

Celtic Faerie Tales Considered[©]

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Introduction

From man's earliest use of symboling to communicate, storytelling has been a core human instinct. So too has been man's enlistment of myth, to help him understand and portray the human place in nature.¹ Myth, at once supernatural and magical, originates in the human imagination. It is an organizing quality of any culture's collective unconscious, imposing "images upon the mind since of old," and has retained its "paramount significance for the history of human phantasy and thought."²

Gaelic Ireland began to collect her folk-tales almost as early as any country in Europe.³ While the primary focus of this article is upon faerie tales of Ireland, narrative and poetic alike, the oral tradition admitted of no necessary distinction between what was Irish and what was Scottish or Welsh.⁴ The faerie stories described here include some that "have been extant, and can be traced for well nigh a thousand years."⁵

European continental folk tales, many curated by Hans Christian Anderson or the Brothers Grimm, habitually featured faerie godmothers, talking animals and wicked stepmothers.⁶ Irish faerie tales, in contrast, have most frequently employed mortals displaying the rainbow of human qualities, patient to impetuous, esurient to generous, measured to foolhardy, and a Hieronymous Bosch canvas in dark shades of heroic warriors, deadly goddesses and mischievous supernatural creatures dispensing menace as easily as comedy.

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¹ Prehistoric cave art from France progressed from hand stenciling to art depicting game hunting notable for its imagery of men not only as mortal huntsmen but also as huntsmen with shamanic features.

² PAUL RADIN, *THE WORLD OF PRIMITIVE MAN* 304, 306 (Evergreen/Grove 1953, 1960). Mythic storytelling, conveyed initially through oral tradition, originated in its written form most probably in India, and gained broader Indo-Germanic acceptance as stories sharing many common traits spread throughout the world.

³ JOSEPH JACOBS, *CELTIC FAERIE TALES*, *Preface* at vii (G.P. Putnam's Sons/NY 1892)(Dover/NY 1968).

⁴ "Scottish and Irish were one language and one literature, the great written monuments of which were in Ireland, though they belonged as much to the Highland Celt." T. W. ROLLESTON, *CELTIC MYTHS AND LEGENDS* 287-289 (C. Harrap & Co./ London 1911) (Dover/NY 1917, 1990) Wide-ranging commonalities exist as well among the Welsh, English and French folkloric traditions. DONNA ROSENBERG, *WORLD MYTHOLOGY* (3d ed.) 255 (NTC 1994).

⁵ JOSEPH JACOBS, *CELTIC FAERIE TALES*, *Preface* at x (G.P. Putnam's Sons/NY 1892) (Dover/NY 1968).

⁶ Several of these continental faerie tales with messages thought in modernity to be unpalatable to modern tastes have been modified accordingly. Coincident with evolving standards of what a parent would want a child to hear is the evolution of society's attitudes towards its children, the faerie tales changed most often have been *Little Red Riding Hood* and *The Gingerbread Man* due to violence, while *Cinderella*, *The Princess and the Pea*; *The Ugly Duckling*; and *The Frog Prince* have drawn criticism for insensitive stereotyping of various stripes.

In addition to its indigenous tribes of Celts, ancient Ireland was a bouillabaisse of invasive British, Western European and Nordic populations – the Southern Picts of the Western Scottish Isles; Angles, Saxons, and Jutes; Norwegian and Danish Viking assaults of particular vigor in the Ninth Century and those of the Anglo-Normans in the Eleventh Century; and the imposition of the Anglo-Saxon hegemon with the assumption of Henry VIII as King of Ireland in 1541. Ethnographic evidence from the oldest of native Irish writings suggests a “long established and universally received . . . belief in the existence of faeries [that] came in with the earliest colonists that entered Ireland[.]”⁷ Pagan in origin but then affected by the evangelism of St. Patrick, many early iterations of Irish faerie tales were transcribed from the oral tradition by Christian monks in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries.

Mr. Alfred Nutt, a leading folklorist of the late Nineteenth Century, described Irish faerie literature as constituting “as fair and bounteous a harvest of myth and romance as ever flourished among any race.”⁸ Of this Scotch-Irish past, Nutt’s contemporary Alfred Perceval Graves added: “The truth is that the Gaelic peasant, Scotch and Irish, is a mystic, and believes not only in this world, and the world to come, but in that other world which is the world of Faerie, and which exercises an extraordinary influence upon many actions of his life.” The Heaven-World of the ancient Celts “was not situated in some distant, unknown region of planetary space, but here on our own earth[.]” often in “a subterranean world entered through caverns, or hills, or mountains, and inhabited by many races and orders of invisible beings, such as demons, spectres, faeries, or even gods.”⁹ Some of these faeries were life-sized, but there existed another class of “diminutive preternatural beings who came into close touch with man,” including the Luchryman, or shoemaker, otherwise known as the Leprecaun, who if grasped firmly will disclose hidden treasure, usually in golden doubloons.¹⁰

The Irish faerie tale is more likely to unfold in the rural countryside or village than in any concentrated populous, which is understandable in that the Irish peasant in fiction and fact was more tenaciously superstitious than were his city counterparts. As sociologist Georg Simmel explained, the city and its inhabitants are readily contrasted with the Elysian fields of “the slower, more habitual, more smoothly flowing rhythm of the sensory-mental phase of small town and rural existence[.]”¹¹

As will be seen, most of the stories as collected are true to the then-existing idiosyncratic Irish-English usages.

Faerie Tale Morals

Faerie tales are presumed generally to have morals, and most imbed a lesson that is morally unambiguous. Whether in the form of myth or folklore, these stories all essay to give social guidance, in the form of norms that inform or demand behavior. For example, honesty or truth-telling has always been a mainstay of mature societal goals. Celtic folk stories are suffused with examples of good blessing the truth-teller and ill befalling the deceiver. In *King O’Toole and His Goose*, a happy and good King O’Toole has grown old, and eschewing all aulic refinements has resorted to buying a goose as his sole diversion.¹² Eventually, the goose is stricken by old age and the King is left feeling utterly alone.

⁷ ALFRED PERCEVAL GRAVES, *THE IRISH FAERIE BOOK, Epilogue* at 307 (1938) (Senate/Guernsey 1996). “Scottish and Irish were one language and one literature, the great written monuments of which were in Ireland, though they belonged as much to the Highland Celt.” T. W. ROLLESTON, *CELTIC MYTHS AND LEGENDS* 287-289 (C. Harrap & Co./ London 1911) (Dover/NY 1917, 1990). To the Scotch-Irish foundations can be added Welsh. Wide-ranging commonalities exist as well between and among the Welsh, English and French folkloric traditions. DONNA ROSENBERG, *WORLD MYTHOLOGY* (3d ed.) 255 (NTC 1994).

⁸ GRAVES, *IRISH FAERIE BOOK*, *id.* at viii.

⁹ W.Y EVANS-WENTZ, *THE FAERIE FAITH IN CELTIC CULTURES* 314 (Henry Froude-Oxford/London 1911) <https://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/celt/ffcc/index.htm>

¹⁰ *Leprecaun* derives from the Irish *leith bhrogan* (shoemaker, *i.e.*, the brogue) who is often seen working tirelessly on a single shoe. The word’s etymology has also been identified as *luchor pan*, or “little man.”

¹¹ Georg Simmel, *The Metropolis and Mental Life (Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben)* 12 (1903), www.blackwellpublishing.com (2020).

¹² JOSEPH JACOBS, *supra* note 5 at 93, 98.

One day St. Kavin, appearing simply as a journeying young man, greets the King by name. The King asks the visitor questions such as his identity and the basis of the man's knowledge of the King's regal status, but St. Kavin answers only: "I am an honest man." St. Kavin does, however, state that his trade is that of "makin' old things as good as new," adding: "What would you say if I made your old goose as good as new?" The King is overwhelmed with hope, and after a brief negotiation, agrees to give the young man "all the ground the goose flies over." The matter settled, St. Kavin makes the sign of the cross over the goose, holds it up in his hands, tosses it into the air, and the goose flies like a swallow.

At this point St. Kavin asks, "[W]ill you gi'e me all the ground the goose flew over?" to which King O'Toole answers he will, "though it's the last acre I have to give." St. Kavin then replies: "It's well for you, King O'Toole, that you said you will, for if you didn't say that, the devil the bit o' your goose would ever fly ag'in." Only now does St. Kavin reveal his saintly origin, and that he came to the King to "try" him. Having shown his honesty, the King lived out his days with his goose. Even afterwards, the goose was blessed, in some measure, in that one day in diving for a trout, it instead struck a horse eel, which killed the goose; however, the eel would not eat the goose because "he darn't ate what Saint Kavin had laid his blessed hands on."

Recurring Faerie Tale Themes

For their variety in personalities, journeys and misadventures, fortunes and failures, Celtic faerie tales return consistently to the same or similar haunts, spectres, challenges, contretemps and temptations. In these recurrent tropes the audience experiences vicariously the Leprecaun whose gold one can win only by keeping a tight hold on him; cats appointed to guard hidden treasure or holding command over other animals; sea or lake maidens; Cinderella sagas; bride capture; dormant heroines; fraudulent sales of worthless property; hideous *carlins* with giant sons; baying faerie hounds; changelings and infant replacement; shape-shifting to effect escapes as hares or other swift animals; cures by laughing; magical wells; banshee cries foreboding death to those who's ears can hear it; and the passing of seemingly healthy infants or young in a belief that they have been replaced by false bodies, and that the men, women and babies themselves have been "carried off by into Faerieland as brides and bridegrooms for Faeries who have fallen in love with them, as nurses for Faerie babies."¹³

Faerie Abduction

Paddy the Sport is the focus of a series of eponymous stories, one of which involved the classic faerie theme of child abduction.¹⁴ In a manor house with the lord away, a baby boy in the care of a nurse leaves the child, at last fast asleep, having "laid it . . . in the bed, as careful as if it was golden diamonds," to partake of a party downstairs, charging one of the housemaids to stay in the room with the child, while the nurse joined those in the festivities "merry enough they wor, at playin' iv cards, and dhrinkin' punch, and dancin', and the like o' that." But the housemaid herself left the child to join another party of the "undher-sarvants," as for what appeared the entire house "was all as one as a play-house, fairly turned upside down broke into partying."

"Well, as I said," Paddy continued, "the nurse (undher God) had an inklin' o' what was to be, for . . . she could not keep the child out iv her head, and she thought she heerd the "screeches av it ringin' in her ear every minit, although she knew full well she was far beyant where the cry o' the child could be heerd." The nurse raced back upstairs towards the child's room, only upon entering to see the foot carpet around the bed inching under the child's bed as though some one or thing was pulling it. She grabbed the carpet, and could see the child laying in its folds as the carpet and the child were pulled downward into the floor, with half of the baby already out of sight and "screechin' like a sae-gull[.]"

"Then it was the fairies were taking the child away?" Paddy was asked. "Who else would it be?" answered Paddy. "Sure the carpet wouldn't be runnin' undher the bed itself, if it wasn't pulled by the fairies," fulfilling a prophesy for the male babies of the lord, besides, Paddy continued: "I towl' you there was a prophecy stannin' agin the male boys of the lord's fam'ly."

"I hope, however, that boy lived?"

¹³ GRAVES, IRISH FAERIE BOOK, *Epilogue* at 309-10.

¹⁴ SAMUEL LOVER, LEGENDS AND STORIES OF IRELAND (3d ed)(W.F. Wakeman/Dublin 1834), <https://archive.org/details/legendsandstori03lovegoog/page/n8/mode/2up>

“Oh yes, sir,” said Paddy, “the charm was bruk that night; for the other childher used to be tukaway always by the faeries; and that night the child id have been tuk, only for the nurse, that was givin (undher God) to undherstan' the screechin' in her ears, and arrived betimes to ketch howlt o' the carpet, and baulk the faeries.” “The charm was bruk that night,” Paddy explained, “for all knowledgable people I ever heerd, says, that if you baulk the faeries wanst, they'll lave you alone evermore.”

In another tale of abduction, this one of a winsome maiden, is *The Recovered Bride*,¹⁵ a story that opens with the countryside wedding of a lovely young couple is interrupted by the groom's alarm that Margaret, his bride, is missing. All from the wedding party search everywhere for her, to no avail. But that night a twist of thistle is found on her pillow, “which as everyone knew was a faerie sign.” That night, Margaret appeared to her groom in a vision, wearing her bridal clothes. He was struck speechless, but she said “Do not be disturbed, dear husband, I am now in the power of the faeries, but if only you have courage and care, we may soon be happy together again!”

She ascribed the reason for her enchantment to her flawed confession to the priest, explaining that the faeries “caught me because I was thinking of you and not of my sins when I made confession, and so was not prepared for the sacrament of marriage, and then I wandered into a faerie ring during the wedding celebrations.” The cure she explained in this way: “Next Friday will be May-eve, and the whole court will ride out of the old fort after midnight. I must be there along with the rest. Sprinkle a circle with holy water and have a knife hafted in old bog oak¹⁶ as well as a blackthorn stick¹⁷ with you. If you have the courage to pull me off the horse and pull me into the ring, their powers will be of no use to them!” She closed with the warning that “You must leave some food for me every night on the dresser until then, for if I taste a mouthful of their food, I will be lost to you forever.” Immediately, the groom arranged as asked, and was pleased to see in the morning that the food he had left was gone. The evening following, shortly before midnight, the groom prepared the site with holy water as instructed and took his position in the middle of the circle, hafted knife and blackthorn stick in hand.

Suddenly the old abandoned fort nearby was transformed into a beautiful palace from the lofty entrance of which there came torch-bearing attendants preceding “richly attired lords and ladies emerged on horseback,” within which group he caught “sight of the one he was looking for – his very own dear Margaret, borne on a milk white steed. As she was unable to move closer to him, he leaped from the circle, seized her in his arms and carried her off. The faerie weapons were brandished from all sides, but with a “superhuman strength and courage,” lashing with the knife and stick, he “beat aside the faerie weapons, forcing the faeries them back, for they seemed to have a horror of the knife.” The groom pulled his bride into the ring, where for all of the faerie shouts of contempt and defiance “none of the myriads around dared to follow,” as “the two mortals held each other with great determination.” In a saving denouement, the tale concludes as the groom and his bride “made their way happily home, and the tale went around the county for the next five months, although they lived happily a good deal longer than that!”

For all of the promised morals to faerie tales, there are many stories in which the moral is subsumed by gross immoralities that are also taught and cruelties countenanced, an inversion one scholar has described as “backward morals.”¹⁸ For example, in the Celtic faerie tale *Princess Finola and the Dwarf*,¹⁹ to reach the eventual message that love will prevail over any enchantment, the audience must first encounter the unspeakable and patently gratuitous cruelty visited upon an ultimate hero as low-born and pitiable as the genre has to offer. This plangent tale tells of a fool and simpleton becoming the story's brave, heroic seeker, with ample opportunities for the villainous insinuations of a destructive trickster.

¹⁵ <https://www.pitt.edu/~dash/abduct.html#recovered>; also collected at *Irish and Celtic Folk Tales and Faerie Tales*, <http://emeraldisle.ie/the-lost-bride>

¹⁶ A wood said to be as old as the faeries themselves.

¹⁷ A blackthorn, known as a wishing thorn.

¹⁸ Slarom, *The Backward Morals of Faerietales*, Jack Heckel (9/29/2014), <https://www.tor.com/2014/09/29/slarom-the-backward-morals-of-faerietales/>

¹⁹ EDMUND LEAMY, *IRISH FAERIE TALES 1* (M. H. Gill & Son, Ltd./ Dublin 1906); <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/29311/pg29311.txt>

Here we come upon a little hut in the middle of a lonely moor where lived an old woman, "withered, sour-tempered, and dumb," and a young girl, Finola, who was "as sweet and as fresh as an opening rosebud." Within the hut shaped as a beehive, a fire burned night and day as though by some magic "it was never touched or tended by human hand."

Outside the hut stretched a lonely moor, and at night there was neither sign nor sound of any living thing. Apart from the old woman, the only person who Finola ever saw was a speechless dwarf who, mounted on a broken-down horse, visited once a month with a sack of corn for the two. Although Finola and the dwarf never exchanged words, she always gave him a cake she had made specially for him. The dwarf could not speak of his love for her, "and often his heart was heavy and sad as he thought of her pining away in the lonely moor."

One day Finola did not come out to greet him. Instead, the old woman beat his horse to drive him away, but as he rode off he saw Finola crying in the door way, and suddenly he heard a voice: "It is time for you to come." The dwarf looked up to see right before him "a little man not half as big as himself," dressed in a green jacket and a red cap and tassel, who bid him: "Get off your horse," and "Come with me, that I may touch your lips with the wand of speech, that we may have a talk together." The dwarf followed the little faerie man through a small hole into a splendid room with a table set for royalty. "Take a chair," said the faerie, "and I will ring for the wand of speech." The faerie waved the wand three times over the dwarf, struck him on the right shoulder, then the left, touched it to the dwarf's lips and said: "Speak." The dwarf spoke, and he so rejoiced at hearing the sound of his own voice that he danced about the room.

The faerie asked the dwarf: "Who are you?" All that the dwarf could remember was that one day he had joined a crowd at the great fair of the Liffey when he followed jugglers performing for the King, and when their play ended the King bade the dwarf come over and asked him who he was but the dwarf could not answer. The King took the dwarf into his service, and as his only task directed him to go once a month to the hut of the old woman and Finola with his bag of corn.

"And there you fell in love with the little Princess," offered the faerie. "Now tell me, truly," the faerie asked, "do you love the Princess, and what would you give to free her from the spell of enchantment that is over her?" "I would give my life," confessed the dwarf. Thereupon the faerie told this story: "The Princess Finola was banished to the lonely moor by the King, your master. He killed her father, who was the rightful King, and would have killed Finola, only he was told by an old sorceress that if he killed her he would die himself on the same day, and she advised him to banish her to the lonely moor, and she said she would fling a spell of enchantment over it, and that until the spell was broken Finola could not leave the moor. And the sorceress also promised that she would send an old woman to watch over the Princess by night and by day, so that no harm should come to her; but she told the king that he himself should select a messenger to take food to the hut, someone he could trust never to tell anyone anything about her; and that is the reason he selected you."

"Tell me, how can the spell be broken?" the dwarf asked. "Oh, it is easy enough to break the spell if you have the weapons," said the faerie. The weapons the dwarf would need are "the spear of the shining haft and the dark blue blade and the silver shield," said the faerie. "They are on the farther bank of the Mystic Lake in the Island of the Western Seas . . . for the man who is bold enough to seek them." "And if you are the man who will bring them back to the lonely moor" the faerie continued, "the spell of enchantment will be removed, and the Princess will be free."

"And whatever it cost you," said the faerie, "will you pay the price?" "I will," said the dwarf. "Well, then, mount your horse, give him his head, and he will take you to the shore opposite the Island of the Mystic Lake. You must cross to the island on his back, and make your way through the water-steeds that swim around the island night and day to guard it." The dwarf thereupon rode his old horse over ever greater hills and vertiginous valleys before coming to the waters surrounding the Island of the Mystic Lake. There he saw not only the island but also the approaching water steeds, raising almost into the air and tossing white spray to the skies. The frightened dwarf turned to flee, but as he did he heard "the twang of a golden harp, and right before him who should he see but the little man of the hills, holding a harp in one hand and striking the strings with the other." "Are you ready to pay the price?" the faerie asked, and the frightened dwarf answered bravely: "Yes, I am ready." "Back to your waves!" cried the little harper to the water steeds, and as he ran his fingers across his lyre, the frightened steeds drew back into the waters.

"What is the price?" asked the dwarf. "Your right eye," said the faerie, as he scooped out the dwarf's eye with his finger, and put it into his pocket. The water steeds had become perfectly still, appearing to float on the surface of the water. "Now," said the faerie, as he led the dwarf's horse to the water's edge. The dwarf urged the horse into the water, and it struck out. Upon reaching the island dwarf rode on to the summit of the green hills looking down on the Mystic Lake. He dismounted and fell asleep. Towards midday of the next day the dwarf beheld what he thought was a black cloud sailing across the sky that seemed to grow larger as it came nearer and nearer, until he could recognize it as a huge bird, one of the murderous Cormorants of the Western Seas, that was soon accompanied by its two offspring. After much thunderous and menacing activity, the birds departed.

The Cormorants gone, the dwarf mounted his horse and descended towards the lake. He was almost at the shoreline, and in another minute would have plunged in, when he remembered that the faerie had told him that if he attempted to swim the lake without paying the price the three Cormorants would pick the flesh off his bones. "Faint heart never won fair lady," said the little harper. "Are you ready to pay the price?" "Yes," the dwarf said; "I am ready--win or die. What is the price?" "Your left eye," said the faerie. And as soon as said he scooped out the eye, and put it in his pocket. The poor blind dwarf almost fainted with pain.

Whereupon the faerie announced the dwarf's last trial that involved leading his horse across the lake. This accomplished, the dwarf regained his sight and magically he no longer rode his spavined old horse, but instead "was bestride a noble steed," and felt "an unknown vigour in his limbs." Atop the hillside the dwarf now saw "a silver shield, bright as the sun, resting against a spear standing upright in the ground," and as the dwarf espied his reflection in the shield, he saw that he "was no longer a dwarf, but a gallant knight." At this moment, the dwarf's memory returned to him, and "he knew he was Conal, one of the demi-royal Knights of the Red Branch, and he also now remembered that the spell of dumbness and deformity" had been cast upon him by the Witch of the Palace.

Plucking the spear from the ground, and slinging his shield over his left arm, he leaped on his horse. As they descended to the sea separating the island from the mainland, nowhere could he see the black Cormorants, as in their place were three white swans. Conal and his horse rode as swiftly as the wind and before long were bounding over the enchanted moor. His approach was heralded as wherever his steed's hooves struck the ground, "grass and flowers sprang up, and great trees with leafy branches rose on every side." Reaching the little hut of Princess Finola, as instructed Conal three times struck the shield with the haft and three times with the blade of his spear. The hut disappeared, and before him stood Princess Finola. Conal took her in his arms and kissed her; "then he lifted her on to the horse, and, leaping up before her, he turned towards the north, to the palace of the Red Branch Knights, and as they rode on beneath the leafy trees from every tree the birds sang out, for the spell of silence over the lonely moor was broken forever." While the outcome of this faerie tale warms any heart, what is limned with great emphasis is the "backward moral" of the malign faerie genius behind the Jobian cruelty visited upon the poor dwarf.

Faerie Tale Poetics

As with the most ancient forms of story-telling, faerie tales have been rendered in poem with sufficient frequency to create their own poetics. Of these several are quite short. *The Lament of the Last Leprechaun*,²⁰ employing the *voce magicae* "my grief" repeatedly, seems a requiem to a passing time:

For the red shoon of the Shee,
 For the falling o' the leaf,
 For the wind among the reeds,
 My grief.
 For the sorrow of the sea,
 For the song's unquicken'd seeds,
 For the sleeping of the Shee,
 My grief.
 For dishonoured whitethorn-tree,
 For the runes that no man reads

²⁰ Nora Hopper, *The Lament of the Last Leprechaun*, in GRAVES, *THE IRISH FAERIE BOOK*, *supra* note 7 at 322.

Where the grey stones face the sea,
 My grief.
 Lissakeole, that used to be
 Filled with music night and noon,
 For their ancient revelry,
 My grief.
 For the empty faerie shoon,
 Hollow rath and yellow leaf,
 Hands unkissed to sun or moon,
 My grief--my grief!

Another Irish poem involving an abducted Irish maid, *The Dark Faerie Rath*,²¹ makes clear that a faerie capture, once effected, can be impervious to mortal intercession:

Long, long have I wandered in search of my love,
 O'er moorland and mountain, through greenwood and grove,
 From the banks of the Maig unto Finglas's flood
 I have no'er seen the peer of this Child of the Wood.
 One bright Summer evening alone on my path,
 My steps led me on to the Dark Faerie Rath;
 And, seated anear it, my Fair One I found,
 With her long golden locks trailing down on the ground.
 When I met her, though bashfulness held me in check,
 I put my arm gently around her white neck;
 But she said, "Touch me not, and approach me not near;
 I belong to this Rath, and the Faerie Host here."
 "Ah!" I spake, "you are burdened with sorrow and care;
 But whence do you come? From Clar Luire or elsewhere?
 Are you Blanaid the blooming, the queenly, yet coy,
 Or the dame brought by Paris aforetime to Troy?"
 "I'm neither," she said, "but a meek Irish maid,
 "Who years ago dwelt in yon green-hillocked glade,
 And shone all alone like a lamp in a dome.
 Come! take off your arms! I'll be late for my home."
 "O pearl of my soul, I feel sad and forlorn
 To see your bright cheeks faerie-stricken and worn.
 From your kindred and friends far away were you borne
 To the Hill of Cnoc-Greine, to languish and mourn."
 And I said to myself, as I thought on her charms,
 O how fondly I'd lock this young lass in my arms.
 How I'd love her deep eyes, full of radiance and mirth,
 Like new-risen stars that shine down upon earth.
 Then I twined round her waist my two arms as a zone,
 And I fondly embraced her to make her my own;
 But when I glanced up, behold! nought could I see.
 She had fled from my sight as the bird from the tree!

²¹ W. G. WOOD-MARTIN, 2 TRACES OF ELDER FAITHS OF IRELAND, A FOLKLORE SKETCH: A HANDBOOK OF IRISH PRE-CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS (vol. 2) 2 (Longmans, Green & Co./ London 1902); <https://archive.org/details/cu31924092530553>

Of Leprecauns, Gnomes and Little People Intercession

The central and catalytic character in many Celtic tales is the mischievous little tailor or cobbler, sometimes gnomish, never large, and ever a sentinel to caprice. The poem *The Leprecaun* (or *Faerie Shoemaker*)²² tells of a herdsman's (Cowboy) fantasy of capturing a Faerie Shoemaker "a span and a quarter in height," squeezing him to exact a fantastic ascension to a splendid carriage with a with a royal bride and an opulent ever after with the "nine and ninety treasure crocks" that the miser faerie has secreted "in his mountains, woods and rocks." The Cowboy's plans are simple enough – he need only lay in wait for the propitious moment:

I. Little Cowboy, what have you heard,
 Up on the lonely rath's²³ green mound? . . .
 Lay your ear close to the hill.
 Do you not catch the tiny clamour,
 Busy click of an elfin hammer,
 Voice of the Leprecaun singing shrill
 As he merrily plies his trade?
 He's a span
 And a quarter in height.
 Get him in sight, hold him tight,
 And you're a made Man!

Success is apparently at hand, as the herdsman reports, until the shoemaker proves an underlying tenet of all such faerie tales: No rewards inure to the undeserving:

III. I caught him at work one day, myself,
 In the castle-ditch, where foxglove grows -
 A wrinkled, wizen'd, and bearded Elf,
 Spectacles stuck on his pointed nose,
 Silver buckles to his hose,
 Leather apron - shoe in his lap -
 "Rip-rap, tip-tap,
 Tick-tack-too!
 (A grasshopper on my cap!
 Away the moth flew!)
 Buskins for a faerie Prince,
 Brogues for his son -
 Pay me well, pay me well,
 When the job is done!"
 The rogue was mine, beyond a doubt.
 I stared at him; he stared at me;
 "Servant, Sir!" "Humph!" says he,
 And pulled a snuff-box out.
 He took a long pinch, look'd better pleased,
 The queer little Leprecaun;
 Offer'd the box with a whimsical grace--
 Pouf! he flung the dust in my face,
 And, while I sneezed,
 Was gone!

In a different and mordant tone, *The Stolen Child*²⁴ is a melancholy and morally unfixed story of a faerie abduction of a child to a sylvan and abundant faerie land where:

²² William Allingham, *The Leprechaun or Faerie Shoemaker*, in GRAVES, IRISH FAERIE BOOK, *supra* note 7 at 31.

²³ A dwelling and stronghold in former times.

²⁴ *The Stolen Child*, curated by William Butler Yeats, in GRAVES, IRISH FAERIE BOOK, *supra* note 7 at 67.

There dips the rocky highland
 Of Sleuth Wood in the lake,
 There lies a leafy island,
 Where flapping herons wake
 The drowsy water rats;
 There we've hid our faerie vats,
 Full of berries,
 And of reddest stolen cherries.
 "Come away, O human child!" importunes the faerie abductor,
 to a land free of weeping:
 To the waters and the wild
 With a faerie, hand in hand,
 For the world's more full of weeping than
 you can understand.

The promised refuge is one of "olden dances mingling hands and mingling glances," to "seek for slumbering trout, and whispering in their ears give them unquiet dreams; leaning softly out from ferns that drop their tears over the young streams." And yet in rescuing the child from a "world more full of weeping than you can understand," the story teller admits poignantly the loss the stolen child will suffer:

Away with us he's going,
 The solemn-eyed:
 He'll hear no more the lowing
 Of the calves on the warm hillside;
 Or the kettle on the hob
 Sing peace into his breast,
 Or see the brown mice bob
 Round and round the oatmeal-chest.
 For he comes, the human child!
 To the waters and the wild
 With a faery, hand in hand,
 From a world more full of weeping than
 he can understand.

Of Royalty and the Path to Wisdom

The Kings and Queens of Irish faerie tales are rarely very wise, farsighted or even honest. Royal callowness and venality are frequent themes, and the intercession of some faerie magic is often needed to reveal an epiphany permitting the royal protagonist to fulfill any honest and generous potential.

The Joseph Jacobs' version of *Tale of Ivan*²⁵ describes one Ivan, of parish Llanlavan in Hwrddh, as he bade his wife goodbye in order to search for work. Traveling East he came to the house of a farmer, and agreed to work for a year for a wage of three pounds. At the end of the year the farmer offered him the three pounds but offered alternatively that he give Ivan a piece of advice. Ivan opted for the advice, and it was this: "Never leave the old road for the sake of the new one." The two agreed that Ivan would work for another year at the old wage, and the end of which Ivan again took the advice in lieu of the three pounds. This time the advice was "Never lodge where an old man is married to a young woman." Again, at the end of a third year of work, Ivan accepted the advice, this time being "Honesty is the best policy."

Ivan now wanted to return to his wife, but the farmer importuned him to stay one more night to permit the farmer's wife to prepare Ivan a cake to take home to his wife, instructing: "when ye are most joyous together, then break the cake, and not sooner." Leaving with the cake the next day Ivan met three merchants from his own parish Tre Rhyn, returning from Exeter Fair, who bid Ivan to return with them. But when they set out on a new road, Ivan kept to the old, and robbers set upon the merchants almost immediately. Ivan, hearing the merchants' cry of "Thieves!", joined the chorus of alarm and at this the robbers fled away.

²⁵ JOSEPH JACOBS, *supra* note 5 at 195.

“Oh Ivan,” said the merchants, we are beholding to you; but for you we would have been lost men.” “Come with us,” they invited Ivan, “at our cost, and welcome.” When the four came to the proposed lodging, Ivan said “I must see the host. Here is the hostess, she is young and pretty.” Ivan then went into the kitchen to find the host, “a weak old man turning the spit.” “Oh! Oh!” exclaimed Ivan, remembering the second piece of advice he received, “I’ll not lodge here,” and made his bed instead in the next lodging.

As it happened, the hostess at the lodging had plotted with an evil monk to murder the old man in his bed that night and to lay the crime on the lodgers. Ivan, though, heard of the plot through a hole in the pine plank end of the house as the monk placed his back to the hole lest “people in the next house may see our deeds” while the hostess killed the old man. Alarmed, Ivan took out his knife and cut a piece of fabric from the monk’s robe that protruded through the hole. The following morning the wife brought the news of the host’s murder, and declared the merchants should hang for it. Ivan challenged the town justices to “summon the real murderers,” and to their inquiry said “If I cannot prove who committed the crime, hang me in their stead.” Telling all he knew, Ivan produced the cloth from the monk’s robe, and in a fitting *coup de thé-âtre* the hostess and the monk were seized and hanged.

When Ivan and the three merchants rejoined their journey after traveling a while, their roads separated, and Ivan, declining the merchants’ choice of route made straight home to his wife, who greeted him: “Home in the nick of time. Here is a purse of gold I’ve found; it has no name, but sure it belongs to the great lord yonder. I was just thinking what to do when you came.” Ivan recalled the third piece of advice the farmer gave him: “Honesty is the best policy,” and the two set out for the lord’s castle. The lord was not in, so they left the purse with the servant who minded the gate, and went home.

Some time later the great lord stopped at their house for water, and Ivan’s wife said to him: “I hope your lordship found your lordship’s purse quite safe with all its money in it.” His lordship professed no knowledge of it, and after the wife explained, she and Ivan set out to the castle to look into the matter. There the doorkeeper admitted keeping the purse, and was sent from the castle. Thereupon the lord made Ivan his servant in the stead of the thief. “Honesty is the best policy,” Ivan proclaimed, “How joyful am I!” He then remembered the injunction of the farmer that he break the cake gift “when he was most joyful,” and on doing so Ivan and his wife discovered within it the wages for the three years he had labored there.

Christianity and Paganism in Celtic Story Telling

Following the arrival of St. Patrick to Hibernia Christianity was introduced unevenly into tribal Ireland, particularly in the countryside, but even as many Celtic openly pan-theistic pursuits were retained accommodations were made to the new Roman faith, to the point of adoption of mythic tales mimicking formalisms within the eucharistic ceremony, concessions of the Irish spectral imagination to the metropole of the church, first Roman and later Tudor.

One example is found in *The Celtic Cauldron of Abundance*, a mystic poem of Arthurian origins, describing Caer Pedryvan, the Four-Square castle of Pwyll, within which a cauldron rimmed with pearls is “fanned by the breath of nine maidens” representing the Sun, giving forth light, heat and fertility, with the lance or sword the weapons of lightning that appeared in Norse mythology as the hammer of Thor.²⁶ In a most interesting iteration within the tale *Peredur* of the magical attributes of cauldrons throughout Celtic myth, an unknown singer “transforms the ancient tale of vengeance and redemption into the mystical romance at the heart and soul of Christendom,” in which “the magic cauldron became the cup of the Eucharist,” leading to “its re-creation by artist after artist for seven hundred years.” In the time of St. Patrick a belief in a world of fairies existed even in the King’s household, for it is recorded that “when the two daughters of King Leary of Ireland, Ethnea the Fair and Fedelma the Ruddy, came early one morning to the well of Clebach to wash, “they found there a synod of holy bishops with St. Patrick. And they knew not whence they came, or in what form, or from what people, or from what country; but they supposed them to be Duine Sidh, or gods of the earth, or a phantasm.”²⁷

²⁶ T.W. ROLLESTON, CELTIC MYTHS AND LEGENDS, *supra* at 410-412.

²⁷ GRAVES, IRISH FAERIE BOOK, *Preface, supra* note 7.

Emergent Maidens and Faerie Taskmasters

The *Shepherd of Myddvai*,²⁸ another tale from the oral tradition collected by Joseph Jacobs, is set in the Black Mountains of Caermarthenshire, where lies Lake Lyn y Vab Vach, and where the shepherd of Myddvai led his lambs. It is a story in the tradition of the European *droll* “the loss of temper bet.” One day there raised from the Lake’s dark waters three maidens, each of “more than mortal beauty,” who waded ashore, and the shepherd fell in love with one of them, to whom he offered his bread. Taking the bread, the Lake Maiden sang to him:

Hard-baked is thy bread,
Tis not easy to catch me.

The following day the shepherd brought with him bread that was not well-baked, and when the maiden took and tasted it, she sang:

Unbaked is thy bread,
I will not have the.

The third day the shepherd offered the maiden as his chosen bread some morsels he picked from the water, which found her favor. She agreed to marry him on two conditions. The first was that he be able to pick her out from her two companions, both palimpsests of the first. This the shepherd was able to do having noticed the distinctive strap to her shoe. The second condition was that she would leave him if he ever struck her three times. He naturally swore not to strike her, and so the maiden came to his side with a “marriage portion” of three cows, two oxen and a bull. Their marriage thrived, and they had three children. One day, however, on finding that his wife had not fetched horses as he had instructed her, and he tapped her lightly on the shoulder with his riding gloves. “That’s one,” said she. Some time thereafter at a wedding the husband found the Lake Maiden weeping, and tapped her on the shoulder. She told him that “Trouble is upon you; for that is the second causeless blow you have given me. Be careful; the third is the last.”

After this, the shepherd took even greater care not to breach her stated conditions, but upon her bursting out into inappropriate laughter at a funeral, he touched her on the shoulder, asking pointedly “Is this a time for laughter?” “I laugh,” she said, “because . . . the last blow has been struck; our marriage is at an end, and so farewell.” Returning to their home, she called to the cattle that she had brought into the marriage:

Brindle cow, white speckled,
Spotted cow, bold freckled,
Old white face, and gray, Geringer,
And the white bull from the King’s coast,
Gray ox, and black calf, all, all, follow me home

As it happened the black calf had been slaughtered and was hanging on a hook, but upon the Lake Maiden’s bidding it got off the hook and followed her; so too did the oxen, engaged in ploughing, trailing the plough with them, and leaving “to this day . . . the furrow . . . which the plough left as it was dragged across the mountains to the tarn.” After this the Lake Maiden returned only once, with her sons by then grown into manhood, giving them the gifts of healing “by which they won the name of Meddygon Myddvai, the Physicians of Myddvai.”

Music to the Faerie Tale Lyric

Throughout Celtic faerie tales is emphasized the magical effect of music. Faerie tale chronicler T.W. Rolleston confirmed: “The sense of something magical in music, as though supernatural powers spoke through it, is of constant recurrence in Irish legend,”²⁹ one with “roots in the incantations, songs and dances of ancient man.”³⁰

Revealing in this regard within the *Legend Cycle of Conary Mor* is its story of *Labra the Mariner*,³¹ of whom, after his accession as King, it was told that he had his hair cropped once each year by a man, chosen by lot, who was thereupon put to death in order to hide the truth of his deformity - that he had the ears of a horse. Sadly, the lot fell one year upon a poor widow’s only child, a boy.

²⁸ JACOBS, CELTIC FAERIE TALES 57, *supra* note 5.

²⁹ ROLLESTON, CELTIC MYTHS AND LEGENDS 155, *supra* note 4.

³⁰ Michael Dirda, *Rending the Veil*, May 28, 2020 THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS 43.

³¹ ROLLESTON, CELTIC MYTHS AND LEGENDS 154-55, *supra* note 4.

The mother was able only through “tears and entreaties” to prevail upon the King to let the son live “on condition that he swore by the wind and Sun to tell no man what he might see.” But the secret “so preyed on the boy’s mind that he fell into a sore sickness,” and when near death, a wise druid was called. The druid’s prognosis was that the son would never be well until he revealed the truth. He instructed the boy to travel upon the nearby high road and upon arriving at a place where four roads met turn right and “tell his secret to the first tree that he should meet on the road.” It happened that the first tree was a willow, and the boy “laid his lips close to the bark, whispered his secret to it, and went home light-hearted as of old.” But it chanced that not long after this a harper, one Craftiny, a regular performer at the King’s hall, having broken his harp and in need of a new one, came upon the willow as the first tree suited to his need, cut it down and made his new harp of it. No sooner than the harper touched the strings that night did the King’s assembled guests hear in chime the words: “Two horse’s ears hath Labra the Mariner.” Recognizing that there was no longer a secret to preserve, the King “plucked off his hood and showed himself plainly; nor was any man put to death again on account of this mystery.”

Stories of Chronic Longing

Whether the desired object is golden guineas, an unattainable love, an untroubled life in a land of abundance, or simply a life other than what the protagonist then enjoys, a pronounced theme in Irish faerie tales is that of chronic longing. Ella Young was a turn of the Nineteenth-Century Irish poet and Celtic mythologist. In her retelling of *The Golden Fly*,³² Ethaun, Angus, Fuamach, and Midyir dwelled in the World of the Gods. To Angus’s offer that the damsel Ethaun accompany him in his travels to other worlds, he as a juggler, a wandering minstrel of a beggarman and she as “a poor singing woman of a strolling player,” Ethaun complained that “all the worlds are full of weariness”, and vowed to ask Midyir “to make a world for myself.” Fuamach, interrupting, said: “You have the heart of a fly, that is never contented; take the body of a fly, and wander till your heart is changed and you get back your own shape again.” Unfortunately, as a little Golden Fly Ethaun feared leaving the World of the Gods and wished she could regain her human form. She approached Midyir and buzzed round him, but when she lit on his hand he brushed her away.

She flew to Angus, who was making string music on his *tiompan*,³³ and succeeded in getting his attention. “You have a sweet song, little fly,” and he made the *tiompan* buzz like a fly. “O Angus, give me back my shape again,” she begged. I am Ethaun, and Fuamach has changed me into a fly and bidden me wander till I get back my shape.” Angus said: “It is only in Ildathach that I am a Shape-Changer. Come with me to that land and I will make a palace for you and while you are in it you will have the shape of Ethaun.” Ethaun followed Angus to his castle in Ildathach, “a beautiful palace that had all the colours of the rainbow,” with windows facing North, South, East and West, where she re-took her earlier form. For all of the views from each window and the tale of the world Angus told her, “at last the old longing came to her and she grew weary of everything she could see.” “I wish the walls of the palace would fall and the trees wither,” she said, “for they are always the same!” Going to the Eastern window and unbarring it, she viewed the wind-blown sea, whereupon a great wind blew the window open and caught Ethaun and whirled her out of the palace,” outside of which she resumed her form as the Little Golden Fly. She wandered for a spell, “scorched by the sun and beaten by the rain,” before coming to the World of the Dark Shadow (Earth), where appeared a beautiful house where a King and Queen stood together, the King holding a golden cup of mead. Little Golden Fly lit on the edge of the golden cup just as the King was giving it to the Queen, and the Queen drank the mead and the Little Golden Fly all in one gulp. Time passed, and the Queen gave birth to “a strange beautiful child” whom she named Ethaun. While all in the castle loved the child, she was implacable, with nothing pleasing her for long, and even as she grew older and more beautiful she was never contented, to the point that the Queen despaired that the child was one of the Deathless Ones “that bring with them too much joy or too much sorrow for mortals.”

Given her contrarian personality it was inevitable that the King would eventually send her away “to live in a little hut of woven branches in a forest where only shepherds and simple people came to her and brought her food.” There she grew more beautiful by the day, walking beneath the great trees and singing her own songs. One day Eochy, the King of all Ireland, who was “young and beautiful and strong,” came riding by, and when he saw Ethaun he exclaimed: “No woman in the world is beautiful after this one!” He approached Ethaun as she sat outside of her little hut combing her hair in the sunshine.

³² ELLA YOUNG, CELTIC WONDER TALES 70 (Maunsell & Co./Dublin 1910), <https://archive.org/details/celticwondertale00younrich/page/n10/mode/2up>

³³ A hand-held timpani instrument similar to the tambourine.

"It is wrong," said Eochy, "that your beauty should be shut in this forest, come with me and you shall be the High Queen of Ireland." Ethaun looked at Eochy, and said: "I have waited here for you and no other. Take me into your house, High King." Even in the wonderful house Eochy made for Ethaun, "there was always in the mind of Ethaun a beauty that made the rich hangings seem poor and the jewels dull and she had a song in her heart that took the music out of all other songs." One day by the carved yew door of her palace and watching the sea-gulls wheeling in the sky, Ethaun could hear the palace fool singing.

"Go on singing!" she said. "I wish my heart were as lightsome as yours." "How could your heart be lightsome, Queen," rebuked the Fool, "when you will not give the flower a chance to blossom, or the hound a chance to catch his prey, or the bird a clear sky to sing in?" The redness of shame spread itself in Ethaun's face. She stooped and lifted a little bud from the floor. "I think the Deathless Ones could make this bud blossom," she said, "but all the buds that I break off wither in my hands. I will break no more buds, Fool." While she spoke there was a noise outside, and Ethaun asked her attendant what it was. "Only a beggar-man they are driving away. He says he is a juggler and can do tricks." "Let him stay," said Ethaun, "if he has the will to please me he will please - and tonight Incar will please me too." She stepped out through the carved yew door and bade the beggar-man do his tricks.

The Queen gave him a ring from her finger and the little bud she had in her hand. The beggar-man kept the bud in his hands and suddenly "it blossomed into a rose and he plucked the petals apart and flung them into the air and they became beautiful white birds and they sang till every one forgot the sky above them and the earth beneath them with gladness. When the people looked for the beggar-man he was gone. Ethaun called after him: "Angus Angus! Come back!" but no one answered. That night as King's juggler did feats that even Ethaun praised, but while the people were shouting their approval a tall dark man robed as a foreigner entered. The King called the stranger to him, and said: "What knowledge have you, and what skill is in your fingers?" "I know," said the stranger, "where the sun goes when the earth does not see it, and I have skill in the playing of chess." The King's skill in chess was renowned and none could beat him, or perhaps none dared. The King said: "I will play a game with you." At this the stranger "brought out a chess-board that had the squares made of precious stones brighter than any stones of the earth and he set the men on it. They were of gold and ivory, but the ivory was whiter than the whiteness of a cloud and the gold brighter than the sunset."

At this Ethaun looked into the stranger's eyes, recognizing him to be her god Midyir, "and she remembered the World of the Gods, and Midyir, and Angus, and Fuamach, and how she had been the Little Golden Fly." "O Midyir," Ethaun said, "in all the worlds I would be nothing but a little fly. I have wandered far, but I have learned wisdom at last from a Fool. I am going to make a world for myself." As she was speaking Eochy came back with his board. "The first games on my board," said Midyir, "the last on yours." "Be it so," said Eochy. Midyir began to set out the chess pieces. "What are we playing for?" asked Eochy. "Let the winner decide," said Midyir. Eochy won the first game, and he asked for fifty horses out of faerie land. "I will get them," said Midyir, and they played again, and Eochy won again, demanding and receiving his terms. They played again, and this time Midyir won. "What do you ask?" said Eochy. "I ask Ethaun," said Midyir. "I will never give her!" said Eochy, but after bargaining agreed nonetheless to surrender Ethaun at the end of one year.

"I will come at the year's end," said Midyir, and he left the hall. After that there was never such a bounteous year in Ireland. At the end of a year of festivity and plenty in the Ireland of the mortals Midyir returned, and "suddenly there was a light in the hall that made the torches and the great candles that are lit only for Kings' feasts burn dim," and the King himself bowed, as did the poets and the druids and chiefs. On the small *cruit* he carried he played sweet music, and turning to Ethaun sang:

Come with us, Ethaun, to Moy-Mell where the star-flocks are straying
like troops of immortal birds forever delaying, delaying the moment of flight
that would take them away from the honey-sweet plain.

Surely you long for waves that break into starry rain

And are fain of flowers that need not die to blossom again.

Midyir stretched his hands to Ethaun, and she turned to Eochy and kissed him. "I have put into a year the gladness of a long life," she said, "and to-night you have heard the music of Faerie, and echoes of it will be in the harpstrings of the men of Ireland for ever, and you will be remembered as long as wind blows and water runs, because Ethaun - whom Midyir loved - loved you."

Ethaun put her hand in Midyir's and they "rose together as flame rises or as the white light rises in the sky when it is morning; and in the World of the Gods Angus waited for them, and Fuamach; and they walked together again as they had walked from the beginning of time."³⁴

The *Little Golden Fly* fable meanders, as might a fly in flight, but does at least permit the observation that Kings, often practiced in not knowing, more often than not desire a just and proper conclusion of affairs but almost as often need faerie guidance to understand what that result is. As to the Little Golden Fly herself, the story leaves unresolved if her rapprochement with Midyir will relieve her of her preternatural dour negativism.

Of Gnomes and Leprechauns

The Irish leprechaun has intrigued relentlessly against the ordinary. Stories of little people as authors of supernal meddling in mortal affairs are not the exclusive province of faerie tales, as their intercession in mortal affairs has figured often in western literature. In Arthur Machen's late Nineteenth Century short stories collected in *THE GREAT GOD PAN* (1894) the author imagines the survival of "a primordial and malevolent race of hominids, now lurking in Welsh hills and caves" surrounded by "brooding hills and made magical by a romantic past."³⁵ Together with other ructions of the unconscious mind, Philip Dixon Hardy introduces *The Leprawhaun*³⁶ with an ode to these beings in the form of a sonnet:

The winter's nights are long, and storms are rife,
 The dashing hail careering to the earth,
 The wild wind shrieking in their savage mirth,
 And mingled roar of elemental strife;
 Place me on such a chilling night, beside
 The lonely cottier's hospitable fire,
 And let me hear the grandam or grandsire
 Tell how the faerie lights such times deride
 The way-worn traveler, on his painful way,
 With hope of shelter nigh; and then relate
 How in times past, for which they have no date,
 The Elfin court at midnight used to stray
 from firth³⁷ to glen; and how upon the lawn
 At eve, they met the wily Laprawhaun.

Mythic Lands Beyond the Sea

The imagination of a land beyond the sea or an island not visible over perilous waters is a feature in many fantastical faerie stories in the Norse-Irish traditions.³⁸ These paradisaic lands have often shared dreams of beautiful castles, lush flora and fauna, delicious food without end and enchanting women.³⁹

³⁴ Here the story teller reminds the reader: "The motive of the tale, including the choice of the mortal [Eochy] rather than the god [Midyir], reminds one of the beautiful Hindu legend of Damayanti and Nala." ROLLESTON, *CELTIC MYTHS* 163, *supra* note 4 at 163.

³⁵ Michael Dirda, *Rending the Veil*, May 28, 2020 *THE NEW YORK REVIEW* 40 (discussing *THE GREAT GOD PAN* (1894)).

³⁶ *The Leprawhaun*, from PHILLIP DIXON HARDY, *LEGENDS, TALES, AND STORIES OF IRELAND* 216 (John Cumming/Dublin 1837) (Kessinger/Whitefish, MT 2007). Hardy was Irish poet, bookseller, printer and publisher who introduced steam-powered printing to Ireland in 1833.

³⁷ The name, Hardy explains, given by the peasantry in some districts to the *rath* or mound frequently encountered in Ireland, and celebrated as the resort of the fairies.

³⁸ MATHIAS EGELER, *ISLANDS IN THE WEST: CLASSICAL MYTH AND THE MEDIEVAL NORSE AND IRISH GEOGRAPHICAL IMAGINATION* (Brepols 2018). In modernity space and astrophysics have taken the place of oceans and sea-going vessels, resulting in new fables such as is portrayed in the 2013 movie *Elesium* starring Matt Damon and Jodie Foster.

³⁹ Plutarch wrote of "A strong belief has penetrated as far as the barbarians that there is the Elysian plain and the dwelling place of the blessed, which Homer sang about," and his General Quintus Sertorius reported mariners from "the Atlantic isles" abundant in natural beauty and temperate in climate. Odysseus visited the "thickly

For some knights errant the return portal to mortal life is laden with risk. In the *echtra*⁴⁰ *The Voyage of Bran* a woman invites Connlae the Red to set sail with her in the woman's crystal ship to a land of women and maidens, where he is provided with any food he wishes, but after a year he and his men yearn to return home. Approaching the Irish shore they do not recognize any of the people gathered, who tell the returning voyagers they have, however, heard of the men from ancient stories. Jumping from the boat onto the shore Connlae the Red turns to ashes.⁴¹

Connla of the Fiery Hair⁴² appears in the faerie tale *Connla and the Faerie Maiden*⁴³. One day when standing by his King and father Conn he is approached by a maiden clad in strange attire. "Whence thou comest?" Connla asks, and the maiden responds "I come from the Plains of the Ever Living, where there is neither death nor sin. There we keep holiday always, nor need we help from any in our joy. And in our pleasure we have no strife." Now only Connla could see the maiden, although all could hear her voice as she answered his father Conn: "Connla speaks to a young, fair maid, whom neither death nor old age awaits. I love Connla, and now I call him away to the Plain of Pleasure. Oh, come with me, Connla of the Fiery Hair, ruddy as the dawn with thy tawny skin. A faerie crown awaits thee to grace thy comely face and royal form. Come, and never shall thy comeliness fade, nor thy youth, till the last awful day of judgment." Conn the King is frightened by the Faerie Maiden's words, and calls upon his druid, one Coran, to use his "cunning magic" to protect his son from succumbing to the maiden's "wiles and witchery." Coran's magic was sufficient to make the maiden disappear, only as she did she threw an apple to Connla. For the next month Connla would eat of nothing but the maiden's apple, as for all Connla ate, "it grew again and always kept whole." All the while "there grew within him a mighty yearning and longing after the maiden he had seen."

On the last day of the month Connla again stood by the side of his father when the maiden appeared and approached him, saying: "'Tis a glorious place, forsooth, that Connla holds among shortlived mortals awaiting the day of death. But now the Folk of Life, the ever-living ones, beg and bid thee come to Moy Mell, the Plain of Pleasure." The King again called for druid Conn to invoke his powerful magic, but the Sea Maiden disparaged that magic's realm. "'Tis hard upon me," then said Connla, "I love my own folk above all things; but yet a longing seizes me for the maiden." Leaping at her opportunity, the maiden answered and said "The ocean is not so strong as the waves of thy longing. Come with me in my curragh, the gleaming, straight-gliding crystal curragh (canoe). Soon we can reach Boadag's realm. I see the bright sun sink, yet far as it is, we can reach it before dark. There is, too, another land worthy of thy journey, a land joyous to all that seek it. Only wives and maidens dwell there. If thou wilt, we can seek it and live there alone together in joy." When the maiden ceased to speak, Connla of the Fiery Hair rushed away from the King and his party and jumped into the gleaming curragh (canoe), and could only watch as Connla and the Sea Maiden glided away over the bright sea towards the setting sun, until they "were no more seen, nor did any know where they came."

The *Tonn Cliodhna*, or Wave of Cleena, on Glandore Bay, County Cork, is a story that has several iterations over time, but the consistent theme is that there once was a Danaan maiden, who lived in Mananan's country, the Land of Youth beyond the sea. She escaped her birthplace to marry a mortal, Keevan of the Curling Locks, and ended on the southern coast of Ireland. One day, with her husband Keevan off to the woods to hunt, Cleena, laying on the beach, "was lulled to sleep by faerie music played by a minstrel of Mananan" when a great wave from the sea "swept up and carried her back to Faerieland," leaving Keevan inconsolable." Hence, as recounted by T.W. Rolleston, the place was called the Strand of Cleena's Wave.⁴⁴

forested" Circe's island "where the houses and dancing places of early-born Dawn are." Mary Wellesley, *Naked Hermit*, March 5, 2020 LONDON REVIEW OF BOOKS 35.

⁴⁰ A tale within a category of Old Irish literature about a hero's adventures in the Otherworld.

⁴¹ Barbara Hillers, *Voyages between Heaven and Hell: Navigating the Early Irish Immram Tales*, 13 HARVARD CELTIC COLLOQ. PROCEEDINGS 66-81 (1993).

⁴³ JACOBS, CELTIC FAERIETALES *supra* note 5 at 1.

⁴⁴ T.W. ROLLESTON, CELTIC MYTHS AND LEGENDS at 127.

Sowles for Sale: The Corrupt Bargain

In the Irish faerie tale the mortal is often offered the existential opportunity to receive riches in exchange for the mere sale of his soul. In the lilting patois of rural Ireland and the argot of centuries past, *The Devil's Mill*,⁴⁵ introduces Sir P, a visitor with an interest in the ruins of a mill along the River Liffey, and with surveyor's drawings as well to match his interest meets a silver haired old man whom he senses will tell him the story of the mill. There is no hint that at the shortest notice this seeming gracious soul will transmute into a red-eyed raven. Flattering the man with some ham and whiskey, the visitor shows him his sketches of the mill. The story unfolds:

"Thank you kindly, Sir," said the old man as he proceeded to give an account of the mill in question. "You see, Sir, there was a man wonst, in times back, that owned a power of land about here - but God keep us, they said he didn't come by it honestly, but did a crooked turn whenever 'twas to serve him self . . . and what luck or grace could he have after that? The story goes, the Divil (God bless us) kem to him, and promised him hapes o' money, and all his heart could desire, and more too, if he'd sell his sowl in exchange." The bargain was struck by which terms the Divil would leave the Colonel alone for so long as the Colonel could task Ould Nick with some work that even the Divil with his capacious skills could not perform.

"So, when the bargain was made, the Colonel says to the Divil, "give me all the money I want." "As much as you like," says Ould Nick, "how much will you have?" "You must fill me that room, up to the verry ceilin' with goolden guineas." replied the Colonel. With that the Divil began to shovel the gold guineas into the room, but soon came to think it odd that the room was not filling faster, whereupon he discovered that the Colonel had fooled him, as there was a hole in the floor of the rooms that emptied into yet another room. "Ho! Ho!" says Ould Nick, 'is that the way wid you? Musha, bad luck to your impudence . . . you villain" "Oh! forgive me this wanst." said the Colonel. The Divil took another tack. "I'm not angry with you, at all at all; but only like you the betther, bekase you're so cute - lave off slaving yourself there," he said "you have got goold enough for this time; and whenever you want more, you have only to say the word, and it shall be yours at command." So the Divil and the Colonel parted ways.

The Colonel continued in his prosperity, aided of course by his gold, and "in coorse of time, he bought great estates, and was a great man entirely—not a greater in Ireland, throth." But after many years of prosperity in his advancing years the Colonel thought increasingly of his mortal soul in the light of his pact with the Divil, so he plucked up his courage and his cuteness, and "towld the Divil, in a bantherin' way, . . .that he was goin' to a party, and hoped Owld Friend wouldn't inconvainience him, that a-way." The Divil put the Colonel to the task, which is to say, to secure the continual freedom from interruption the Colonel must contrive a task that was beyond the devil's abilities.

"Well, then,' says the Colonel, "build me a mill, down there, by the river, says he, "and let me have it finished by to-morrow mornin'." "Your will is my pleasure,' said the Owld Chap, and away he wint; and the Colonel thought he had won his bargain, but the next morning "the whole counthry round was runnin' to see a fine bran new mill." The Colonel was of course troubled, and strove to think of a genuinely impossible task, and hearkened to a popular maxim that the Divil "couldn't make a rope out of the sands of the sae," but this too the Divil accomplished.

After another one or two more challenges that the Divil accomplished with alacrity the Colonel pleaded.' "Will you give me one more offer,' says the Colonel. "You don't desarve it," said the Divil, "but I don't care if I do[.]" "Well then,' says the Colonel, "make my lady's tongue be quiet for the next month, and I'll thank you." "She'll never throuble you agin,' says Ould Nick, "and, with that, the Colonel heerd roarin' and cryin', and the door of his room was thrown open, and in ran his daughter, and fell down at his feet, telling him her mother had just dhropped dead." The instant the door opened, the Divil ran to hide himself behind a big elbow chair; and "the Colonel was frekened almost out of his siven sineses, by raison of the sudden death of his poor lady, let alone the jeopardy he was in himself, seein' how the Divil had forestall'd him every way."

"Well," the story teller continued, "the Divil grinn'd and wagg'd his tail, and all as one as a dog when he's plaised, and asked "what do you say now P?" "Oh!" answered the Colonel, "only lave me alone antil I bury my poor wife,' says he, "and I'll go with you then, you villain."

⁴⁵ T.C. CROKER, FAERIE LEGENDS AND TRADITIONS OF THE SOUTH OF IRELAND 135 (London/McMillan 1825).

“Well, Sir, to make a long story short, “the Divil pertended to let the Colonel off, out of kindness, for the three days, until his wife was buried; but the reason of it was this, that when the lady his daughter fainted, he loosened the clothes about her throat, and in pulling some of her dress away, he took off a gold chain that was on her neck, and put it in his pocket, and the chain had a diamond cross on it, (the Lord be praised) and the Divil darn’t touch him while he had the sign of the cross about him.”

For the three days of grace granted, the Colonel did nothing but read his Bible from morning until night, and “he was so intent upon the holy book, but sat up in an old room in the far end of the house, and bid no one disturb him on no account, and strived to make his heart bolder with the words of life; and sure it was something strivened him at last . . . at the dead hour of the night, when the poor sinner was reading away as fast as he could.” At midnight on the third day the Colonel’s heart jumped when he felt a tap on his shoulder. “Oh, murder, who’s there?” “It’s me,” says Old Nick, and he stood right before the Colonel, his eyes like coals of fire.⁴⁶ “Come !” says the Divil. “Another day,” cried out the poor Colonel, but Satan refused a day, even an hour, even a few minutes. Instead the Divil said “Lave off your palaverin, I have of you, you would baste,” said he, “so come along at once,” and the Divil put his claw to catch him, “but the Colonel would not take a fast hold of the Bible, and begged hard that he’d let him alone, and wouldn’t harm him until the bit of candle that was just blinking in the socket before him was burned out.” “Well, have it so, you dirty coward,” said Old Nick, and with that he spit at the Colonel. But the Colonel, “cunning to the end. . . snatched the little taste of candle that was foremost him, out of the candlestick, and putting it on the holy book before him, he shut down the cover of it, and quenched the light.”

Foiled now beyond reply, “the Divil gave a roar like a bull, and vanished in a flash of fire, and the poor Colonel fainted away in his chair; but the servants heard the noise, (for the Divil tore off the roof of the house when he left it.)” And from that day, the old man concluded his story, “the Colonel was an altered man,” and had the Bible read to him every day, as he had lost his sight in one eye when the Devil hit him with the rope of sand, and lost his other eye when the devil spit on him. “So you see, Sir, after all, the Colonel . . . was too able for the Divil, and by reading the good book his soul was saved, and (glory be to God) isn’t that mighty improving?”

The tincture of time has left many ancient themes unchanged, including the bargain for one’s mortal soul. A modern Western adaptation of this ancient continental tale, including an unholy wager for a pot of gold and seven years of good luck, is found in Stephen Vincent Benet’s *The Devil and Daniel Webster*.⁴⁷

Impatient Yearning and Impulsive Pursuit

There are few contemplative pauses or luxurious ruminations, in Celtic faerie tales. Ambidextrous thinking is rare. Most of the tales convey a leitmotif of impatient if irresolute yearning and impulsive pursuit. Throughout are stories that intertwine to create a Roshomon effect as details about identical events emerge from different perspectives.⁴⁸ *The Three Crowns* is an elegant tale of the Wexford region that visits the full range of the venial sins and nearly all of the mortal sins as well,⁴⁹ as suffered, experienced or perpetrated by a King, a Queen, three Princes, three Princesses and a beggar gnome named Seven Inches. The three Princesses (two uncharitable but one, the youngest, as good as the other two were bad) on a walk to a lake decide to take “the beautifullest boat you ever saw in your life” for a sail, over the hesitations of the principled Princess, who fears the vessel is enchanted. Three Princes wished to court the Princesses, two of them as flawed as two older Princesses, but one “as lovable” as the youngest. Here appears Seven Inches on the boat deck who looses the boat on the lake, while assuring the Princes of their safe return. On the far side Seven Inches again appears and lowers by a basket and *winglas* never before seen into a well. The Princes run to the far side of lake and find not the Princesses but only the well, *windlas*, and a silk rope affixed to a white basket. The eldest Princess claims the first turn to descending into the well “in right of my bride,” with the two others following, the youngest on the third day.

⁴⁶ This “evil eye” description of a malevolent glare dates to its use in Greece dating at least to the Sixth Century B.C.

⁴⁷ Stephen Vincent Benet, *THE DEVIL AND DANIEL WEBSTER* (Kingsport Press/Tenn. 1945), set in the border country between Massachusetts joins Vermont and New Hampshire, involves a young farmer *manqué* quite persuaded that he is fated to a lifetime of bad luck, and that his adequate holdings in land were blighted, at least until he meets a devil who proposes to him an unholy bargain for his soul.

⁴⁸ Coco Fusco, *Love Among the Ruins*, April 9, 2020 *THE NEW YORK REVIEW* 16.

⁴⁹ Patrick Kennedy, *The Three Crowns*, *GRAVES, IRISH FAERIE BOOK*, supra note 7 at 1.

They see first a large lime kiln, beyond which are green fields and a castle all under a bright sky. The virtuous Prince enters the castle door to find a table set with fine food, but declines to eat without invitation. The older two Princes, encumbered by neither patience nor principle, set upon the meal “without leave or license.”

Soon Three Inches appears with the youngest Princess. For their boorishness the two Princesses are turned to stone statues, and Seven Inches predicts: “I suppose, if they ever get home, they’ll look on poor people as if they were flesh and blood like themselves.” Whereupon appears the giant of the castle, who states his intention to marry the good Princess but who promptly falls asleep with his head in the dish. In fits and starts the two older Princesses appear as castle housekeepers, and the youngest Prince uses the windlass to hoist them to their freedom.

Having wearied of the castle and while on a walk, the estimable Prince meets a smithy, who offers bed and board in exchange for work, and he agrees. The King from the far shore wearies of waiting for the betrothals of the older Princes to their respective matches and declares he will give the hand of the youngest and unselfish Princess to whomsoever brings him three crowns, and so charges the youngest Prince. As it happens, the smithy habitually accumulates the leavings of his work, and has amassed sufficient gold, silver and copper to fashion the three crowns desired by the King. The King sends a royal coach to return the Prince who has secured them. One of the older Princes by imposture so claimed, but Seven Inches intervenes to fill that Prince’s coach with stones that fell upon the King upon his opening the carriage door. The second Prince essays the same deceit, with the result that the opening coach door looses a cascade of mud upon the King. Then Seven Inches decides to take matters more fully into his own hands, and in peasant garb himself sets out to the smithy’s forge. There he recovers the youngest Prince, returning him to the King’s castle and his prospective bride. Seven Inches now take his leave, giving this advice to the favored Prince: “Continue as good and kind as you always were; love your wife, and that’s all the advice I’ll give you.”

Of Changelings and Abstracted Children

The stories of T.C. Croker in a delicious circumlocution describe changelings as “abstracted children.” In the short tale *The Changeling*,⁵⁰ a young woman, Mary Scannell, lived with her husband at Castle Martyr. One day in harvest time she went with several other women to help in binding up the wheat, and left her nursing infant in a corner of the field, quite safe she thought, wrapped up in her cloak. When she had finished her work, she returned where the child was, but in place of her own child she found a being in the cloak that was not half the size of her own, and this creature kept up such a crying you might have heard it a mile off. Guessing that what she held in her arms was a changeling, she took it in her arms, pretending to be mighty fond of it all the while, and went “to a wise woman, who told her in a whisper not to give it enough to eat, and to beat and pinch it without mercy,” which Mary Scannell did. Just one week later to the day, when Mary Scannell awoke in the morning, she found her own child lying by her side in the bed, as for all appearances the faerie that had been put in its place “did not like the treatment it got from Mary Scannell, who understood how to treat it, like a sensible woman as she was, and away it went after the week’s trial, sending Mary’s own child back to her.”⁵¹

The Evanescent Pot of Gold

The *Fairies’ Dancing Place* serves to remind that one never errs in giving the faeries’ their due.⁵² In the tale one Lanty M’Clasky, husband and landowner, makes plans to build a home worthy of his property and although warned against it, chooses for its site “one of those beautiful green circles that are supposed to be the playground of the faeries.” Dismissive of the warnings, the headstrong M’Clasky responds that he “would not change such a pleasant situation for his house to oblige all the faeries in Europe.”

⁵⁰ CROKER, FAERIE LEGENDS, *supra* note 45 at 77, www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/39752

⁵¹ In his notes to *The Changeling* T.C. Croker explains: “The most formidable attribute of the Elves,” quoting Sir Walter Scott, from his *Essay on Faerie Superstition*, “was their practice of carrying away and exchanging children, and that of stealing human souls from their bodies,” and includes a song describing the proceedings of a faerie troop: “When larks ‘gin sing Away we fling, And babes new borne steal as we go, And elfe in bed We leave instead, And wend us laughing. Ho ! Ho ! Ho !”

⁵² William Carlton, *The Fairies’ Dancing Place*, WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS, FAERIE AND FOLK TALES OF THE IRISH PEASANTRY 15 (Waller Scott/London 1888), <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/33887/33887-h/33887-h.htm>

Upon completion of the house M'Clinty plans a housewarming party, procuring copious amounts of whisky and a fiddler, and the party is in full flight when suddenly the home begins to shake violently, and "there was nothing heard but crushing, and heaving, and pushing, and groaning, and panting, as if a thousand little men were engaged in pulling down the roof."⁵³ From somewhere without came the exhortation "Come, work hard: you know we must have Lanty's house down before midnight." At last appreciating his predicament, M'Clinty addressed the unseen interlopers: "Gintlemen, I humbly ax yer pardon for buildin' on any place belongin' to you; but if you'll have the civiltude to let me alone this night, I'll begin to pull down and remove the house to-morrow morning." There followed "a noise like the clapping of a thousand tiny little hands, and a shout of "Bravo, Lanty! Build half-way between the two White-thorns above the boreen," after which the intruders were heard from no more. True to his promise, M'Clinty commenced to dig the foundation of his new home on the sanctioned site and discovered beneath the ground *kams*⁵⁴ of gold, "so that in leaving to the fairies their play-ground, he became a richer man than ever he otherwise would have been, had he never come in contact with them at all."

As besotting as it may be for a mortal to imagine a pot of gold, the windfall can be lost in the bat of an eye. In *Larry Hayes and the Enchanted Man*,⁵⁵ we meet Larry Hayes, "a dacent man" and a "strong farmer" from Cloghreen who was burdened by the misfortune that "he couldn't put a cow or sheep upon his little farm but he was sure to find them in the morning all torn and smashed to bits." Walking his farm one night to discover the cause of this ruinous depredation he encounters a man, but when Larry began to speak with him the man vanished and a big wolf appeared. Terrified, Larry "blessed himself with the sign of the cross, at which the wolf spoke "just like a natural born Christin." "I 'm the man,' said the wolf, "I'm enchanted, and it was I that killed your sheep, and I couldn't help it; but if you'll follow me, and do my bidding, I'll make a rich man of you. You needn't be afraid, for no harm shall come to you." After some pause Larry said he would, and followed the wolf "to the big black rock, where the waterfall is now," and opening a door in the rock the wolf led Larry into an "iligant parlour," whereupon the wolf turned into a "beautiful young man." After fortifying Larry with "plenty of beef and mutton and whisky punch," the young man took him to a room full of gold, and gave him a big bag of it and said that Larry could return to replenish his gold as often as he pleased, with only this condition: "Don't let mortal know anything you saw to-night, and keep the secret for seven years." Should Larry tell anyone, the young man warned, "I'll be destroyed, and so will you." "Never fear me," said Larry, as he made his way home with his bag of gold. Inevitably, all of the neighbors were agog at Larry Hayes's new wealth, not the least of whom was his wife. After he rebuffed her repeated efforts to so learn, Larry's wife followed him one night as he returned to the black rock, and watching him open the door and enter, she followed him and banged at the door. Larry reappeared, and overwhelmed by her demands he betrayed his secret. Suddenly not the handsome young man but the wolf sat atop the rock, and roared in a voice of thunder that made the mountain shake: "You 're done for now, Larry Hayes!" In a *momento mori* true to the foretelling, the wolf was then "whipped up in a flame of fire" and plunged into the lake, the water bursting a hole through the side of the rock, and running down the mountain like lightning, covered the rock with the foam of its fall. Larry Hayes and his wife barely managed to avoid the water and survive, but in a short time he became poorer than ever, "till at last Larry had to travel the country with a bag on his back, like a poor buckaugh as he was."

For as long as Ireland has abounded in tales of Celtic life at its faerie interstices, so too its tale tellers been wont to share them. In an adventure featuring metamorphic enchantment worthy of Circe, the daughter of Helios, *The Story Teller at Fault* introduces King Red Hugh O'Donnell,⁵⁶ who granted his favorite story teller a large estate on the condition that he tell the King a new story every night of their respective lives. One morning on his garden stroll the story teller found himself bereft of any new ideas for a story even as he thought through his conventional launches such as "there once was a King who had three sons . . ." or "one day the King of all Ireland . . ." Eschewing breakfast, his now-concerned wife, looking from the window pointed out a "black thing" in the far field.

⁵³ In a faerie tale a supernatural interposition of nature against a mortal man can assume gigantic proportion, as put by Joseph Conrad in *TYPHOON*, "It was if Nature itself were an intelligent being trying deliberately to destroy them."

⁵⁴ Metal containers used to douse rushlights.

⁵⁵ Collected in GEOFFREY STRAHAN, *IRISH FAERIE TALES AND LEGENDS 1* (Gibbings 1904), <https://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/17912>

⁵⁶ In Ireland of these times there may have been only one King of the land, but there were many lesser and provincial Kings.

Together they approached the form to find “a miserable looking old man” with his detached wooden leg beside him. Seeing dice in the old man’s hand, the story teller inquires why, and the old man responded: “I am waiting here to see if anyone will play a game with me” for the one hundred pieces of gold he had in his leather. The story teller and his wife readily agreed, in the hope that at the least the adventure would generate a story he could tell the King. The two placed a smooth stone between them and commenced to cast their throws. Before long the story teller had lost all of his money. The old man challenged him again, this time for his chariot, horse and hounds. At this, the story teller demurred, stating that he would never run the risk of having his wife tramp home on foot, but his lady said: “Play on, . . . I don’t mind walking, if you do love.”

Again the story teller loses. This time the one-legged man wagers for the story teller’s wife, and the story teller turns away, but his wife stops him. The old man wins again, and his wife rises and takes her seat by the man. Now the old man wages “the whole now, wife and all, against your own life” Again the story teller loses, and asks “What do you want with me?”, to which the man responds with a question, “What would you rather be, a dear, a fox or a hare?” The story teller chooses to be a hare, and with a wave of a wand the man makes it so, and looses the animal on the green, only to have the wife set the hounds on it and have it trapped, when without explanation the old beggar restores the story teller to his form. The beggar then grants the story teller the gift of invisibility permitting him to walk about and view all as though he were not there. The two visit the story teller’s patron, King O’Donnell, whereupon the old man performs some tricks for pay, and then disappears, only to reappear at the castle door with the invisible story teller. For no reason given, the old man slanders the music of the King’s harpers, who draw their swords to attack him, but whose blows fall only upon themselves. “Hang the fellow who began it all!” thunders the King, and the guards seize the beggar, only to discover him afterwards sitting on a bench, drawing from a flagon of ale, and the King’s favorite brother at the end of the hangman’s rope. The command for the beggar man’s execution is repeated, only this time it is the King’s favorite harper who is found hanging. Now completely bedeviled King’s Captain frees the beggar, bidding him to go “as fast as you please if you’ll only go far enough.”

“Since you’ve given up trying to hang a stranger because he finds fault in you music,” the one-legged beggar man then revealed that should the Captain return to the gallows he will find all of his friends “none the worse for what has happened,” and the story teller gains the return of his wife, money, carriage and horses. The story teller, understandably, was still angry that his wife gave him up, setting the hounds upon him, but the beggar told him “she couldn’t help it,” and announces his true self to the story teller: “O am not as old and beggarly as you think. I am Angus of the Bruff; many a good turn you’ve done me with the King of Leinster. This morning my magic told me the difficulty you were in, and I made up my mind to get you out of it.”

As for the story teller’s wife, the same magic that changed his form also changed the wife’s turn of thinking, and in all events, the beggar admonished: “Forget and forgive as a man and wife should do,” adding: “and now you have a story for the King of Leinster when he calls for one.” And then the old one-legged enchanted beggar man disappeared. That night the story teller told the King the entirety of what had passed, and the King laughed so long and loudly that he could not even go to sleep, and instructed the story teller not to bother with harvesting new stories, choosing instead to hear again and again “the tale of the lank grey beggar man.”

The Wonderful Cake is a short tale involving a lively household of a mouse, a rat and a little red hen,⁵⁷ the last of which proposed one day: “Let’s bake a cake and have a feast,” and the mouse and the rat concurred. The Little Red Hen asked who would get the wheat ground, to which the mouse and the rat demurred, so she declared “I will myself.” Gesturing “Presto!” the desired cake rolled from the cottage, with the mouse, the rat and the Little Red Hen in pursuit. Passing a barn full of threshers who asked where it was running, the cake answered “I am running away from the mouse, the rat, the Little Red Hen, and from you too if I can.” The threshers, flails in hand, joined the pursuit until they all came upon a ditch full of ditchers, who also asked the cake where it was running, and the cake answers: “I am running away from the mouse, the rat, the Little Red Hen, and from a barn full of threshers, and from you, too, if I can.” The cake continued, steps ahead of its growing retinue, and comes upon a well full of washers, and after the familiar exchange the washers too fall into pursuit.

Then the cake comes up to a ford, and a fox, who asks where it was running. After the cake’s practiced response, o the fox rejoins: “But you can’t cross the ford.” “And can’t you carry me over it?” asks the cake. To the fox’s question “What will you give me?” the cake proposes: “A kiss at Christmas and an egg at Easter.”

⁵⁷ Patrick Kennedy, *The Wonderful Cake*, GRAVES, IRISH FAERIE BOOK, *supra* note 7 at 126.

The fox agrees and bids the cake climb up, and it does, up to the fox's shoulder. The fox now suggests that it would be safer if the cake climbed higher to its shoulder, and then that the cake would be safest if it climbed "to the ridge pole of my nose." The cake complies, whereupon the fox flips it into the air, catches it in his mouth, and sends it "down the Red Lane." "And that," the story ends, "was the end of the cake."

In *The Faerie Greyhound* we meet Paddy M'Dermid, a boisterous, bellicose delinquent, "one of the most rollicking boys in the whole county of Kildare," and a man who was "in every place, like bad luck."⁵⁸ Late in sowing, late in harvesting, his farm in weed, and down to his last penny Paddy did have the luck, "if he had *gomch* (sense) enough to mind it," to be visited by "the most beautiful dream," that under the place he had lain was a pot of gold "buried since long before the memory of man." Paddy was uncommonly closed-mouth about the dream, and the following night, fortified by holy water, he drew a circle about where he had slept and commenced to excavate, to the level of his knees and then once again, when his pick hit a flagstone. Hearing breathing nearby, he looked up to see sitting by the hole a "comely Greyhound." In their formalistic greeting "God save you" said Paddy, and the Greyhound responded "Save you kindly," leaving out "God, bekase he was the Divil." The Greyhound asked "what would you be looking after in that grave of a hole you're diggin' there? After pausing, the Greyhound conceded: "Arrah, be don't I know very well what you are looking for?"

God save you," said Paddy, every hair in his head standing up as straight as a sally twig. "Save you kindly," answered the Greyhound ("leaving out God, Christ defend us from ever seeing the likes o'him."). "Faith, nothing at all, at all," answered Paddy, growing in his dislike of the stranger. Before Paddy could utter another lie, the Greyhound beckoned Paddy out of the hole to take a seat on the bank. No sooner had Paddy done so then the hound set upon him, fire flaming from his mouth, and drove him out of the Rath.

Withal, Paddy returned the next night to renew his excavation, but again when his pick hit the flagstone the Greyhound appeared in the same place. Paddy continued to dig. "Well, Paddy M'Dermid," said the hound, "since you will have money, you must; but say, how much will satisfy you?" "Fifty thousand pounds," Paddy said, while thinking to himself he "might as well have said a hundred thousand, for I'll be bail the beast had money gulloure." "You shall have it," the hound said, and after leaving briefly returned carrying a "croit ck full of guineas between his paws." Paddy made straight away home with his prize, only to have the gold turn into small bones by the time he arrived. Swearing his vengeance, Paddy returned to the hole the next night, where, as before, he met Mr. Hound.

Paddy again cursed the deceitful beast of a Greyhound, and went the next night to the Rath again, where, as before, he met Mr. Hound. "So you are here again, Paddy?" said he. "Yes, you big blaggard," said Paddy, "and I'll never leave this place until I pull out the pot of money that's buried here." "Oh, you won't," said he, and offered his final bargain in equal parts of treachery and flattery." "For honour," said the Greyhound, "I am your friend; and so don't stand in your own light; come with me and your fortune is made. Remain where you are and you'll die a beggar-man." Paddy, helpless in the event, consented, and in the middle of the Rath opened up a beautiful staircase, down which they walked; and after winding and turning they came to a house much finer than the Duke of Leinster's, in which all the tables and chairs were solid gold. Paddy was delighted. After sitting down, a fine lady handed him a glass of something to drink; but he had hardly swallowed a spoonful before the beautiful people surrounding him took the form of "good people" (faeries), and grabbing him by his arms and legs carried him up a high hill and flung him into the river, where, striking a rock he appeared dead. He only appeared dead, however, as the next morning he was found in the trench *mote*, "and from that hour to the day of his death he was the greatest object in the world. He walked double, and had his mouth (God bless us) where his ear should be."

In the widely collected tale of two gnomes, *Munachar and Manachar*, Munachar is angry that Manachar has eaten all of the raspberries Munachar had assiduously plucked and preserved.⁵⁹ And so he sets about to perfect his vengeance and encounters a rod. "What news the day?" asked the rod. "It is my own news that I'm seeking," answered Munichar: "I am looking for a rod, a rod "to make a gad, a gad to hang Manachar, who ate my raspberries every one." "You will not get me," responds the axe, "'until you get a flag[stone] to edge me."

⁵⁸ YEATS, FAERIE AND FOLK TALES, note 52 at 69, [http://www.gutenberg.org/files/31763/31763-h/31763-h.htm#The Faerie Greyhound](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/31763/31763-h/31763-h.htm#The_Faerie_Greyhound)

⁵⁹ JACOBS, CELTIC FAERIE TALES, *supra* note 5 at 83.

"What news today?" said a flagstone. "It's my own news I'm seeking." replied Munachar "Going looking for a flag, flag to edge axe, axe to cut a rod, a rod to make a gad, a gad to hang Manachar, who ate my raspberries every one." Now in a cadence of ascending tasks familiar to folk song and story, Munachar eventually meets some threshers.

"You will not get any whisp of straw from us," said the threshers, "until you bring us the makings of a cake from the miller over yonder." Munachar then walked to the miller. "What news to-day?" asked the miller, and Munachar replied: "It's my own news I'm seeking. Going looking for the makings of a cake which I will give to the threshers, the threshers to give me a whisp of straw, the whisp of straw I will give to the cow, the cow to give me milk, milk I will give to the cat, cat to scrape butter, butter to go in claw of hound, hound to hunt deer, deer to swim water, water to wet flag, flag to edge axe, axe to cut a rod, a rod to make a gad, a gad to hang Manachar, who ate my raspberries every one."

The miller told Munachar "no makings oa a cake" would be forthcoming unless he took a sieve and brought him a full sieve of water from the river. Munachar's endeavor was thwarted, of course, because the sieve would hold no water, no matter how many times Munachar tried, "and sure, if he had been there from that day till this, he never could have filled it." By a fortuity sacred to the faerie tale, a crow flies by and cries "Daub! daub!" At once understanding, Munachar, took the red clay and the daub that was by the riverbank and rubbed it into the bottom of the sieve, until all the holes were filled. The sieve now sound, Munachar brought the water to the miller, and the miller "gave him the makings of a cake, and he gave the makings of the cake to the threshers," who precipitated the repetition of tasks until "the flag sharpened the axe, the axe cut the rod, and the rod made a gad." Munachar was now, at last, ready to hand Manachar for his defalcation, only to find that Munachar, in meeting his just desserts, had burst.

In *A White Trout*,⁶⁰ a traveler leaves his home in the village of Cong, County Mayo, to visit a nearby natural formation, a subterranean river within a limestone cave and a place of wonderment and caution for its history of dangers. He espied a handsome elderly woman filling her pitcher with the cold, clear water. Offering a pleasantry, she commenced to leave along with an active boy who identified himself as her great-grandson.

"Great-grandmother!" the visitor exclaimed, "You are the youngest woman I have ever seen to be a great-grandmother," said he, "and you seem still in good health, and likely to live many a year yet," adding: "I perceive a great number of persons about here of extreme age. Now, how long generally do the people in this country live?" "Troth, sir," said she, "we live here as long as we like." At this point, the great-grandson "descended into the cave, bearing some faggot of bogwood, a wisp of straw, and a lighted sod of turf." On his return he proclaimed "Now, your honour . . . you'll see the pigeon-hole to advantage."

"Why is it so called?" the guest inquired. "Because, sir, the wild pigeons often build in the bushes and the ivy that's round the mouth of the cave, and in here too," said she, pointing into the gloomy depth of the interior.

"Now, sir," said the old woman, "we must try and see the white trout; and you never seen a trout o' that colour yet, I warrant," adding: "Strive and see it before you go, sir, for there's them that says it isn't lucky to come to the cave and lave it without seein' the white throat. And if you're a bachelor, sir, and didn't get a peep at it, throth, you'd never be married."

"But look, sir, look!" and she pointed to the stream: "There she is." The traveler could indeed see the fish, distinctive in its creamy color and luminescence. His guide told the story of a beautiful young lady in a castle by a lake who was promised to a King's son, when tragically the royal heir was murdered and thrown into the lake. The young beauty lost her mind to grief, and the faeries took her away. Sometime later there appeared for the first time the white throuth, "just where you seen it this blessed minnit." The people came to believe that the throuth was a faerie, and resolved that it never be harmed, but some wicked sojers (soldiers) scoffed, and "one o' them in partic'lar (bad luck to him; God forgi' me for sayin' it!) swore he'd catch the throuth and ate it for his dinner--the blackguard!"

⁶⁰ SAMUEL LOVER, LEGENDS AND STORIES OF IRELAND 31 (Baldwin and Cradock/London 1831, 1834), www.sacred-texts.com > neu > celt > lasi > lasi06

The villainous sojer caught the trout and put it into a frying pan, and upon thinking one side of the fish cooked sufficiently flipped it over, but when he placed a morsel into his mouth “the divil a taste of a burn was an it at all at all; and sure the sojer thought it was a *quare* throu that couldn't be briled. “But,” he said, “I'll give it another turn,” ('little thinkin' what was in store for him--the haythen!')” Only the same burnt taste persisted no matter how many times the sojer flipped and cooked the white trout. The now frantic villain reasoned that the trout properly cut up might taste better than it looked, but upon application of the knife to the fish there was a “murtherin' screech,” and the fish jumped from the pan, and where it fell “up riz a lovely lady--the beautifulest young crathur that eyes ever seen, dressed in white with a band o' goold in her hair, and a sthrame o' blood runnin' down her arm.”

“Look where you cut me, you villain,” cried the beautiful young woman. “Couln't you lave me cool and comfortable in the river where you snared me, and not disturb me in my duty? . . . I was watchin' for my throe love, that is comin' by wather to me, an' if he comes while I am away, an' that I miss him, I'll turn you into a pinkeen, and I'll hunt you up and down for evermore, while grass grows or wather runs.” The sojer pleaded for mercy. “Renounce your evil coorses,” she charged him, “you villian, or you'll repint it too late; be a good man for the futhur, and go to your' duty reg'lar.” “And now,” said she, “take me back, and put me into the river agin, where you found me.”

“Oh, my lady,” cried the sojer, “how could I have the heart to drownd a beautiful lady like you?” Before he could utter another word, the beautiful apparition had vanished, leaving only the little trout on the ground. Placing it on a clean plate, the sojer “run for the bare life, for fear her lover would come while she was away; and he run, and he run, ever till he came to the cave agin, and threw the throat into the river.” The water where he threw to trout was as red as blood for a time because of the knife's cut, but at once the red disappeared “and to this day there's a little red mark on the throu's side where it was cut.”

From that day onward, the grandson told the traveler: “the sojer was an althered man, and reformed his way, and wint to his duty reg'lar, and fasted three times a week-though it was never fish he tuk an fastin' days; for after the fright be got, fish id never rest an his stomach . . . and he used to pray evermore for the sowl of the White Throu.”

An enchanted trout in a well again appears in the epic Celtic tale of vanity and envy *Gold-Tree and Silver-Tree*.⁶¹ In this story, a particularly prideful Silver-Tree - the wife of the King and mother of Gold-Tree - returns time and again to a trout in a well and asks if she is “the most beautiful Queen in the world.” The trout, no thrall to the Queen, responds consistently that she is not, and says that the most beautiful is Gold-Tree. Unprepared to abide this as true, the Queen devised a plan in which she feigned illness, and told her King that the only way for her to recover would be to eat the heart and liver of her daughter. Refusing to so provide her, the King sent out hunters who killed a he-goat, and presented it to the Queen, who ate its heart and liver and declared herself well. When the Queen questioned the trout again a year later, she was alarmed to learn that Gold-Tree was still alive, had married a Prince, and lived abroad. At her request, the King prepared a long ship to permit Silver-Tree to voyage to the land in which Gold-Tree now dwelled. Upon her mother's arrival, Gold-Tree hid in a locked room; however, Silver-Tree successfully importuned her daughter to at least put her finger through the keyhole so that she might kiss it. Of course, Silver-Tree did no such thing, and instead stabbed her finger with a poisoned point. When her husband, the Prince, found her dead, rather than begin burial rites, he placed her in a room and locked it. He eventually remarried.

One day, the Prince's new wife gained access to the room and discovered the beautiful Gold-Tree. Noticing the poisoned point in her finger, she removed it and Gold-Tree arose, as alive and as beautiful as ever. At the end of the year, Silver-Tree returned to the trout in the well, and was enraged anew to learn not only that she was not the most beautiful Queen in the world, but also that Gold-Tree was alive. Again Silver-Tree set out for the land of Gold-Tree, her Prince, and the second wife (as the Prince had decided to keep them both). The three went to the shore to greet her. Silver-Tree offered Gold-Tree a special drink, which was poisoned of course, but the second wife reminded the Queen that the custom of the land was for the person offering a draught to drink first.

⁶¹ JACOBS, CELTIC FAERIE TALES, *supra* note 5 at 88.

When Silver-Tree put the goblet near her mouth, the second wife struck the goblet, causing some of the drink to go down Silver-Tree's throat. The vain and covetous Queen fell dead, and the Prince with his two wives lived peacefully thereafter.

William Carleton's *The Rival Kempers* is a faerie tale from the north of Ireland in which a spinning competition between and among aspiring brides turns in favor of the young woman's unsolicited hospitality to a strange, nameless woman dressed in red, the most familiar of faerie colors.⁶² In that region farmers invited spinning meetings of unmarried females frequently held at the houses of farmers, called kemps, and were known as "animated and joyous scenes," conducted before daybreak, that not incidentally promoted industry within the farming communities, and at the conclusion of which there would be the announcement of the winner followed by a mirthful community dance.

In the parish of Faugh-a-ballagh, one such archetypal arcadian community, there lived Shaun Buie M'Gaveran, known to be "the cleanest, best-conducted boy, and the most industrious too," and much sought after among the young women of the parish. Shaun, as prudent as he was handsome, had fixed his interested gaze on two girls "whom he thought a trifle above the rest," a Bidy Corrigan and Sally Gorman, and he let it be known that he would marry which one of them won the next kemp upcoming. Ever civil in public, "the girls agreed to this very good-humouredly, Bidy telling Sally that she (Sally) would surely win it; and Sally, not to be outdone in civility, telling the same thing to Bidy."

One afternoon two days before the kemp there walked into the house of old Paddy Corrigan a little woman dressed in high-heeled shoes and a short red cloak. Bidy was alone in the house, and invited the Little Woman in Red to sit down, and the two commenced to chat. The woman said: "So, there's to be a great kemp in Shaun Buie M'Gaveran's." "Indeed there is that, good woman," replied Bidy.

"And whoever wins the kemp wins a husband?" asked the little woman. "Ay, so it seems," answered Bidy. "Well, whoever gets Shaun will be a happy woman, for he's the moral of a good boy," the visitor declared. "That's nothing but the truth, anyhow," replied Bidy, "But, you appear to be tired, honest woman, an' I think you had better eat a bit, an' take a good drink of buinnhe ramwher (thick milk) to help you on your journey." "Thank you kindly," said the woman, "I'll take a bit, if you please, hopin', at the same time, that you won't be the poorer of it this day twelve months."

"Sure," said the girl, "you know that what we give from kindness ever an' always leaves a blessing behind it." "Yes, acushla," affirmed the Little Woman in Red, "when it is given from kindness." She accordingly helped herself to the food that Bidy placed before her, and appeared, after eating, to be very much refreshed.

"Now," said the woman, rising, "you're a very good girl, an' if you are able to find out my name before Tuesday morning, the kemp-day, I tell you that you'll win it, and gain the husband." "Why," said Bidy exclaimed, "I never saw you before. I don't know who you are, nor where you live; how then can I ever find out your name?"

"You never saw me before, sure enough," said the old woman, "an' I tell you that you never will see me again but once; an' yet if you have not my name for me at the close of the kemp, you'll lose all, an' that will leave you a sore heart, for well I know you love Shaun Buie." And so the Little Woman in Red took her leave of Bidy, who was downcast, fearing that she had no hope of learning her name, upon which knowledge so much seemed to depend.

At very near the same hour of the same day, Sally Gorman was sittin in her father's house, thinking of the kemp, when the Little Woman in Red walked in. After modest pleasantries, Sally inquired as to any news the woman might have. "The only news in the neighbourhood," replied the woman, "is this great kemp that's to take place at Shaun Buie M'Gaveran's. They say you're either to win him or lose him then." "I'm not very much afraid of that," said Sally, "but even if I do lose him, I may get as good."

"It's not easy gettin' as good as Shaun," Sally's visitor rejoined, "an' you ought to be very glad to win him, if you can." "Let me alone for that," said Sally confidently, "Bidy's a good girl, I allow; but as for spinnin', she never saw the day she could leave me behind her." "Won't you sit an' rest you?" Sally added; "maybe you're tired." The little visitor sat down, and the two chatted upon several subjects for about half an hour; after which she arose, and taking her little staff in hand, bade Sally good-bye. Away from the house, the little woman rhymed to herself her disappointment in the encounter:

⁶² YEATS, FAERIE AND FOLK TALES, *supra* note 52 at 17.

She's smooth and smart,
But she wants the heart.
She's tight and neat,
But she gave no meat.

In the meantime, poor Biddy was frustrated in all of the inquiries she made concerning the old woman, and was beginning to lose hope, as “she knew in her heart she would never get Shaun’s equal, or at least any one that she loved so well.”

The day of the kemp arrived, and “it was a blythe and merry place, and many a light laugh and sweet song rang out from pretty lips that day.” The spinning commenced, and as expected, Biddy and Sally were soon far ahead of the rest, but the two spinners were so close in their expertness that no one could proclaim who was better. “All who were at the kemp felt themselves wound up to the highest pitch of interest and curiosity to know which of them would be successful.” The competition half-concluded, Biddy Corrigan's heck broke in two, and so to all appearance ended the contest in favour of her rival Sally.” Adding to her mortification, she was as ignorant off the red little woman's name as ever.

As it happened, Biddy’s 14-year-old brother Johnny had accompanied her to the kemp, and was promptly dispatched with the broken heck to Donnel M’Cusker's, the wheelwright, in order to get it mended, in which journey he passed close to Kilrudden forth, a place celebrated as a resort of the faeries. Passing a white-thorn tree, Johnny was astonished to hear to hear a female voice singing, in accompaniment to the sound of a spinning-wheel, in a rhythmic double entendre:

There's a girl in this town doesn't know my name;
But my name's Even Trot—Even Trot.

“There's a girl in this town,” Johnny Corrigan exclaimed to the lady, dressed in red, who he found within, “who's in great distress, for she has broken her heck, and lost a husband. I'm now goin' to Donnel M’Cusker's to get it mended.” “What's her name?” asked the little woman. “Biddy Corrigan.” Johnny replied. The woman bade Johnny to “never mind,” as she whipped the heck from her own wheel and told him to take it to his sister Biddy and to hurry. “You have little time to lose,” she added, “so go back and give her this; but don't tell her how you got it, nor, above all things, that it was Even Trot that gave it to you.” Johnny returned to the kemp, but as was inevitable he told his sister that it was a little old woman called Even Trot who sent it to her.

“Tears of delight” formed in Biddy’s eyes, as “she felt that something good would happen to her.” She resumed her spinning, “and never did human fingers let down the thread so rapidly.” Hour by hour Biddy’s output came closer to that of her rival Sally, and Sally “now spun, if possible, with double speed on finding Biddy coming up with her.” Just as the two were again even, there entered Biddy’s friend, the Little Woman in Red, who asked aloud, “Is there any one in this kemp that knows my name?” As Biddy at first lacked the courage to answer, the woman had to ask three times, before Biddy answer her, saying at last: “There's a girl in this town does know your name—Your name is Even Trot—Even Trot.”

“Ay,” said the old woman, “and so it is; and let that name be your guide and your husband's through life. Go steadily along, but let your step be even; stop little; keep always advancing; and you'll never have cause to rue the day that you first saw Even Trot.”

The story teller scarcely needed to add that Biddy prevailed in the kemp, won her handsome husband Shaun, and that the two of them “lived long and happily together.” “I have only now to wish, kind reader,” closed the story teller, “that you and I may live longer and more happily still.”

W.Y. Evans-Wentz was an American anthropologist and expert in both in faerie legend and Buddhist mysticism. His *FAERIE FAITH IN CELTIC CULTURES*⁶³ offers Celtic tales from Ireland, Wales and Scotland, and comprises in large part recitations of stories reported directly to him in his field work, illustrating, Evans-Wentz, explains, “the marked difference” between the short conversational stories of the living faerie faith and the longer, more polished ones more typically found in published collections. Evans-Wentz includes a tale of *Einion and Olwen*, told as a tale told by the reporter’s mother “as she used to sit by the fire in the twilight knitting stockings.”

⁶³ EVANS-WENTZ, *THE FAERIE FAITH*, *supra* note 9 at 160.

In the story one cloudy and misty day Einon, a shepherd boy having lost his way, came upon “a hollow place surrounded by rushes where he saw a number of round rings.” Recognizing it as a place he had been warned to avoid, before him there appeared an “old, merry, blue-eyed man.” Hoping to find his way home, the boy followed the old man, who said to him: “Do not speak a word till I tell you.” They came to a *menhir* (long stone). The old man tapped it three times, and then lifted it up. A narrow path with descending steps was revealed, and from it emerged a bluish-white light. “Follow me,” said the old man, “no harm will come to you.” The two continued, entering “a fine, wooded, fertile country,” and reached a palace “enchanted by the singing of birds.” Music of all sorts was in the palace, but he saw no people. Meals came and disappeared, and disembodied voices surrounded them.

At this point, the old man told the shepherd boy that he could speak, but when the boy tried “he could not move his tongue.” Soon an old lady approached him, smiling, and “leading three beautiful maidens.” The maidens smiled and spoke, but the boy could not reply until one of the maidens kissed him and “all at once he began to converse freely and most wittily.” The shepherd boy thereupon fully enjoyed a year and a day in this marvelous land and its castle, at which point, missing his old acquaintances, he thanked the old man and asked if he could return home. The old man replied: “Wait a little while,” and so he waited a while longer, for the maiden who had kissed him, named Olwen, “was unwilling to have him go; but when he promised her to return, she sent him off loaded with riches.”

Upon returning to his home, he was surprised that “not one of his people or old friends knew him,” and further that everybody “believed that he had been killed by another shepherd. And this shepherd had been accused of the murder and had fled to America.” At the new moon, the boy remembered his promise to the maiden that he would return to the beautiful place, and he did so, to the great rejoicing of all. Einon and Olwen decided to marry, but wanted to do so quietly and secretly, “for the fair-folk dislike ceremony and noise.” When the marriage was over, Einon wished to go back with Olwen to the upper world, the shepherd’s home, and two snow-white ponies were given them” for their return. Reaching the upper world safely, and “being possessed of unlimited wealth, lived most handsomely on a great estate.” People inquired as to Olwen’s pedigree, but as she offered none, “it was taken for granted that she was one of the faerie-folk.” “And this,” the story ends, “is the origin of the term faerie-folk (Tylwyth Teg).”

Conclusion

The legacy of Celtic imaginary writing tracks in ways that of the Celts in their ancestral conflict with the Anglo Saxons, Picts and the Scots: “‘They went forth to battle, but they always fell,’ yet the captive Celt has enslaved his captor in the realm of imagination.”⁶⁴ His dreams, beautiful or horrifying, have all apertures open in oneirographic foretelling. As is seen, the ordinary faerie tale embeds a moral lesson. Consistent with literary canon, the good have ended happily and the bad unhappily.⁶⁵ Be the tale faerie or folk in genre, the tales are typically parables that reinforced Celtic community wisdom or norms, in a mother tongue as often the language of the absurd.

This article provides but a sampling of Gaelic faerie tales and legends as collected at the turn of the Nineteenth Century that reveal the flamboyance of the Irish personality in the people’s ambitions, morality, fears and joys, hunger and satiety, forbearance and foolhardiness. Many of the protagonists share standard folk-tale qualities of intelligence, courage, kindness, and luck. The leading player, whether prating, japing, extraordinarily talkative,⁶⁶ restive,⁶⁷ impatient, or impulsive, is also usually Faustian, which is to say dissatisfied with prosaic earthly existence and alert to any possibility of escaping the merciless logic of ordinary life. The faerie imagination permits believers to place themselves at the center of their own experience.

⁶⁴ JACOBS, CELTIC FAERIE TALES, *supra* note 5 at 4.

⁶⁵ Attributed to Oscar Wilde’s *Lady Bracknell*.

⁶⁶ “We Irish are fond of dilating on whatsoever subject we treat . . . and there is “ample verge” for indulging in this natural propensity, whether it concern places or persons, men or manners, town or country, morning, noon, or night.” *The Star of Sweet Dun-Dalk*, LOVER, LEGENDS AND STORIES, *supra* note 60 at 258, <https://archive.org/details/legendsandstori03lovegoog/page/n8/mode/2up>

⁶⁷ Leaving it probable, as Joseph Conrad wrote in the cruise sequence in *COUNTERFEITERS*, that “all the ills of man come from this, the inability to sit still in a room.”

Their stories, revealing the ructions of the unconscious mind, portray a creativity that imagines the Celtic world beyond the agonies of the hour, in dreams occupying the liminal space between the conscious and the unconscious, beyond the dimensions of time, space and causality. The prevalent happy endings to these stories should be read, Joseph Campbell suggests, “not as a contradiction, but as a transcendence of the universal tragedy of man.”⁶⁸ Releasing the audience into a telos of contradiction and mystery, like nothing else in Western literature the Irish Celtic faerie tale conjoins frisson with the relief of comedy, succeeding, as has been said of the work of Irish author Samuel Becket, through its ability to pack hilarity, despair, resignation and hope into individual mythic adventures.

⁶⁸ Joseph Campbell, *Tragedy and Comedy*, THE HERO WITH A THOUSAND FACES (Pantheon 1949, 1964).