Arthur Rackham,
'The Changeling' (1905).

Prisoners of the gods: The captivity narrative in fairy lore

Jeremy Harte

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jeremy Harte

Notes

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

8. Katherine Briggs, *The Vanishing People* (London: Batsford, 1978), 104-17.
9. Robert Cromek, *Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song* (London: T. Cadell & W. Davies, 1810), 305-6.
10. Lewis Spence, *The Fairy Tradition in Britain* (London: Rider & Co., 1948), 258-61, 264.
11. Yeats, *Writings on Irish Folklore*, 140.
12. June Namias, *White Captives: Gender and Ethnicity on the American Frontier* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).
13. Robert Davis, 'Counting European slaves on the Barbary coast', *Past & Present* 172 (2001): 87-124 (92).
14. The modern *neraides* dance in the woods, wear flowing white, raise whirlwinds, and marry men when their veil is taken and flee when they find it – common motifs from the general stock of fairy lore which, as Herbert Jennings Rose observed, have been grafted onto the classical nereid: 'Things old and new', *Folk-Lore* 45 (1934): 8-28 (17-20).
15. James Whitaker, 'Water mamas among the Makushi in Guyana', *Folklore* 131 (2020): 34-54 (44-5).
16. Robert Hunt, *Popular Romances of the West of England* (London: John Camden Hotten, 1865), 118.
17. Edmund Stedman (ed.), *A Victorian Anthology, 1837–1895* (Boston MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1895), 288-9.
18. Stephanie Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South* (Harvard MA: Yale University Press, 2019); George Moore, *Esther Waters* (London: Walter Scott, 1894), 142.
19. Cecelia F. Klein, 'The devil and the skirt: an iconographic inquiry into the Pre-Hispanic nature of the Tzitzimime', *Ancient Mesoamerica* 11 (2000): 1-26 (8); William Crooke, *The Popular Religion and Folk-Lore of Northern India*, vol. 1 (London: Archibald Constable, 1896), 269-71.
20. Lizanne Henderson and Edward J. Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief: A History* (East Linton: Tuckwell, 2001), 166.
21. William Wilde, *Irish Popular Superstitions* (Dublin: James McGlashan, 1852); Jane Wilde, *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms and Superstitions of Ireland* (London: Ward & Downey, 1887).
22. Thomas Crofton Croker, *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland* (London: John Murray, 1825-8); compare Séan Ó hEaochaidh, *Síscéalta Ó Thír Chonaill / Fairy Legends from Donegal*, ed. and trans. Máire Mac Neill and Séamas Ó Catháin (Dublin: Comhairle Bhéaloideas Éireann, 1977).
23. Patrick O'Flanagan, Paul Ferguson and Kevin Whelan (eds), *Rural Ireland 1600–1900: Modernisation and Change* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1987), 50.
24. Tim Coughlan, *Now Shoon the Romano Gillie: Traditional Verse in the High and Low Speech of the Gypsies of Britain* (Aberystwyth: University of Wales Press, 2001), 235.
25. George Petrie, *The Petrie Collection of the Ancient Music of Ireland*, vol. 1 (Dublin: Dublin University Press, 1855), 73.
26. Francis James Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 10 vols (Boston MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1882–98).
27. John Gregorson Campbell, *Superstitions of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* (Glasgow: Glasgow University Press, 1900), 84.
28. C. Fred Blake, 'The feelings of Chinese daughters toward their mothers as revealed in marriage laments', *Folklore* 90 (1979): 91-7.
29. Yeats, *Writings on Irish Folklore*, 248, 316; Gregory, *Visions and Beliefs*, 107.
30. Magnus Course, 'Changelings: alterity beyond difference', *Folk Life* 55 (2017): 12-21.
31. Yeats, *Writings on Irish Folklore*, 310; Gregory, *Visions and Beliefs*, 143.