

Guest Editors' Introduction

Sam George and Bill Hughes

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

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

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

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

Gothic Faerie

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Notes

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

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