Fairies, Fearies, and Other People of the Fay

A Bibliography

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Fairies
I chanced to stray
At the close of day
Down to the broke where the fairies stay.
Where the water whirls
And eddies and swirls;
On a lovely throne of purest pearls
Sat the Fairy Queen,
In a gown of green;
The prettiest sight I have ever seen.
For the brook would play
The music gay,
And all the fairies would dance and sway.
In a golden crown
And lacy gown
Each fairy subject was bowing down
When a wicked breeze
From among the trees
Tickled my nose and made me sneeze
When that sneeze rang shrill
Through the evening still,
Each fairy turned into a daffodil.

- Edith Charrington

Scope
Fairy, Faery, Fay, or Fae, they are known by many names but are all the same. Fairies are said to be supernatural beings usually showing up in folklore being of diminutive human form, whom magically intermeddles in human affairs. The term “fairy” starts to appear in both European written and oral literature during the Middle Ages. But they bear great differences from modern fairies.
Fairies of the past were described as dangerous and powerful beings. They were sometimes friendly to humans, but could turn cruel or mischievous at a moment notice. It wasn’t until modern time that fairies started becoming known as beautiful magical creatures that show up in children’s literature. In Victorian times children were told of magical beings that liked to carry off children and leave changelings in their place. Fairies were also said to carry off adults to the fairy realm, humans were said not to be able to return to the mortal world if they eat or drink while there.

This bibliography will focus mostly on the evolution of fairy lore.

**Introduction**

**Characteristics**

Fairies are impossible to define precisely. The term “Fairy” has been used to describe angry or jealous dead family members, to small and benevolent nature-spirits, with many categories in between. (Purkiss, 2001) In Ireland they were also known as the aossi (fairy folk), slua sí (fairy host), and doaine maithé (‘good people’) and played a major part in Irish traditions. The sula sí would carry off mortals, most often beautiful or otherwise exceptional children, leaving a changeling (síofra or síobhra) behind. (Welch, 2000)
The term changelings show up in many different cultures and stories that involve fairies, they were part of the fairy race, in most stories they were considered to be the young of fairies. Once a mortal baby was switched with a changeling they (the changeling) never thrived, and remained small, shriveled, mentally abnormal, and ill tempered. A baby whose defects were not obvious at birth but appeared in the first year or two could thus be explained as not truly human. They were often ill treated by the family as this supposedly drove changelings away. In Cornwall there was a common belief that if you ‘Put the small body upon the ashes pile and beat it well with a broom, then lay it naked under a church-way stile...till the turn of night; and nine times out of ten, the thing will be took off and the stolen cheeld put in his place.’ (Bottrell, 1873: 202) (Simpson 2000)

Fairies were thought of as supernatural beings, capable of being helpful and benevolent to humans, hostile and dangerous or simply mischievous. Fairies could make themselves invisible at will. (Sharpe, 2009) The cruel pranks of fairies accounted for mysterious happenings, ill fortune, and unsatisfactory situations.

Fairies can be divided by two major groups: ‘social’ fairies, imagined as living in communities and pursuing group activities such as dancing and feasting; and ‘solitary’ fairies, of which some attach themselves to human households as helpers and luck bringers; while others haunt an open-air site, often as a more or less serious threat to
passer-bys. (Simpson 2000) In some cultures they appeared on coastlines, and were labeled mermaids.

On the other hand, informants sometimes insist on rigid separations between categories. The number of local words for species and sub-species, and for individuals is considerable. In Ireland for example, solitary fairies are known variously as the leipreachán or drunken fairy; the fear dearg ('red man') or trickster; the fear gorta ('hunger man'), a phantom appearing at times of famine; the dallacán, a headless sprite who rides on the death-coach. (Welch, 2000) The original English term for the whole species was elf, but in the Middle English this was largely replaced by ‘fairy’, which was borrowed from the French. Folklorist generally used the term ‘fairy’ rather loosely to cover a range of non-human yet materials bright with magical powers. (Simpson 200)

A fairy rath (or fort) are where the social fairies are said to live. (Welch, 2000) Usually found in the woods or forests. Some fairies were known to live in trees others made their home among patches of mushrooms. In Celtic mythology trees were thought to serve as homes for fairies; oak, ash, and thorn trees were considered part of a magical trio.

**HISTORICAL ASPECT**

Fairy beliefs originate in the ancient world of the Mediterranean, where fairies take the form of childhood demons or nymphs, and by the Renaissance stories about fairies were widespread in the European countryside. (Purkiss, 2001) The fairies that were
widely believed in the Middle Ages and beyond were very different from the fairies of children’s stories in modern times. (Hey, 2009)

In general fairy beliefs are of long standing and vast, there has been over 170 types of fairy have been listed from British sources. After a while fairy lore became a matter of mythology among educated people, but it long remained accepted as fact at a populist level. (Hey, 2009) Most of the fairy beliefs were already fixed in the Middle Ages, even though evidence shows that that belief began to thicken in the 16th century. Towards the end of that century fairies became increasingly sought after as possible sources of wealth, often time these beliefs would be used by the dishonest to rob the unsuspecting.

There are narratives from the 16th and 17th century of healers using ointments and powders that the claimed were given to them by fairies. There are also persons that declared fairies enabled them to identify witches.

Towards the end of the fairy lore craze adults started using the belief in fairies as a way of controlling children and ensuring their safety by telling them stories that had threats of dangerous mythical creatures. This strategy was first used in the upbringing of some people during the Middle Ages, but as stated before for the general population there was still some factual belief in the stories. Soon there came a more amiable item of Fairy-lore for children, the introduction of the tooth fairy, where fairies take away discarded teeth, leaving money instead.
Stories about fairies and magical creatures were especially common in Scotland, Ireland, the Mediterranean, Eastern Europe, and remote parts of England like the West Country and Romney Marsh, and these stories were often cautionary tales about dangerous beings who could draw those who saw them into illness, madness, or death. (Purkiss, 2001)

It wasn’t until Paracelsian doctrines on spirits that fairies started becoming honorary servants to magicians. This might be how demonologists started identifying them as devils.

Belief in fairies started to become important in social settings. Domestic untidiness was punished, a code of conduct was enforced (fairies were said to hate lust and lechery), and the virtues of neighborliness were upheld. Impostors and con artists could, and often did exploit these beliefs to their own advantage. Nevertheless on the whole a fear of fairies in all their various forms helped to reinforce communal values and to offer comfort in distressing circumstances. (Hey, 2009)
Who and what fairies were changed from culture to culture. According to 9th century Book of Armagh fairies were the pagan gods of the earth, it was Christianity that prevailed over these pagan gods. In Gaelic tradition, fairies were the Tuatha Dé Danann, ancient gods of Ireland residing in the Fairy mounds all over the Irish countryside. They feature most notably in the mythological cycles in tales such as Cath Maige Turied or Tochmarc Etaíne.

The basic European repertoire of beliefs in tales about fairies as less preserved in England than in the Celtic, areas of Wales, Ireland, and Highland and Scotland, though much of it was well known there in the 17th century and later. (Simpson 200) In the farming community there was a strong belief in the household brownie (or pixy, or puck). The Anglo-Saxons had charms that were used against elves, this shows how they were dreaded for the diseases they were thought to inflict upon mortals. There are scattered indications that the fear persisted, to some extent, into Tudor and Stuart times. (Simpson 2000)

LITERATURE

The fairies of past were featured in stories aimed at either scary children, enforcing superstitions, or explain away cruel pranks and ill misfortune. Spenser’s Faerie Queen, a
medieval romance, brought about another Fairy altogether this fairy was a fairy that signified wealth and aristocracy. Before Spenser’s medieval romance fairies were thought of living amongst nature, even though they were later sought after for wealth and power most people didn’t associate them with having this power and wealth for their own use.

Another literary figure to change how fairies were perceived was Shakespeare. Shakespeare knew little and cared less about popular beliefs, he was no folklorist. At the same time it is because of him, and specifically because of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, that fairies become associated with lyrical bucolic idylls. (Purkiss, 2001) Shakespeare solidified the idea of fairies with his writings. He relegated some fairies forever to the dust heap forgotten in the passages of time and awarded immortality onto his own creations. In Shakespeare’s writings where ever fairies appeared they usually are coupled with jokes, tricks, and disguises. And they were all connected with the countryside and country life. After Shakespeare, all fairies in English poetry became more or less funny and kind. It wasn’t until the later Romantic poets revived the menacing fairy of earlier eras that this image was shed. (Purkiss, 2001)

In 17\textsuperscript{th} century the best contemporary account of fairy and associated beliefs in Britain was from Robert Kirk’s, *The Secret Common-Wealth* and *A Short Treatise of Charms and Spels*, ed. Stewart Sanderson (1976). Written near the end of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century Kirk was a scholarly and Gaelic-speaking minister of the Church of Scotland. Kirk recognized that many of his parishioners believed in fairies, the ‘second sight’, and other supernatural
phenomenons. He set out to record the evidence of spirits for scientific enquiry. (Hey, 2009)

In 1621, the story of Tom Thumb, featured what could be considered the first fairy godmother. But the figure did not become popular until two later fairy tales, Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty, which reached England and France in the late 18th century. It wasn’t until Cinderella however that the protective godmother replaced the magical animal from early oral versions, usually representing her dead mother. She has now become a stock figure in popular imagination.

The literary revival (1890-1922) gave rise to a renewed interest in the fairy-lore of Ireland, which came to be seen as a unique body of almost sacred literature of Celtic origin. It encapsulated realities occluded by the advance of a materialistic civilization. A number of Anglo-Irish writers in second half of the 19th century began collecting in the folklore traditions of Ireland. (Welch, 2000) However by 19th century belief in them among the educated was long gone. (Sharpe, 2009)

After the 17th century traditional fairy-lore started to become overshadowed by literary portrayals medieval, Shakespearian, or modern lore. It wasn't the until the 1960's and 70's when Katherine Briggs brought all the evidence together, collected by the regional folklorists, that the public became aware of it's coherence and power.
As stated before Robert Kirk set about recording evidence of fairies and other supernatural phenomena. In his research he set forth that belief in fairies was not contradictory with belief in Christianity. The crafty, bitter, menacing fairies could be seen as the agents of the Devil. From the stories he collected he learned that fairies had to be appeased and their unpredictable and sinister power counteracted with charms and incantations. In his writings Kirk described the ways in which people visualized the physical appearance of the fairy folk, their dress and weapons, and concepts of their social organization and domestic economy. Other contemporary accounts support his findings, as do the legends and traditions of Scotland and Ireland. (Hey, 2009)

Because of the fairies intermediated position between the human or mortal world and the spirit world they were often placed close to devils. After the Reformation this connection was more easily believed and fairies figured in a number of witchcraft investigations. (Sharpe, 2009) The clergy, whether Catholic or Protestant, usually insisted that all such creatures could only be devils. (Simpson 2000) Yet many of these clergy realized that there were some similarities between fairies and creatures of classical mythology, i.e. fauns, satyrs, nymphs, etc., however they also regarded those creatures as demons.

In popular belief, fairies were fitted into the Christian frame of reference in ways that left them morally ambiguous. In Cornwall they were said to be Angels who refused to side either with God or Lucifer, after the later rebelled. And so, ‘being too good for Hell and to bad for Heaven’, were thrown down to earth and lived

Figure 10 Fae of the Dark by Linda Bergkvist
wherever they happened to fall. (Simpson 2000) Yet still some people believed them to be ghosts of mortals.

**Subject Heading Statement**

The subject of fairies can go under many different names depending on culture and subdivision. However the common spellings are usually the main subject headings. As stated before the idea of fairies and magical folk goes back to the middle ages in Europe, and they are also linked to some of the Greek gods and goddess. It would be worthwhile to look sources in history, social history as well as literature to find information on fairies. For every country listed below one could do the same for almost every country in the world. Fairies or a variation of them seem to show up in almost every culture, past and present.

**Fairies— (May Subdivide Geographically)**

Fairies--Australia
Fairies--China
Fairies--Comic books, strips, etc.

Fairies--Denmark
Fairies--Dictionaries
Fairies--Dictionaries, Juvenile
Fairies—Encyclopedias
Fairies--Encyclopedias, Juvenile
Fairies--Ireland
Fairies--Spain--Catalonia
Fairies--Sweden

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Figure 11: The Fairy (Profile of Light)
Odilon Redon (French, 1840-1916)
Fairies—Juvenile literature
Elves—Juvenile literature
Fairies—Juvenile fiction
Fairies—Juvenile poetry
Fairies—Literary collections
Fairies—Poetry

Fairy plays (Fairies in Drama)

Fairies—History
Fairies--Scotland—History

Fairies in art
Fairies in art—Catalogs
Fairies in art—Juvenile literature
Fairies—Pictorial works

Fairies in music

Fairies—Periodicals

Folklore—May Subdivide Geographically
Subdivision of Folklore can be under names of countries, cities, etc., and under classes of persons, ethnic groups, uniform titles of sacred works, and topical headings.

Classification Statement
As the same with subject headings call numbers under the Library of Congress as well as Dewey classification system varies based on the information being sought on fairies.
In most public libraries if you are searching for folklores and fairytales, browsing the 398s will get you the books you need. You might even see dictionaries and encyclopedias about fairies. However under the LC classification browsing the PRs and even the PZs could garner the same results. If you are looking for literature about fairies the 800s in Dewey and still Pr and PZ will have the best results. Here’s a more detailed breakdown.

**Dewey Decimal Classifications**

398.21: Fairy Tales, Fairies, and Fairies -- Juvenile
398.2103: Fairies --Dictionaries; Fairies--Encyclopedias
398.45: Fairies
398.45089916041: Fairies -- Great Britain
398.209417: Fairies -- Ireland
808.80375: Fairies -- Literary collections (see also: 822.33, 398.2)
822.33, 398.2)
831.2: Fairies in Literature

Faeries in Art: 741.64092; 743.8939821; 700.475; 741.092;
741.642092; 745.67; 751.4547; 818.5402

**Library of Congress Classifications**

S9547)
BF1552: Fairies – Great Britain, Fairies – History, Fairies- Scotland- History
PR2827: Fairies – Literary Collections (see also: PZ5)
GR549: Fairies – Periodicals, Fairies
PR429.F3: Fairies (see also: PR2257, AC911, BF1434.S3, GR141, GR548)
NC978.5.F76: Fairies – Pictorial works
Form Examples and Sources

General Sources

Companions


In 1917 two young girls were able to produce photographic proof of fairies. Although it was later proved to be a complicated hoax this source is still valuable in showing how society was so easily provoked with proof of mythical magical creatures during a time when the world was encapsulated in the biggest war they had ever seen, WWI.


Shakespeare is known to have fairies show up in a number of his plays, but one thing should be noted that Shakespeare was not a folklorist. Nor did he really care about maintaining popular beliefs. This source talks about the connection between the changes in how fairies were seen in literature and later on in popular beliefs from dangerous frightening creatures to funny kindly nature-spirits.

Legends and traditions are big in both Scotland and Ireland, and was even a bigger thing back in the middle ages. It was what guided their everyday life more so than their growing belief in Christianity. This source talks about how a minister set about documenting the existence of fairies in the 17th century. Showcase the legends and traditions that backed up his claims that they were in deed followers of the Devil.


The Irish are seemed to be synonymous with the belief in fairies and superstitions folklores based around them, this source gives you a great overview of fairies from the Irish point of view.


Sharpe gives a great general definition of the term fairies from British History.

**Dictionaries**


A very intensive definition of the term fairies, this source also gives a general overview of the history of fairy belief. Starting from the Middle Ages and going on to the early 19th century it discusses how fairies evolved from menacing dangerous creatures to beautiful fun filled beings.

Even though the first fairy godmother made an appearance in the 1621 story of Tom Thumb it wasn’t until the late 18\textsuperscript{th} century with the two fairy tales, Cinderella and Sleeping beauty that the figure gained popularity. Simpson and Roud’s brief definition and history of the idea of the fairy godmother is needed for anyone doing general research on fairies and their evolution to modern fairies.


Documents the tradition of the belief in the Tooth Fairy. Although it wasn’t record in print until the 1950’s but there are oral records of people who remember it being very popular in the 1920’s and possible before.

\textbf{Encyclopedias}


Another general description of the term fairies, it includes a historical overview of the belief in fairies. How fairies changed from culture to culture as well as their prominence in literature.

A general description of the start of the fairy-lore, from a culmination of two superstitious beliefs: one attached to the Parcae, goddesses of destiny; the other to the “women of the Forest”. While other sources merely mention that the belief in fairies started in the Middle Ages, this source gives more details about how that happened. As well as a brief overview from near the 11th century up until the 17th century.

**Subject Specific Sources**

**Articles**


A narrative told to the water about an encounter with a water fairy. It reads like a historical fairy tale.


Davis gives a closer analysis of the original 1904 production of Peter Pan. In his article he reveals the blending of two simultaneous debates in ethnology: the idea that the last of the fairy folk were departing from Britain, and the more empirical observation that gypsy-tinkers were losing their rural way of life.


Figure 17 Cover of Brothers' Grimm Tales from a German Edition Published in Berlin, 1865 Giclee Print
Green discusses the connection between Shakespeare’s writings and the evolution of fairies. This source focus mostly on defending Charles Lamb’s statement that Shakespeare invented the fairies. The best thing about this source that it tries to use examples that aren’t used elsewhere, especially by Kathleen Briggs.


For the researcher looking for a broader study of fairies emphasizing the use of folklore in Victorian culture. These two volumes explore the fascination and multiple meanings that fairies had for the Victorians. During the Victorian period, it seems, fairies could be found everywhere. They frequently appear in art, music, and literature—for children and adults—as well as in the decorative arts.


In the 1990s Britain was the scene of an Environmental protest. Out of the protest a unique culture known as "eco-paganism" emerged in response of to the destruction of nature and construction of new roads. The movement adopted the fairy mythology as one of their structured beliefs. Giving examples of this mythology this article, Letcher shows how it was expressed, and shows that it produced three responses: outright rejection; a symbolic identification with fairies; and/or literal belief.
A person trying to research the origins of fairies should read this article. It’s thesis is that fairies originated from the ghost of early man. They stand on the principle that fairy lore came out of a very remote memory of times gone by when there was knowledge or folk-memory of ghosts and through the years that memory has been transmuted into something else.


*Fairies in Nineteenth-Century art and literature* is a literature review on George MacDonald's *Phantastes* (1858) where MacDonald express the fact that fairies have much to share and teach us. That we as humans have some connection to fairies, whether they are ancestors of early man or remnants of ancient mythology it would be beneficial to study them.


Nodelman reviews one of Kathleen Briggs many books on fairy lore, while he believes that her books are not very useful for any student of children’s literature, he
thinks they are great for any reader who likes to browse topics. This is a great review of a person who is considered one of the leading writers of fairy lore.

**Books**

**Annotation for Katherine Briggs books:**

Katherine Briggs has been considered one of the most important cataloguer and writer of fairy lore. She has been cited in many sources since her start in the 1960’s. She is one of the few writers that have collected these stories straight from regional folklorists. Her books are loaded with details and packed with information about all kids of fairy folk. Someone looking for general books about fairies would do better to read one of her books before moving to other general or specific sources.


Maureen Duffy examines the erotic meanings, hidden or obvious, behind the incredible element in English literature. She explores the symbolisms, themes, and double meanings whether done on purpose or in ignorance.

Filled with beautiful pictures and general fairy lore this is a great start to learning about fairy lore.


Beautiful pictures and handwritten annotations, written in a style that looks as if it belonged to a researcher who did field studies of fairies in their native habitats.


This source is written not only for someone looking for Irish folklore but also Irish history as it relates to folklore and the spirit world. Written before many of Kathleen Briggs


This book is an archeology of a culture, not only does it do a great job discussing the history of fairy folklore it also examines the ways in which Victorian folklorists and theorists built upon traditional and inherited materials and, through selection and revision, created a genre that was then further developed and elaborated by Victorian painters, writers, and essayists.

**Publishers**

Oxford University Press seems to be the leading publisher of sources dealing with fairies and fairy lore. Based in Oxford England they have the most direct access to those wishing to collect, preserve and share this genre from its regional beginnings. They seemed to be publisher not only books, but also electronic materials, and periodicals. While Folklore Enterprises, Ltd.
has one of the best journals for articles written around the subject of folklore. University of Chicago has published a number of items about fairies and folklore.