indicate her suffocated and unused potential until she unlocks her fairy powers. Likewise, in the description of her hybrid body, the deathly connotations that have been pointed out actually refer to her human upper part, while her serpentine tale is endowed with bright colours and animal liveliness. If it is true that Melusina spends her Saturdays as if in a sepulchre, it is also true that inside this sepulchre there is living nature: not only the running water of the 'fountain'¹³² but also 'wild flowers'¹³³ and 'a couch of green moss'.¹³⁴ In a true Gothic fashion, the scene where Melusina's monstrosity is revealed evokes images that are not simply deathly and sepulchral but blur the very boundary between life and death, thus foregrounding their inextricability. Melusina's hybridity turns out to be equally inextricable – and inescapable. The ending of the poem is the same as that of the source, even though the journey leading there is the opposite: Melusina cannot fully embrace her 'fairy power',¹³⁵ just as she cannot fully embrace her humanity in the original tale. She can only turn into half a snake and she cannot get rid of the 'human passion'¹³⁶ that makes her fall in love with Raymond. She suffers – and inevitably succumbs to – the 'wondrous wo'¹³⁷ and the 'curse of grief and pain'¹³⁸ that come from having 'a mingled dower',¹³⁹ be it that of a half-fairy or a woman poet.

In conclusion, 'The Fairy of the Fountains' captures central themes of the Melusine legend – including the 'fluid transformability between ambiguous dichotomies' and the 'revelation of the slippery line between ontological categories' – but, at the same time, questions and subverts its reassuring conservative message.¹⁴⁰ Whereas the traditional narrative 'emphasizes Melusine's human side over that of her serpentine, fairy body, and in doing so, reassures audiences about humanity's central place in the Christian cosmic hierarchy', Landon's poem tells an opposite story where Melusina prefers being a fairy to being human.¹⁴¹ In doing so, she gives prominence to the darker, disrupting, undomesticated side of fairiness, without demonising it, but rather as a way to radically challenge contemporary basic assumptions about the desirability of humanity and of women's place in human society.

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Greta Colombani

Notes

1. Kari Lokke, 'Letitia Landon's "The Fairy of the Fountains" and Gothic Narrative', *Pedagogy* 16, no. 2 (2016): 315-22 (315).
2. In the introductory note, Landon states that '[t]he Legend, on which this story is founded, is immediately taken from Mr. Thoms's most interesting collection' (Letitia Elizabeth Landon, *Letitia Elizabeth Landon: Selected Writings*, ed. Jerome J. McGann and Daniel Riess (Ontario: Broadview Press, 1997), 225).
3. I will use 'Melusina' to refer to Landon's character, as it is the name by which she is called throughout the poem with the exception of the last line. I will use 'Melusine', instead, when referring to Thoms's and the traditional versions of the legend.
4. Adriana Craciun, *Fatal Women of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 196.
5. Craciun, *Fatal Women*, 195.
6. Most critics dealing with the poem highlight its Gothic elements: see Lokke, 'Letitia Landon's "The Fairy of the Fountains"', 315; Anne DeLong, *Mesmerism, Medusa, and the Muse: The Romantic Discourse of Spontaneous Creativity* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012), 112; Michelle O'Connell, "'Such Strains as Speak No Mortal Means': Melusine Voices in Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and Landon's "The Fairy of the Fountains"', in *Haunted Europe: Continental Connections in English-Language Gothic Writing, Film and New Media*, ed. Evert Jan van Leeuwen and Michael Newton (New York: Routledge, 2020), 36-56 (47).
7. Misty Urban, Deva Kemmis, and Melissa Ridley Elmes (eds), *Melusine's Footprint: Tracing the Legacy of a Medieval Myth* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 8; Melissa Ridley Elmes, 'The Alchemical Transformation of Melusine', in Urban, Kemmis, and Elmes (eds), *Melusine's Footprint*, 94-105 (104); Misty Urban, 'How the Dragon Ate the Woman: The Fate of Melusine in English', in Urban, Kemmis, and Elmes (eds), *Melusine's Footprint*, 368-87.
8. Landon, *Letitia Elizabeth Landon*, 225.
9. Landon, *Letitia Elizabeth Landon*, 287.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Letitia Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', lines 269-74.
12. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', lines 488-9.
13. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 490.
14. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 311.
15. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 281.
16. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 317.
17. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 272.
18. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 271.
19. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', lines 432-5.
20. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', lines 436-7.
21. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 439.
22. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', lines 183-4.

23. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', lines 179-82.
24. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 182.
25. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', lines 201-2.
26. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 179.
27. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 180.
28. Chera A. Cole, 'Passing as a "Humayn Woman": Hybridity and Salvation in the Middle English *Melusine*', in Urban, Kemmis, and Elmes (eds), *Melusine's Footprint*, 240-58 (241).
29. Cole, 'Passing as a "Humayn Woman"', 241.
30. Cole, 'Passing as a "Humayn Woman"', 243, 258.
31. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 178.
32. Cole, 'Passing as a "Humayn Woman"', 256.
33. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', lines 167-9.
34. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 173.
35. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 175.
36. Richard Fantina misreads these lines when he asserts that Melusina 'sacrifices immortality' by 'abandon[ing] herself to' youth, love and hope (Richard Fantina, "'The Maiden Felt Hot Pain': Agency and Passivity in the Work of Letitia Elizabeth Landon", in *From Wallstonecraft to Stoker: Essays on Gothic and Victorian Sensation Fiction*, ed. Marilyn Brock (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009), 30-48 (36)).
37. Cole, 'Passing as a "Humayn Woman"', 253.
38. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 1.
39. Craciun, *Fatal Women*, 284.
40. DeLong, *Mesmerism, Medusa, and the Muse*, 125.
41. Ya-feng Wu, "'Why Did She Love Her Mother's so?': L.E.L. Forging Corinne", *臺大文史哲學報* 77 (2012): 289-328 (307).
42. Harvey Sacks, *Lectures on Conversation*, ed. by Gail Jefferson, vol. 1 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 4. Interestingly, Sacks's work anticipated some insights of the performative theories of identity to which Chera Cole has recourse. For an insightful and detailed discussion of this topic, see Carmen Dell'Aversano, 'A Research Programme for Queer Studies', *Whatever. A Transdisciplinary Journal of Queer Theories and Studies* 1 (2018): 35-73.
43. Marvin B. Scott and Stanford M. Lyman, 'Accounts', *American Sociological Review* 33, no. 1 (1968): 46-62 (46).
44. *Ibid.*
45. Scott and Lyman, 'Accounts', 62.
46. Craciun makes a similar point: 'Melusine's mother is thus Fouqué's Undine, an earlier generation of mermaid poet who renounces her powers, and advises her readers and her daughter to' (Craciun, *Fatal Women*, 210).
47. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', lines 120-1.
48. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', lines 135-6.
49. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', lines 141-4.
50. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', lines 150-2.
51. Michael Ostling, 'Introduction: Where've All the Good People Gone?', in *Fairies, Demons and Nature Spirits: Small Gods at the Margins of Christendom*, ed. Michael Ostling (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 1-55 (5).
52. See Frederika Bain, 'The Tail of Melusine: Hybridity, Mutability, and the Accessible Other', in *Melusine's Footprint*, 17-35 (29); Zifeng Zhao, 'Metamorphoses of Snake Women: Melusine and Madam White', in *Melusine's Footprint*, 282-300 (286, 290); Gillian M.E. Alban, 'The Serpent Goddess Melusine: From Cursed Snake to Mary's Shield', in *The Survival of Myth Innovation, Singularity and Alterity*, ed. Paul Hardwick and David Kennedy (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 23-43 (32).
53. Zhao, 'Metamorphoses of Snake Women', 286.
54. Craciun, *Fatal Women*, 210.
55. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 582.
56. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', lines 584-5.
57. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 572.
58. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 581.
59. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 571.
60. See Craciun, *Fatal Women*; Wu, "'Why Did She Love Her Mother's so?"; Kari Lokke, 'The Romantic Fairy Tale', in *A Companion to European Romanticism*, ed. Michael Ferber (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 138-56.

61. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 272.
62. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 271.
63. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 141.
64. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 142.
65. *Ibid.*
66. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 22.
67. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 186.
68. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 187.
69. Barbara Fass Leavy, *In Search of the Swan Maiden: A Narrative on Folklore and Gender* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 240.
70. Writing about fairies in early modern Britain, Regina Buccola points out that 'early modern popular belief granted fairies the ability to slip out of socially constructed gender and class categories' and that 'the departures from social conventions that appear in popular lore about fairies reveal resistance to standard gender roles and behavior' (Regina Buccola, *Fairies, Fractious Women, and the Old Faith: Fairy Lore in Early Modern British Drama and Culture* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 2006), 10).
71. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 147.
72. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 149.
73. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', lines 137-40.
74. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 314.
75. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 315.
76. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 325.
77. Nicola Bown, *Fairies in Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 14.
78. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 436.
79. Dale Townshend had already identified these two main components of the Gothic in his edited collection *Terror and Wonder: The Gothic Imagination* (British Library, 2014), but he explores the specific relationship of this Gothic duality with fairies in his keynote talk "'The fairy kind of writing': Gothic and the aesthetics of enchantment in the long eighteenth century' at the 2021 OGOM Conference 'Ill met by moonlight'.
80. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 556.
81. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', lines 552-5.
82. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 140.
83. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 341.
84. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 370.
85. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 373.
86. Wu, "'Why Did She Love Her Mother's so?'" , 309. See also Richard Cronin, 'Felicia Hemans, Letitia Landon, and "Lady's Rule"', in *Romantic Women Poets: Genre and Gender*, ed. Lilla Maria Crisafulli and Cecilia Pietropoli (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 209-39 (231-3).
87. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 559.
88. DeLong, *Mesmerism, Medusa, and the Muse*, 128.
89. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', lines 560-1.
90. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 3.
91. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 18.
92. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', lines 99-100.
93. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', lines 111-12.
94. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 147.
95. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 440-3.
96. Harriet K. Linkin, 'Romantic Aesthetics in Mary Tighe and Letitia Landon: How Women Poets Recuperate the Gaze', *European Romantic Review* 7, no. 2 (1997): 159-88 (174).
97. *Ibid.*
98. Cronin, 'Felicia Hemans, Letitia Landon, and "Lady's Rule"', 231.
99. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 435.
100. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 557.
101. See Craciun, *Fatal Women*, 210; DeLong, *Mesmerism, Medusa, and the Muse*, 126; Lokke, 'Letitia Landon's "The Fairy of the Fountains"', 319; O'Connell, "'Such Strains as Speak No Mortal Means"', 49, 51.
102. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', lines 127-8.
103. Lokke, 'The Romantic Fairy Tale', 153.

104. This is a recurring theme in the works of Romantic women poets: see, for instance, Margaret Homans, *Women Writers and Poetic Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 3-11; Brandy Ryan, "'Echo and Reply': The Elegies of Felicia Hemans, Letitia Landon, and Elizabeth Barrett", *Victorian Poetry* 46, no. 3 (2008): 249-77; Adriana Craciun, 'Romantic Satanism and the Rise of Nineteenth-Century Women's Poetry', *New Literary History* 34, no. 4 (2003): 699-721.
105. Glennis Stephenson, 'Letitia Landon and the Victorian Improvisatrice: The Construction of L.E.L.', *Victorian Poetry* 30, no. 1 (1992): 1-17 (4).
106. Landon, *Letitia Elizabeth Landon*, 180.
107. Craciun, *Fatal Women*, 218.
108. Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 112, 113.
109. Craciun, *Fatal Women*, 223. See also Wu, "'Why Did She Love Her Mother's so?'" , 307.
110. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 526.
111. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 525.
112. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 525.
113. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', lines 479-80.
114. Craciun, *Fatal Women*, 224.
115. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 4.
116. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', lines 8-9.
117. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 15.
118. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 16.
119. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 90.
120. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 91.
121. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 253.
122. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 536.
123. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 539.
124. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 541. 'Melusine has the "damp and heavy" hair of the dead, and the "hectic blushes" and "fever'd cheek" of pestilent fever' (Craciun, *Fatal Women*, 220).
125. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', lines 498-503.
126. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 511.
127. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', lines 514-17.
128. Craciun, *Fatal Women*, 219.
129. See Katharine Mary Briggs, 'The Fairies and the Realms of the Dead', *Folklore* 81, no. 2 (1970): 81-96; Carole G. Silver, *Strange and Secret Peoples: Fairies and Victorian Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 41-3.
130. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 172.
131. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 168.
132. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 524.
133. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 530.
134. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 531.
135. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 142.
136. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 142.
137. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 2.
138. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 197.
139. Landon, 'The Fairy of the Fountains', line 141.
140. Zhao, 'Metamorphoses of Snake Women', 283; Urban, 'How the Dragon Ate the Woman', 374.
141. Cole, 'Passing as a "Humayn Woman"', 243.



John Duncan,
'The Riders of
the Sidhe' (1811).

A 19th-century influence of Gothic Faerie: The fairy tree, fairy lover, fairy art, and fairy revenge in Clay F. Johnson's poem 'A Ride through Faerie'

Tatiana Fajardo

In the pages of the early Gothic romances such as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), generally considered to be the first Gothic novel, or Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron* (1777), one finds a gloomy, melancholy aesthetic tinged with macabre mystery, decay, terror and death. Little has been published with regard to the idea of 'Gothic Faerie', or the darker realm of fairyland, and the connections between some pieces of Gothic literature with the more magical world of supernatural enchantment, fairy magic, and all the fantastic illusions of *ignes fatui*. This relationship between the Gothic and the concept of 'Gothic Faerie' emerges in Clay F. Johnson's poem 'A Ride Through Faerie' (2019), which I will be discussing in this essay, and which holds both 'dreams poetical / And visions phantasmal' while employing the figure of the fairy.¹

Interestingly, what the English essayist Joseph Addison wrote in *The Spectator* in 1712 is most relevant here as it pertains to this idea of 'Gothic Faerie':

There is a kind of Writing, wherein the Poet quite loses Sight of Nature, and entertains his Reader's Imagination with the Characters and Actions of such Persons as have many of them no Existence, but what he bestows on them. Such are Fairies, Witches, Magicians, Demons, and departed Spirits. This Mr. Dryden calls the Fairy Way of Writing, which is, indeed, more difficult than any other that depends on the Poet's Fancy, because he has no Pattern to follow in it, and must work altogether out of his own Invention.²

Johnson makes use of this 'fairy way of writing' in his poem 'A Ride Through Faerie', first published in *Enchanted Conversation: A Fairy Tale Magazine* in September 2019, introducing magical characters that could be interpreted as fairies, witches, even departed spirits, and which certainly imagines a poetic narrative following his own 'poet's fancy' that Addison writes of. However, when writing his poem, Johnson was also influenced by his 19th-century Gothic literary interests, including the ideas and concepts of 'Gothic Faerie'.

A self-professed obsessive for the Romantics, especially the life and writings of John Keats whose work I will touch upon shortly, Johnson has written that much of his early poetry was influenced by the aptly nicknamed 'haunted summer' of 1816, where stormy weather enticed Lord Byron to challenge his guests at the Villa Diodati in Switzerland to write a ghost story.³ What was later born from this ghost story challenge were two masterworks of Gothic fiction that, over two hundred years later, still influence writers today: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus* (1818) and Dr John William Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819).

However, Johnson's Keatsian influence should not be underestimated in relation to the composition of 'A Ride Through Faerie' in 2019. In the same essay describing his literary influences, Johnson writes: "[T]his year of 2019, for me, is all about Keats. It is the 200th anniversary of, in my opinion, Keats greatest year, or *annus mirabilis*."⁴ He further points out that 1819 was the year in which Keats wrote "'La Belle Dame sans Merci'" in April' and 'his exceptionally brilliant piece of Ovidian witchery *Lamia* over the summer.'⁵ These two poems by Keats are important to this argument and will be discussed in detail in this essay.

Besides being inspired by 19th-century literary Gothic, Johnson's poem was also written as a response to the ecocide that occurred in the Amazon during the summer of 2019, when the world became engrossed in a raging inferno that seemed ceaseless in its consuming devastation. Although fires do occur in nature naturally, the conflagration in the Amazon that year was unnatural. It was manmade deforestation encouraged by governments who had recently passed anti-environmental legislation.⁶

Written with such ideas in mind, and the poem's focus on the avaricious destruction of nature and the inherent consequences that follow, Johnson's 'A Ride Through Faerie' not only fits within the concept of 'Gothic Faerie' but is also a perfect example of 'eco-Gothic'. The forest that Johnson describes throughout his poem is alive and feeling, sentient and living, conscious and thinking, and, at times, ambivalent and threatening. Elizabeth Parker writes:

The forest that is ostensibly alive is the forest that is both animate and sentient. By 'animate', I mean that it somehow demonstrates physical movement, which causes (or at least threatens) harm to the human; by 'sentient', I mean that it shows evidence of conscious, insidious thought and intention.⁷

With the origins of the poem's inspiration in mind, my essay will focus on the 19th-century influences that aided in shaping 'A Ride Through Faerie', which is divided into

four distinct parts, each containing themes and tropes of 'Gothic Faerie'. In the order that they appear in Johnson's poem, I will begin with a brief look into the folklore of the hawthorn tree and its deep-rooted associations with Faerie. Next, I will discuss the fairy lover in Keats's 'La Belle Dame sans Merci' (1819) and 'Lamia' (1820). I will continue by briefly analysing the fairy art of John Anster Fitzgerald and the echoes of Edgar Allan Poe present in Johnson's stanzas, particularly regarding the horror tale 'Ligeia' (1838), and, in conclusion, explore fairies and the fairy revenge in connection to the Irish authors William Butler Yeats and Lady Francesca Speranza Wilde.

Johnson's poem tells the story of a mortal man, Lord Ortho, who cuts down a hawthorn tree in order to build a house, and, by doing so, awakens the fairy world connected to the tree. Setareh, a seemingly supernatural being, lures him into her realm, marries him and wreaks revenge on him for destroying her powerful natural habitat.

The Fairy Tree: The Folklore of the Hawthorn Tree

In Part I of 'A Ride Through Faerie', 'The Felling of the Tree', Johnson describes a tree that is being destroyed by an 'axe of earthly metal',⁸ and how 'woodchips of silver luminescence fell / Like broken witch-stones'.⁹ This brutal attack on the tree reflects what scholarship labels 'ecophobia', or, as David Del Principe states, the 'fears stemming from humans' precarious relationship with all that is nonhuman'.¹⁰ These fears hark back to the 19th century, when there were prophesies about 'population, the food supply, and agriculture and the vehement reaffirmation of human primacy over nature and animals'.¹¹ In his poem, Johnson introduces an eco-Gothic trope by manifesting 'the role that the environment, species, and nonhumans play in the construction of monstrosity and fear', in this case the revenge nature will complete to re-establish the natural order.¹²

Nonetheless, in Johnson's first stanzas, nature is presented as vulnerable, and it succumbs to the industrialisation Lord Ortho embodies. In this opening confrontation it is the tree that is conquered and destroyed, silencing nature's music:

Babbling day & night like a noisome magpie
That murders the song of the nightingale,—
Nowhere near as clever—he silences
The living music that breathed for eternities¹³

Interestingly, the reader soon discovers that the harmed tree is not ordinary: it is magical. According to Richard Sugg, 'There were three central areas of the fairy landscape which posed special danger: These were fairy trees, fairy forts and fairy paths'.¹⁴ Disturbing any of this fairy landscape, especially to build a house, was considered perilous. Johnson's male character Ortho, the antagonist who parallels certain political leaders, is destroying this 'Fairy Tree' for just that reason: to build a house.

In his ninth stanza, Johnson uses the phrase 'mayflower blooms'¹⁵ which suggests that the tree is a hawthorn. In Gaelic folklore, the hawthorn is said to 'mark the entrance to the

otherworld', which later plays a significant role in Johnson's poem.¹⁶ Johnson thus echoes Donna L. Potts' analysis that 'proclamations about the fairies' revenge, ostensibly directed at anyone who cuts down their trees, underscore the historic significance of trees in Irish culture.'¹⁷ Potts develops her study by clarifying how 'the devastation of deforestation, as well as the Irish language and folklore suppressed in the course of colonization', strengthened 'ecological arguments grounded in the postcolonial desire' to reclaim land and culture.¹⁸ Johnson emphasises the environmental catastrophe and, as will be shown in the last section of this essay, also illustrates some of the Irish folk tales collected by Lady Wilde.

There is an Irish tradition of the *sídhe*, or fairies who dwell in the Otherworld as descendants of the *Tuatha Dé Danann*, the Irish race of gods, yet Johnson focuses on the Fairy Queen as the sole avenger against the human Lord Ortho. By doing so, Johnson alludes to the medieval tradition of an enchantress who seduces a knight following the medieval trope the aforementioned Romantics were fond of, and it is no coincidence that the Fairy Queen embodies the destroyed hawthorn tree. As Susan S. Eberly explains, in medieval love allegory, the hawthorn is 'an inversion of the "fruitful tree" found in both the Old and New Testaments.'¹⁹ The hawthorn tree or *arbor cupiditatis*, particularly in the literature of the 15th century, was a 'consistent symbol of carnal love, as opposed to the spiritual love', a connotation of lustfulness which continued in later texts such as in Charlotte Brontë's Gothic *Jane Eyre* (1847).²⁰ Brontë's text is full of Irish fairy folklore, and one of the main settings, Thornfield Hall, 'can be interpreted as a reference to the hawthorn tree.'²¹ Moreover, Brontë compares Jane to a fairy several times as Rochester names Jane 'malicious elf', 'sprite' or 'changeling' among other pet names.²² In addition, Jane adopts a ground-breaking masculine role on some occasions, such as when she negotiates her inheritance or saves Rochester. As Carole G. Silver argues, 'by depicting fairy brides either as depraved and degraded, akin to female savages, or as idealized and etherealized beyond the realm of physical desire, folklorists brought female sexuality within the realm of Victorian comprehension.'²³ Jane is ethereal and needs to be 'tamed' in Rochester's view to fit in society, just like Johnson's Lord Ortho seems to desire this type of control over the Queen of the Faeries (as I will argue in the next section of my essay). Both Rochester and Lord Ortho are fragile when they manage to get closer to their 'fairy brides': Rochester depends on Jane as he is physically weakened by the end of the novel, and Lord Ortho discovers his rather fitting doom for cutting down a magic tree.

As I have argued so far, in Johnson's poem, the fact that Ortho destroys a hawthorn tree depicts this character's ecophobia, his sexual desire towards a beautiful woman, and, thus, references the medieval tradition of the hawthorn tree as an allegory for carnal love, with 'the Biblical metaphors for the alienation of humankind with God.'²⁴ (This is different from the common belief that Jesus's crown of thorns during the last trial was made of hawthorn and hence why the tree is considered sacred.)

Nevertheless, Johnson does not portray the hawthorn tree as holy in Christian terms, but as a means of connection with nature, which stems from pre-Christian beliefs such as

the above-mentioned Irish ones. The cutting down of this tree serves to outline his greedy and lustful character at odds with the quietness and natural harmony the landscape evokes.

The previous conception of carnal love and passion is highlighted by the encounter between Lord Ortho and the Fairy Queen in Johnson's second section of his poem, 'The Moonlight Meeting of Lord Ortho and Setareh'.

The Fairy Lover: The Moonlight Meeting

In Part II of 'A Ride Through Faerie', Johnson introduces the idea of the 'Fairy Lover' with the rendezvous between Ortho and Setareh. The poet's 'Fairy Lover' can be thought of as a sort of archetypal *femme fatale*, 'a womanly foil of the frail, lovely, and goodhearted Gothic heroine'.²⁵ Johnson, taking a more feminist approach to the subject, points out that the idea of the 'fatal woman' has long suffered 'unjust names'²⁶ such as Pandora, Aphrodite,²⁷ and 'child-eating Lamia' or 'Eve the snake-friend',²⁸ all of whom endure epithets of 'dangerous women', especially threatening towards men. Johnson names his character 'Setareh', Persian for 'star' or 'fate', introducing the consequences Lord Ortho may suffer as Setareh's hypnotising enchantment and absolute power over men are unquestionable. Like Keats in 'La Belle Dame sans Merci', Johnson uses the idea of being seduced by 'wild, wild eyes'.²⁹ The mortal man, especially one so 'artless'³⁰ as Ortho in Johnson's poem, has no hope of escape from such a gaze.

Johnson connects the enchanted forest present in Keats's poem to the tradition of seducing fairies that Patricia Monaghan describes:

Many stories of FAIRYLAND centered on this ravishingly beautiful woman —for it was almost always a woman — who stole away the most brilliant poet or the most handsome man from this world and made him her lover ... The [fairy] lover called to her chosen mate through dreams that haunted him until he sought her out ... Because time passed differently in fairyland than in our world, a single night with the fairy [lover] crept by pleasantly while centuries slipped away on this side of veil.³¹

Keats's 'Lamia' is another example of the fatal 'Fairy Lover', written shortly after 'La Belle Dame sans Merci'. In Greek mythology, Lamia was a child-eating serpent-woman, later turning into something akin to a vampire. In the folkloric beliefs of several European countries, the Orient, and the Malay peninsula, supernatural female creatures are 'models for the women vampires who have become an important part of the popular imagination – women who are aggressive, destructive, rebellious, and, at the same time, irresistibly sensual'.³² These female characters do not portray the maternal characteristics idealised by 19th-century society; on the contrary, they are blood-suckers who are a threat to men.

However, marriage is central in both Keats's 'Lamia' and Johnson's poem. Keeping with the theme of 'Fairy Lover', marriage is a way to possess the mortal man, to ensnare him with wedding bonds. Because the 'Fairy Lover' has already enchanted the mortal men with her eyes, a 'love trance'³³ in Keats's, 'glamoured by spell-craft'³⁴ in Johnson's, marriage is now what both men desire. Foreshadowing dark things to come, Ortho and Setareh marry while surrounded by Setareh's unseen 'creatures of night-life'³⁵ atop the ruin of the Fairy Tree that Ortho had recently destroyed.

In Keats's 'Lamia,' his 'Fairy Lover' somewhat plays the role of vampire, for during the wedding the true nature of the serpent-woman Lamia is revealed and the mortal man's arms become 'empty of delight' and, as if the prey of a vampire, his limbs are drained of life.³⁶ James Twitchell argues that through Keats's research of Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) and elsewhere, one can see the poet's fascination with female vampires and how 'Lamia's physical description is strikingly similar to La Belle Dame's.'³⁷ Keats's 'La Belle Dame sans Merci' was written as a long journal letter in April 1819, the same month as Polidori's *The Vampyre* was published. Vampires being the rage of the period, it is thus not surprising to find similar features between Keats's female characters.

In 'La Belle Dame sans Merci', Keats's 'Fairy Lover' takes the mortal knight to her lair, her 'elfin grot' of Mother Nature.³⁸ According to Twitchell,

vampires prefer to work in the dark; hence one of the folklore protections is to build a fire near where one sleeps. Vampires don't fear the heat but are terrified by light. This may be partly why La Belle Dame takes the knight to the dark grotto.³⁹

Johnson reverses this in his poem. Instead, it is the 'Fairy Lover' that is taken to the mortal male's lair, 'Ortho's pretentious home'⁴⁰ which is 'tasteless', with 'wasted space',⁴¹ and an abomination of Nature. It also contains an invitation to allow the vampire in, a plot device present in other vampire texts such as Sheridan Le Fanu's 'Carmilla' (1872) or Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). Lord Ortho's invitation, though, constitutes a double danger: apart from a vampire attack, the fairy is linked to the hawthorn tree. As Helen Frisby explains, according to British folklore, especially in England, "'to bring May in'" to the home was to invite death in.⁴² The 'May' refers to the common hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, which Johnson draws attention to in the aforementioned line of 'mayflower blooms'.⁴³

The poet depicts sympathy towards the fairy/vampire throughout his poem, as she is the victim of deforestation and the attack on the patriarchy that Mother Nature represents. Thus her attack on the human is justified. Lord Ortho's pompous house serves to promote artificiality versus the purity of the forest.

In both poems, the mortal men are both lulled to sleep and both of them dream. These are warning dreams of the 'Fairy Lover' who has ensnared them. The ghostly kings

and warriors in Keats's poem cry out, 'La Belle Dame sans Merci hath thee in thrall!'⁴⁴ The warning dream in Johnson's poem is more obscure, and it is clear that Ortho's dream is tintured with something more: opium nightmares.

Fairy Art: The Fragment of a Dream

In Part III of 'A Ride Through Faerie', Johnson gives us a glimpse into the 'poetry for artless dreams'⁴⁵ with which Setareh doses Ortho's tea in Part II. With the fairy's invitation to drink a poisoned beverage, Johnson echoes both the art of the British painter John Anster Fitzgerald (commonly nicknamed 'Fairy Fitzgerald') and several tales by the influential American Gothic author Edgar Allan Poe.

Johnson's lines, though colourful with 'emerald shadows'⁴⁶ and 'bluebells of changing sapphire',⁴⁷ are reminiscent of the nightmarish fairy paintings by Fitzgerald, likely born in 1819, the same year that Keats wrote both 'La Belle Dame sans Merci' and 'Lamia'. As Sugg writes, 'whether or not he himself took it, Fitzgerald certainly found this distinctive Victorian narcotic a potent source of subject-matter'.⁴⁸ In the first half of the 19th century in England, 'opium preparations were freely on sale to anyone who wanted to buy them, in any sort of shop'.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the situation changed when in 1868 the Pharmacy Act showed that there was a 'public health case of concern about the way in which opiates were used'.⁵⁰ This anxiety was triggered by, among other forces, rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, which led to new types of employment and destroyed the landscape. This might explain why fairy paintings were so popular during the Victorian period, as they provided a means of escapism for the citizens.

Johnson absorbs Fitzgerald's essence, especially that of his painting *The Artist's Dream*, when he writes the following:

Then all busy life stopped,
And there was dead silence,
The air was cold and all eyes
Fixed upon the dreamer

All eyes were of emerald
Faceted with glamour,
They held dreams poetical
And visions phantasmal⁵¹

The hallucinatory atmosphere, with the opium-inspired sensations of 'mingling colors & music',⁵² echoes Jeremy Maas, who was honoured with a fairy painting exhibition after his death in 1997.⁵³ Maas wrote that 'opium dreams tended to intensify colours: reds became redder; darkening to maroons and blood crimsons . . . yellows became yellower and more luminescent'.⁵⁴

This delirious ambiance was mastered by Edgar Allan Poe, especially in his tales in which women returned from their deaths to seek revenge against male characters who had wronged them. 'While Fitzgerald might therefore be seen to have alchemized fairy glories from both the drugs of the East and the modern innovations of industry', there is a huge debate about the possible addictions Poe may have suffered.⁵⁵ From his alcoholic abuse to his alleged opium dependence, Poe's biography has gained the attention of some scholars; thus, 'George E. Woodberry's 1885 biography that claimed Poe "ate opium and drank liquor" resulted in a rebuttal from Poe's nemesis, Dr. Thomas Dunn English.'⁵⁶ Whatever the truth may be, Poe's horror stories 'Berenice' (1835), 'Morella' (1835), 'The Fall of the House of Usher' (1839), and 'Ligeia' (1838) depict disturbed narrators under the effects of drugs, and vampiric women who threaten them. I will focus on the latter tale in my comparison with Johnson's poem,

'Ligeia' is depicted as the opium-induced narration of a man in which he explains how his two wives, first Ligeia and then Lady Rowena, die. When the unfortunate second spouse expires, the unnamed narrator believes that she has returned from the dead but in the body of Ligeia. The narrator, who, after Ligeia's death had become 'a bounded slave in the trammels of opium,' and '[whose] labors and [whose] orders had taken a coloring from [his] dreams,' recalls her 'desire for life.'⁵⁷ As John R. Byers Jr describes it, 'as the fantasy corpse rises before him and the black hair falls free and the eyes open to reveal his new-found and vital Ligeia, the narrator shrieks, not because Ligeia has returned from the grave . . . but because Ligeia has never been dead at all.'⁵⁸ His horror at Ligeia's 'wild eyes' (also referred to before her death) when she revives, and the detailed attention to a specific room, namely the description of Ligeia's bride/death chamber, are alluded to in Johnson's poem.⁵⁹ Ligeia suffers a cataleptic seizure, which the narrator understands as her death, and he rapidly sends her to her grave. Likewise, Lord Ortho believes that his killing of the hawthorn tree will not bring about any consequences for him, and, like the unnamed narrator of 'Ligeia', comprehends the devastating significance of his misdeed only when it is too late.

In Poe's tale, the narrator idealises Ligeia; he 'lives tensely at the highest pitch of his passion and imagination.'⁶⁰ Lord Ortho similarly pursues an ethereal woman who ensnares him and who possesses vast knowledge, yet it is in his visions and delusions where he loses touch with his reality, again with allusions to opium. As James W. Gargano argues, 'in her effect upon her lover, Ligeia has the combined force of Keats's nightingale, Grecian urn, La Belle Dame Sans Merci or Lamia.'⁶¹ It is thus not surprising that Johnson also chooses to echo Poe in his poem, since all the male characters struggle to possess a female fairy/vampire who escapes them. Nevertheless, Johnson opts to give Lord Ortho the momentary bliss the knights of 'La Belle Dame sans Merci' and 'Lamia' experience, and not the brooding melancholy Poe's narrator suffers.

This short happiness ends when Ortho awakens, and Johnson's poem focuses on the Fairy Queen's retaliation. In the last section of my analysis, I will clarify how the fairy's revenge is clearly drawn from sources in Irish literature and folklore.

Fairy Revenge: Lord Ortho Awakens

In the final part of 'A Ride Through Faerie,' Setareh exacts on Ortho what can only be described as 'Fairy Revenge'. As I mentioned in the first part of my essay, Donna L. Potts considers environmentalism as connected to fairies and a sense of Irish identity. The conviction that fairies and their supernatural habitat exist persists nowadays, as Patricia Monaghan explains:

Belief in fairy trees has not entirely died out in Ireland. In 1999 a famous fairy thorn tree in County Clare gained worldwide attention when a local schoolmaster, Eddie Lenihan, waged a campaign to have a road redirected that would otherwise have been built over the grave of the tree.⁶²

One of the most famous writers who defended the real existence of fairies was William Butler Yeats. The poet, fascinated by Irish legends, fairy lore, mysticism and the occult, helped to promote both Ireland's Gaelic culture and the expansion of Irish nationalism. Yeats published *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, a collection of narratives from the 18th and 19th centuries, in 1888. Some years later, he was criticised for his volume *The Celtic Twilight* (1893), in which he collected instances of the oral tradition that Irish peasants had related to him about encounters with supernatural beings.

As Sinéad Garrigan Mattar argues, 'there is a remarkable consonance between Yeats's vision of human-fairy-environmental relation in the 1880s and 1890s and the recent redefinition of "animism" by social scientists.'⁶³ Edward Tylor coined the term 'animism' in his 1871 study *Primitive Culture* as 'the first stage in the development of religious thought: the stage at which "naturalism," an entirely materialist understanding of the world, was superseded by a stage in which souls and spirits were considered to play a part in the functioning of life.'⁶⁴ Tylor examined cultures in their ethnographic sense, including their morality; he analysed the development from 'primitive' societies to civilised states. For Yeats, folklore had a value not 'as a specimen or a "survival" of savage culture, but as a continually revivifying source', and by his use of comparative anthropology, he could verify the cultural authenticity of his studies.⁶⁵

Johnson introduces an awareness of ecophobia against the supernatural kingdom of the fairies when Lord Ortho awakens:

Yet his waking dream was not all a dream,
For his new wife is gone, and in her place
Slithers a sickly serpent, moon-cancer pale,
Uncoiling upon a severed bluebell

Consumed by fear & rage & embarrassment
He goes to find his axe to kill the serpent—
But when he returns the serpent has vanished
And the bluebell now has a stem of silver glass⁶⁶

In these lines, Johnson repeats the fact that Ortho intends an attack with an axe, thus echoing the beginning of the poem. By Setareh's abandoning the knight while he is drugged, the reader understands that she is planning her revenge. Johnson's final stanzas, which I will turn to shortly, depict her retribution in the folkloric tradition that Lady Jane Wilde, mother of Oscar Wilde, described in her book *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms, and Superstitions of Ireland* (1887).

In the piece 'Fairy Nature' from her collection, Wilde writes that fairies want

quiet possession of the rath and the hill and the ancient hawthorn
trees that have been theirs from time immemorial, and where
they lead a joyous life with music and dance, and charming little
suppers of the nectar of flowers, . . . lit by the diamonds that
stud the rocks.⁶⁷

In another tale, 'The Fairies' Revenge', Wilde describes the revenge the fairies take on a farmer named Johnstone for building a house on a fairy spot and 'cutting down the hawthorn bush'.⁶⁸ The fairies repossess their land, but only after the farmer 'ceased to mind his farm, and the crops went to ruin and the cattle died, and finally, before a year and a day were over, he was laid in the grave by the side of his little son; and the land passed into other hands, and as no one would live in the house it was pulled down'.⁶⁹ This story, which clearly exemplifies the fairies' vendetta against the mortal man, refers to the supernatural beings' 'ancient rights and possessions and privileges'.⁷⁰

Similarly, in Johnson's poem, the mortal Lord Ortho is seriously injured. Setareh's 'Fairy Revenge' is centuries in the making. Employing the idea that time passes differently in Fairie, Setareh crushes Ortho's spirit by showing him the ruin of his home that is now 'nature-taken by centuries of time'.⁷¹ Before Ortho 'withers away to bone-dust'⁷² and dies, she ironically asks him if he remembers the hawthorn tree that he destroyed, which has now grown back in full. Most fittingly, Johnson ends his poem with the 'Fairy Lover' Setareh's 'Fairy Revenge':

We were married two hundred years ago this very night,
Within my own moonlight, consumed by a single beam—
Haunted were the visions & shadows of your waking dream,
Though my names are many, kneel to me as your Faerie Queen.⁷³

With this ending, Johnson illustrates Elizabeth Parker's concept of the forest being 'sentient'. He encourages us to consider the interconnections between the 'human' and 'non-human' that Parker describes. While Lord Ortho embodies 'our exploitation of the Earth, using its forests for our own self-serving material and recreational desires', the Faerie Queen personifies a forest in pain, destroyed by humankind as was the Amazon rainforest in 2019.⁷⁴

Conclusion

In this essay, I have argued that Clay F. Johnson's poem, in his poem 'A Ride Through Faerie', has made use of ideas from and has been influenced by the concept of 'Gothic Faerie'. Much of this, as I have pointed out, stems from Johnson's interests in 19th-century authors and artists such as John Keats, Lady Wilde, Edgar Allan Poe, and John Anster Fitzgerald.

By analysing the four distinct parts of Johnson's poem, I have drawn attention to the fairy folklore, particularly in connection with the Irish tradition and mythology as it pertains to the magical belief system around the hawthorn tree, including the dire consequences suffered for cutting one down; the view of the fairy as a sort of vampire as it relates to the seductive and alluring 'Fairy Lover'; the use of a poisonous opium elixir to depict hallucinatory narrations and nightmarish dreamscapes; and the singular 'Fairy Revenge' from the Fairy Queen herself showing that, against the sublimity of nature, man will always lose.

Johnson's poem, enraged and inspired by the Amazon wildfires of 2019, emphasises the concept of 'Gothic Faerie', using tropes and ideas from Gothic literature and connecting them to a darker fairy realm of supernatural enchantment. The luring and glamouring of men, as in poems such as John Keats's 'La Belle Dame sans Merci' and 'Lamia,' is repurposed in Johnson's verse as a means to explore ecophobia and depict a feminist attitude towards the fairy/vampire. This poem is relevant, then, not only as adding to research in the concept of 'Gothic Faerie'; it is relevant to gender studies, and as a source for eco-Gothic scholarship of contemporary poetry. Much current eco-Gothic research tends to focus on contemporary novels and leaves poetry behind. Therefore, by analysing Johnson's poem, my objective is threefold: creating a link with the still new and budding scholarship of 'Gothic Faerie', pointing out the important connection in 'A Ride Through Faerie' to 19th-century authors and artists and their continued relevance in today's literary world, and, lastly, introducing contemporary poetry as a relevant and interesting subject as it pertains to eco-Gothic studies and related fields of research.

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Tatiana Fajardo

Notes

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27. Johnson, 'A Ride Through Faerie', line 102.
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51. Johnson, 'A Ride Through Faerie', lines 217-24.
52. Johnson, 'A Ride Through Faerie', line 188.
53. The English art dealer and historian was an expert in Victorian painting, and his gallery, the Maas Gallery, revived interest in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.
54. Jeremy Maas, quoted in Sugg, *Fairies: A Dangerous History*, 199.
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Peter Rindisbacher, 'A drifting Iceberg strikes the ship in the night of June 29, 1821'.



The Ballad of Isabel Gunn as 'The Daemon Lover' / 'Tam Lin': The economic migrant and enchantment as a recruitment strategy

Catherine Greenwood

Described as 'one of the most curious cases of cross-dressing in Canadian history', the story of a Scottish woman who secured employment in Canada's early fur-trade by presenting herself for hire in male-drag is notably depicted in Scottish-Canadian poet Stephen Scobie's long documentary poem *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn* (1987).¹ Following the poem's publication, it has been variously regarded in terms of feminist, postmodern, and post-colonial criticism that emphasised Scobie's engagement with literary theory; it has received only passing mention of its debt to the ballad and scant notice of its fairy-tale antecedents.² In the *Ballad*, Scobie has hybridised form to create a historical Gothic narrative of a mythical frontier environment and its taxing effects on indentured migrant workers.

Principally set in remote regions such as Labrador, the poem might be read as a specimen of Can Lit 'wilderness Gothic', but a very particular sort of wilderness is discovered.³ As Diane Purkiss notes in her cultural history of fairy lore and literature, *Troublesome Things*, fairies are associated with locales beyond familiar boundaries, and fairyland as a fictive site was remapped in concert with the pace of exploration in the New World. In Scottish minister Robert Kirk's 17th-century treatise *The Secret Commonwealth*, for instance, the notion of a 'fairy kingdom, a space alongside but outside the homely, the idea of two societies living side by side, was a paradigm for the colonial situation.'⁴ Rearticulating Charles Taylor's conception of a secular social imaginary in the early modern period, Diane Long Hoeveler says, 'it became possible to believe simultaneously in both the realms of the supernatural and the natural, the enchanted and the disenchanting, at the same (uneasy) time.'⁵

Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec ascribe a similar-sounding notion to post-19th-century conceptions of 'space', that is, space as the 'relations among sites' in our 'epoch of simultaneity', and propose the term 'heterotopology' for understanding the 'simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live.'⁶ My analysis of Scobie's *Ballad* includes an application of the Foucauldian construct *heterotopia* to the

fairyland (or secret commonwealth, to borrow Kirk's apt term) wherein, with subtle transparency, the poem's narrative is placed – an otherworldly realm contiguous with and mirroring the seductive utopian notion of Canada held by the migrant labourers recruited by the Hudson's Bay Company. A close reading of the *Ballad's* engagement with key Gothic motifs such as otherworldly landscapes, thresholds, the grave and other features inherited from folklore, romanticism and Scottish poetry and song will reveal a Scottish fairy ballad stealthily masquerading as a Canadian documentary poem.

Stephen Scobie is a poet and critic who 'cherishes Robert Burns' and 'writes at the intersection of Scottish tradition and the radically displaced perspectives of European modernism', but it is perhaps not surprising that the critical reception of *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn* pivoted toward contemporary literary theory; after all, Scobie so successfully melded the documentary and ballad forms that critics either ignored, minimised, or rejected the poem's titular form.⁷ Peter Jaeger, applying to it Linda Hutcheon's term 'historiographic metafiction', is somewhat more receptive to the notion that Scobie's *Ballad* is what it purports to be, 'albeit in a highly adapted fashion':

Scobie's designation 'ballad' is significant inasmuch as the poem carries on the traditional ballad's continuous narrative structure, while simultaneously expanding that form to include prose texts quoted verbatim, lyric verse, and visual reproductions. The formal structure of the ballad mirrors the actions of Isabel, for just as Isabel crosses genders, Scobie adapts his text to straddle conventional and contemporary forms.⁸

This fusion of genres is not unlikely as it might seem. Traditional ballads such as those collected by Thomas Percy, Walter Scott, and Francis James Child in the 18th century and Romantic period are rooted in 'folk and working-class conditions', and the 'art form most integrally connected to the ballad is ... song and, more broadly, the oral tradition'.⁹ An emphasis on working-class concerns is also typical of the 20th-century documentary poem. The term was coined by Canadian political poet Dorothy Livesay, who determined that the generic Canadian long poem was neither narrative nor historical epic but 'documentary' – specifically, a work of research based on topical historical and geographic data composed of 'descriptive, lyrical and didactic elements'.¹⁰ Scobie's own understanding of the form's structure, content and voice – usually, according to his findings, a book-length narrative of 'historical happenings' that 'focuses on a single character who took part in these events' – seems in sympathy with characteristics ascribed to traditional Scottish ballads.¹¹ As described by Alan Riach, the Border ballads are 'stories in song' whose 'form arises from oral delivery, extemporisation and extension of story through the immediate engagement of an individual performer'.¹²

The happenings in these song-stories originate from what Lowry Charles Wimberley, in *Folklore in the English and Scottish Ballads* – his ‘exhaustive survey’ of customs, beliefs, magic and religion in traditional English and Scottish balladry – describes as a world of primitive thought.¹³ With the disclaimer that ‘incidents found in ballads may not reflect’ the actual practices of those voicing them, Wimberley emphasises that the ballads nonetheless ‘give a bona fide record of the stuff of actual tradition’, citing Francis B. Gummere’s tantalising assertion that ‘[t]he worst stories come directly from life, and ballad or tale simply follows fact – a hint for the too eager discoverer of a literary origin for every narrative in verse’: for Gummere, the ballads depict ‘a kind of obsolete reality’.¹⁴ The ballad does bear a resemblance to the documentary in its impetus to relay a type of testimony: as Emily Lyle puts it, though the ballad singers ‘would often have thought that their stories were true’, their narratives convey ‘emotional truths’.¹⁵ As far as length is concerned, the determining factor for both genres rests upon the story being told: a ballad’s extension, according to Riach, varies to accommodate ‘the event and its moment’, while the documentary poem, according to Scobie, is governed by the central character’s ‘biography’, which ‘provides the structure of the book’.¹⁶

spiriting away, as clean as any seal in fact or legend, into Canada¹⁷

Isobel Gunn’s biography is rich with the ‘mysterious travels, mythical locations, grim portents, potent images and narrative tension’ that ‘animate the ballad’.¹⁸ In the *Ballad*’s acknowledgements page, Scobie lists various sources for the pattern of events that unfolds in his fictionalised version of Isobel’s life, and details preserved in parish records, company archives and local lore are summarised in articles readily available online.¹⁹

A distillation of the record portrays an Orcadian woman named Isobel Gunn, also known as Mary Fubbister (her stepfather’s surname), born in Orkney in 1780 or 1781. At the age of 25, disguised as a man under the alias ‘John Fubbister’, she signed a three-year contract with the Hudson’s Bay Company (the HBC) to work in Rupert’s Land, now Canada, for £8 per year (other than the Indigenous women employed at their fur-trading posts, the HBC prohibited the hiring of European women, yet relied on a supply of male labourers from Orkney who were valued for their ability to endure the harsh living conditions).²⁰

Whether Isobel was following a lover to Canada or simply seeking lucrative work remains open to speculation, but in 1806 aboard the *Prince of Wales* she set sail for Labrador, part of empire’s floating labour pool. She spent two years working ‘at anything and well like the rest of the men’, undertook several supply delivery expeditions to remote outposts and endured a brutal winter on the Red River, the first European woman to set foot in that region.²¹ Near the end of her term – in both

senses – while working in Canada's northern territories, 'John' Fubbister was outed when s/he gave birth to a boy. The baby was baptised John Scarth, and his namesake was a long-time employee of the HBC who had departed Orkney on the same voyage as Isobel. Demoted to washerwoman for the remainder of her employ, 'Mary' Fubbister returned to Orkney in 1809 on the same ship she'd boarded three years earlier. In 1861, at eighty years of age, she died in Stromness and was buried as Isobel Gunn, an impoverished subsistence knitter.

In the *Ballad*, Scobie follows the chronological trajectory of Isobel's known journey, while making good use of his dictum that in documentary poems factual history is frequently embellished with 'purely fictional incidents'.²² Actual historical documents used as intertexts, such as photos of archeological sites in Orkney, HBC illustrations depicting ships and remote trading forts, copies of archival receipt-books and journal excerpts, are supplemented with invented letters written to the illiterate Isabel by her estranged lover Scarth and read to her by one James Brown, another real-life HBC hire whose role as Isabel's go-between is entirely invented.

Bonnie Davie, dainty Davie

***It's who will answer what he's wrocht?*²³**

Another invention, germane to the specific ballad templates Scobie is working from, is a love triangle involving a charming young shipbuilder's son: a labourer from Fife named David Spence Junior to whom Isabel privately assigns her son's paternity. Balladry has its own tradition of intertextuality, deriving 'elements from various sources, from medieval literature, from chronicles, from classic sources, and from tradition, sacred or otherwise', and the *Ballad's* intertexts include several familiar-sounding folksongs.²⁴ Isabel introduces her romantic predicament by inviting the reader – 'You know the old song?'²⁵ – to summon to mind one of these approximations, a tune called 'Dainty Davie':

He gives me kisses one two three
Bonnie Davie, dainty Davie
And swears by the moon that he'll marry me
My ain dear dainty Davie²⁶

Modeled on an 'old song' that was also the source for later versions popularised by Robert Burns, Scobie's appropriation participates in a cycle of self-reflexive revisions, and this ballad-within-the-ballad performs, via its own checkered history, a winking cultural shorthand for illicit sexual relationships and unwed pregnancy.²⁷ The 'polite' version Burns published in the *Scots Musical Museum* c.1797 is itself 'an improvement and extension of an earlier song' called 'The Gardener wi' his paidle', and is suggestive rather than explicit in its nature-inspired imagery of springtime fertility:

The crystal waters round us fa'
The merry birds are lovers a',
The scented breezes round us blaw
A wandering wi' my Davie.²⁸

Scobie's gloss is embedded in Isabel's reverie, as she awaits Davie's return and the 'final harmony' of his laughter:

At last it was pure lyric, rowing the Red
in the late August sun, with the banks slipping by
to the silver notes of the slender birch
like a line of descant, tossed in the breeze²⁹

After a year of leading a 'double life' with two identities and two lovers, Isabel submits to a brief period of happiness as she is 'doubled again' by the growing 'life inside' her, and she simultaneously voices and inhabits the lyric in a romantically pregnant transcendence adumbrated by a simple statement: 'The song / was all around me.'³⁰

The short-lived season of Isabel's joyous relationship with Davie is interrupted by the reappearance of John Scarth. The invented love triangle, as Kenneth Hoepfner reads it, serves both dramatic and thematic functions: 'to even the account with Scarth for his infidelity ... Isabel thinks the image of exchange: "Trade-goods were all we lived by"':³¹ Hoepfner's point regarding images of exchange merits further attention. However, there is another purpose of Scobie's invention to consider first – that is, the way that Isabel carries inside an unborn Dainty Davie, so the folksong is set within a larger narrative, and the deep structure governing the *Ballad* is the template of a traditional supernatural ballad called 'The Daemon Lover', overlaid by the fairy-tale plot of another, 'Tam Lin'.³²

***his soul was claimed away from me, John Scarth,
as if by a horn-book devil*³³**

Known variously as 'James Harris' (or 'Herries'), 'The Carpenter's Wife', 'The Distressed Ship-Carpenter', 'The Daemon Lover', and 'The Banks of Italy', and in America as 'The House-Carpenter', the evolution of what the folktale and ballad collector Peter Buchan called 'this curious and scarce legend' is meticulously traced by Francis James Child in his five-volume study *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*.³⁴ The original broadside upon which subsequent revisions are based, variant A in Child's catalogue, appeared in print as early as 1685, and introduces an ominous theme that inheres in the eight ballads collectively called here, for ease of reference, 'The Daemon Lover'. Instructively titled, the full heading of the broadsheet A, as published in the Pepys Ballads in 1689 and reprinted in Child, encapsulates the basic plot:

A Warning for Married Women, being an example of Mrs Jane Reynolds (a West-country woman), born near Plymouth, who having plighted her troth to a Seaman, was afterwards married to a carpenter, and at last carried away by a Spirit, the manner how shall presently be recited.

The supernatural nature of the Seaman is depicted in varying degrees, and this 'revenant', as characterised by Child, ranges from A's 'Spirit' to what he describes as the 'even tamer' mariner in B (apparently mortal as he drowns with the woman); the vengeful cuckold in C and an ambiguous (yet equally vengeful – he throws the woman overboard) 'weird seaman' in D. Identifying him as a daemon lover in their titles, E-G imbue the mariner with an 'eery personality' and, with what Child terms 'a sort of vulgar rationalism, turn him into the devil.'

Isabel is a knowing metatextual interpreter of the legend she inhabits; hearing the siren-like 'silkie singing' a 'song . . . meant for [her]', 'it scarcely mattered who he was, John Scarth'.³⁵ Ideal HBC material, Scarth is 'reliable, solid, and dour,' one of those men who can 'wait out winter . . . / dull inside themselves like bears',³⁶ and more animal than demon. Nonetheless, 'all the tales he'd told to woo' Isabel of a frigid Canadian winter (and the impressive 'thirty-two pounds a year' he is paid to endure it) have an unanticipated effect when she wants to sail away with him;³⁷ this seduction echoes 'The Daemon Lover' and Scarth's embodied animalism subtly references the shapeshifting motif found in variant A:

When he had told her these fair tales,
To love him she began,
Because he was in human shape,
Much like unto a man³⁸

Utopias, per Foucault, are 'fundamentally unreal spaces' in which real sites are 'simultaneously represented, contested and inverted'.³⁹ John Scarth's romanticised tales of Canada are reminiscent of the instances in which the Daemon Lover tempts the woman by offering to 'show [her] how the lilies grow / On the banks o' Italy';⁴⁰ the inducements for the woman to come away with him and leave behind her 'young ship-carpenter' and 'little son'⁴¹ include seven ships laden to the brim with gold, velvet-lined gold slippers, a chair of gold, music and mariners to wait upon her, limitless wealth and, in C, the prospect of a stopover at 'Rose Isle' before venturing to the 'far countrie'.⁴² Isabel is yet to meet her own ship-carpenter, but the faraway land is metonymy for all such enticements: 'on a map, James Bay / hangs from the southern end of Hudson, an udder from a cow'.⁴³ Canada, in this pragmatic homespun metaphor, is figuratively and literally a resource to be milked, and the utopian imagery hints at its heterotopian counter site: milk, according to Diane Purkiss, is the preferred food of fairies, often given in payment for services rendered.⁴⁴

Evocative of the Daemon's 'Beautiful to behold' spell upon the woman in which he 'cast[s] a glamour oer her face' that shines 'like the brightest gold',⁴⁵ Isabel's seducer himself succumbs to an enchantment:

on the desolate shores of the Davis Strait
his soul was claimed away from me, John Scarth,
as if by a horn-book devil: at night I could see
the tall green curtains of light in the sky
dance in his eyes like a midsummer's fire.⁴⁶

In another inversion, Isabel claims her own agency in an adamant refutation of 'all the stories' that will have told how she was 'seduced' and 'debauched'⁴⁷ – stories implicitly drawn from 'The Daemon Lover', where the woman is 'delud[ed] away' from home by the revenant mariner.⁴⁸

As in 'The Daemon Lover', where after sailing 'a league but barely three' the woman observes his 'cloven foot,' dismal countenance, and 'drumlie ee', prompting her to weep 'right bitterlie',⁴⁹ the estrangement between Scarth and Isabel begins soon after their departure from Orkney:

with his hands so hard on the ship's cold rail
his bones stood white as that ice-bound coast
at which he stared and stared
with a look in his eyes I did not
as yet understand: but was later to learn
quite simply, was love.⁵⁰

Isabel attributes their sleeping apart on ship to Scarth's revulsion now that she has 'become a man'.⁵¹ In the midst of her first bleak Canadian winter she learns that this emotional abandonment, which he rationalises as a 'snow-blind' infatuation with Canada, is less fancifully explained by the existence of a Chipewyan wife. After reading aloud his Dear John (that is, John Fubbister) letter, Scarth's reluctant ventriloquist James Brown provides a blunt interpretation:

I do not know her name. He has had her
for three years now. That is why he returned
from Orkney. They had two children, boys,
but both died young, within their first winters.
She watched his hand as he wrote your letter.
He smiled at her when he fixed its seal.⁵²

This account of the 'country wife' mirrors an obverse 'Daemon Lover story', that of the *other* other woman, a kind of Jane Eyre moment grounded in historical reality: such cohabitation between Company men and Indigenous women is characterised by Dorota Filipczak as a 'pattern in the imperial colonies spawned by western fantasies of power translated into sexual terms'.⁵³

After this shocking revelation comes a hard season among men 'dangerous as bears' and hibernating 'like animals' – dreaming of Orkney, Isabel awakes with 'the tear-drops turning / to splinters of ice stabbing into [her] skin'.⁵⁴ The following March brings 'two great events': her short-lived fling with David Spence Junior, and her tense reunion with John Scarth.⁵⁵ Alan Riach notes that in the Daemon Lover tradition 'the pain and consequence of too ready trust and absolute betrayal cut deep', and in A and B it is the distressed ship-carpenter whose grief is emphasised:⁵⁶

He beat his breast, he tore his hair,
The tears fell from his eyes,
And in the open streets he run
With heavy doleful cries.⁵⁷

In the *Ballad* it is Isabel's ship-carpenter, the 'coin' paid against the demon John Scarth's 'account', who will leave *her*, but not before roaring with laughter at Isabel's disguise of face-blackening and fur when they first meet.⁵⁸ It is 'laughing Davie' who writes 'John' Fubbister ('how hard [he] laugh[s] to write it') with the alluring offer of a marital home in Québec 'grander by far than anything seen in Fife or Orkney', and advises her to 'forget that surly brute' Scarth.⁵⁹ And it is David Spence Junior who will drown when a river boat overturns, leaving Isabel disconsolate, pregnant and alone.⁶⁰

***a kind of tax for living here, you pay
with parts of your body***⁶¹

The ballads serve a 'didactic purpose' in their portrayal of enduring human truths, and this didacticism is another element shared by the documentary poem.⁶² In Dorothy Livesay's original conception of the genre, these narratives 'are not told for the tale's sake or for the myth's sake: The story is a frame on which to hang a theme'.⁶³

Here, a central theme is 'labour': labour as work, as childbirth, and as commodity. To return to Hoepfner's point that Isabel conceptualises her sexual relationships with images of exchange, Davie Spence – whose surname is an amalgam of 'spend' and 'pence' – in this construct is an emotional commodity hedged against John Scarth's infidelity. When Davie leaves her, 'the charge / could be repaid by flipping that same coin', but her bitter reunion with Scarth offers diminishing returns and their intercourse is a form of indenturedship: 'We laboured at making love, like miners / bound to a dangerous, ill-paid job'.⁶⁴

In another of the *Ballad's* inversions of 'The Daemon Lover' template, Scarth makes good on the promised gold, paying a fine void of emotional capital when Isabel gives birth to a son they both know is not his:

But now that I was a woman again
the story required a seducer, a man
who had made me his victim: so for his shame
and mine, John Scarth laid down
a purse of coins beside my bed, and went.⁶⁵

Constrained by the economy of the ballad world, their exchange is modeled upon the bargain struck by the Daemon Lover who offers the woman wealth to come away with him then defaults on the deal: 'What, weep you for my gold?' he said, / 'Or do you weep for my fee?'⁶⁶ The use of 'fee' here is ambiguous, but the ultimate tariff is the woman's life when the ship sinks and she drowns. In this context, 'fee' can be classed with other instances of 'tribute' to the devil found in balladry. Wimberly traces the function and origin of 'human sacrifice' in the ballads 'Tam Lin' and 'Thomas Rymer':

As a consequence of having at stated intervals to pay this tax, tithe,
or teind to hell, the fairies, so it was formerly believed in Scotland,
were accustomed to abduct earthly folk, whom they offered up as
a tribute to the fiend.⁶⁷

One of the documents included in the *Ballad* is an image from the actual HBC account books of 1806 that records a payment of one pound and four shillings from John Fubbister to James Brown. This minor character shares qualities with one of the 'significant types' of fairy in Diane Purkiss's classificatory system:

1. Brownies, hobs and familiars; live in one house or serve one person, and overlap with
2. Fairy guides; often dead; conduct a person to fairies and/or teach them fairy lore.
3. Fairy societies; seen in fairy world or on ride; include king and queen.
4. Poltergeist/demon fairies, eventually melt down into tricksters; overlap with 1.⁶⁸

If Scarth meets the criteria to be classed as a demon fairy, Brown the brownie qualifies as a benevolent one – as Purkiss explains, 'Scottish fairy guides are usually kin to the person they guide', and brownies, 'like slaves, did household and farm

chores in exchange for enough food to stay alive'.⁶⁹ Isabel's 'countryman' Brown is her protector and messenger, and for his service the environment exacts a toll, 'three toes / [lost] to the frostbite' that John Scarth will 'throw into the Eastmain River'.⁷⁰ Isabel makes compensation with what remains of her own wages: 'A guinea for carrying the letters, / I thought, and a shilling for each of his toes'.⁷¹ The gruesome offering tossed into the river foreshadows the drowning to follow, and in keeping with tradition, where 'the fiend prefers one who is fat and healthy', Davie Spence is the tithe paid to hell, and a tax on the Hudson's Bay Company, human capital the cost of doing business.⁷²

**Winter became our world, the enclosure
of cold that knew no outer limit but the wind⁷³**

Isabel herself, inducted into the Company and passing by virtue of her ability to work like a man, appears to be a 'Type 3' fairy. Of the various heterotopias Foucault identifies, colonies are 'extreme types'; he instances Puritan and Jesuit religious communities in the first wave of colonisation that functioned as partitioned 'heterotopias ... of compensation', terrestrial spaces partitioned from disorganised sites of human life.⁷⁴ Though the *Ballad's* colony of HBC men is transient, its partitions are tenuous but real:

When the winter comes, you mustn't sleep
with your head to the wall; the wall is where
outside begins.⁷⁵

In religious heterotopias, orderly regulation of life functions as the compensatory element, and, in the company, such compensation appears in the rhythm of labour. The disappearing warmth of interior space, an inhospitable Arctic realm where sheets freeze hard as boards and the factor's wine turns to red ice, has shifted inside from the autumnal outdoors; there, the men sing a work anthem around their temporary hearth, a campfire 'inside the great dark': 'But we'll shoot red deer and we'll eat their tongues / Haul away, there's nothing better'.⁷⁶

Again, the song borrows from an older one, 'Johnie Cock': 'And he has taen out of that dun deer / The liver bot and the tongue'.⁷⁷ Despite Johnie's drinking the deer's blood, Wimberley says of this ballad that there's nothing to see here 'of the supernatural;' yet adds the suggestive afterthought that in Norse balladry blood-drinking 'effects restoration of enchanted mortals to human form'.⁷⁸

The *Ballad* offers other clues that the HBC voyageurs are trapped inside Fairyland. Scobie's repeated use of animal motifs to depict this society continues a time-honoured trend of hirsute fairies: as Diane Purkiss describes it, 'there's something quite hairy about fairies, they're often described in hairy terms'.⁷⁹ David MacRitchie,

in his euhemeristic 1890 anthropological study of fairies, *Testimony of Tradition*, would concur, as the term 'shaggy' as applied to a 'race' of hairy people featured in Highland lore 'is a synonym for a "brownie"'.⁸⁰ Celtic fairies are particularly associated with hunting deer, and MacRitchie recounts a folkloric theme wherein fairy troops are 'privileged' hunters with exclusive land rights, often for periods ending on Halloween.⁸¹ The HBC have claimed a similar privilege in their fur-trapping enterprise, and that the shivering men are all robed in heavy pelts makes it easy for Isabel to hide among them:⁸²

We huddled in furs, gathering round us
the skin of our commerce. Marten and fox,
beaver and mooseskin: small fortunes in London
we wore on our backs.⁸³

Interleaved in this image of humans wrapped in animal skin is a more sinister implication: Purkiss has noted a strand of ballad lore wherein a sense of ownership regarding fairy captives reveals a 'thin to vanishing point line between human and cattle' with 'mortals being the fairies' cattle'.⁸⁴ Stephen Scobie has tapped into a vein of fairy literature that, according to Purkiss, proliferated in the 16th century just as the English slave trade began: like the slave, 'the fairy advances his master's social position by apparent sleight of hand; the wealth he produces is unearned'.⁸⁵

Of the men who left Orkney to work for the HBC, the Reverend Francis Liddell wrote:

Instead of offering an honourable service to their King and
country, or staying at home to cultivate their lands, and protect
their wives, their children, and their parents, for the sum of £6 per
annum hire themselves out for slaves in a savage land.⁸⁶

This 'savage land' in the *Ballad* is figured as an otherworldly Arctic hell and the 'slaves' as enchanted mortals:

boys who left home without even a beard
and returned with three hard winters driven
into their skins by the Hudson's Bay.
We called them the Nor-wasters, and their eyes
had turned into the vacant blue of ice.⁸⁷

The three-year terms undertaken by these 'Otherworld itinerants' – to use Wimberly's apt descriptor – who have been emptied rather than enriched by their

indenture, reflect standard contractual language of the ballad tradition in describing 'periods of service, absence, penance, and so on'.⁸⁸ Isabel, who herself leaves Orkney as a beardless boy – 'a strong and sturdy lad' who speaks in 'whispers' – enters such a contract by making 'his mark on the line, a deeply scratched X / beside his name: John Fubbister'.⁸⁹

***Then Geddes welcomed the boy aboard,
shaking my hand so hard I nearly cried***⁹⁰

Wimberley observes the balladry's preservation of a universal primitive belief that a person's spirit, personality or power is 'bound up with' and 'present in' his or her name.⁹¹ Further, names have power to enchant or charm, and the example provided by Wimberley is of the ballad hero Tam Lin, who is cut off from his home when abducted by elves and assigned an 'unearthly' name:

'First they did call me Jack,' he said,
'and then they called me John,
But since I lived in the fairy court
Tomlin has always been my name.'⁹²

This name magic holds Jack/John/Tam Lin under an enchantment yet also grants him status as 'a naturalised member of the fairy community'.⁹³ Isabel, likewise, is initiated into the male world of the HBC when she boards the *Prince of Wales* and signs on as 'John' – a historical happenstance that, along with other striking congruencies between 'Tam Lin' and the documented facts of Isobel Gunn's life, Stephen Scobie deftly parlays into an echoing narrative of entrancement, unwed pregnancy, adventure and disenchantment.

As with 'The Daemon Lover', there are numerous iterations of the ballad commonly known as 'Tam Lin' mustered under that collective heading in Volume I of Francis James Child's compendium. And, as with 'The Daemon Lover', the narrative comes with a warning, aimed in this instance at *unmarried* women. In six of the nine Child versions, a caution dispensed in the first verse expressly forbids all maidens to come or go 'by Carterhaugh' (A, B, H, and I; 'Chaster's wood' in D or 'Charter's woods' in G) where young Tam Lin is waiting to collect their 'wad', or pledge; the cost of defying this prohibition will be "their rings, or green mantles, / Or else their maidenhead".⁹⁴ The poem then introduces a feisty young woman named Janet, Jennet, or Lady Margaret, who, insistent on her right of access, does exactly that and falls pregnant after the inevitable sexual encounter with Tam Lin, which is depicted in terms ranging from suggestive to explicit. In C, E, and F, the warning is retrospectively implied, and the seduction or rape scene elided, with the action commencing when Janet

revisits Carterhaugh ('Kertonha', 'Charteris ha', or 'Chester wood', respectively) to be reunited with her lover Tam Lin.

The story, in essence, is that Tam Lin has been captured by the Fairy Queen and the looming expiration of a seven-year stint in these 'pleasant' elfin lands means the obligatory tithe to hell is coming due: 'I am sae fair and fu o flesh, / I'm feard it be mysel!'⁹⁵ This danger precipitates his bargain with Janet, that if she helps him regain his human identity – one of privilege and title – he will be her worldly mate. The variants adhere to a consistent recipe for his release: Janet must wait at a specified hour – typically midnight, sometimes on Halloween – for the fairy host to ride through a crossroads (usually Miles Cross but in other instances Blackning Cross, Blackstock, or Chester Bridge). Here, she must pull Tam Lin from his milk-white steed and hold him tightly as he metamorphoses through a series of shapes – bear, greyhound, adder, wolf, etc., even a red-hot iron bar – until he is himself again, a 'naked knight' or 'mother-naked man' (A, B).

The plot's emphasis on entry tolls and exit spells demonstrates another principle of Foucault's heterotopology, that heterotopias operate under a 'system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable'; unless entry is compulsory, such as imprisonment, '[t]o 'get in one must have a certain permission' and in some cases 'submit to rites and purifications.'⁹⁶ In 'Tam Lin', ingress requires either defloration or abduction, and the charm for egress requires a ritualistic process:

First dip me in a stand of milk,
And then in a stand of water;
Haud me fast let me na gae,
I'll be your bairnie's father⁹⁷

In A, B, G and I, Janet's return trip to Carterhaugh is prefaced by a dramatisation of the court's anxiety about the unborn child's paternity, as voiced by one of her father's retainers, in A an 'auld grey knight': 'Alas, fair Janet for thee / But we'll be blamed a.'⁹⁸ That same anxiety is neatly grafted onto Scobie's riff on 'Dainty Davie': '*It's who will answer what he's wrocht?*'⁹⁹ In the song, Davie swears he will marry the singer, and his *Ballad* counterpart David Spence is cast in dual roles, that of the ship's carpenter in 'The Daemon Lover', and as an avatar of his progenitor Tam Lin.

As 'an earthly knight',¹⁰⁰ and the bonniest or bravest of the company, Tam Lin enjoys renown among the fairies, and informs Janet he is of noble birth – heir to an earl's, knight's or laird's wealth – but before helping him escape the elfin lands Janet makes him swear that he is who he says. In G, the question 'What pedigree are you?'¹⁰¹ is precursor to a something like a peerage review:

O I hae been at gude church-door
An I've got Christendom
I'm the Earl o' Forbes eldest son
An heir ower a' his land.¹⁰²

This version includes a negotiation, with Tam Lin assuring Margaret that he is a human man of status, and promising that their unborn child if a 'knave-bairn' will be his 'heir', and if a 'lass-bairn' will receive 'red gowd'.¹⁰³

David Spence writes to Isabel with an offer echoing Tam Lin's: after 'one winter more' of 'God-forsaken ice and bogs' he'll start a business in Quebec and build a grand house fit for a 'wife and family'.¹⁰⁴ Isabel, like Janet, has also done a background check:

Davie was sent to school
and meant to be a minister, but that could never
have been his way, for all that he wore
neat saint waistcoats, kept his linen clean
even on Hudson Bay. Oh, he could drink
...
but yet there was a delicacy in him:
he paid me court as if I were a lady
as fine in crinoline in any banker's niece
or a boat-builders daughter.¹⁰⁵

David Spence, like Tam Lin, is cut from a more gentlemanly cloth than his fellows. However, unlike Tam Lin, David Spence is blithely unaware of the tax on his head, and his plotline ends prematurely when his boat overturns – a dip into dramatic irony – with his own repatriation to the mortal world taking the form of a riverbank burial. Among his effects, a 'parcelled up ... satin waistcoat' is shipped home to his father in Scotland, a pyrrhic marker of class among a cargo of animal hides.¹⁰⁶

In *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn* it is the elderly retainer – John Scarth, veteran Company man – who grudgingly answers to fathering Isabel's son. And it is Scarth, the demon lover, who takes Isabel's toll in the form of her maidenhead, but it is the recruiter Geddes – proxy for the Royal HBC, which in turns stands for the Fairy Queen – who collects her pledge and transports her to Canada.

When you sail the North Atlantic You sail a sea of ice¹⁰⁷

Another 'extreme' form of heterotopia is the ship, 'heterotopia par excellence' – in 'civilisations without boats', claims Foucault, 'dreams dry up'.¹⁰⁸ *The Prince of Wales* is

a floating synecdoche for the Crown, sailing into a 'vacancy' where the 'land-locked shapes that determined [Isabel's] life' have disappeared.¹⁰⁹ Nested inside what she disdainfully terms the "'princely'" ship's 'claustrophobic enclosure' is the intimate space of Isabel and Scarth, simultaneously 'closed as a seashell, yet / as vast and grand as Canada'.¹¹⁰ As Wimberly observes, 'Otherworld itinerants must cross some sort of water barrier, a river or the sea'.¹¹¹ This particular ship is an extension of, and a bridge to, the new world's 'ice-bound coast'.¹¹² In 'The Daemon Lover', apart from the initial seduction of the married woman by the mariner, the poem is set entirely onboard and the ship is the site of dreams, disillusion, and death. On the voyage the woman spies a mountain 'dreary wi frost and snow' and the mariner spitefully advises her that this (and not the promised utopia of Rose Island) is their destination, 'the mountain of hell'.¹¹³

Isabel is headed for the same place. Fort Albany in summer is a mirage-like palisade, visible upon approach 'as if through a haze, a shimmering grey / distortion in the air': the instant Isabel and her fellow conscripts step ashore under a sun 'already fading at noon' they are beset by biting sand-flies until their skins run with blood; bleakly jesting about biblical plagues, 'we laughed', Isabel reports, 'as best we could, like souls / on their first day in hell'.¹¹⁴ They have arrived at Company Headquarters, known in the ballad realm as the Fairy Court. The idea that the heterotopia 'is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place ... several sites that are in themselves incompatible' neatly coheres in the title of the first published version of 'Tam Lin'.¹¹⁵ Thus, among versions A through I – variously named for the hero 'Young Tam Lane', 'Tomaline', 'Tam-a-Line the Elfin Knight' or 'The Knight of Faerylande', etc. – it is C, Herd's 1769 fragment 'Kertonha, or The Fairy Court', that foregrounds a geo-spatial simultaneity of the real and the supernatural.¹¹⁶

Substituting *Canada* for the uncannily assonant placeholder *Kertonha* creates an equally on-point alternate title for *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*. In 'Tam Lin', the liminal or wild zone Miles Cross is the designated site of disenchantment, and the most *unheimlich* moment in the *Ballad* occurs when Isabel, realising she is pregnant, leaves the warmth of the campfire and walks inland to a 'barren waste / of rock and muskeg, melting snow'.¹¹⁷ Here, in this interior no-man's land distant from the transient dwellings of the fur-traders, Isabel comes to the crossroads that precipitates her own retransition to female form. The process commences with a lament that references a similar crisis point in 'The Daemon Lover':

'O gentle death, come cut my breath,
I may be dead ere morn!
I may be buried in Scottish ground,
Where I was bred and born!'¹¹⁸

Isabel indulges in the same immigrant's nostalgia for the old country, its permanence symbolised by her memory of Orkney's immovable 'standing stones'; in an extremity of homesickness, she scrubs her face with dirt – 'the earth / that was not Orkney'¹¹⁹ – as if attempting to literally *ground* herself. The 'land-locked shapes' that previously informed her identity have literally and metaphorically 'disintegrated'.¹²⁰ In theorising 'place-identity', Harold Proshansky *et al.* observe that an individual's 'environmental past' provides data for validation of 'his or her own continuity' via 'stability of place and space'.¹²¹ Germaine to a reading of Isabel's deranged demonstration of grief and her unsettling interaction with an Indigenous family who appear in the barrens, then, is the relevance of the unstable liminal space she has entered, the 'or' between *Canada* and *Fairyland*.

***I had stepped outside all scope of pity,
I had become unnameable***¹²²

In the remote wasteland where Isabel retreats to contemplate the predicament of her pregnancy, the actual ground is 'melting' beneath her feet and is as unstable and unnameable as Isabel/John has now become. Smearing her face with earth is symptomatic of an existential disorder, and Isabel's *dérangement* repurposes that of Janet in 'Tam Lin': looking 'pale and wan' and ceasing to 'comb her yellow hair,' the cause of Janet's 'sair sickness' is soon construed by the court, that she has 'been with some leman'.¹²³ It is in this *unsettled* state that Isabel becomes aware of the ghostly Indian family silently regarding her and likens the dirt on her face to 'warpaint'.¹²⁴ Despite Isabel's masculine disguise of buffalo robes, 'the woman [understands her] sickness'¹²⁵ (which sickness, though? and what kind of understanding? Isabel's morning sickness is also *mourning* sickness, and the family's spectral fading away images a comparable loss of place-identity due to settler colonialism).

The idea that geospatial data informs one's sense of selfhood is key also to Foucault's conception of the 'mirror' function between heterotopias and utopias, a coeval junction between 'real' and 'absolutely unreal' sites where the self is reconstituted: 'Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself ... where I am'.¹²⁶ When Isabel cries out *Stromness!* – a place instead of a name – this strange utterance might be construed as a battle cry, a statement of solidarity (she, like the family observing her, is indigenous to a space impacted by empire), or the magic word that releases her from an enchantment: by invoking the name of her birthplace, Isabel dispels her seducer John Scarth's hold over her: 'the contest between us was over'.¹²⁷ It is in the heterotopic mirror, *Fairyland* reflected in the failed utopia of *Canada*, that she returns to herself.

***This blankness, this despair, this final
Canada***¹²⁸

In the *Ballad* the metamorphosis story is displaced onto Isabel, whose de-transition puts a new spin on Tam Lin's restoration to a 'mother-naked man'. When her labour pains start, Isabel must 'escape from / the Company' and departs fairyland for the 'mortal snows' of Pembina, where she gives birth on the floor of the astonished Factor's residence.¹²⁹ Mr Henry's florid description of Isabel's dis/clothes/ure might have been lifted directly from Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796): the 'poor, helpless abandoned wretch, who was not of the sex I had supposed . . . opened her jacket, and displayed a pair of beautiful, round white breasts.'¹³⁰ The final step of disenchantment here is not a ritual dip in milk but Isabel's demotion to laundry woman and 'washing for all hands, / which indeed she is no Witch at.'¹³¹

Isabel is now a 'freak', the 'object of salacious' stories,¹³² and this ontological disenchantment is not a rebirth; the 'mortal snows' signify a human realm, and a realm of death. When she returns to Orkney – on the same ship she set out on three years earlier – she returns a revenant, much like the mariner of 'The Daemon Lover':

Mother and child turned vagabond
on the roads of Orkney: no kin to receive me,
James Brown gone south in search of work
and every eye closed on me like a door.¹³³

The society open to Isabel Gunn, and where she reclaims her true name (the one that will appear on the real Isobel's death certificate in 1861), is located 'inside the walls of the Maes Howe tomb' where she shakes hands and speaks with unseen spirits who lived there 5,000 years earlier.¹³⁴ This site exemplifies what Foucault calls a 'heterochrony', a heterotopic space that breaks with traditional time, for instance, 'the cemetery' – a 'quasi-eternity in which [the individual's] permanent lot is dissolution and disappearance.'¹³⁵

If David MacRitchie's architectural drawings and pseudo-anthropological surmises in his 1890 *Testimony of Tradition* are to be credited, the Maes Howe Mound is as much a fairy habitat as the green hill where Tam Lin dwells. That a burial mound can be a fairy heterotopia is fitting, for as Diane Purkiss says of 'ancient' archetypal fairies, they 'have links with the dead, and some are the dead'.¹³⁶ Isabel is now one of the icy-eyed Nor-wasters who returns from the otherworld ordeal impoverished rather than enriched, a revenant recognised only by otherworld citizens like herself. Stephen Scobie's innovative iteration of 'The Daemon Lover' / 'Tam Lin' demonstrates how actors constrained by the economy of the ballad world are mirrored in colonial history, and how the didactic function of the ballad is borne out, with Isabel's story serving as a warning.

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Catherine Greenwood

Notes

1. Alan R. Knight, 'Steve and Isabel and Colin and Kurt: Local and Not So Local Heroes', *Essays on Canadian Writing* 41 (1990): 50-8 (28); Stephen Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn* (Kingston: Quarry Press, 1987).
2. For example, see Knight, 'Steve and Isabel and Colin and Kurt'. See also Kenneth Hoepfner, 'Secret Lettering', *Canadian Literature* 121 (1989): 135-7; Peter Jaeger, 'Theoreographic Metawriting: *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*', *Canadian Poetry* 34, no. 34 (1994) [no pagination], <http://canadianpoetry.org/volumes/vol34/jaeger.html>, accessed 30 June 2020; and Smaro Kamboureli, *On the Edge of Genre: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).
3. Faye Hammill notes that a 'prevalence of wilderness motifs in the national literature was the basis for the earliest critical accounts of Canadian Gothic' and the 'vast, sparsely-populated forests of Labrador; Quebec and Ontario, or the frozen areas further north, are the classic setting for Canadian Gothic texts' in "'Death by Nature': Margaret Atwood and Wilderness Gothic', *Gothic Studies* 5, no. 2 (2003): 47-63 (47).
4. Diane Purkiss, *Troublesome Things: A History of Fairies and Fairy Stories* (London: Penguin, 2001), 204.
5. Diane Long Hoeveler, *Gothic Riffs: Secularizing the Uncanny in the European Imaginary, 1780-1820* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010), 4.
6. Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowicz, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 22-7, doi: <https://doi.org/10.2307/464648> (22-4).
7. Laurie Ricou, 'Scobie, Stephen (1943-)', in *Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*, 2nd edn, ed. E. Benson and L.W. Conolly (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), <https://www.proquest.com/encyclopedias-reference-works/scobie-stephen-1943/docview/2137926828/se-2?accountid=13828>, accessed 17 January 2022, paras 1, 4. Smaro Kamboureli acknowledges that the poem includes 'many ballad elements' but argues that the 'specification "ballad" is somehow at odds with' Isabel's synchronic relationship to her poetic personae; furthermore, Kamboureli argues that 'Scobie's own act of entitling the poem *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn* creates an 'ideological distancing' similar to that found in his previous long poem *McAlmon's Chinese Opera* (Kamboureli, *On the Edge of Genre*, 93).
8. Jaeger, 'Theoreographic Metawriting', para. 3.
9. Doug Thomson and Wendy Fall, 'Gothic Chapbooks and Ballads: Making a Long Story Short', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Gothic and the Arts*, ed. David Punter (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 259-70 (265).
10. Dorothy Livesay, 'The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre', in *Contexts of Canadian Criticism*, ed. Eli Mandel (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 267-81 (269), cited in Smaro Kamboureli, *On the Edge of Genre*, 43.
11. Stephen Scobie, 'Amelia, or: Who Do You Think You Are? Documentary and Identity in Canadian Literature', *Canadian Literature* 100 (1984): 264-85 (269).
12. Alan Riach, 'Scottish Gothic Poetry' in *Scottish Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. C.M. Davison and M. Germanà (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 75-88 (76-7).
13. Lowry Charles Wimberly, *Folklore in the English and Scottish Ballads: Ghosts, Magic, Witches, Fairies, the Otherworld* [1928] (New York: Dover, 1965), vii.
14. Wimberly, *Folklore in the English and Scottish Ballads*, 6, 17; Frances B. Gummere, cited in Wimberly, *Folklore*, 8, 13.
15. Emily Lyle, Introduction to *Scottish Ballads*, ed. Emily Lyle (Edinburgh: Cannongate, 1994), 9-19 (18; original emphasis).
16. Riach, 'Scottish Gothic Poetry', 77; Scobie, 'Amelia', 269.
17. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 8.
18. Riach, 'Scottish Gothic Poetry', 78. I use 'Isobel' to denote the historical woman and 'Isabel' the character as named in Scobie's poem.
19. See Scobie, *Ballad*, 61. For comprehensive accounts, see HBC Heritage, 'Isobel Gunn', Hudson's Bay Company History Foundation, <http://www.hbcheritage.ca/people/women/isobel-gunn>, accessed 3 July 2020; and Sigurd Towrie, 'Isabel Gunn', Orkneyjar: The Heritage of the Orkney Island, <http://www.orkneyjar.com/history/historicalfigures/isobelgunn.htm>, accessed 13 January 2022.

20. Towrie's Orkneyjar website provides this data: 'In 1799, of the 530 men working in the Hudson's Bay Company post in North America, 416 were from Orkney.'
21. Hugh Heney (1807?), cited in Emily Gwiazda, 'Isobel Gunn', in *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (2018), <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/isobel-gunn>, accessed 3 July 2020.
22. Scobie, 'Amelia', 269.
23. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isobel Gunn*, 36.
24. Wimberley, *Folklore in the English and Scottish Ballads*, 21.
25. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isobel Gunn*, 35.
26. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isobel Gunn*, 36.
27. James Barke and Sydney Goodsir Smith (eds), *Robert Burns: The Merry Muse of Caledonia* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1964), 10.
28. Alexander Whitelaw (ed.), *The Book of Scottish Song* (Glasgow, Edinburgh and London: Blackie and Son, 1843), https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Page:The_Book_of_Scottish_Song.djvu/116, accessed 5 July 2020, 98.
29. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isobel Gunn*, 45.
30. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isobel Gunn*, 40, 45.
31. Hoepfner; 'Secret Lettering', 136.
32. Francis James Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 5 vols. (1892; New York: Dover Publications, 2003), Kobo book [no pagination]. The excerpts cited from 'The Daemon Lover', 'Tam Lin', and 'Johnie Cock' are from Child's compendium and are identified by their variants' letter, stanza and line number.
33. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isobel Gunn*, 20.
34. Peter Buchan, cited in Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. Scobie would almost certainly have been aware of Bob Dylan's version 'The House Carpenter', recorded in 1961. According to Ricou, Scobie's 'favourite twentieth-century balladeer is Bob Dylan, about whom he has written both a serial poem, *and forget my name* (1999), and a biography *Alias Bob Dylan* (1991; rev. 2001)' (para. 2).
35. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isobel Gunn*, 9.
36. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isobel Gunn*, 10.
37. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isobel Gunn*, 10-12.
38. Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, A.27.
39. Foucault and Miskowiec, 'Of Other Spaces', 24.
40. Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, C.16.3-4.
41. Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, B.4.3-4.
42. Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, C.19.3-4.
43. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isobel Gunn*, 21.
44. Purkiss notes that 'One of the standard fairies of English folklore is the brownie, or hob, a household spirit that helps housewives, or more often servants, with their work in exchange for food, usually a bowl of milk or cream. A striking number of witches' helpers also demanded milk as payment for their services' (*Troublesome Things*, 153).
45. Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, E.8.
46. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isobel Gunn*, 20.
47. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isobel Gunn*, 11-12.
48. Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, B.13.4.
49. Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, F.10-11.
50. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isobel Gunn*, 19.
51. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isobel Gunn*, 21.
52. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isobel Gunn*, 29-30.
53. Dorota Filipczak, 'Transvestite M(other) in the Canadian North: *Isobel Gunn* by Audrey Thomas', *Text Matters* (Lodz) 8, no. 8 (2018): 431-40 (432).
54. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isobel Gunn*, 33.
55. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isobel Gunn*, 34.
56. Riach, 'Scottish Gothic Poetry', 78.
57. Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, A.30.

58. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 36.
59. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 41.
60. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 46.
61. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 29.
62. Riach, 'Scottish Gothic Poetry', 77-9.
63. Livesay, 'The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre', cited in Kamboureli, *On the Edge of Genre*, 43.
64. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 36-7.
65. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 51.
66. Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, B.9.3-4.
67. Wimberley, *Folklore*, 323-4.
68. Purkiss, *Troublesome Things*, 8.
69. Purkiss, *Troublesome Things*, 155, 213.
70. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 29.
71. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 30.
72. Wimberley, *Folklore*, 325.
73. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 27.
74. Foucault and Miskowiec, 'Of Other Spaces', 27.
75. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 27.
76. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 26.
77. Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, A.8.3-4.
78. Wimberley, *Folklore*, 74.
79. Diane Purkiss, 'What is a Fairy?', keynote address for "'Ill met by moonlight': Gothic encounters with enchantment and the Faerie realm in literature and culture', Open Graves, Open Minds conference, University of Hertfordshire, 8 April 2021.
80. David MacRitchie, *The Testimony of Tradition*, Project Gutenberg (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1890), 159, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/40290/40290-h/40290-h.htm>, accessed 23 September 2022.
81. MacRitchie, *The Testimony of Tradition*, 98-9.
82. Purkiss notes a folkloric motif of 'the English hob's fondness for animal-skin clothing, and for suits of leather; also an animal hide' in *Troublesome Things*, 155.
83. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 27.
84. Purkiss, 'What is a Fairy?'
85. Purkiss, *Troublesome Things*, 210-11.
86. Reverend Francis Liddell, *Old Statistical Account (1799?)*, cited in Sigurd Towrie, 'The Hudson's Bay Company', Orkneyjar: The heritage of the Orkney Islands, <http://www.orkneyjar.com/orkney/stromness/hbs.htm>, accessed 17 January 2022.
87. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 8.
88. Wimberley, *Folklore*, 108, 329.
89. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 13.
90. *Ibid.*
91. Wimberley, *Folklore*, 84.
92. Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, D.9; 'Tomlin', cited in Wimberley, 88. (Tam Lin is variously known as Tomlin, Tam-a-line, or Tam Lane.)
93. Wimberley, *Folklore*, 88.
94. Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, A.1.3-4.
95. Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, A.2.4.5-6.
96. Foucault and Miskowiec, 'Of Other Spaces', 26.
97. Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, B.34.
98. Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, A.11.3-4.
99. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 36.
100. Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, A.29.

101. Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, G.23.4.
102. Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, G.24.
103. Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, G.20.
104. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 41.
105. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 35.
106. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 46-7.
107. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 17.
108. Foucault and Miskowiec, 'Of Other Spaces', 27.
109. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 17.
110. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 18.
111. Wimberley, *Folklore*, 110.
112. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 1.
113. Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, F.13.
114. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 25.
115. Foucault and Miskowiec, 'Of Other Spaces', 25.
116. The 'Tam Lin' composers would likely have understood that Carterhaugh is a real place: 'Carterhaugh is a plain at the confluence of the Ettrick with the Yarrow, scarcely an English mile above the town of Selkirk, and on this plain they show two or three rings on the ground, where, they say, the stands of milk and water stood, and upon which grass never grows' (Glenriddell MS, cited in Child, n. pag.).
117. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 39.
118. Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, C.18.
119. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 39.
120. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 17.
121. Harold M. Proshansky, Abbe K. Fabian, and Robert Kaminoff, 'Place-Identity: Physical World Socialization of the Self', *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 3.1 (1983): 57-83 (66).
122. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 53.
123. Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 1.12-13.1.
124. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 39.
125. *Ibid.*
126. Foucault and Miskowiec, 'Of Other Spaces', 24.
127. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 39.
128. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 53.
129. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 50.
130. *Ibid.*
131. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 53.
132. *Ibid.*
133. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 57.
134. Scobie, *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn*, 58. Tom Muir, 'The Unknown Isobel Gunn', Orkneyology.com, <https://www.orkneyology.com/isobel-gunn.html>, accessed 23 September 2022.
135. Foucault and Miskowiec, 'Of Other Spaces', 26.
136. Purkiss, *Troublesome Things*, 48.

Arthur Rackham,
'The Changeling' (1905).



Prisoners of the gods: The captivity narrative in fairy lore

Jeremy Harte

‘It’s about fourteen years since so many young women were brought away’, said the man from Tillyra. ‘Peter Regan’s wife of Peterswell, and James Jordan’s wife of Derreen, and Loughlin’s wife of Lissatunna – hundreds were carried off in that year. They didn’t bring so many since then; I suppose they brought enough then to last them a good while.’¹ He was explaining things to the lady from the big house, who listened intently, sometimes glancing across at the man dressed in black. The two visitors had heard accounts like this before and knew that the one time when women were most at risk from *them*, the Gentry, was just after childbirth. They were full of life then, and the others wanted to harvest that life; perhaps they needed a wet-nurse for their babies, perhaps it was just the services of young women that they coveted, for they would take young brides also, even on their wedding day.

Soon Lady Gregory would return to the big house at Coole to write up what she had heard. Sometimes Yeats had gone visiting with her in his trademark black suit, but he relied on her notebooks for the stories. In a series of six articles written for the London journals between 1897 to 1902, he published selections of what they had been told. Later in 1920 Augusta Gregory brought out the full record of her collections. Gregory builds up her argument by juxtapositions, while Yeats is more explicit about the concepts that lay behind the stories: but then he was a great builder of systems.

Gregory had a playwright’s ear for talk, and her Galway collectanea were set down as accurately as could be done by someone who relied on memory rather than sound equipment. Ten years later the Irish Folklore Institute was travelling the same roads and recording much the same stories with its Ediphone apparatus.² But the material collected by the two passionate amateurs differs from that on the official record, and is often more illuminating. The Institute and its successor, the Irish Folklore Commission, were consciously collecting a culture: they made a beeline for the nearest *seanchaí* and preferred well-crafted stories.³ But Gregory and Yeats were looking for ordinary people whose lives had been touched by the supernatural.

The touch was hard, and the lives were full of suffering. Again and again the notebooks at Coole record losses which, to outsiders, would seem like deaths from natural causes:

puerperal fever, tuberculosis, heatstroke, drowning. But to the Galway peasantry they were not dead, but taken. In his articles Yeats puzzled away at 'this complex faith'.⁴ The fairy mythos had never been spelt out explicitly to him: this was the unspoken knowledge that has no primers or catechisms. But by linking story after story he was able to elicit an unexpectedly consistent canon of belief.

This taught that people who appeared to have died before their time were not really dead at all. The *sí* took their captives to punish the breaking of a rule by those who had walked into a fort or touched a whirlwind of dust; or because it was time to restock the hollow hills with human cattle; or just out of the caprice with which the powerful treat the lives of the poor.⁵ After a tragic death, survivors would brood on every detail of what had happened, until gradually these grits of fact in the oyster-shell of memory were smoothed into a story on traditional lines.⁶

It was the good and the handsome – strong workers, fine dancers – who were taken by the *sí*, not as spirits, but substantially: they continued to live a parallel existence within the fairy fort, eating and drinking. A young mother could be taken to suckle fairy children, just as a cow could be stolen for its milk or a horse to pull loads. The fairies disguised their theft by putting something in the place of the stolen woman, so that a log or other substitute would be buried in her place. The abduction was not irreversible, and there were stories – always situated long ago or far away – about families who had got their loved one back. It was not easy to graft this faith onto what the priests taught about heaven, but the popular consensus was that everything had a natural term of life, and that eventually when her time was up the taken woman would die as we understand the word, and her soul would pass on to wherever souls go.

As he slowly pieced this worldview together, Yeats thought that he was hearing echoes of the religion of the ancient Celts: but he was not. Stories with the tell-tale motifs of a false death, an illusory body and a recovered woman had appeared, seemingly for the first time, in the medieval preacher's manual of Thomas of Cantimpré, written on the borders of France and Flanders, which is a long way from Galway Bay.⁷ The idea that ordinary people might be stolen by the fairies was one which knitted together themes already familiar in elite stories of the supernatural, and from the 13th century onwards it spread across northern Europe, after which it gradually declined. By 1600 it had already lost most of its consistency in England, though it was still known in Lowland Scotland; by the 19th century it was confined to the Gaelic-speaking areas and Scandinavia.⁸

Why did people turn to this frightening creed? Its supernatural dangers added one more layer of threat to lives which must have been hard enough already. But it also provided some comfort to the bereaved, for Faerie was not an abstract chill heaven; life went on there as it did in the cabins of the living, and the lost could be imagined enjoying ordinary experiences, and still caring about the living. A mother might return at night to

tend the children she had left behind, and her loss did not seem so irrevocable if the body buried in the coffin had only been a sham substitute for the real, breathing woman. Like most supernatural memorates – tales of traditional character told as first-hand experience – these reports of fairy incursions into the human world were fragmentary. Their underlying philosophy was much more apparent in the folktales, which had a clear plot-line and detailed description, and would tell you exactly how a wife had been rescued from being taken, or how a man had gone into the fairy hill and seen old neighbours whom he thought were long since dead.

Stories survived in the repertoire even when the supernatural world that they described was no longer so threatening – all they needed was the half-belief that sustains legend. And because folk narrative is performance as well as lore, it makes manifest the ideas which lie implicit in simpler memorates. Take the well-told tale of Alexander Harg, who lived on the banks of the Nith in Kirkcudbrightshire. One night as he was fishing, he heard the noise of workmen coming from a ruined hulk of a ship in the stream. ‘What are ye doing there?’, called out a thin voice. ‘Making a wife to Sandy Harg’, said the other: and with that, the farmer raced home, barred and bolted the door, and held on tight to his wife. There came a knock at the door, and she started to open it, but he held her back. The cattle roared and bellowed, as if wild beasts were loose among them; the horses snorted, as if the stable were on flame; all night the farm was in an uproar, but Sandy held on tight, though his wife entreated him to let her go and help. At dawn all was silent and he stepped out into the yard, where he saw a heavy stock of bog oak, shaped to the rough likeness of his wife, and left behind when the fairies had failed to substitute it for her. So he burnt it.⁹

Being a story, not a first-hand account, this ends happily with the wife saved from the schemes of Faerie. But if we set aside the supernatural machinery of the plot and concentrate on the human relations, we see that the happiness of the ending depends absolutely on a woman’s obedience to the patriarchal authority of her husband. He is active, she is passive; his arbitrary commands override any resistance on her part.

Women were especially liable to be stolen by the fairies at the two points in their lives when they passed from individual status to an existence for others: marriage and childbirth. It is as if the passage from their older social identity to a new one opened a crack in time when they could be taken from this world to another. Peter Regan’s wife of Peterswell and James Jordan’s wife of Derreen had made a wrong transition, from pregnant woman at home to nursing mother within the fairy fort. To bring them back, in the imaginative world of tradition if not in hard reality, it was enough to bring to mind their status in the previous rites of passage. Word went round that the woman could be saved if only you threw her wedding gown over her; in another story, a man goes to the fairy hill and rescues his wife by tying three knots in the black silk handkerchief which she wore on her wedding day.¹⁰

Galway people were a little hazy about the status of those who were taken by the *sí*. In one interpretation, they were absorbed into the fairy population, eventually ceasing to be recognisable human individuals. But according to others, they remained a permanent underclass, doing the work of their fairy masters. These opposing views reflect an ambiguity in the popular concept of fairies. In one perspective, they are a parallel race: whatever we do, they do – washing, weaving, cooking, carpentry and so on. The fairies described by the 19th-century peasantry tend cattle and spin, just as the fairies of a medieval aristocracy rode and hunted, both equally shadows of the imagining community. But there was another apprehension of the fairy world, in which it was brighter, finer, grander than our own.

‘What were they like when you saw them?’, Lady Gregory asked the old man as he sat in his dark cabin, flickers of flame running over the peats. On her finger-ring a faceted stone catches the light of the fire. ‘Your ladyship’s ring is nothing to the beauty of the dress that was on them!’¹¹ In tales of the ever-dancing, singing, shining fairy mansion, it is as if a real-life peasant is looking at the rich people – so lovely in their fine outfits, so graceful, so everlastingly young (think how manual labour lined the face and stooped the back in those days). These lordly ones – the Gentry, as the Irish called them – depended for their glamour on the labour of ordinary people: which was not voluntary labour.

Those who were taken by the fairies became the captives of another race, and it is curious how close their stories of supernatural abduction are, as stories, to the autobiographies written in the 17th and 18th centuries by people who had been taken prisoner by strangers from outside the European world.¹² These captivity narratives are typically a cycle of female peril and preservation. The young wife is safe at home when a terrifying horde breaks in on her domestic security. It means nothing to her whether they are Algerian pirates or Native Americans: always they speak an unknown language and come from wild places outside the civilised world. She enters a new life, sometimes making brief contact with fellow captives, but continually being moved away. Despite overwhelming pressure for adoption into this new community, she keeps up a stubborn passive resistance. And finally the menfolk track her down and deal with her captors, so that she can be restored to home life once more.

The captivity narrative is essentially a story about identity, seen through the prism of contemporary values: the stolen woman writes to reassure us, and herself, that she had never forgotten who she really was. Her self-respect is founded not just on chastity and Christianity, but on internalised values of female passivity of the sort we have seen praised in the Kirkcudbrightshire story. She awaits rescue by men, and the ways that they bargain with or blackmail her abductors can sound very like the strategies by which husbands in legend get their wives out of the fairy hill: bluster (a threat to strip the hill of turf), deceit (a cry of ‘the fairy hill is on fire!’), and armed threat (an iron knife slipped in the crack of the green door).

But are these just general analogies, of the sort that might arise in any narrative which is structured around taking and return? Not necessarily: parallels between supernatural captivity and actual slavery would have come naturally to anyone living when the fairy mythos began to take on its present form. Influenced by the grim shadow of later history, we forget that in the 17th century there were more European slaves in Africa than African slaves in Europe. The Barbary corsairs took 240 Cornish slaves in 1645, 237 Irish ones in 1631, and these were only the *grandes battues*. There was continual raiding up and down the west coast of Europe, picking up an incautious woman here, a group of children there.¹³ For anyone minding animals on the shores of Penwith or gathering kelp on the beach in Connemara, abduction by a race of implacable strangers must have been an ever-present imaginative possibility.

That must remain speculative in the absence of a full contemporary archive from some 17th-century Yeats or Gregory. But it is quite plausible that storytellers would draw on the experience of slavery to describe supernatural abduction. In Guyana the water mamas, originally a kind of mermaid, have expanded their narrative role to encompass the whole spectrum of otherworldly motifs, as the classical nereids have done in modern Greek tradition.¹⁴ The mamas have magnificent houses in impossible palaces, stocked with inexhaustible wealth, to which they entice ordinary men and women, and when they cannot entice, they steal. All this is refracted through family memories of the slave raids in which Makushi were carried off by Brazilian traders.¹⁵

Slavery finally came to an end in Amazonia, but the Makushi still describe the mamas as if they were white people – owners of inexplicable wealth, commanders of mysterious technologies. Wherever there is a power gradient, those who have the upper hand will be described as if they were supernatural, while supernatural beings will look and act like the human elite. The results are not always as richly evocative as Lady Gregory's sapphire ring. An old Cornish lady who lived alone, and probably on the edge of madness, was comforted by her visions of the pixies, as grand as she could imagine: 'they look like little sodgers'.¹⁶

We have already met with mortal women being abducted after childbirth to nurse fairy children, a position much like that of the working-class wet-nurse who has been brought into the big house to suckle a gentlewoman's baby. In the long, long pages of minor Victorian fairy verse, there are a few poems with genuine feeling, and most of these seem to be Irish; contact with a living fairy tradition gave vitality to its literary reflexes. The most passionate of these is William Cosmo Monkhouse's 'The Faery Foster-Mother':

Weak Thing, Meek Thing! take no blame from me
Altho' my babe may moan for lack of what I give to thee;
For though thou art a faery child, and though thou art my woe,
To feel thee sucking at my breast is all the bliss I know.¹⁷

The intensity of this poem hints at human relations thinly masked by a supernatural cover story; the foster-mother has the same conflicting feelings about her charge as the slave wet-nurses of the American South, or their commercial sisters in the London suburbs. As Esther Waters spells it out to the woman who pays her, when a woman is taken from her own baby to feed someone else's, the rich child is feeding on the life of the poor.¹⁸

But for the country people of Galway, this story could address quite different tensions. They would have been drawn to the motif of the stolen wet-nurse not so much to comment on social inequality, but to make sense of something that was otherwise intolerable – the loss of fertile women from the community. When a young bride died in childbirth, while it made sense to imagine her being taken for the one role that a new mother could best fulfil, the real force of the story lay in its proposal that she was not really dead at all. The true death, the good death, was that of the old who had come to the end of their days and their social role, and who died in the comfort of religion. But to die young, and worst of all to die when you should be bringing forth new life, was against every expectation of how the world should be.

Other cultures have felt the same cognitive challenge when confronted by women who die in childbirth, and have coped with it by inventing special categories for them, outside the ordinary ranks of the dead. In ancient Mexico these women, alone of all their sex, were ascribed the status of warriors who had died in combat. In India they became the most fearsome of ghosts.¹⁹ While the Irish tradition that they were not truly dead but in Faerie differs from these two extremes, it still responds to the same problem. The storytellers insisted against all apparent evidence that contemporaries who had left this world, apparently for ever, had nevertheless not died.

After all, the fairies have much in common with the dead. They live underground, are active at night, have access to a mysterious fund of wealth, and respond with murderous anger if not respected. In many traditions they make their homes in burial mounds. And it followed from the core beliefs about abduction that these fairy hills must be full of people who, so far as outer appearances went, were dead. This is confirmed by reports from fairy doctors, the seers who interacted with denizens of the other world and reported on those who had been seen there: this included identifying the seemingly dead victims of abduction. Alison Peirson, the 16th-century seer of St Andrews, was described caustically by a local poet as one who 'Names oyt nytboris sex or sewin, / That we belevit had bene in heavin'.²⁰

Other Scottish witches sought out those who had died in some unhallowed way that put them in the power of the fairies. And yet despite the analogies and the explicit references, the fairies as a supernatural community occupy a quite different imaginative space from the dead. They are alive, with a fierce vitality exceeding that of the mortal race: compared to them, it is we who are the pallid phantoms.

It would be more true to say that thinking about fairies was a way of thinking about death, but a contrary way. The collection which comes closest to making the fairies spectral is Jane Wilde's *Ancient Legends of Ireland*; however, the Gothic tints in her style owe more to late Romanticism than folk belief. The plots of the stories are more likely to be authentic, because although Wilde did no collecting herself, she wrote from notes kept by her late husband, William Wilde, a rare Irish-speaker amongst the elite who had been told the stories during his work as a doctor.²¹ He was on duty during the Famine from 1845 onwards, a time when it was not surprising that people's thoughts should have turned to the dead. The Great Hunger left long memories and it may well overshadow the preoccupation with supernatural explanations of sudden death that Gregory and Yeats found in late 19th-century Connaught. In pre-Famine collections like that of Thomas Crofton Croker, there are three tales of changeling children for every one about the abduction of women. The later repertoire has far more abductions than changelings; the experience of mass death had changed perceptions of the supernatural.²²

It is a tricky task, looking back on the world of these storytellers from more settled times, and trying to judge where the lore is offering a symbolic commentary on the human condition, and where it is reflecting actual life. At one level, stories about the abduction of young women were a cultural means of coping with premature death, but the theme would nevertheless have come naturally to a society where young women really were abducted. Long after the days of slave raids, it was still common on the wild fringes of the British Isles for a good-looking daughter to be kidnapped by some posse of armed neighbours and taken off as a wife for a young man too weak-minded to do his own wooing.²³

These incidents were remembered in tradition, where the narrative could be rounded off by a happy ending in which the girl returned safely home. The abducted Eppie Morrie in Child 223 fights her way out of rape – 'and aye she grat and aye she spat' – but Irish tradition is less willing than the Scots ballad to contemplate active female resistance. Instead, the girl usually employs some clever trick to alert her friends, hoping that the menfolk will eventually come to rescue her. In one song, the raiders come to carry her off for a forced marriage when she has been left in charge of her little brother and the baby of the family. After she has been surrounded, but before she is carried away, she uses the little time left to sing a lullaby to the baby, with coded words that alert her brother to run off and get the men of the family.²⁴

This is a recurrent folk theme – the song which means one thing to outsiders, but another to those in the know. But there is a particular fitness in the choice of a lullaby for these double-edged lyrics. Lullabies are unique among the genres of folksong because the intended audience of the song – the baby – has no idea what the words mean, so that the mother or nurse can sing anything she likes, as long as there is a continuous soothing refrain.

This is the plot device behind a lullaby recorded from a Limerick woman in the first half of the 19th century. The words make sense when you understand that a woman in the fairy hill has become aware that a neighbour is walking outside and is using the song to reveal that she has been taken to nurse a fairy child. If only her husband will come with holy candle and black-hilted knife, wait for her horse to ride out of the fort, and pull the rider down – then she will be saved. But time is running out: she has been in the fort for a year, and soon she will be made queen; that is, taken as wife by the leader of the fairy company. All this is interposed with a meaningless running hum of *seó hú leó* to keep the baby amused and divert suspicion.²⁵

In short, this is the same tradition about a lullaby as covert warning that was used in the tradition of the woman sending off her young brother, only here it is transposed into a supernatural key. No full text of '*Seó hú leó*' was recorded again but it survived in fragmentary versions and a Scots ballad, 'The Queen of Elfland's Nourrice' (Child 40) is based on the same tradition.²⁶

These songs were passed on, not just because they told a good story, but because they really were lullabies: the soft melody, which in the frame-story is soothing a fairy child, came in handy when there was an actual baby to be lulled. But this adds yet another layer of meaning to the already overdetermined motif of a woman taken to nurse a child of the *sí*. Because the lyrics of lullabies mean nothing to the sleeping child, they can speak of what matters most of the mother, and in this case it may well include feelings that she would not express directly, even to herself.

Significantly, many of these lullabies open with appeals to a 'little sister', reminding her of the night that the girl was taken, begging her to seek help.²⁷ It is as if only close kin will be able to understand what the abducted woman is going through. That is how things are in a society with patrilocal marriage, such as rural Ireland: when she moves to a new home, the bride leaves behind the blood relatives who cherish her, and finds herself instead under the authority of her husband's family, who do not know her and may not care for her very much. In the early days of the marriage, before the children grow up and bond her to her in-laws, the bride may very well feel as if she has been carried off into isolation among strangers, and the words of '*Seó hú leó*' give vent to that feeling.

Is this a credible interpretation of the old song? We cannot go back to pre-Famine Limerick and test it with fieldwork: but there is a parallel from halfway across the world which shows that metaphors of this kind are not impossible.²⁸ The affection felt by a Chinese bride for mother and home was set against her unalloyed (and not unjustified) dread of the new husband and in-laws, who she calls 'the dead people'. In one marriage lament the girl sings 'dead people come to fetch me', exactly as if she were being taken into the otherworld, and she makes a point of eating little or nothing at the wedding feast, like Persephone in the underworld, or an Irish girl resisting captivity among the fairies.

Sharing food unites the family and joins it to other families in a broader social unit. The storytellers knew this, consciously or otherwise, when they made food into a test for those who entered the fairy realm. But the motif is developed in different ways according to gender. One tale-type will feature a young man as protagonist. Outgoing and reckless, he finds himself in the fairy hill, where a great feast is in progress and at the high point of the celebrations he is offered a cup of wine – but something is wrong, he has caught an unpleasant glint in the eyes of his hosts or a nod of the head from a friend, long supposed dead, but really lost among these hostile others. He rejects the offer and escapes at once.

To eat in the fairy realm is to be swallowed up by it. This rule applies just as much in the abduction of a woman, but the tales frame it in a very different way. She has not gone into the hill of their own accord, but has been taken. There is no grand banquet; instead, she is set to work in a mundane setting, much like the kitchen or wash-house at home. Instead of breaking free in one grand gesture of renunciation, she struggles day after day not to eat what is offered in her new environment, willing herself not to be incorporated in it. In these short, disconnected stories, halfway between legend and memorate, we are often presented with a woman's memories of her experience: how she survived for three or seven years, refusing food, but somehow getting out at night and living off the scraps on offer in the human world, glad to snatch at cold potatoes on the dresser, or to pick up a bit of whatever was in the pig troughs.²⁹

The mythologised image of a woman in fairy captivity shadows the reality of the young wife in a strange house, desperately longing for the food and comforts of home. Here the motif of not eating fairy food becomes a story about resistance, the resistance of extreme passivity: a protection of the self behind sealed lips, like anorexia.

Locked in silence and refusing everything that is offered, the abducted woman might as well have been the stock or lifeless substitute which had been left in her place. Here, as with other elements of the fairy mythos, the more developed tale types were able to develop themes with an imaginative flair impossible for reports tied to personal experience. In a storyteller's version, like the tale of Sandy Harg, a wooden block was left as a substitute for the stolen wife. But in actual life, nobody ever saw one of these artfully crafted simulacra. Instead, they encountered a not-woman who looked just like the real, taken woman but did not talk or act or respond in the way that the wife would have done: or at least not as her husband and other relatives thought she ought to have done.

The story of the captive woman runs on the same lines as that of the changeling child. In both cases the true loved one has been stolen to some supernatural elsewhere, and a false imposition has taken their place.³⁰ The two traditions evidently have a common history, with the much more widespread changeling story perhaps providing the template on which the captivity narratives were built, but they differ in

character. The stolen child is replaced by a fairy: instead of a speechless baby, the cradle contains a wizened old elf who, if suitably tricked, will say a great deal more than he should. In contrast, the stolen woman has been replaced by a lump of wood. The real woman who desperately wants to communicate, who is trying to make her voice heard from the imprisoning place, is concealed behind a dull, speechless block.

The analogy between the two tale types remains important: the woman in these stories is assimilated to a child in her passivity and her need for others to rescue her; as well as in the legitimacy of fire, weapons and violent attack in forcing the imposter away and the real loved family member back again. But whereas the changeling story is always told from the viewpoint of the mother and not of the child, captivity narratives are often presented from the perspective of the woman herself.

Even today, when we have so much language to describe the self, people suffering from depression will often return to the old symbolic tropes and talk of being stolen away, with an uncommunicative stock put in their place. Once someone had been taken, Yeats was told, they were never the same, even if somehow they managed to get back to the daylight world: such people were solitary, often bedridden, the greater part of their life being among the company by whom they were abstracted at night.³¹ Carrying over into this world some of the skills of their uncanny companions, they might suddenly and accurately comment on what was happening many miles away, or give a handful of dung the appearance of shining gold pieces. The poet-folklorist was more impressed by the magic of these things than his informants, who saw them as empty tricks, of no use in a workaday world. Hard as life might be in the peasant cabins of the furthest West, it was still preferable to the illusory glamour of fairy captivity.

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Jeremy Harte

Notes

1. William Butler Yeats, *Writings on Irish Folklore, Legend and Myth*, ed. by Robert Welch (London: Penguin, 1993), 161; Augusta Gregory, *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland* (London: G. P. Putnam, 1920), 145.
2. Patricia Lysaght, 'From "Collect the fragments" to "Memory of the world" – collecting the folklore of Ireland 1927–70', *Folklore* 130 (2019): 1-30 (14).
3. The *seanchaithe* specialised in traditional history, or legendary material presented as history. They earned a tribute from one of the great Irish folklore collectors: James Delargy, 'The Gaelic story-teller, with some notes on Gaelic folk-tales', *Proc. of the British Academy* 31 (1945): 177-211.
4. Yeats, *Writings on Irish Folklore*, 168.
5. *Sí* (*sidhe* in pre-1948 spelling) is the Irish term corresponding to elf or *fée*; what are generally known as the social fairies. But the Irish literary tradition, which continued to influence folklore up to the 19th century, gave them a more mythological character than is found elsewhere: Mark Williams, *Ireland's Immortals: A History of the Gods of Irish Myth* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).
6. Dorena Allen, 'Orpheus and Orfeo: the dead and the taken', *Medium Aevum* 33 (1964): 102-11.
7. Richard Firth Green, *Elf Queens and Holy Friars: Fairy Beliefs and the Medieval Church* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 163-4.

8. Katherine Briggs, *The Vanishing People* (London: Batsford, 1978), 104-17.
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10. Lewis Spence, *The Fairy Tradition in Britain* (London: Rider & Co., 1948), 258-61, 264.
11. Yeats, *Writings on Irish Folklore*, 140.
12. June Namias, *White Captives: Gender and Ethnicity on the American Frontier* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).
13. Robert Davis, 'Counting European slaves on the Barbary coast', *Past & Present* 172 (2001): 87-124 (92).
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15. James Whitaker, 'Water mamas among the Makushi in Guyana', *Folklore* 131 (2020): 34-54 (44-5).
16. Robert Hunt, *Popular Romances of the West of England* (London: John Camden Hotten, 1865), 118.
17. Edmund Stedman (ed.), *A Victorian Anthology, 1837–1895* (Boston MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1895), 288-9.
18. Stephanie Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South* (Harvard MA: Yale University Press, 2019); George Moore, *Esther Waters* (London: Walter Scott, 1894), 142.
19. Cecelia F. Klein, 'The devil and the skirt: an iconographic inquiry into the Pre-Hispanic nature of the Tzitzimime', *Ancient Mesoamerica* 11 (2000): 1-26 (8); William Crooke, *The Popular Religion and Folk-Lore of Northern India*, vol. 1 (London: Archibald Constable, 1896), 269-71.
20. Lizanne Henderson and Edward J. Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief: A History* (East Linton: Tuckwell, 2001), 166.
21. William Wilde, *Irish Popular Superstitions* (Dublin: James McGlashan, 1852); Jane Wilde, *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms and Superstitions of Ireland* (London: Ward & Downey, 1887).
22. Thomas Crofton Croker, *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland* (London: John Murray, 1825-8); compare Séan Ó hEaochaidh, *Síscéalta Ó Thír Chonaill / Fairy Legends from Donegal*, ed. and trans. Máire Mac Neill and Séamas Ó Catháin (Dublin: Comhairle Bhéaloideas Éireann, 1977).
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29. Yeats, *Writings on Irish Folklore*, 248, 316; Gregory, *Visions and Beliefs*, 107.
30. Magnus Course, 'Changelings: alterity beyond difference', *Folk Life* 55 (2017): 12-21.
31. Yeats, *Writings on Irish Folklore*, 310; Gregory, *Visions and Beliefs*, 143.



I found myself in
a little cave

Arthur Hughes, 'I Found
Myself In a Little Cave',
*Phantastes: A Faerie Romance
for Men and Women* by
George MacDonald, 1905.

Fairyland's Gothic offspring: The Maid of the Alder Tree as an arboreal femme fatale in George MacDonald's *Phantastes* (1858)

Michaela Hausmann

George MacDonald's *Phantastes* (1858) follows the male protagonist Anodos on his strange, dream-like journey through a fantastic world called Fairy Land on a quest to spiritual ennoblement. Instead of a peaceful Arcadia or 'a land of heartbreakingly beautiful forests and glens,' as Melody Green describes it, the Fairy Land in *Phantastes* is closer to what Tolkien described as Faërie in his lecture/essay 'On Fairy Stories': 'Faërie is a perilous land, and in it are pitfalls for the unwary and dungeons for the overbold.'¹ It is 'filled with many things: all manner of beasts and birds are found there; shoreless seas and stars uncounted; beauty that is an enchantment, and an ever-present peril; both joy and sorrow as sharp as swords.'² The unwary protagonist of *Phantastes*, Anodos, indeed encounters enchanting yet perilous beauty in the form of the Maid of the Alder; MacDonald's unique example of a Gothic fairy.

Previous academic reflections on MacDonald's female characters have noted the sexual allure of demonic women, especially in his 1895 novel *Lilith*, and identified the Maid of the Alder's function as a *femme fatale* or as the 'archetypal female figure' of the 'temptress' who embodies the negative side of the Jungian anima.³ However, the Maid of the Alder has received little close attention with regard to her Gothic dimension, her relation to fairy lore, or her function as an embodiment of the dangerous aspects of nature.

In this article I am going to investigate the Alder Maid as a Gothic fairy in more detail. First, I am going to describe the various fairies of Fairy Land in order to draw attention to similarities and differences in form and behaviour to other fairy creatures in the narrative. Particular attention will be paid here to the flower fairies and the tree fairies in *Phantastes*.

The second and main part of the analysis is devoted to the Maid of the Alder's body and her function as a Gothic *femme fatale*. As Marie Mulvey-Roberts argues,

the female Gothic body has developed through the Madonna/whore duality, incarceration, fragmentation, hybridity and sexuality, while femininity itself has been demonised in Gothic literature by way of the *femme fatale*, man-made monster, vampire and Medusa.⁴

I will show how the Maid of the Alder's body is invested with many of these Gothic images that serve to make her a powerful paragon of the literary *femme fatale*. As a hybrid creature that is half human and half tree, the Maid of the Alder is moreover strongly rooted in nature and folklore. Hence I will concentrate on the natural features of alder trees as well as their folkloric associations in order to shed light on possible reasons for the choice of this particular tree species for her character. The Alder Maid's curious hollow back relates her to Scandinavian elves and fairies, especially the Danish *elle-maids* and Norwegian *huldras*. Their appearance and behaviour will consequently be compared to that of the Maid of the Alder. Since the Maid of the Alder is specified as a fairy *femme fatale* with magic power, I will explore intertextual links to literary works such as Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, the ballad of 'Thomas the Rhymer', and John Keats's 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' as possible influences for MacDonald in this respect.

Finally, the Alder Maid's human/tree hybridity provokes questions of man's ambivalent relationship to female sexuality and nature in general. The concluding part of the analysis will therefore discuss the Alder Maid's personification of nature's seductive and destructive potential and draw attention to the problems such a feminisation of nature entails. I will summarise the results of the analysis to give a comprehensive picture of this Gothic fairy's literary and folklore heritage and her function in *Phantastes*.

Types of fairies in *Phantastes*

Fairy Land is populated by various kinds of fairies. During a brief sojourn in a forest cottage, Anodos observes the activities of tiny flower fairies in the cottage garden:

The whole garden was like a carnival, with tiny, gaily decorated forms, in groups, assemblies, processions, pairs or trios, moving stately on, running about wildly, or sauntering hither or thither. From the cups or bells of tall flowers, as from balconies, some looked down on the masses below, now bursting with laughter, now grave as owls; but even in their deepest solemnity, seeming only to be waiting for the arrival of the next laugh.⁵

This passage clearly shows the close affinity between fairies and flowers. Anodos even asserts that 'the flowers seem a sort of houses to them, or outer bodies, which they can put on or off when they please.'⁶ The comparison of the fairies' activities to a carnival evokes

notions of Bakhtin's carnivalesque mode in the sense of a chaotic subversion of human systems of belief and codes. In appearance and behaviour, the flower fairies thus largely correspond to the 'flower-and-butterfly minuteness' Tolkien railed against and for whose popularisation he held Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Michael Drayton's *Nymphidia* partly responsible.⁷ Blake's illustrations for Erasmus Darwin's *The Botanic Garden* and his accounts of fairy funerals and thistle fairies may have been another major source of influence in this respect, as John Docherty argues.⁸

In contrast to the flower fairies, the tree fairies in *Phantastes* seem to be imaginatively indebted to the dryads from classical mythology and to Celtic fairy lore which informed works like Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and the ballads of 'Tam Lin' or 'Thomas the Rhymer'. The fairies or elves in these works are of human size yet possess supernatural powers and an enchanting or uncanny aura. Apart from various literary works, George MacDonald would have had recourse to several publications on fairies resulting from an increased fascination with folklore all over Europe, such as Thomas Keightley's *Fairy Mythology* (1828), Walter Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802), Benjamin Thorpe's *Northern Mythology* (1851), Thomas Crofton Croker's *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland* (1825), and the German Romantic folk and fairy tales.

In *Phantastes*, three such tree fairies feature more prominently – the Beech, the Ash, and the Maid of the Alder. Before Anodos actually meets any of them, he is taught a lesson in tree lore by the young woman. She identifies Oak, Elm and Beech as trustworthy, the Birch as young and volatile, but warns Anodos to 'shun the Ash and the Alder'.⁹ Her knowledge proves correct as the Beech later saves and protects Anodos whereas Ash and Alder are bent on his destruction. Their bodies usually look like the trees of the eponymous species yet they can move, are capable of human speech and can take on a more humanoid form so that Anodos is repeatedly confused over whether the Beech is tree or woman and he is fooled by the Maid of the Alder's deceptive human form.¹⁰

As different as these kinds of fairies may seem, Anodos is informed that the tree and flower fairies 'are of the same race'.¹¹ They share a strong physical connection to nature and hedonistic impulses unbridled by human codes of morality. As a consequence, the fairies in *Phantastes* are associated with inordinate violence and death.

Even though the flower fairies initially act like innocent children at play, Anodos witnesses the fairy of calceolaria murdering the already moribund Primrose with a bite for flimsy reasons. The serious action of murder is rendered ludicrous by its transmission in a childish song-dialogue between the fairies and the murderer is simply scolded like a naughty child. Even the funeral for Primrose is ridiculed because the fairies resume their frolics immediately afterwards as if nothing had happened.¹² The underlying motivation for almost any of their actions is fun because 'they like fun better than anything else'.¹³ Thus, the flower fairies' actions – in the Bakhtinian sense of the carnivalesque – ridicule human moral codes by trivialising murder and mocking funeral rites.

The Ash's primary motivation for hunting Anodos is 'a grasping desire to possess'.¹⁴ As the Beech explains to Anodos:

They [ash trees] are all disagreeable selfish creatures . . . but this one has a hole in his heart that nobody knows of but one or two; and he is always trying to fill it up, but he cannot. That must be what he wanted you for.¹⁵

This need to fill his own metaphysical void is often conveyed by means of comparisons to corpse-figures with an insatiable hunger and particular emphasis on the Ash's groping claw-like hands. One of the first glimpses of the Ash reminds Anodos of 'what [he] had heard of vampires', corpse-like with rather handsome features but with eyes that 'were alive, yet not with life. They seemed lighted up with an infinite greed'.¹⁶ After his encounter with the Maid of the Alder, the Ash appears with 'ghoul-eyes', and with 'the hideous hand outstretched, like a beast of prey'.¹⁷ As a means of protection against the Ash, the Beech gives Anodos a girdle of her leaves that resembles a chastity belt.¹⁸ This indicates that the Ash may be read as a projection of Anodos' own selfishness and sexual possessiveness at the beginning of the narrative which he needs to learn to control. Significantly, Anodos loses this belt in his encounter with the Maid of the Alder, whose chief hedonistic impulse is possession too – yet in an entirely sexual sense.¹⁹ Ash and Alder are therefore examples of 'the metaphor of "the beast within the human"' – the innate animalistic impulses that threaten to govern human behaviour if not held in check by social norms.²⁰ The Alder Maid's role as a *femme fatale* corroborates the impression of a character operating outside socially acceptable boundaries.

The Maid of the Alder as a Gothic *femme fatale*

'Thy lips, like worms, / Travel over my cheek'. These lines from William Motherwell's poem 'The Demon Lady' preface chapter VI, in which Anodos meets the Maid of the Alder.²¹ Both the title and the lines already foreshadow the image of a *femme fatale* due to the interlacing of erotic imagery and notions of death and decay.

In the preceding chapters of the narrative, Anodos had been warned about the Maid by various characters such as the knight and the girl from the cottage – both virtuous characters Anodos had met on his journey. The knight's adventure with the Maid has stained his reputation; this is symbolised by the coat of rust on his armour. His misfortune mirrors the story about Sir Percivale, which Anodos had read in the cottage. This already contained important features of 'the damosel of the alder tree', such as 'fair words and false countenance', her 'beguil[ing]' behaviour and her leading the man away.²² In addition, the cottage girl warns Anodos that the Alder 'will smother you with her web of hair, if you let her near you at night'.²³ The web of hair indicates entrapment and mesmerising beauty. It

furthermore evokes the snake hair of the gorgon Medusa – one of the earliest instantiations of the *femme fatale* motif, 'who encodes the perils of sexual autonomy and aberration'.²⁴ Since the Maid of the Alder also represents sexual temptation on Anodos' way towards spiritual ennoblement, she adopts the typical function of the *femme fatale*, which is to 'stand in the way of the male hero's quest, providing an immediate goal that distracts the protagonist from the sacred one'.²⁵ Clearly fashioned as a *femme fatale* before her first actual appearance, the Maid of the Alder entraps the gullible Anodos in an opportune moment – when he is full of desire for his marble lady.

In chapter VI, Anodos pursues the marble woman with whom he has fallen hopelessly in love. When he sees a woman in the forest, Anodos mistakes her to be his beloved, not knowing it is the deceptive Maid of the Alder. Like the marble woman, the Alder Maid is described as a translucent white figure with the sweetest voice and a girlish figure that leaves an 'impression of intense loveliness' on Anodos,²⁶ but she is also intensely erotic. Her 'delicious laugh' as 'of one who has just received something long and patiently desired' significantly 'ends in a low musical moan' and she leads Anodos to a classical *locus amoenus* – her earthy grotto, which alludes to female genitalia.²⁷ In there, Anodos eventually succumbs to her charms and forgets about the outside world: 'And we had met at last in this same cave of greenery, while the summer night hung round us heavy with love, and the odours that crept through the silence from the sleeping woods were the only signs of an outer world that invaded our solitude'.²⁸ Anodos's being lured to the Alder Maid's grotto thus invokes the motif of fairy abduction.

Despite his eager responses to her advances, Anodos notices from the beginning that there is something strange about his companion: Her touch feels cold, he can never see her clearly and she carefully avoids showing him her back.²⁹ This strange detail recalls the Beech tree's warning to 'try walk around them' if Anodos should see others like her.³⁰

The reason for this is presented the following morning when Anodos sees an object which 'looked like an open coffin set up on one end' but which is in fact 'a rough representation of the human frame, only hollow, as if made of decaying bark torn from a tree.' As soon as the thing turns around, Anodos recognises his 'enchantress' but with 'dead lustreless eyes' and her rosy light replaced by 'a pale greenish hue'.³¹ John Patrick Pazdziora argues that the green colour 'identifies her as one of the fairy folk' but it could also emphasise her corpse-like look.³² This nightmarish vision is further exacerbated since she is about to deliver Anodos into the murderous hands of the Ash after she had effectively rid Anodos of his protective belt.

It is striking that the Alder Maid's body is verbally dismembered in this passage with particular emphasis on her hollow back, her colour and 'her dead lustreless eyes'.³³ This focus on individual body parts, especially those associated with female sexuality, contribute to a monstrous distortion and generalisation of the female body in 'an erasure of individuality and denial of integral personhood. Fragmentation is conducive to hybridity, the stuff of monstrosity'.³⁴ Her hollow back, in particular, is regarded with horror.

Similar to the hole-hearted Ash, the Maid's hollow back suggests unwholesomeness in a physical but also metaphysical sense. In his analysis of George MacDonald's *Lilith*, Dieter Petzold argues that monsters in MacDonald are generally depicted as unwholesome creatures to signify a lower level of moral development, 'perhaps in particular the human instinctive nature, which, to MacDonald as Victorian moralist, is suspect.'³⁵ The Maid's rotten core might thus symbolise her as well as Anodos' own moral corruption.

The images of the gaping hole and the torn bark furthermore invite interpretations of the Maid's back as a *vagina dentata*, 'a horrific image conveying the dread that the female will eat or castrate the male during sexual intercourse.'³⁶ Camille Paglia even speaks of '[w]oman's latent vampirism' because '[m]etaphorically, every vagina has secret teeth, for the male exits as less than when he entered.'³⁷ Such sexual anxieties about the draining of male power through the female body underlie the frequent link between the *femme fatale* and predatory monsters such as vampires and gorgons. Even euphemisms like *la petite mort* for sexual orgasm stress the perceived interconnection between sex and death. In *Phantastes*, the Alder Maid's sexuality poses an existential threat to Anodos which culminates in his post-coital, almost oxymoronic impression of the Maid of the Alder as a 'walking Death.'³⁸

Her hollow back and the *femme fatale* motif relate the Maid of the Alder to seductive female elves from Scandinavian folklore such as the *elle-maid*, *huldra*, *skogsrå*, and others. Despite some geographical variation, they share the features of physical beauty and attractiveness, a deformed back and a symbiotic relationship with the woods and marshes in which they live. In her typology of fairy creatures, Katherine Briggs draws on William Craigie's *Scandinavian Folklore* (1896) for her description of such 'Wood Elves': 'The females had pretty, smiling faces, but were hollow at the back, like the trunk of a hollow tree.'³⁹ Chronologically, MacDonald would have needed earlier sources than Craigie. He is likely to have found them in Thomas Keightley's *Fairy Mythology* (1828) and Benjamin Thorpe's *Northern Mythology* (1851), who are strongly indebted to the Danish folktale collector Just Mathias Thiele. Both publications preceded *Phantastes* by several years. Keightley's book proved particularly popular in the 19th century and underwent several reprintings and revised editions (for example, in 1833, 1850 and 1878).

In Keightley's folktale collection, the Danish 'Ellefolk or Elve-people' are said to 'live in the Elle-moors'. From the front the female is 'of a fair attractive countenance, but behind she is hollow like a dough-trough'. Men should be wary 'for it is very difficult to resist her' and her dance in the moonshine has the power to enchant.⁴⁰ This description is followed by several stories about human encounters with Elle-Maids that repeat the characteristics, such as 'The Elle-Maid near Ebeltoft' as well as an account of the 'strange connexion between the Elves and the trees' for '[t]hey not only frequent them, but they make an interchange of form with them.'⁴¹ In tree shape, they may walk about, visit human houses or guard certain parts of the country. As consequence, certain types of wood, especially that of elder and lime trees, may cause strange occurrences and misfortunes.⁴²

Benjamin Thorpe mentions the 'huldra' that – in some parts in Norway – 'is described as a handsome female, when seen in front, but is hollow behind, or else blue'.⁴³ Thorpe also writes about the *skogrå* in Swedish folklore, who are generally 'represented as evil, wanton and foreboders of misfortune' even though they might occasionally bring luck in hunting. When coming close to men, she appears as a beautiful woman but hides her back, where 'she appeared as hollow as a hollow tree or a baker's trough'.⁴⁴ A more oblique reference is made to the Swedish *löfferskor* who inhabit trees. As a consequence of their symbiotic relationship to their trees, they offer rewards for humans who take care of their trees or exact dreadful punishments for tree cutters.⁴⁵

The hollow, tree-like back clearly marks the Alder Maid as a fairy. These Scandinavian elves are not necessarily associated with a particular kind of tree even though elder and lime are said to be particularly popular with fairies, just as hawthorn and elder are in Anglo-Irish folklore.⁴⁶ MacDonald's decision to make his fairy *femme fatale* an alder tree requires further investigation into the biological facts and folklore beliefs about alders.

For one, the fact that alder wood turns from white to blood-red when cut makes them particularly suitable candidates for the anthropomorphisation of trees in fantastic literature.⁴⁷ Alders have also been linked to witches via their red hair. In the north of Germany there is a proverb which roughly translates as follows: neither red hair nor alder trees grow on wholesome ground. The unwholesome ground in this saying refers to the alder trees' natural habitat. They usually grow close to water or in boggy environments whose uncanny atmosphere has consequently been conferred to alder trees so that they are regarded as inherently evil trees.⁴⁸ Bogs are liminal spaces – they represent the fuzzy border between water and earth, between life and death, and are the sites of strange phenomena, crime and deception. The *ignes fatui* in folklore that deceive and lead wanderers to their destruction are imagined to be small fairies who prefer alder trees as their abode.⁴⁹ Since water and earth are both traditionally seen as female elements, it is perhaps not surprising that the fairies dancing on the moors and leading unhappy men astray are usually female. Incidentally, Jerrold Hogle uses the metaphor of the 'the primal and engulfing morass of the maternal' and its connection to 'abject monster figures' to describe the central focus of the Gothic.⁵⁰ Taken together, the aspects of liminality, femininity, deception and death make bogs a quintessentially Gothic landscape and the bleeding alders and their fairies their arboreal icons.

Another possible connection between fairies and alders might derive from Goethe's extremely popular ballad 'The Alderking' – a sinister male alder who preys on children. Goethe was strongly influenced by Herder's ballad 'Alderking's Daughter', Herder's translation of the Danish ballad 'Her Oluf'. Herder reputedly mistranslated the Danish phrase 'Eller-Kongens daatter' as Alderking's daughter instead of Elf-king's daughter. Hannah Berner, however, argues that Herder may have deliberately exploited the homonymous relation between both words in order to associate his elf-maiden with the sinister trees of haunting moors.⁵¹ Even though elf-king seems

more likely as the original meaning in the context of the Danish ballad, there is indeed a close relationship between the words for alder and elves in Danish, as can be seen in words like *elletræ* (alder tree) and *ellepige* (elf-girl). Whether a translation mistake or deliberate poetic licence caused Herder to turn the fairy in his ballad into an alder cannot be determined for certain, yet his 'Alderking's Daughter' and Goethe's 'Alderking' certainly contributed to the close affinity between malignant nature sprites and alders in German literature and the popular imagination. As an avid reader and translator of German literature, George MacDonald surely would have known Goethe's ballad and probably even Herder's.

Whereas the degree of influence of these German works on *Phantastes* remains uncertain, there are more overt parallels to the ballad of 'Thomas the Rhymer' as related in Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802), Keats's 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' (1819) and Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590). In all these works the motif of the *femme fatale* is inextricably linked to the motif of fairy abduction, which endows the female perpetrators with fantastic as well as Gothic qualities that are also discernible in the Maid of the Alder.

Based on the medieval romance *Thomas of Erceldoune*, the ballad of 'Thomas the Rhymer' contains the central elements of fairy abduction, a mortal's sojourn in Elfland, the human-sized 'queen of fair Elfland' with whom the male protagonist becomes infatuated, and a special tree.⁵² The latter is called the 'Eildon Tree'; it serves as a landmark and firmly sets the story in the Scottish border region. Underneath this tree, Thomas first spies the fairy queen and it also canopies the fateful kiss that seals Thomas's thralldom.⁵³ Although the Eildon tree species is not specified, it serves as a portal to the otherworldly Elfland. MacDonald's *Phantastes* concludes with Anodos dreaming underneath a tree about his experiences in Fairy Land and listening to the Beech tree's voice, so that a tree likewise functions as a fuzzy border between worlds. The road to Elfland in 'Thomas the Rhymer' lies between the paths 'of righteousness' and 'wickedness'.⁵⁴ Elfland is thus a place of moral liminality – just like Fairy Land in *Phantastes*. The erotic dimension of the fairy abduction also links MacDonald's narrative to 'Thomas the Rhymer', even though Thomas eventually returns from Elfland relatively unscathed after seven years of service. Whereas the connection between sexuality and power is clearly emphasised, the Scottish ballad is less concerned with death.

The knight in Keats's 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' is less lucky. Whereas Keats also fashions his *femme fatale* as a 'fairy's child' with wild eyes and long hair, she does not abduct her victim to a morally ambiguous Elfland.⁵⁵ Instead, she takes the knight to 'her elfin grot' which is echoed in the grotto to which the Alder Maid leads Anodos.⁵⁶ The sexual allusions are similarly strong and both men awake to a vision of horror – in Keats's ballad the knight suffers from a nightmare vision of the dame's previous victims with their ghost-like pallor and 'starv'd lips' gaping '[w]ith horrid warning'.⁵⁷

Similar to the knight, whose armour rusts after his encounter with the Alder Maid in *Phantastes*, the knight in Keats's ballad has fallen from his chivalric code of honour and given into sexual temptation. The fact that he is 'alone and palely loitering'⁵⁸ makes him the antithesis of the chivalric knight and implies his social ostracisation, which is an inextricable part of the sexual threat the *femme fatale* poses: 'The permanence of the *femme fatale* as a sexual persona is part of the weary weight of eroticism, beneath which both ethics and religion founder.'⁵⁹ Even though Paglia ignores the fact that sexuality and eroticism are – to a large extent – social constructs too, she draws attention to the long tradition of imagining animalistic sexuality as the antithesis of civilised human society. For the knight figures, the encounter with the *femme fatale* consequently results in a social death. The fact that Keats's knight is 'alone and palely loitering' suggests a living death which is reinforced by the absence of life in nature as the 'sedge has withered from the lake / and no birds sing.'⁶⁰ The lifeless body of water in the ballad links the text to the watery habitat of alder trees again. Moreover, the Alder Maid regards Anodos' plight with a look of 'careless dislike on her beautifully moulded features'.⁶¹ Her own mercilessness echoes the epithet of Keats's Dame so that both women are portrayed as essentially amoral. Keats's ballad and MacDonald's narrative therefore resemble each other in their use of a long-haired, entrancing, yet amoral fairy *femme fatale*, the figure of the fallen chivalric ideal and the pronounced link between sex and death.

As an important reference to chivalric romance, Joseph Sigman has pointed out the Alder Maid's very similar role 'to that of Malory's demon lady and Spenser's Duessa and his false Florimell'.⁶² Duessa is a 'false Sorceress / that many errant Knight hath brought to wretchedness' in *The Faerie Queene*.⁶³ MacDonald uses several lines from *The Faerie Queene* as an epigraph in *Phantastes*, and his Maid of the Alder shows indeed many parallels to Spenser's Duessa.⁶⁴ Just as the Alder Maid poses as the marble lady to seduce Anodos and deliver him into the hands of the Ash tree, Duessa – in the shape of a virtuous and beautiful maid (Fidessa) – deceives the Redcrosse Knight and brings him to the monstrous Orgoglio.

In addition to these plot elements, a transformed tree is of particular importance in this context. After the Redcrosse Knight and Duessa have been travelling together for some time, they reach 'two goodly trees' whose 'arms' are with 'gray Moss over-cast' but in whose shade 'the fearful Shepherd' never sat nor plays his pipe 'but shun'd th' unlucky Ground'.⁶⁵ The latter indicates a supernatural or cursed atmosphere around the trees. Yet, together with the moss, which prefers moist conditions, Spenser's description evokes similar superstitious connotations as the alder tree. In the subsequent lines, the tree's arms are revealed to be more than a metaphor. When the Redcrosse Knight cuts a twig from one of the trees, 'small drops of gory Blood' issue from the wound because the tree is Fradubio, a man who had been transformed into a tree by Duessa.⁶⁶ The bleeding tree is primarily intended to demonstrate the tree's anthropomorphic core yet it recalls the blood-red wood of freshly cut alder trees.

Fradubio then relates how he and his true love (the second tree) were cursed into arboreal shape because Fradubio had once doubted and abandoned his lady for Duessa, with whom he lived in enchanted bliss for some time until he discovered Duessa's real shape:

I chaunst to see her in her proper hew,
Bathing her self in origane and thyme
A filthy foule old woman I did vew,
That euer to haue touch'd her, I did deadly rew.

Her neather partes misshapen, monstrous,
Were hidd in water, that I could not see,
But they did seem more foule and hideous,
Than Woman's Shape Man would beleue to bee.⁶⁷

Once again, the *femme fatale* is portrayed as a deceptive sorceress with a close affinity to nature, especially water and earth. Duessa's initial sexual appeal is turned into a horrifying vision of monstrosity by the verbal dissection of her body and her dehumanisation through notions of obscurity, elemental hybridity, and an existence beyond male comprehension.

Seductive and destructive nature personified

As these brief excursions into folklore and selected literary works have shown, the alluring yet dangerous fairy *femme fatale* is usually inextricably linked to nature. Camille Paglia sees a general tendency to conflate nature and women in the form of the *femme fatale* as a result of men's attempt to repress both:

The more nature is beaten back in the west, the more the *femme fatale* reappears, as a return of the repressed. She is the spectre of the west's bad conscience about nature. She is the moral ambiguity of nature.⁶⁸

Paglia's argument reveals a central problem of a feminisation of nature. As a synthesis of patriarchal fears about women and nature and the desire to control both, feminised nature is set in diametrical opposition to masculinised society, and there seems little hope for harmonious coexistence.

The knight's social death has already been discussed as an example of this clash between nature and culture, yet it also becomes vivid in one of the Alder Maid's foil characters: the marble woman. In a Jungian sense, Sigman interprets the marble woman as embodying the figure of the muse and thus a positive aspect of the anima. In this role, he compares her function to that of Dante's Beatrice and Spenser's Una.⁶⁹

The marble woman's relation to art is obvious from her first appearance because she is found entombed in a block of alabaster and freed by Anodos through song. To stress her status as a work of art even further, MacDonald furnishes this scene and the setting with various references to the classical myth of Pygmalion and his artistic creation of the ideal woman.⁷⁰ Her statuesque body and confinement in alabaster underline her opposition to the Alder Maid's hollow frame and natural surroundings. The pair therefore curiously corresponds to Mulvey-Roberts' distinction between the classical and the Gothic female body: 'The classical female body, as opposed to the unruly or transgressive female Gothic body, is represented by the closed mouth, enclosed body and locked household door.'⁷¹ As the ideal woman of patriarchal society, the marble woman is confined to mute beauty, but devoid of any sexual agency. Later in the narrative, she is revealed to be the knight's lady who waits for his return, which also explains her rejection of Anodos' advances. Hence, she represents the faithful wife and ideal woman of courtly love who must not be approached with sexual intentions and who is firmly situated within the codes and norms of society.

Despite the idealisation of the marble woman and the demonisation of the Alder Maid in *Phantastes*, MacDonald also offers decidedly positive examples of feminised nature in his narrative. The Beech tree is another foil character to the Alder Maid and represents nature's protective aspect. Unlike the Alder, the Beech unselfishly rescues Anodos from the Ash and accepts that her love for him is unrequited because she regards her vegetative existence as inferior to Anodos' human one.⁷² Her only desire is to become a real woman, and the girdle she gives to Anodos symbolises chaste and pure female love. Docherty writes about their relationship: 'With Anodos and this Beech, MacDonald is allegorising an attitude towards the world of nature directly contrary to the attitude of exploitation that has prevailed for centuries in the West.'⁷³ This interpretation, however, depends on what is meant by exploitation. Anodos certainly does not exploit the Beech in any sexual sense but he gladly uses her as a shelter, takes the girdle made of her leafy hair, and offers nothing in return. With her unselfish attitude and her generous gifts, the Beech resembles the maternal image of nature.

The ancient conceptualisation of nature as a mother also finds expression in *Phantastes*, especially after Anodos' death:

Now that I lay in her bosom, the whole earth, and each of her many births, was as a body to me, at my will. I seemed to feel the great heart of the mother beating into mine, and feeding me with her own life, her own essential being and nature.⁷⁴

The passage exemplifies the desired physical as well as spiritual union with nature, which is compared to the foetus in the maternal womb. Despite the comfort of the mother-child

constellation, the imagery in this passage has erotic connotations. A similar eroticisation of the Earth itself occurs just before Anodos meets the Maid of the Alder: 'Earth drew me towards her bosom; I felt as if I could fall down and kiss her.'⁷⁵ Whether as mother or as mistress, Earth and nature are invariably gendered as female. And, as the passage above also shows, female nature is always connected to both life and death. Feminised nature in *Phantastes* is consequently both the womb and tomb, the lover and killer. These configurations correspond to the 'dialectical image of nature as the active unity of opposites in tension' that were both traditionally identified 'with the female sex and were projections of human perceptions onto the external world.'⁷⁶ John Pridmore also recognises MacDonald's use of an ambiguous model of nature and that this 'model is inescapably anthropocentric. It is as if we were describing *someone*.'⁷⁷ The problem of this personification, however, lies in its use of gender stereotypes.

The dialectical image of feminised nature is constructed as irreconcilable antipodes that seem to exclude all possibility for shades in between. Gender stereotypes about human women are projected onto nature and vice versa, creating one-dimensional characters that are either idealised or demonised. Whereas one might argue that such one-dimensional representations result from the genre conventions of the fairy tale and romances, the women figures in *Phantastes* are in stark contrast to the multidimensional and dynamic protagonist. As mutually exclusive opposites, Mother Nature/Beech tree on the one hand and the Alder Maid on the other hand perpetuate the misogynistic Madonna/whore dichotomy. In addition, both roles can be considered as subservient to male needs. The feminisation of nature thereby runs the risk of continuing the patriarchal fiction of masculine human dominance over nature.

Despite these problematic implications, the Alder Maid is a fascinating character with a relatively high degree of autonomy. Unlike the other women characters in the narrative, she seems remarkably cunning and possesses enchanting powers and sexual agency. Even though her hollow back and vampiric lust for Anodos suggest a parasitical existence, she seems fairly independent in her seduction of Anodos and in her moral indifference to his fate after their night together. She is even beyond poetic justice as she receives no retribution for her actions. As a personification of untamed, sensual and dangerous nature, she is allowed to persist.

Conclusion

George MacDonald's Maid of the Alder is a literary fairy who is firmly set in the Gothic tradition and rooted in folkloric and literary sources as well as in gendered constructions of nature as female. Having first investigated the various fairies and elves in MacDonald's *Phantastes*, I subsequently argued that the Alder Maid's Gothic monstrosity derives from her body's associations with images of decay, death and predatory sexuality. The Maid of the Alder's tree-like hollow back, in particular, represents animalistic desires and a

death-like loss of male sexual agency. Yet her hollow back and the literary motifs of fairy abduction and the *femme fatale* with supernatural powers also link the Alder Maid to nature and folklore.

Her fairy nature, her unusual appearance and explicit identification as an alder tree have consequently warranted an exploration of the Alder Maid's folkloric and literary sources. The blood-red wood of alders and their boggy habitat have endowed this tree species with a sinister and supernatural reputation. The hollow back and the seduction/abduction pattern strongly suggest an imaginative kinship with Scandinavian wood elves, whereas her portrayal as a fairy *femme fatale* may have been partially inspired by literary works like the ballad of 'Thomas the Rhymer', Keats's 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' and Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*.

By comparing the Alder Maid with her foil characters in *Phantastes*, the final part of the analysis discussed her personification of nature's seductive and destructive potential. In an antithetical positioning of feminised nature as either idealised nurturer or demonic destroyer, the Maid of the Alder's associations with female sexuality, death and animalistic nature make her the nemesis of patriarchal society and its moral codes. Such a feminisation of nature involves the danger of implying that women and nature must be harnessed by men. However, the Alder Maid's success in her designs and her continued existence also demonstrate that nature is eventually beyond human control. MacDonald's Gothic fairy is a creative amalgam of folkloric and literary various sources and she is an arboreal *femme fatale*. Unscathed and unchecked, the Alder Maid keeps stalking the woods of Fairy Land – beautiful and perilous, just like Fairy Land itself.

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Michaela Hausmann

Notes

1. Melody Green uses this description indiscriminately for the settings of *Phantastes*, *Lilith* and 'The Golden Key'. Even though I agree with Green that these fantastic worlds serve to bring MacDonald's characters 'closer to God, and closer to each other', they portray a variety of sceneries – from Arcadian idylls to apocalyptic wastelands (Melody Green, 'George MacDonald and Celtic Christianity', *North Wind* 35 (2015): 103-13 (112)).
2. J.R.R. Tolkien, 'On Fairy Stories', in *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), 109-61 (111).
3. For *Lilith*, see Dieter Petzold, 'Beasts and Monsters in MacDonald's Fantasy Stories', *North Wind* 14 (1995): 4-21 (18); and Stephen Prickett, *Victorian Fantasy*, 2nd rev. edn (1979; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005), 202. For the *femme fatale*, see Michaela Hausmann, '*Music Makers and World Creators: The Forms and Functions of Embedded Poems in British Fantasy Narratives*' (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2020), 76. For the Jungian archetype, see Joseph Sigman, 'Death's Ecstasies: Transformation and Rebirth in George MacDonald's *Phantastes*', *English Studies in Canada* 2 (1976): 203-26 (208).
4. Marie Mulvey-Roberts, 'The Female Gothic Body', in *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 106-19 (108).
5. George MacDonald, *Phantastes*, ed. John Pennington and Roderick McGillis (1858; Hamden, CT: Winged Lion Press, 2017), 17.

6. MacDonald, *Phantastes*, 16.
7. Tolkien, 'On Fairy Stories', 111.
8. John Docherty, 'Dryad Fancies and Fairy Imaginations in *Phantastes*', *North Wind* 24 (2005): 16-28 (23).
9. MacDonald, *Phantastes*, 9.
10. MacDonald, *Phantastes*, 28-9, 44.
11. MacDonald, *Phantastes*, 15.
12. MacDonald, *Phantastes*, 18-20.
13. MacDonald, *Phantastes*, 15.
14. Roderick McGillis, '*Phantastes* and *Lilith*: Femininity and Freedom', in *The Gold Thread: Essays on George MacDonald*, ed. William Raeper (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), 31-55 (41).
15. MacDonald, *Phantastes*, 29.
16. MacDonald, *Phantastes*, 27.
17. MacDonald, *Phantastes*, 47.
18. MacDonald, *Phantastes*, 30.
19. MacDonald, *Phantastes*, 47.
20. Petzold, 'Beasts and Monsters in MacDonald's Fantasy Stories', 14.
21. MacDonald, *Phantastes*, 41.
22. MacDonald, *Phantastes*, 14.
23. MacDonald, *Phantastes*, 9-10.
24. Mulvey-Roberts, 'The Female Gothic Body', 106.
25. David Leeming, 'Femme fatale', in *The Oxford Companion to World Mythology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195156690.001.0001/acref-9780195156690-e-547>, accessed 3 August 2021.
26. MacDonald, *Phantastes*, 46.
27. A *locus amoenus* is Latin for 'pleasant place'. As a literary topos, it denotes a place of natural beauty and seclusion that serves as a meeting place for lovers.
28. MacDonald, *Phantastes*, 46.
29. MacDonald, *Phantastes*, 45-6.
30. MacDonald, *Phantastes*, 30.
31. MacDonald, *Phantastes*, 47.
32. John Patrick Pazdziora, *Haunted Childhoods in George MacDonald* (Leiden and Boston: Brill & Rodopi, 2020), 168.
33. MacDonald, *Phantastes*, 47.
34. Mulvey-Roberts, 'The Female Gothic Body', 11.
35. Petzold, 'Beasts and Monsters in MacDonald's Fantasy Stories', 13.
36. Mulvey-Roberts, 'The Female Gothic Body', 115. William Gray, for instance, remarks that the scene 'expresses a horror and disgust of the vagina both as a displaced anus and as the site of castration' (William Gray, 'George MacDonald, Julia Kristeva, and the Black Sun', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 36, no. 4 (1996): 877-93 (883)).
37. Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 13.
38. MacDonald, *Phantastes*, 47.
39. Katherine Briggs, *The Vanishing People: A Study of Traditional Fairy Beliefs* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1978), 75.
40. Thomas Keightley, *The Fairy Mythology: Illustrative of the Romance and Superstition of Various Countries*, vol. 1 (1828; London: H.G. Bohn, 1850), 81.
41. Keightley, *The Fairy Mythology*, 92.
42. Keightley, *The Fairy Mythology*, 93.
43. Benjamin Thorpe, *Northern Mythology: Comprising the Principal Popular Traditions and Superstitions of Scandinavia, North Germany, and The Netherlands*, vol. 2 (London: Edward Lumley, 1851), 3.
44. Thorpe, *Northern Mythology*, 73-4.
45. Thorpe, *Northern Mythology*, 73.

46. See Ben Simon, 'Tree Traditions and Folklore from Northeast Ireland', *Arboricultural Journal* 24, no. 1 (2000): 15-40 (19); and Briggs, *The Vanishing People*, 74-5.
47. See Leopold Hartley Grindon, *The Trees of Old England: Sketches of the Aspects, Associations, and Uses of Those Which Constitute the Forests, and Give Effect to the Scenery of Our Native Country* (London: Pitman, 1868), 83.
48. Hanns Bächtold Stäubli, *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, vol. 2: C.M.B-Frautragen (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1987), 922. In German, the proverb reads, 'Rotes Haar und Erlenloden wachsen nicht auf gutem Boden'.
49. Hans Ehrlich, 'Die Waldflora in ihren Bezeichnungen: Eine kulturhistorische Studie', *Deutsche Forstzeitung: Organ für die Interessen des Waldbaues, des Forstschutzes und der Forstbenutzung* 6 (1891/2): 142-4 (142).
50. Hogle, Introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, 10.
51. Hannah Berner, "'Her Oluf hand rider saa vide': Stationen der Wanderung einer dänischen Ballade von Herder bis Heine", in *Fremde Ähnlichkeiten: Die 'Große Wanderung' als Herausforderung der Komparatistik*, ed. Frank Zipfel (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2017), 114-39 (117).
52. Walter Scott, 'Thomas the Rhymer', in *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border: Consisting of Historical and Romantic Ballads*, vol. 2 (London: Longman & Rees, 1803), 269-73, line 15.
53. Scott, 'Thomas the Rhymer', lines 4, 17-24.
54. Scott, 'Thomas the Rhymer', lines 43, 47.
55. John Keats, 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', in *Keats's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox (New York and London: Norton, 2009), 338-42, line 14.
56. Keats, 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', line 29.
57. Keats, 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', lines 41-2.
58. Keats, 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', line 46.
59. Paglia, *Sexual Personae*, 15.
60. Keats, 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', lines 46-8.
61. MacDonald, *Phantastes*, 47.
62. Sigman, 'Death's Ecstasies', 219.
63. Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A.C. Hamilton (London/New York: Longman, 1977), 1.2.34, lines 8-9.
64. See Hausmann, 'Music Makers' and World Creators, 88-9. Even the title of *Phantastes* has a source in *The Faerie Queene* (Hausmann, 'Music Makers' and World Creators, 65-7).
65. Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 1.2.28.
66. Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 1.2.28, line 9.
67. Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 1.2.40-1.
68. Paglia, *Sexual Personae*, 13.
69. See Sigman, 'Death's Ecstasies', 208, 219. Una is indeed the virtuous female counterpart to Duessa.
70. MacDonald, *Phantastes*, 32, 34.
71. Mulvey-Roberts, 'The Female Gothic Body', 107.
72. MacDonald, *Phantastes*, 29-30.
73. Docherty, 'Dryad Fancies', 21.
74. MacDonald, *Phantastes*, 190.
75. MacDonald, *Phantastes*, 43.
76. Carolyn Merchant, 'Nature as Female', in *Ecocriticism: The Essential Reader*, ed. Ken Hiltner (Routledge: Abingdon and New York, 2015), 10-34 (14, 10).
77. John Pridmore, 'Nature and Fantasy', *North Wind* 19 (2000): 2-8 (4).



Carl Friedrich Hampe,
'Knight's Castle in the Moonlight' (1817).

Fairies in Ann Radcliffe's 'The Glow-worm': The communal aspect of art

Györgyi Szirákiné Kovács

The present paper focuses on the fairies in the poem 'The Glow-worm' in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). The novel abounds in poems; their presence in the subtitle *A Romance, Interspersed With Some Pieces of Poetry* suggests their importance and their integral role in the entirety of the novel, yet the main body of literary criticism omits them from the analysis of the novel. I approach 'The Glow-worm' from the perspective of Radcliffe's ideas on the supernatural as detailed in her posthumous dialogue, 'On the Supernatural in Poetry' (1826). In the dialogue, Mr W expresses the notion that people who are characterised by sensibility are able to communicate with each other through their works of art and form a community. Ingrid Horrocks noticed that a similar notion is present in the way Radcliffe's heroines compose poems, by drawing from a shared consciousness which includes past and present British literary figures and the nature that they are all part of.¹

In this essay I argue that the fairies in the poem 'The Glow-worm' are depicted as a community of artists and their dance as an active creation and appreciation of art. I will build on Mr W's ideas to show how the poem associates sensibility with poetic affinity and the ability to experience the supernatural in the metaphorical discussion of the fairies in the dialogue which introduces the poem, and in the character of the fairies themselves in the poem. I will also demonstrate how the poem expresses Emily's own anxieties about becoming and being accepted as a poet.

The posthumous dialogue

'On the Supernatural in Poetry' was published three years after Radcliffe's death, in 1826 in the *New Monthly Magazine*, and consists of a dialogue between two characters from the frame narrative of Radcliffe's novel *Gaston de Blondville* (1826). The title was given to the text by the *Magazine*, as is explained in the footnote:

Having been permitted to extract the above eloquent passages from the manuscripts of the author of the 'Mysteries of Udolpho,' we have given this title to them, though certainly they were not

intended by the writer to be offered as a formal or deliberate essay, under this, or any other denomination. They were, originally, part of an INTRODUCTION, to the Romance, or Phantasie, which is about to appear. The discussion is supposed to be carried on by two travellers in Shakspeare's native county, Warwickshire.²

This discussion is not repeated in the novel; instead, the following words mark its absence: 'Here ensued a conversation on illusions of the imagination and on the various powers of exciting them, shown by English poets, especially by Shakespeare and Milton, which it is unnecessary to repeat in this place.'³ The decision to extract the more theoretical part of the introduction was probably made by Henry Colburn, publisher of the novel *Gaston de Blondville* and co-founder of the *New Monthly Magazine*. According to Radcliffe's biographer Thomas Noon Talfourd, the novel was likely written during the winter of 1802, after Radcliffe's visit to Kenilworth Castle, which serves as the location of both the frame narrative and the body of the novel itself.⁴ If we accept Talfourd's estimation, that constitutes a five-year gap between her last published novel *The Italian* (1797) and the composition of *Gaston de Blondville* with the dialogue in its Introduction. This gap is longer than Radcliffe's usual maximum of three years between publishing her novels, but it still puts her dialogue in a context closer to the novels published in her lifetime, in contrast to the year 1826 in which *Gaston* was published.

The discussion in 'On the Supernatural in Poetry' was therefore not intended as a philosophical treatise. It is characterised by a free association of ideas, expressed by Mr W (in the novel, Mr Willoughton) to his friend. Mr W has a vast knowledge of literature and regards himself as an expert on taste, and he talks about English literary figures whose works he admires. He speaks about literature to his friend Mr S (in the novel, Mr Simpson), who is, in contrast, represented as a man who is usually more interested in dinner than in literature. Both Mr W's opinion in the extracted dialogue and his behaviour illustrate his expertise, which serves as a model on how to receive the body of the novel. Nevertheless, as it was removed from the novel, in the reception of Radcliffe it has been treated as a separate work. In David Sandner's 2004 edited collection, it is included among such works as 'The Fairy Way of Writing' (1712) by Joseph Addison and 'On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition' (1827) by Walter Scott.⁵ It is regarded as Radcliffe's *ars poetica* by many scholars, such as Dale Townshend, who makes assumptions about Radcliffe's ideas on Shakespeare based on 'On the Supernatural in Poetry'.⁶ Angela Wright points out that the 'attendant circumstances'⁷ that Mr W talks about in the dialogue, where Radcliffe is retrospectively articulating her artistic principles, are already present in the supernatural scenes in novels written earlier such as *The Italian* (1797).⁸ Similarly, Nelson C. Smith looks to the dialogue as a source to learn more about Radcliffe's attitude towards sensibility.⁹ Robert Miles calls the dialogue the aesthetic justification of Radcliffe's art, and relies on

Mr W's distinction between terror and horror in the dialogue to differentiate between Radcliffe's and Matthew Lewis's Gothic styles.¹⁰ I agree that Mr W's views articulate an aesthetic which she employed in the earlier novels, including *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). More specifically, I will show how the poem 'The Glow-worm' illustrates one of the key points Mr W also makes.

Speaking of Shakespeare, Mr W raises an elaborate rhetorical question to start off his literary musings:

‘Where is now the undying spirit,’ said he, ‘that could so exquisitely perceive and feel?—that could inspire itself with the various characters of this world, and create worlds of its own; to which the grand and the beautiful, the gloomy and the sublime of visible Nature, up-called not only corresponding feelings, but passions’.¹¹

Even though Mr W talks about a literary figure, he uses the vocabulary of religion to express Shakespeare's superiority over the common people and even other poets. Shakespeare is thus removed from the field of literature and held up as an embodiment of a system of beliefs. Fred Botting and Scott Wilson note that in the 18th century, Shakespeare's name was the focal point of an emerging aesthetic which favoured genius and imagination. Edward Young, Horace Walpole, and Richard Hurd all offered a distinctively 18th-century perspective of Shakespeare's work, thus establishing a new aesthetic.¹² Mr W talks about Shakespeare's 'undying spirit' and he endows Shakespeare with a creative power similar to that of God. Radcliffe's choice of words when talking about Shakespeare was characteristic of the period.¹³ Pope called Shakespeare 'divine', and Samuel Johnson used the word 'immortal'.¹⁴ In his *Essay on Sepulchres* (1809), William Godwin also toys with the idea that long-dead literary figures such as Shakespeare or Milton are emancipated from mortality.¹⁵

Terry Castle demonstrates that, during the Enlightenment, ghosts became internalised; they were absorbed into the world of thought.¹⁶ Writing about Radcliffe's most famous novel, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, she draws attention to the emotional power of the novel to show that it results in displacing the supernatural into everyday life.¹⁷ Through sensibility, the mental image or spiritual essence of a person becomes more important than the corporeal reality, so both living and dead people can be unchangingly preserved in one's imagination.¹⁸

As Castle points out, this phenomenon is conveyed by the very language of the novel; she gives the example of Emily's and Valancourt's wedding, which takes place in an 'enchanted palace'.¹⁹ A similar method is used in the essay 'On the Supernatural in Poetry': using the rhetoric of religion, Radcliffe makes a connection between poetic creativity and the supernatural. Later in the dialogue, Radcliffe makes this connection more explicit:

'I am speaking of the only real witch—the witch of the poet; and all our notions and feelings connected with terror accord with his.'²⁰ Here, Mr W links poetic creativity to the supernatural and also associates both with the feeling of terror, which Edmund Burke had identified as the key component of the sublime.²¹ Mr W attributes great prestige to this kind of literature:

all these are circumstances which the deepest sensibility only could have suggested, and which, if you read them a thousand times, still continue to affect you almost as much as at first. I thrill with delightful awe, even while I recollect and mention them, as instances of the exquisite art of the poet.²²

Sensibility was a broad term in the 18th century; its meaning included a belief in natural goodness and compassion and was associated with the cult of feeling.²³ In Radcliffe's novels, sensibility is closely linked with poetic creativity, especially in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, in which the heroine Emily composes many poems that serve as signs of her exquisite sensibility. Mr W also makes this connection in the dialogue: the greatness of the ghost scene in *Hamlet* is evidence of Shakespeare's own 'deepest sensibility', and it is this sensibility which enables him to produce such high-quality literature that can be read with pleasure over and over again.

Sensibility also enables people to establish emotional connections with each other. Mr W implies that those who possess sensibility can both produce valuable literature and enjoy such literary works, and so they share a valuable aesthetic experience through literature. Mr W refers to this understanding between poets and readers later as well: when speaking of the importance of the attendant circumstances, he remarks that 'this must immediately be understood by those who have bowed the willing soul to the poet.'²⁴

Through such a deep experience of literary works, the reader may feel a connection with the author that is both voluntary and overwhelming ('bowed the willing soul to the poet'). According to Mr W, a poet himself is characterised by 'the soul of poetry',²⁵ which he finds difficult to define, but it seems to entail the ability to have a lasting effect on the reader. The readers who possess sensibility can fully understand such a poet's works, and so they can join him in the aesthetic experience. The supernatural aspect of this inference is that great poets who are deceased can still communicate through their writings (Mr W lists Shakespeare, Milton, Thomas Gray, William Collins, and James Thomson). This connection might seem one-sided, yet Mr W's choice of words (such as 'undying spirit') and his enthusiasm imply the continuing existence of the author and thus the possibility of a more active connection between author and reader.

In her dialogue, Radcliffe uses the words 'poets' and 'poetry', but their meaning is extended to other forms of art: her chief examples are Shakespeare's dramas, but she applies very similar notions to reflect on her own novels as well. Music can also be included

in this discussion, as there are plenty of examples in Radcliffe's works which emphasise the power of music to affect the listener, such as the seduction scene in *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), or Radcliffe's posthumously published long poem *Salisbury Plains* (1826), in which a druid triumphs over an evil wizard through the power of music.²⁶ A shared understanding between poets and readers is also indicated in the poem 'The Glow-worm', which itself is highly musical, having 'a sort of tripping measure', as Emily says before she recites it to St Aubert. Indeed, St Aubert's words on fairies and glow-worms may be taken as foreshadowing the interdependence of words and music in the poem: 'The Glow-worm lends his light, and they in return charm him with music, and the dance.'²⁷ Artist and audience are also bound together by a 'charm': the poem is introduced through Emily's conversation with St Aubert, a true man of sensibility, whose fanciful ideas seem to have been 'anticipated' by her in the poem ('I have anticipated you' – she tells him before the recital), and who sinks into a deep reverie after hearing it.²⁸

Sensibility enables people to properly appreciate works of art through emotional connection and common understanding with the author. Moreover, sensibility also enables people to produce art which is appreciated by others who possess sensibility as well, forming a community. Mr W's idea of the connection between poets and readers embodies a community of artists.

The reception of Radcliffe's poetry

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Emily composes many poems which are included in the novel, along with those composed by her suitor Valancourt, and during their travels they spend much time reading poetry together. In *The Romance of the Forest*, Adeline catches the eye of her future suitor Theodore when she is reciting poetry and Theodore makes a favourable impression on Adeline by appreciating the poem. Nathaniel Paradise notes that, beginning with Charlotte Smith, there was a tendency in the final decade of the 18th century to include poems in novels. He also remarks that in all these works poetic creativity is a sign of the heroine's sensibility and so of her worth in the world of the novel.²⁹ Poetry shows that the heroine would be deemed worthy by Mr W to join in the community of artists.

As with her novels, Radcliffe's poems often featured the supernatural by invoking the same kind of atmosphere that Mr W values so much in Shakespeare's plays. The following stanza is from *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), from a poem titled 'Evening', which describes the change from day to night:

Still through the deep'ning gloom of bow'ry shades
To Fancy's eye fantastic forms appear;
Low whispering echoes steal along the glades
And thrill the ear with wildly-pleasing fear.³⁰

Here, the twilight creates an aesthetically pleasing atmosphere, in which a personified Fancy is identified as the source of the supernatural. Fear constitutes an important element of this atmosphere and receives the adjunct 'wildly-pleasing'. Charlotte Smith invokes a similar atmosphere in her *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784), for example in 'Sonnet XXXII To Melancholy'. In this poem, the speaker takes on the role of the literary genius and meets the ghost of the poet and dramatist Thomas Otway.³¹ In 'The Glow-worm', Radcliffe portrays the supernatural as an aesthetic expression of poetic genius.

The communal aspect of Radcliffe's poetry is noticed by Horrocks, who writes that, in her novels, reading and quoting poetry constitute a form of communication, linking the minds of the reader and the poet.³² This concept echoes Mr W's description of the connection between author and reader: Horrocks also emphasises the emotional aspect of this connection: in experiencing poetry the reader believed that they experienced the same feelings as the poet. This touches upon some of the central issues of the philosophy of sensibility as developed earlier in the 18th century. In his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), David Hume establishes both the individuality and the social nature of human emotions. He also claims that feelings are trans-subjective entities that pass between people, almost as if by contagion, calling the movement of feeling between people 'sympathy'.³³

Horrocks also argues that, when the heroine Emily composes a poem, it is described as involving a lack of agency on her part, whereby instead 'her ideas arranged themselves'. This indicates a way of composition in which Emily draws from a shared consciousness she is part of.³⁴ Horrocks interprets the frequency of the quotations in certain parts of the novel as Radcliffe's own practice of drawing from a shared consciousness.³⁵ The idea that the source of poetic inspiration is something greater than the poet themselves, or that it even originated in dreams, was popular around the same time. This is how Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) – which is regarded as the first Gothic novel – was said to have been written and this is also how Samuel Taylor Coleridge claimed to have composed his *Kubla Khan* (1797; published 1816).

Nathaniel Paradise draws attention to the solitary nature of experiencing poetry. He points out that, in *Udolpho*, poems are written in solitude and in response to emotional stimuli as a natural product of the meditation of the poetic soul.³⁶ Bearing this in mind, the poetic experience seems to be characterised by both a sense of solitude and a sense of community. This duality is present in 'The Glow-worm' as well. Community is provided by shared understanding with literary figures – both long deceased and contemporary but absent. Deidre Lynch connects this sense of community to the then emerging nationalism as well as sentimentalism: mourning and loving long-dead British literary figures strengthened national unity, which in consequence brought the sense of community.³⁷ The reverence towards the dead authors appealed to the need for melancholy, which was characteristic of sentimentalism.

The fairies in 'The Glow-worm'

The poem 'The Glow-worm' appears early in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, in the very first chapter. The heroine Emily is still living with her parents in La Vallée, and Radcliffe dedicates a great length of the first volume to the introduction of her character, her poem contributing to this purpose. 'The Glow-worm' is composed by Emily, and it serves to demonstrate her poetic creativity and thus her sensibility, similarly to the practice noticed by Paradise in Charlotte Smith.³⁸

This poem is the very first of the many poems written by Emily in the novel. She is unsure of her poetic skills, and shows the poem to her father, asking for his opinion. In this scene, before mentioning the poem, Emily and her father are walking in the woods, and nature inspires them to experience aesthetic pleasure, which entails intimations of the supernatural:

'The evening gloom of woods was always delightful to me,' said St. Aubert ... 'in my youth this gloom used to call forth to my fancy a thousand fairy visions, and romantic images; and, I own, I am not yet wholly insensible of that high enthusiasm, which wakes the poet's dream.

'O my dear father, ... how exactly you describe what I have felt so often, and which I thought nobody had ever felt but myself! ... Now the breeze swells again. It is like the voice of some supernatural being — the voice of the spirit of the woods, that watches over them by night. Ah! what light is yonder? But it is gone. And now it gleams again, near the root of that large chestnut: look, sir!'

'Are you such an admirer of nature,' said St. Aubert, 'and so little acquainted with her appearances as not to know that for the glow-worm? But come,' added he gaily, 'step a little further, and we shall see fairies, perhaps; they are often companions. The glow-worm lends his light, and they in return charm him with music, and the dance. Do you see nothing tripping yonder?'³⁹

The passage confirms Terry Castle's point that Radcliffe incorporated the supernatural into the everyday world of the characters.⁴⁰ Emily and her father hear the breeze and see the light of the glow-worm, and they are aware that they are part of the natural world, yet they choose to experience them as if they were supernatural for an aesthetic purpose. Their behaviour mirrors that of Mr W in 'On the Supernatural in Poetry' in making a connection between the supernatural and the aesthetic experience

of poetry. This connection is also present in Joseph Addison's term (borrowed from John Dryden) 'the fairy way of writing', denoting literature which includes the supernatural and gives it prestige through its connection to the creative imagination.⁴¹ The fairies themselves are literally invoked by St Aubert, who finds the evening woods a fitting place for them.

This is the first time Emily shows somebody a poem that she has written and she is anxious for her father's opinion. Before she starts the recital, her father says, 'let us hear what vagaries fancy has been playing in your mind. If she has given you one of her spells, you need not envy those of the fairies.' St Aubert's comment is meant both as a reassurance and a joke. He encourages Emily not to be afraid to show him her poem and does this by referring to the idea (as described by Horrocks) that in the process of composition the role of the poet might well be negligible. If fancy has given Emily 'one of her spells' (that is, if Emily is a true poet), then she does not need to fear criticism because the poetic inspiration will guarantee the quality of the poem. This need not be serious work, but something in keeping with the nature of fancy herself, who 'has been playing in [her] mind'. Even though he jokes about the fairies (there are no real fairies in the novel, except for the ones in Emily's poem), the phrasing evokes a version of the supernatural, exemplifying Mr W's association between poetic creativity and the preternatural in 'On the Supernatural in Poetry'.

The poem itself is long, and even though it is predominantly lyrical, it narrates the story of the glow-worm and the fairies. The details are rather vague and the focus is on the subjective feelings of the characters and the relationships between them. It builds on the legend mentioned by St Aubert that fairies dance their enchanting dance in a ring by the light of a glow-worm. According to legend, humans can also observe the fairies' dance, and sometimes they can even join them.⁴² Radcliffe adopts the legend as the basis of her narrative but presents it with a strong focus on emotions and artistic creativity. In her poem, the traveller is lost, and the glow-worm wishes to guide him to the fairies. The poem also evokes Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In the drama, just as in the poem, the magical world of the faeries coexists with the everyday world of people, and the fairies have the ability to charm people.

The fairies are described as preternatural creatures who spend their time dancing to a magical music. The description signals both how attuned they are to nature and how desirable their world is:

But sweeter, sweeter still, when the sun sinks to rest,
And twilight comes on, with the fairies so gay
Tripping through the forest-walk, where flow'rs, unprest,
Bow not their tall heads beneath their frolic play.
To music's softest sounds they dance away the hour.⁴³

The scene is a forest in the evening, the same as the one Emily and St Aubert are in when Emily is reciting her poem to her father. During their talk, Emily and St Aubert associated the scene with fairies as an expression of their own desire of experiencing aesthetic pleasure. In the poem, the aesthetic potential is realised in a supernatural phenomenon, as the fairies appear in the forest. In the poem, the pleasure of observing their dance is a possibility for the traveller; as the fairies spend their time dancing in the forest, one only needs to look for them. At the same time, they hide from humans, so the traveller in the poem has as little chance of finding them as Emily and St Aubert in the novel.

The dance of the fairies is a community of artists. Even though the fairies are not poets or novelists, their existence and mode of life are the embodiment of art. By dancing together to the same music, they are receivers of art and they also perform the art of dancing. They sympathetically feel the feelings inspired by the music and express themselves through movement. Those who pass Mr W's test of sensibility can appreciate their dance as a form of art. Moreover, as there are many of them, they form a community, which is desirable for the lone artist.

In the poem, the glow-worm is the narrator who introduces the fairies to the reader. The glow-worm displays both sympathy and an affinity for sensibility because it is able to appreciate the fairies' dance. According to the legend, it takes part in the dance of the fairies by giving them light. The glow-worm emphasises how much the fairies need its light when the sky is dark:

When, down among the mountains, sinks the ev'ning star,
And the changing moon forsakes this shadowy sphere,
How cheerless would they be, tho' they fairies are,
If I, with my pale light, came not near!⁴⁴

The poem focuses on the disagreement between the fairies and the glow-worm and its emotional consequences for the title character. The glow-worm is an advocate of community and it wants others to share in the experience, and so it leads people to the fairies. However, the fairies want to hide from the people and, to achieve this, they exclude even the glow-worm from their circle. The fairies are motivated by the same sympathy that urges the glow-worm to include people in the experience, but they feel sympathy towards the nightingale when they hear her song:

Then no more they dance, till her sad song is done,
But, silent as the night, to her mourning attend;
And often as her dying notes their pity have won,
They vow all her sacred haunts from mortals to defend.⁴⁵

The melodious song of the nightingale has been praised by many poets, among them Charlotte Smith, Coleridge and John Keats. Milton called it the 'most musical' and the 'most melancholy'. In ancient Greek and Roman poetry, it was regarded as the symbol of elegy.⁴⁶ Through the Philomela myth, it has been associated with the expression of female suffering. Radcliffe leaves the details of the nightingale's song vague, but judging from the reaction of the fairies, the song is so beautiful that they stop dancing to better be able to listen to it. The nightingale sings about sorrow, and thus wins the sympathy of the fairies. They decide not to let people into their charmed circle in order to protect the nightingale and help relieve her pain. The artistic representation of the nightingale's sadness affects them as much as their own dance affects the glow-worm and the people. In emphasising the importance of the experience itself, Radcliffe may have been influenced by Charlotte Smith's poetry. Smith describes the impression of listening to its song in the woods to demonstrate the superiority of the individual aesthetic experience.⁴⁷

People who were unable to appreciate the magical world of the evening forest disrupted its order and caused harm to the nightingale. Consequently, the fairies decided to hide from the people. As they still dance during the nights, the possibility of finding them still exists. The challenge of finding the fairies gives people an opportunity to prove that they are worthy of joining their circle again: only those who pass the test of sensibility will be able to find the fairies and enjoy their dance.

As the glow-worm continues to lead people to the fairies, they put a spell on it to lead people astray instead and the fairy queen also excludes it from their circle. Even if the glow-worm is near the fairies, it will be unable to perceive their music and their dance: 'If I creep near yonder oak she will wave her fairy wand, / And to me the dance will cease, and the music all be mute.'⁴⁸ The fairy queen has the power to charm the audience of their dance, and she can also withdraw that charm. She has the power to decide how much effect she wants to have on the observers. In this aspect, she is similar to Emily who wishes to affect the reader with her poem. Talking about 'fancy', St Aubert tells her: 'If she has given you one of her spells, you need not envy those of the fairies.'⁴⁹ Emily wishes to possess the ability the fairy queen has: to be able to make an effect with her art.

What dominates the poem is the glow-worm's yearning, both for company and to be admitted into the community of artists. Paradise draws a parallel between the glow-worm and Emily: both have an innate power which is linked to sympathy.⁵⁰ Later in *Udolpho*, Emily chooses to help her aunt even though she did little to deserve it, and this selfless act of kindness defines Emily's character. Similarly, the glow-worm wishes to guide the travellers to the fairies to let them share the experience and suffers the fairy queen's displeasure for it. Another parallel is that both Emily and the glow-worm experience a temporary inability to appreciate art. In *Udolpho*, Emily's distress reaches a level which makes her unable to appreciate and find consolation in art and poetry.⁵¹ Similarly, the glow-worm cannot perceive the fairies' dance while under the Fairy Queen's spell of expulsion.

The glow-worm is also a representation of Emily's poetic ambitions. As this is the first poem Emily shows somebody, it embodies her own wish to join the community of artists. Just as the glow-worm yearns for acceptance and inclusion into the fairies' circle, Emily yearns to be accepted as a poet. She chooses the world of the fairies as a frame in which she can express both her wish and her anxieties. Emily is equivalent to a traveller who is searching for the fairies in the forest – if she finds them, she will have proved her sensibility and that she can be called a poet. The difficulty of finding the fairies ensures that if Emily succeeds, her talent will not be questioned.

The poem ends on a hopeful note, with the possibility of the glow-worm's joining the fairies again. The lines describing their interdependence are repeated with a slight variation:

But soon the VAPOUR OF THE WOODS will wander afar,
And the fickle moon will fade, and the stars disappear,
Then, cheerless will they be, tho' they fairies are,
If I, with my pale light, come not near!⁵²

The fairies need the glow-worm's light for their dance, and the glow-worm wishes to join them by giving them its light. Compared to the light of the moon, the glow-worm's light is pale, but it comes from within, and it is able to substitute the moonlight. In a sense, it stands for the glow-worm's own poetic creativity.

Even though it suffers the Fairy Queen's injustice, the glow-worm still wishes to make it possible for them to dance. It is shown not as an outsider, but as someone who is inherently part of the community of artists and who has the capacity to meaningfully contribute to the art they perform. Similarly, Emily's poetic skills are not questioned in the novel, and they help her endure the hardships of her Gothic adventures.

Conclusion

In her posthumous dialogue 'On the Supernatural in Poetry', Radcliffe invokes a communication between poets and readers through the act of reading and reciting poetry, and this communication is associated with the supernatural. Mr W believes that people who have sensibility have a poetic affinity as well, referred to as 'the soul of poetry'. Such people can communicate and exchange feelings with each other through the art they create. This communication between artists is also present in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, as Horrocks shows in her essay.

The poem 'The Glow-worm' is Emily's first poem in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and it is an important step in Emily's progress to become a poet. It builds on the legend of fairies dancing in a ring by the light of the glow-worm, and people finding and joining them. The fairies in the poem stand for the active creators and receivers of art. It describes the

fairies' dance as a community of artists which is desirable for the people and for the glow-worm as well. In the past people who did not possess sensibility were able to find the fairies, which is why they decided to hide from humans.

The glow-worm disagrees with the fairies' decision; it wants to share the aesthetic experience of the fairies' dance with the people, and so it leads travellers to the fairies. Consequently, the fairy queen excludes it from their circle. The glow-worm's unsatisfied yearning for the community of artists is depicted in the poem, with the hope of joining them in the future. The relationship between the glow-worm and the fairies is based on the similarity of their nature in possessing sensibility and on their mutual need for each other in order to perform the dance. The glow-worm's pain and yearning can stand for Emily's own in her ambition to become a poet.

.....

Györgyi Szirákiné Kovács

Notes

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‘Ill met by moonlight’: Gothic Faery flash fiction

As part of the ‘Ill met by moonlight’ conference, we held a flash fiction competition. Some very inventive pieces redolent of Gothic Faerie were submitted and we have selected the best here. The theme of the competition was ‘Ill Met by Moonlight: Dark Encounters with the Fey’.

Flash fiction is a genre of fiction defined as a very short story. While there is no set word count that separates flash fiction from more traditional short stories, flash fiction stories can be as short as a few words (while short stories typically run for several pages). Flash fiction is also known as sudden fiction, short-short stories, microfiction or microstories. Our competition was not limited to prose, however; we were open to short poems, songs, or even scripts.

Flash fiction is a favoured genre among the English-speaking world’s most celebrated writers for its ability to convey deep truths and universal human emotions in just a few short lines. When done well, flash fiction can convey deep truths and resonate with readers from all walks of life.

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'ILL MET BY MOONLIGHT' FLASH FICTION SELECTIONS

Kimberly Bea

Better to be over the hill than under it:
But I grow pixy-led by my own mind –
A wizened imp; changeling in reverse
With no means to rest my head
And my gold turned to leaves and blown away.
When the elflord beckons, 'Come away', I must say, 'Yes!'

.....

Bryan Brown

The shriek bolted us awake. Of course it couldn't be. The damn foxes, that's all. But
always just at the edge, what if? She was gone. We knew she was. Months had turned to
years. But there at the window, something darkly playful frolics.

.....

Daisy Butcher

I have taken the geode we found in the stone circle to my tent. The others say it's just a
lump of quartz. ... Once I applied heat it cracked open – jagged swirls of silvery purple
and – I must be dreaming – I've hatched a fairy.

.....

Alex Carabine

Faerie-stained, I corrupt what I touch with enchantment. My hands leave a trail of charms
like the slime of a snail and, syncopated, I walk one beat before – behind – beyond.
There's a hollow where my heart should be, filled with the shadows of leaves.

.....

Greta Colombani

'You've been changed', he says with fire on his mind, and I pray his words come true.
People of moonlight revels and twisted games, will you come and spirit me away?
Snatch away my soul with your fingers sharper than sorrow, for his mind is burning
and won't burn alone.

.....

Morgan Daimler

The glittering swirl resolved into dancers, eldritch and unearthly, gossamer clad. Their movements were like the wind, their feet barely touching the earth in the circle they danced in. She stepped forward, knowing it was her doom, but unable to resist that beautiful throng ...

.....

Monty Elsdon (aged 9)

One winter's evening after teatime, mummy and I muffled up and went to the ford near our house to see the full moon and stars that glisten in the night sky. The land was bathed in magical light. As we stood in the forest near the stream, a swirling ball of yellow light appeared, sucking the neighbouring objects into the abyss. A sound like crackling thunder filled the air, as a bright flash of electricity sped furiously from the sky towards us. The air felt heavy and we couldn't breathe. We soon stood by a river, or were we smaller by the stream? We must have been in the Otherworld. Luckily, we knew not to eat any food, including those glamorous berries, and we eventually found a portal home. But it was 3 a.m. when we got back and there was no time to sleep. Then we realised ...

... Time goes quickly in the Otherworld. Very quickly!

.....

Sarah Fissermer

There is light and grass and green. There is song and dance and fire. There is fairy mist and food. A traveller enters the clearing, struck by sound and light and smell. All is joy, all is mystery,

all is laughter.

Is all of this a dream?

.....

Emma Fleming

Once again enamoured of an ass?

Elf shot? Pixie led?

Realising this isn't your bed?

Listen.

While they're brewing tea or boiling eggs – gather your clothes. Turn them inside out, slip them on. Slip out. Find the path.

Next time, don't accept that drink. You'll dance yourself to death.

.....

Kyria Van Gasse

The fairy giggled, laying down the last yellowing leaf from the already withering tree. The blushing face of the newborn still visible underneath it.

'Those demanding humans', she muttered. 'Never happy with what they get.'

She pulled out a glittering dagger, heaved her arms in the air and struck down.



Monica Germana

Just below the water surface, their dark shadows dance around in a circle, speeding towards and retreating from a body dropped from above. Frenzy of excitement clouds the water with the rhythm of their dance until no more bubbles come out of the body.



Richard Grant

Norman practised his mindfulness in the garden when the weather was fair but must have slipped up somehow for the mind-things got out. Most fluttered away harmlessly, but a few gathered in a rowan tree and an especially mean one shouted, 'Dance!' And fuck all, he danced.



Kate Harvey

'Too long have the Faefolk enslaved us, or slaughtered us for mere pleasure.' The Bat Queene looked at the gathering, of fur and feather and flesh. 'We must peck at their eyes and tear at their wings!' Many eyes regarded her, fearful yet resolved. 'We fly. To war.'



Michaela Hausmann

At night she sometimes calls to me
and beckons me to have a taste
Of her intoxicating majesty
I answer her with breathless haste

Once my lips feel her first kiss
I'm lost in her sweet crimson deep
My dreams – a bow'r of bliss
In her red-robed arms of sleep.



Sarah McPherson

a.

We are not little men, impish revellers, dwarven hunters. We are the knot in the tree trunk, the crooked root bursting from the earthen bank. We are the rocky walls of a mountain path. In the air. In the glen. Up and down, up and down, we see you.

b.

I clutched at the berries on the branch, not caring how the thorns tore my fingers, crushed the fruit into a soft mess and pressed it to my mouth. Bitter. Sour. Tears streaked my face as I searched for that elusive sweetness, tasted once in a dream.

.....

Hannah O’Flanagan

a.

The room was dark. Moonlight trickled through the window, like ripples of water. The eyes stared back through the glass, yellow and wild, hungry, smiling with malice. The child stepped from his bed and opened the pane.

In the morning, a leaf that shimmered silver was all that remained.

b.

You said you were my godmother. You said I was beautiful, your dear child. You promised me power, you said you’d protect me.

Yet here I sit. Alone, in a mound that once teemed with music and laughter and colour. I’m cold. I’m so very cold, godmother.

.....

Ivan Phillips

A bedroom’s never quiet, not really. It’s never really still or dark. Do you feel the fluttering in the air? There, again – yes? Something sits on your chest, a slight pressure that feels immense. There’s an extra darkness over your eyes. A tickle at your lips. Don’t be afraid.

.....

Saba Razvi

Wishing Well

They say the fairy circle is the short way home. What they do not say: you are undone. Around you, mushrooms sprout with the silver of your wishing, wine on your tongue and willing what is leaving. Only your echo in the moonlight finds its way beyond stone.

His jagged wings unfurled, iridescent in the moonlight. She had never seen someone, something so ... The words escaped her: He was not of this world and the language she possessed could not encapsulate the wonder, the horror, her fear, her desire ...

.....

Madelaine Sacco

We met under a full moon on a road that bit my feet. She wore a dress of spider-silk, her head bowed, eyes dark and deep. I called for help, fear following behind me on the street. I cried when I saw her beautiful grin full of sharp little teeth.

.....

Catherine Spooner

Five Fairy Tales

I. The Green Child

I come from the mid-place between light and dark. I lost my way and you found me here, in a strange land. The sun stings my eyes. Your skin is too pink. Your outlines shimmer. I want to touch you. If I touch you, can I return?

II. Gaslight Fairies

The stagehands try to look up your skirt when you're not looking. Saucy beggars, winking in the flies. They fix the limelight so the moon shines out of our behinds. Screw them, I say. They get a glimpse of our drawers. But only we girls get to fly.

III. Moth Wings

In the dark house, a flicker of a flame. The light leaves traces on the retina; I am not sure what I have seen. Is it a woman or is it a monster? Her hair falls down over her breasts. The flame sings her wings.

IV. Paper Fairies

Into the tangle of briars I go. Wings flicker like paper, like a camera shutter. I open the door and step inside. I could sleep for a hundred years. Outside, the world moves in stop motion. When I wake up, everything will be different.

.....

V. Godmother

I spent my days in dust and ashes. But then you came, asking only for a cup of water. You saw everything differently. There was magic in your eyes and fingers. With one touch, the world changed. Here I am, in a dress the colour of starlight.

.....

Brittany Warman

When she came on stage, the room went silent. Her dark eyes, her long hair, it all seemed to blur, to shimmer and change even as she caught us in her dream. She whispered her song, something about death and the stars, but we were no longer truly listening.

.....

Caroline White

Grandmother had told her never to touch the harp but she plucked a string. The plaintive tone made her shiver, yet she ran her hand over the odd little faces carved in the wooden frame. She cried out, recoiling sharply. Blood glistened on her fingertips. The faces grinned.

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A review of
**Fearsome Fairies:
Haunting
Tales of the Fae**

B.C. Kennedy

Do you believe in fairies? Certainly, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle famously did so, publishing an article in *The Strand Magazine* (December 1920) that recounted his discovery of photographs taken by two young girls in Yorkshire, who claimed they had taken pictures of fairies by Cottingley Beck during the summer of 1917. This was followed by a book, *The Coming of the Fairies* (September 1922), where Conan Doyle endorsed the authenticity of the photographs.

Nowadays, the Cottingley Fairies are remembered as one of the most famous hoaxes in photographic history. In later life the two girls admitted the fairies had been staged with paper cut-outs and hatpins, yet until she died one of the girls, Frances Griffiths, maintained that the fifth and final image they had taken was genuine.

While Conan Doyle's reputation suffered because of his involvement, the intensity of public debate following his publication of the photos – particularly in a world reeling from the mass deaths and horror of World War I – says a great deal about a collective desire to believe in the supernatural as well as tapping into an older uneasiness as to what fairies might actually be. Were they flimsy butterfly-winged creatures fluttering within the pages of children's books or something altogether more ambiguous, hovering in the shadows?

Today many popular images of fairies fall into the first category and our perceptions of fairies have been shaped by developments in children's books and the entertainment industry; think Tinkerbell! However, historically fairies have always been unpredictable and formidable figures, and associations between fairies and the dead go back a long way. In many folklore traditions, fairies are described as coming from the 'otherworld', which is often also an underworld. Other stories explicitly link fairies to the souls of the departed, and the fairies' acquisition of insect wings in the 18th century further associates them with dead souls, who are linked with butterflies or moths in numerous cultures.

As folklore developed as a discipline during the 19th century, Victorian Britain developed an enormous fascination with fairies, using the otherness of the little folk

to deal with contemporary issues surrounding empire, race, gender class and national identity (10). Some theorists used the emerging social sciences of anthropology and archaeology to suggest pseudo-scientific explanations for belief in fairies and cultural evolution. Meanwhile the development of magical-seeming technologies such as X-rays, photography and moving pictures led to fresh questions about what might exist beyond human perception. Seen within this wider context, it is easier to see how Conan Doyle's conviction that fairies might be invisibly all around us captured the public imagination. It is out of this swirl of ideas about fairies, the occult, death, the otherworld and otherness that this collection of 12 stories, edited by Elizabeth Dearnley, was written between 1867-2014. Together these stories chart one-and-a-half centuries of unsettling encounters between the familiar human world and the unpredictable, potentially dangerous yet tempting fairy realm.

Other than Frances Hodgson Burnett's 'In the Closed Room', which takes place in a humid New York summer, all these stories are set in the British Isles, frequently exploring resurfacings of fairy figures from British and Irish folklore, many of which draw directly on much older folktales. The opening story, Charlotte Riddell's 'The Banshee Warning', for example, brings the death-heralding banshee of Ireland to the real-world locations of Soho and Guy's Hospital in London.

Fairies are by no means always female. Examples of sexually magnetic male fairies can be found in Sheridan Le Fanu's 'Laura Silver Bell', where the orphan Laura becomes captivated by a mysterious lord, while Angela Carter's 'Erl-King', a mesmeric, green-eyed forest-dweller, promises 'red berries, ripe and delicious,' to anyone he entices into his lair. Likewise, the young girl at the centre of 'The White People' describes walking through a suggestively sensuous green valley, full of bubbling streams with ripples that kiss her like nymphs; in fairyland even the landscape can seduce.

Another type of fairy found in this collection, often linked with children, is the changeling; a belief that fairies might steal a human child and leave a doppelgänger in its place. Frances Hodgson Burnett's previously mentioned haunting account of the delicate-featured Judith echoes changeling tales, while Randolph Stow's 'Concerning a boy and a girl emerging from the earth' recounts the consternation within the Suffolk village of Woolpit when two green-skinned children appeared at the edge of a harvest field. Similarly, in Margery Lawrence's 'The Case of the Leannabh Sidhe', an occult detective is called to investigate a young boy exhibiting disturbing behaviour, and J.M. Barrie's 'Lock-out Time' introduces the character of Peter Pan, the once mortal boy who decides on his own accord to live with the fairies. His indecision about whether to return to his mother and the eventual consequence of his leaving is emotionally resonant of other changeling tales.

The Celtic Revival of the 19th and early 20th centuries revitalised interest in the fairy lore of Ireland and Scotland. Fiona Macleod's 'By the Yellow Moonrock' takes the

reader to the Scottish moorlands, where a young piper becomes captivated by a vampiric '*Bhean-Nimhir*' (serpent woman) he meets on St Bride's Night. This tale is part of a long tradition of seductively threatening female fairies. Jane Alexander's '*In Yon Green Hill to Dwell*' revisits the border ballad of '*Tam Lin*' to explore what happens after the mortal Janet saves her lover, Tam, from the fairy queen.

In 19th-century England, a nostalgia for the fairies of Shakespeare or Chaucer was coupled with a sense that there was no place for them in a rapidly industrialising society. The clash between urban modernity and the remnants of older, darker forces buried in the landscape is ably demonstrated in M.R. James' '*After Dark in the Playing Fields*' and Algernon Blackwood's '*The Trod*'.

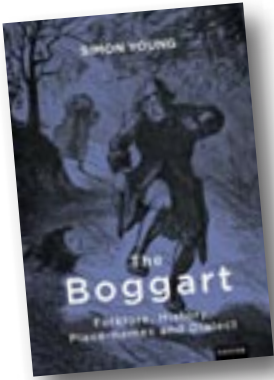
This is a superb collection that uses supernatural occurrences as a magic mirror in which to reflect real-world fears, desires and anxieties. Each story is preceded by a short biography of the authors and some of the stories have a relevant introductory quote which provides contextualisation. While Elizabeth Dearnley provides detailed references in her Introduction and suggested further reading, a glossary of some of the more unusual terms in the stories may have been helpful in addition to the explanatory footnotes provided in some of the stories.

Elizabeth Dearnley's great-grandparents lived in Fairy Dell, Cottingley, and this connection provides the framework of this collection, which has developed alongside a wider project on the Cottingley fairies. The Cottingley Fairy photographs have been reproduced in the appendix of this collection, including the final 'fairy bower' image that Frances Griffiths always claimed was real; readers of this book can judge the veracity for themselves. This book will appeal to fairy story enthusiasts and readers interested in the folk and fairy lore of the British Isles and Ireland, as well as students of history, children's literature and cultural studies.

Editor: Elizabeth Dearnley.

Publisher: British Library Publishing (2021), 336 pp.

B.C. Kennedy



A review of
**The Boggart:
Folklore, History,
Place-names
and Dialect**

Katherine Langrish

In this fascinating, extensively researched account, Simon Young champions 'Britain's most understudied supernatural being', the Boggart – and makes a good case for it also being one of the most misrepresented. His stated aim is to 'reconstitute beliefs for one place (Boggartdom) and for one period (1838-1914) using contemporary or near contemporary documents'. He is well situated to do this, having created *The Boggart Source Book*, a free online research base of thousands of words of Victorian and Edwardian boggart-lore drawn from books, articles, newspapers and broadsides. Additionally, in 2019 he conducted an online 'Boggart Census' which gathered 1,100 responses recording 'snapshot[s]' of the boggart folklore that a given man or woman had grown up with, from 1920 to 1970:

This large database has enabled a localised mapping of boggart placenames and encounters. Plotting boggart toponyms on 19th-century maps, along with boggart personal names linked to specific locations or dwellings, Young charts the distribution of the boggart in the territory he calls 'Boggartdom' – Lancashire and West Yorkshire, with outliers in Lincolnshire and Cleveland – and places it in a wider north-western context with its relations the Dobbie of north Lancashire/Westmorland and the Cumberland Boggle: names which Young suggests do not indicate separate types of supernatural creature, but are instead 'regional reflexes of a similar generic bogie'.

Studying boggart names and lore in actual topographies has led Young to some interesting conclusions. For example, 'Boggart Holes' and 'Fairy Holes' are both to be found in the landscape, but Young finds that fairy placenames are associated with wild, natural features such as crags, streams and wells, while boggart toponyms tend to be situated on the liminal (and in the 19th century, badly lit) outskirts of towns and villages, marking halls, houses, barns, lanes, crossroads, bridges, tunnels, mines and railways. 'Fairies dominate the supernatural physical geography of the north,' he writes. 'Boggarts are, on the other hand, part of supernatural human geography.' This is a fascinating distinction, further illuminated by Young's remark that if fairies 'offer a mirror to human society' (since their activities resemble ours), boggarts 'are not the mirror, rather the shadow of their victims.' His account is full of tales

and references which fully uphold his contention that boggart encounters were regarded as fearful or terrifying. In the early to mid-1800s the Kidgrew Boggart haunted 'the canal tunnel, the mines and the countryside' around the Staffordshire village of Kids Grove, manifesting sometimes as a dog, sometimes as a 'flickering light' and sometimes as a headless woman. Locals explained it as the ghost of a woman murdered on the canal. References to supernatural horrors such as fireballs and revenants, haunted houses and lanes, and even a bleeding bridge near Colne demonstrate the polymorphic range of the boggart as a 19th-century phenomenon: 'an ecosystem' as Young puts it, rather than 'a species'.

Investigating the etymology of the term, he finds that 16th- and 17th-century definitions of 'boggart' glossed it as a 'bugbear', 'phantasm' or 'Spirit that frights one'; while for 19th-century regional writers familiar with the word the most common definition was 'ghost' – followed by 'hobgoblin' 'bugbear', 'spectre', 'apparition' and 'spirit'. In their contemporary context most of these terms were generic, like 'troll' in Scandinavia, and referred to many kinds of frightening solitary supernatural entities. This is likely to come as a surprise to many, including myself, who first encountered boggarts in 20th-century children's fiction and in the work of the great Katharine Briggs. Her entry for 'Boggart' in the *Dictionary of Fairies* describes: 'A mischievous BROWNIE, almost exactly like a poltergeist in his habits' and characterises Brownies themselves as little men with shaggy heads who emerge at night to do farm work and housework in return for bowls of cream.

So how did a catch-all term for frightening things – 'demons, ghosts, hobs, shape-changers, water monsters and will o' the wisps' to name but a few – become narrowed down to indicate only a goblinesque house spirit? Young points to a folktale known as 'The Pertinacious Cobold' in which the activities of a mischievous brownie drives a farmer to leave his home. After the 19th-century folklorist Thomas Crofton Croker published two Irish versions, an anonymous Yorkshire correspondent sent a boggart variant to the *Literary Gazette* (16 April 1825). Croker reprinted this in *Fairy Legends* (1825) and later plagiarised and wrote it up for John Roby's *Traditions of Lancashire* (1829), altering its Yorkshire names to Lancashire-sounding ones. Both books were influential, and 'at a national level, the tale came to be associated with boggarts', spreading the impression that a boggart was a type of naughty brownie. This impression was strengthened when the Victorian children's writer Mrs Ewing wrote *The Brownies* (1865), in which a race of tiny, nimble domestic sprites are called 'brownies' when they are 'useful and considerate' but 'boggarts' when they are bad. Mrs Ewing urges children to be helpful brownies, not naughty boggarts. Lord Baden-Powell took both the point and the name for the younger Girl Guides, and the boggart = brownie equation became fixed in the public imagination.

During the 20th century, boggarts in children's fiction kept very much in line with the helpful/mischievous house-hob image, notably in William Mayne's *Earthfasts* (1969) – my own first meeting with a fictional boggart – and Susan Cooper's *The Boggart* (1993) and later sequels about a Scottish boggart which emigrates to Canada in a family's computer. Then came J.K. Rowling's *The Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999), in which Harry Potter and his friends learn how

to deal with a boggart, depicted as 'a shape-shifting creature that [...] assumes the shape of the victim's worst fears'. Young slyly suggests that in this, Rowling may be closer than many a modern folklorist to the 19th-century boggart, since 'there is at least a sense of fear and horrid potential'.

However that may be, Rowling's boggart seems to have had little impact on 21st-century representations of the boggart, now widely seen as a nature-guardian; we learn of national parks, gardens and trails, such as the Pendle Sculpture Trail, which use stories and even models of green, goblin-esque nature-boggarts to encourage children to learn about wildlife. Young is relaxed about this, for as he says: 'Supernatural creatures and human ideas about them very properly have a life of their own.' Nevertheless it would have been a shame to have lost the back-story of the boggart's long career in supernatural terror. Detailed, scholarly, packed with great tales and interesting speculations, *The Boggart* is a ground-breaking study that rescues and re-establishes the scary boggart of the 19th century.

Author: Simon Young.

Publisher: Exeter Press (2022), 330 pp.

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Katherine Langrish

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About the contributors

Francesca Bihet

Francesca Bihet is an independent scholar based on the Channel Island of Jersey. She completed her PhD in folklore at the University of Chichester in 2020. Her thesis *Folklore and Fairies: The History of Fairies in the Folklore Society from 1878 to 1945* explores the changes in the academic treatment of fairies by Folklore Society members over this period and how far these reflect wider folkloric and cultural trends. Among other articles, she has published the chapters 'Pouques and the Faiteaux: the Channel Islands', in *Magical Folk: British and Irish Fairies 500 AD to the Present* (2018), and 'Death and the Fairy: Hidden Gardens and the Haunting of Childhood', in *Uncanny Ecogothic Gardens in the Long Nineteenth Century* (2020). She has a longstanding interest in the Gothic, as well as witchcraft and the supernatural. She is currently researching the folklore of the Channel Islands.

Greta Colombani

Greta Colombani is currently a PhD student at the University of Cambridge, King's College, where she is working on an AHRC-funded research project about representations of communication with the Other World in British Romantic poetry. She previously completed her studies at the Scuola Normale Superiore and the University of Pisa, where she received a master's degree in Euro-American Literatures and Philologies in October 2018. In September 2017, a reworking of her BA dissertation was published by Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht under the title *A Gordian Shape of Dazzling Hue: Serpent Symbolism in Keats's Poetry*. Greta's research interests focus on British 19th-century literature – in particular Romanticism, Gothic literature and the supernatural – as well as on applications of literary theory and communication theory to textual analysis.

Tatiana Fajardo

Tatiana Fajardo is studying a PhD in Comparative Literature at the University of the Basque Country, focusing on Patrick McGrath's narratives. She completed her MLitt in the Gothic Imagination at the University of Stirling, writing her dissertation on Patrick McGrath. Tatiana presented her study of McGrath's *The Wardrobe Mistress* and *Last Days in Cleaver Square* at the IGA conference in July 2022. Her essay on McGrath's *Ghost Town: Tales of Manhattan Then and Now* was released by Luna Press Publishing in 2021.

Sam George

Sam George is Associate Professor in Research and the Convenor of the popular Open Graves, Open Minds Project at the University of Hertfordshire. Her work with OGOM has led to a number of co-edited books with Dr Bill Hughes: *Representations of Vampires and the Undead* (2012); *In the Company of Wolves* (2020); *The Legacy of John William Polidori*

(2023), and a forthcoming collection on *Gothic Encounters with the Faerie Realm in Literature and Culture*. Sam's latest research is specifically focused on the intersection between folklore and the Gothic; it ranges from British werewolves to Japanese mermaids. She is currently completing a new monograph on the folklore of shadows and a book on *Gothic Fairies: A History* for Bloomsbury. She recently recorded an obituary of Gothic writer Anne Rice for BBC Radio 4's *The Last Word* and appeared on *In Our Time* on BBC Radio 4 with Melvyn Bragg (on John Polidori's *The Vampyre*).

Catherine Greenwood

Scottish-Canadian poet Catherine Greenwood is a PhD candidate in Creative Writing Poetry/Gothic Studies at the University of Sheffield, working on a dissertation titled *Gothicising a Poetics of Displacement: Immigrants/Effects*. Her article 'Defrosting the Gothic: Arctic Poetry in a Melting Sublime' is forthcoming in *Gothic Nature Journal*. For her MA thesis at the University of New Brunswick, she wrote a neo-Gothic adaptation of Matthew Lewis's novel *The Monk*.

Jeremy Harte

Jeremy Harte is a researcher into the overlap between folklore and archaeology, with a particular interest in sacred space, tales of encounters with the supernatural, and the traditions of Dorset, where he grew up. He has published widely in popular and scholarly journals, and is reviews editor of *Time & Mind*, the journal of archaeology, consciousness and culture. He is a member of the Council of the Folklore Society and has organised its annual Legendary Weekends since 2005. His books include *Cuckoo Pounds and Singing Barrows*, *The Green Man*, *English Holy Wells* and the award-winning *Explore Fairy Traditions*, as well as a paper in *Magical Folk*. He trained as a museum professional and is curator of the Bourne Hall Museum at Ewell in Surrey. He has been described by the *Independent on Sunday* as 'the most passionate yet abstruse lecturer I have ever seen since Geoffrey Hill'.

Dr Michaela Hausmann

Dr Michaela Hausmann received her PhD at the University of Vechta, Germany, where she also worked as a research assistant. She has also taught courses in English literature at the Universities of Vechta and Leipzig. Her particular research interests include poetry and narrative theory, fantasy and Gothic literature, and literature from the 19th to the early 20th centuries. In 2020, Michaela's first monograph appeared with Routledge: *'Music Makers' and World Creators: The Forms and Functions of Embedded Poems in British Fantasy Narratives*.

Dr Bill Hughes

Dr Bill Hughes has publications out or in progress on communicative reason and the interrelation of the dialogue genre and English novels of the long 18th century. He is currently researching and has published on contemporary paranormal romance and Young Adult Gothic from the perspectives of formalism, genre, and critical theory. Bill is co-organiser, with

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Györgyi Szirákiné Kovács is a PhD candidate at the Modern English and American Literature and Culture programme at the Doctoral School of Literary Studies at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest, Hungary. Her field of research is 18th-century Gothic literature, specifically the connection between sensibility and the supernatural in Ann Radcliffe's novels. She has presented papers at conferences: for example, the *Gothic Hybridities* conference in 2018 organised by the International Gothic Association and *The Place of Memory and the Memory of Place* conference held online in 2020, organised by the London Centre for Interdisciplinary Research. Her article "'I am all that stands between them and chaos': A Monstrous Way of Ruling in *A Song of Ice and Fire*" was published in 2020 by *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*.

Dr B.C. Kennedy

Barbara Kennedy received her PhD from the University of Sussex where she studied the links between music and healing as described in a wide range of 15th-, 16th- and 17th-century literature. She has lectured at the University of Sussex and the University of Brighton where she has taught a range of courses, with texts from the medieval period to today. Barbara has an interest in Irish folklore and fairy tales, including the political applications of fairy tales in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Katherine Langrish

Katherine Langrish is the author of a number of historical fantasies for children and young adults including the critically acclaimed trilogy *West of the Moon*, and *Dark Angels* (HarperCollins). She studied medieval literature at University College and Kings College, London. Her short stories have appeared in various collections; she has published book chapters on Mervyn Peake and Alan Garner, and is folklore consultant to the journal *Unsettling Wonder*: www.unsettlingwonder.com. Her most recent publication is *Seven Miles of Steel Thistles*, a book of essays on folklore and fairy tales based on her blog of the same name: steelthistles.blogspot.co.uk.

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