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Ph.D. dissertation

A Spirit of Another Sort: The Evolution and Transformation of the Fairy King from Medieval Romance to Early Modern Prose, Poetry, and Drama

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ABSTRACT:

This thesis charts the changing face of the Fairy King between the Middle Ages and the early modern period from a mysterious, sinister, partially diabolical figure of inscrutable motivations to the renowned paterfamilias of illustrious dynastic families. Tracing the putative origin of this figure to the pagan gods of the classical world (in particular to the figure of Dis/Pluto in the context of the Orpheus myth), this thesis examines the way in which the introduction and consolidation of Christianity across western Europe led to a bifurcation of attitudes about pagan gods whereby they were either dismissed (mostly by theologians) as the devilish remnants of an ignorant and heathen past or accommodated within existing discourse through a pedagogical and literary approach which read such figures through the lens of Biblical teaching.

Within the British Isles, a comparable figure existed within the corpus of indigenous (commonly subsumed under the bracket 'Celtic') mythology, and as the Graeco-Roman and the Celtic worlds came into contact with each other within the context of trade and political conquest, there was a concomitant fusion between Dis/Pluto and the Lord of the Celtic Otherworld. The ontological vacillation of the pagan gods in the post-Christian world eventually allied them with the fairies, a distinct class of the supernatural which, given its chequered etymological roots as well as a semantic association with the concepts of death, fatedness, mutability, the afterlife, and ritual practices of burial and interment, came to occupy a unique category of the liminal and the unassimilable, incapable of being retrofitted within any available interpretative or hermeneutic registers. Such an identification informed the representation of the figure of the Fairy King in the secular literature of the Middle Ages, where the fairy monarch exhibited features that were simultaneously reminiscent of his pagan progenitor, its insular equivalent, as well as the Devil of Christian theology.

However, with the transition from Catholic Christianity to Protestantism in the wake of the Reformation, the fear and anxiety formerly generated by the fairies was now transferred on to the figure of the witch. As a consequence of this perspectival shift, the fairies were relatively free to be handled in other ways, and the former medieval tradition of associating dynastic lines with fairy founders (exemplified by the legends of Arthur within the British Isles and Mélusine on the continent) was revived as part of the project of political legitimation adopted by the newly emerging dynastic houses of Europe.

The uniqueness of this thesis lies not only in the scope of texts and literary-historical periods it surveys, but also in the approach it takes in charting such developments. Utilising a variety of theoretical models, this thesis illustrates that literary change cannot be considered in isolation from currents of development in cultural, social, political, historical, and religious systems, thereby making this study truly inter-disciplinary and providing a necessary corrective to monolithic scholarly accounts of how literary figures evolve and transform.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG:

Diese Arbeit zeichnet die Entwicklung des *Fairy King* von einer geheimnis- bzw. unheilvollen, zum Teil auch teuflischen, Figur mit undurchschaubaren Motiven hin zum angesehenen Paterfamilias wichtiger dynastischer Familien vom Mittelalter zur Frühen Neuzeit nach. Der Ursprung dieser Figur ist vermutlich in der Götterwelt der klassischen Antike zu verorten (von besonderer Bedeutung ist hier die Figur des Dis/Pluto aus dem Orpheusmythos). Auf dieser Grundlage wird untersucht, wie die Einführung und Konsolidierung des Christentums in Westeuropa zu zwei Grundhaltungen gegenüber heidnischen Göttern geführt hat. Sie wurden entweder (insbesondere durch Theologen) als die teuflischen Überreste einer ungebildeten heidnischen Vergangenheit zurückgewiesen oder durch eine pädagogische und literarische Herangehensweise, die solche Figuren aus der Perspektive der biblischen Lehre las, in den existierenden Diskurs integriert.

Auf den Britischen Inseln existierte eine vergleichbare Figur als Teil des Korpus indigener (oft zusammenfassend als ‚keltisch' bezeichneter) Mythologie. Der Kontakt zwischen der griechisch-römischen und der keltischen Welt in unterschiedlichen Kontexten wie Handel und Eroberung führte zu einer Verschmelzung von Dis/Pluto mit dem Herrscher der keltischen Anderswelt. Die ontologische Vielfalt der heidnischen Götter in der nachchristlichen Welt wurde allmählich mit den *Fairies* verknüpft, einer eigenen Kategorie des Übernatürlichen, welche angesichts ihrer vielfältigen etymologischen Wurzeln sowie ihrer Assoziation mit Konzepten wie Tod, Vorbestimmung, Wandelbarkeit, dem Jenseits sowie rituellen Bestattungspraktiken auf besondere Art und Weise für das Liminale und das nicht Assimilierbare stand, das nicht in bestehende Schemata oder Deutungszusammenhänge eingebunden werden konnte. Diese Identifikation mit der Kategorie der *Fairies* beeinflusste die Darstellung der Figur des *Fairy King* in der säkularen Literatur des Mittelalters, in der er Eigenschaften aufwies, die gleichzeitig an seinen heidnischen Vorfahren, dessen Entsprechung auf den Britischen Inseln und an den Teufel aus der christlichen Theologie erinnerten.

Doch mit dem Wandel von katholischem Christentum zum Protestantismus in Folge der Reformation wurden die ehemals mit den *Fairies* verbundenen Ängste auf die Figur der Hexe verschoben. Eine Folge dieses Perspektivwechsels war, dass die *Fairies* nun auch auf andere Weise betrachtet werden konnten, und so entstand eine Wiederbelebung der mittelalterlichen Tradition, dynastische Linien mit Gründern aus dem Feenreich zu

assoziieren (beispielhaft hierfür sind die Artussage auf den Britischen Inseln und die Geschichten um die Melusine in Kontinentaleuropa), und zwar als Teil des politischen Legitimationsprojekts der neu entstehenden dynastischen Häuser Europas.

Die vorliegende Dissertation beschreitet Neuland – nicht nur in Hinblick auf die große Bandbreite von Texten und literaturhistorischen Epochen, die sie in den Blick nimmt, sondern auch aufgrund der Herangehensweise, mit der diese Entwicklungen nachvollzogen werden. Mit Bezug auf eine Vielzahl theoretischer Modelle wird gezeigt, dass literarische Veränderungen nicht unabhängig von Entwicklungen in kulturellen, sozialen, politischen, historischen und religiösen Systemen betrachtet werden können. Diese deutliche Interdisziplinarität bietet ein notwendiges Korrektiv zu monolithischen wissenschaftlichen Darstellungen der Entwicklung und Transformation von literarischen Figuren.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AJP	The American Journal of Philology
CH	Church History
CR	Chaucer Review
ELH	English Literary History
ELR	English Literary Renaissance
ES	English Studies
FMLS	Forum for Modern Language Studies
FS	Frühmittelalterliche Studien
HLQ	Huntington Library Quarterly
JAF	Journal of American Folklore
JHI	Journal of the History of Ideas
MA	Medium Aevum
MLQ	Modern Language Quarterly
MLR	Modern Language Review
MP	Modern Philology
NLH	New Literary History
NM	Neuphilologische Mitteilungen
PHCC	Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium
PMLA	Proceedings of the Modern Language Association of America
PQ	Philological Quarterly
PT	Political Theory
RES	Review of English Studies
RQ	Renaissance Quarterly
SA	Sociological Analysis
SAC	Studies in the Age of Chaucer
SP	Studies in Philology
SQ	Shakespeare Quarterly
TAPA	Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association
TCJ	The Classical Journal
YES	Yearbook of English Studies
ZDP	Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie

INTRODUCTION

FROM DIS TO OBERON: THE TWOFOLD EVOLUTION OF THE FAIRY KING AND ITS THEORETICAL CONTEXTUALISATION

This thesis began like all research projects do — with a question. During the first semester of my Master's degree, I had already begun to cultivate an interest in the literature of medieval England. I discovered the text of *Sir Orfeo* by accident, tucked away at the back of one of the lesser-used bookshelves in the departmental library. Figuring that it would be good reading practice for understanding Middle English, I borrowed the book and was almost instantly captivated by the narrative of the poem, particularly by the enigmatic figure of the ostensible antagonist — the Fairy King. In the same semester, an optional paper on Dream in Literature required students to read William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as one of the mandatory texts. As my reading of both the medieval romance and the Shakespearean play coincided with each other, I was immediately struck by how both texts featured the same figure — the King of the Fairies, unnamed in *Orfeo* but known as Oberon in Shakespeare — but in such startlingly different ways. Conjecturally dated to the first half of the fourteenth century, *Sir Orfeo* represents a retelling of the classical myth of Orpheus within a contemporary English milieu, and in this creative medievalisation of the legend, the figure of the Fairy King is presented as a sinister power whose motivations are both ambiguous and inscrutable, and whose realm of Fairyland suggests at once the richness and comfort of Paradise as well as the horrors and depredations of Hell. Shakespeare's play, generally dated to the last decade of the sixteenth century, features the character of Oberon, the King of the Fairies and husband of Titania, belonging to an alternative realm of magic and enchantment which intrudes upon the world of the human actors and influences the events of the mortal world in significant ways. A petulant and somewhat ridiculous (albeit largely harmless) figure, Oberon in Shakespeare's play could at one and the same time wish to teach his recalcitrant wife a lesson as well as be moved to pity by the plight of lovers whose union had been sundered by parental disapproval. A little over two centuries separate the composition of *Orfeo* and *Midsummer*, yet by this time modes of conceptualising fairies and fairy monarchs had clearly undergone a significant change. It was the desire and curiosity to discover *how* and *why* such a change happened that prompted my central research question.

As I began to delve deeper into available scholarship on fairylore, I noticed that most critical approaches to fairies have predominantly taken one of the following three directions:

studies have focused either on fairies as literary devices and cultural artefacts *in general*, compartmentalised the fairies of the medieval and the early modern periods, or examined the figure of the Fairy Queen or fairy mistress (frequently, though not exclusively, in Arthurian romance) through the lens of scholarly developments in the fields of Gender Studies and feminist criticism. Fairies and Fairyland have also been examined in the context of critical evaluations of the medieval romance, although in such cases their importance as the source of scholarly inquiry has been only incidental to the work rather than constituting the primary subject of investigation.[1] Comprehensive academic treatments of the figure of the male fairy monarch, including an examination of the transformations effected in his literary depiction together with an exploration of the cultural, historical, socio-political, economic, and material circumstances which influenced such transitions, are missing in Anglophone scholarship, a surprising oversight in view of the persistence of this figure in the literary-cultural imagination, from the secular literature of the Middle Ages down to the present day (albeit in different forms) in such works as Neil Gaiman's enormously popular *Sandman* series of comics and Susanna Clarke's absorbing fictional recreation of nineteenth-century English magic in *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell*. The rationale for undertaking the present research was thus provided by the need to fill this lacuna in scholarly evaluations of fairies and fairy stories.

In this thesis, I have attempted to critically document the many phases of development and transformation undergone by the figure of the Fairy King in literary representation. Since *Sir Orfeo* was the first source text which prompted my research question, I sought to trace the antecedents of the figure of the Fairy King in the medieval romance through a retrospective evaluation of the genesis and transmission of the Orpheus myth. This endeavour led me to an examination of the emergence of the Orphic legends in classical Greece and the subsequent reformulation of the story of the Thracian poet-harper and shamanic leader in both pre- and post-Christian Italian literature. Noting that the classical equivalent of *Orfeo*'s Fairy King was the pagan god of the Underworld Hades/Pluto (incorporated into Roman mythology as Dis), I have attempted to chronicle the literary development of this figure in the works of the Augustan poets Virgil and Ovid and its subsequent handling by Boethius. An analysis of this development has necessarily focused on the changes effected in the conceptualisation and treatment of this figure in the wake of the introduction and consolidation of Christianity and constitutes the subject of Chapter 1 of this thesis. Given the explicitly English provenance of *Sir Orfeo*, it was important to analyse not only how the Orpheus myth could have travelled to medieval England but also how the indigenous mythography and religious system of the British Isles could have influenced the conception of the Fairy King figure. The intermingling of Celtic religious ideas and folk belief with Graeco-Roman myth was accordingly investigated, and the impact of such cross-cultural interaction on the characterisation of the pseudo-fairy figures of Midir (in the Old Irish saga *Tochmarc Étaíne*) and the Pygmy King (in the tale of Herla in Walter Map's *De nugis curialium*) — figures who might be regarded as the immediate insular predecessors of *Orfeo*'s Fairy King — has furnished the subject of Chapter 2. Chapter 3 is dedicated to a detailed discussion of the Fairy King in *Sir Orfeo* through a contextualisation of the etymology and ontology of fairy, the generic predisposition of medieval romance towards the ambiguous supernatural (and, by extension, to the utilisation of fairylore), as well as the characteristics exhibited by medieval fairies as conscious literary devices. In addition to *Orfeo*, Chapter 3 explores two alternative treatments of the fairy monarch in late medieval poetry through brief analyses of the appearance of this figure (as Pluto) in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale* and Robert Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice*. Chapter 4 shifts the focus of examination to the sociocultural milieu of sixteenth-century England, discussing how fairies were used as instruments of political legitimation by dynastic houses in a cultural project that built upon the historical associations developed between fairy founders and royal genealogy as well as analysing how the male fairy ruler was introduced into England under the prototypical name of Oberon in John Bourchier's *Huon of Burdeux*. The chapter closes with an exploration of the two most representative pre-Shakespearean treatments of Oberon in Robert Greene's *The Scottish Historie of James*

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[1] For representative examples of each approach, see Katherine Briggs, *The Fairies in Tradition and Literature* (London: Routledge, 2002; originally published in 1967), *The Anatomy of Puck: An Examination of Fairy Beliefs among Shakespeare's Contemporaries and Successors* (London & New York: Routledge, 2007; originally published in 1959), *The Vanishing People: A Study of Traditional Fairy Beliefs* (London: Batsford, 1978), *A Dictionary of Fairies: Hobgoblins, Brownies, Bogies and Other Supernatural Creatures* (London: Penguin, 1977, repr. 1994; originally published in 1976), Diane Purkiss, *Troublesome Things: A History of Fairies and Fairy Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000), Minor White Latham, *The Elizabethan Fairies: The Fairies of Folklore and the Fairies of Shakespeare* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1930), James Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), Regina Buccola, *Fairies, Fractious Women, and the Old Faith: Fairy Lore in Early Modern British Drama and Culture* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2006), Carolyne Larrington, *King Arthur's Enchantresses: Morgan and her Sisters in Arthurian Tradition* (London & New York: I. B. Tauris, 2006), Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Corinne Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Literature 1100–1500*, ed. Larry Scanlon (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend*, eds. Elizabeth Archibald and Ad Putter (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

the Fourth and Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, and I conclude the thesis with a summary of the overall conclusions reached together with a note about the potential avenues available for future research on the subject.

CULTURE AS SEMIOSPHERE, SYSTEM EVOLUTION, AND THE FUNCTIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FAIRY KING:

In its attempt to document and analyse the various phases of transformation in the evolution of the figure of the Fairy King, this thesis deals not only with a variety of texts and textual traditions, but also with a broad and encompassing chronological and geographical scope (from the use of classical Greek myth in Augustan Rome to the poetic and dramatic works that proliferated in sixteenth-century England), different and discrete cultural attitudes and practices, as well as diverse socio-political and literary phenomena that resist simplistic classification into facile, reductive categories. The chapters that follow seek to address an array of questions pertaining to facets and nuances of development that are as polyvalent as they are wide-ranging: what factors accounted for the emergence of the Fairy King figure in the pagan mythography of the classical Graeco-Roman world and how are myths semiotically structured and transmitted across time and space; what overlaps could be found in the insular folklore of the British Isles and how the concept of cultural translation, particularly the translation of ideas, can be used to explain the transmigration of elements of religious culture from pre-Christian Greece and Rome to the post-Christian milieu of the 'Celtic' lands where they subsequently found literary representation; what ideas and beliefs coalesced around the conception and treatment of the category of 'fairy' in the Middle Ages and what factors guided the hermeneutic application of this distinct subset of the supernatural to the generic form of the medieval romance; and finally, how were strands of association developed between fairies and the genealogical claims of dynastic houses which led to their frequent deployment in foundational myths utilised by hegemonic regimes which increasingly occupied the political landscape of early modern Europe.

Although each chapter discusses the potential answers to these questions by taking recourse to a selection of specific theoretical approaches, the theoretical base upon which the superstructure of the argument is built has been afforded by Yuri Lotman's semiotic model of culture as well Niklas Luhmann's theorisation (via a novel re-conceptualisation of, among other things, the Darwinian concept of biological evolution) of system evolution. Lotman's theory helps to illustrate how literary representation is not merely an isolated process of creative intellection but is actively couched within and enabled by culture as a semiotic complex, while Luhmann's theory not only lends itself organically to the self-avowed objective of my thesis — to document and explain the *evolution* of the Fairy King — but also gives structural and conceptual clarity to the multiple phases of transformation undergone by the figure. The theories of Lotman and Luhmann suggested themselves as the natural choice for a study focused on charting and evaluating the vicissitudes of development of a literary figure characterised by multiple, shifting trajectories, an active and dynamic cultural process marked by stages of transformation akin to stages in the evolution of the societal system (itself patterned on the evolution of the biological organism). In order to understand the inherent inter-relationship between literary representation and cultural process, merely taking recourse to literary theory isn't enough; what is needed is a composite theoretical model culled from a variety of critical discourses which can help to situate literature (and literary figures) within a wider matrix of cultural correlatives. The flexibility of the Lotmanian-Luhmannian schema is ideally suited for this thesis which regards literary change as the by-product of a continuous process of sociocultural negotiation, a rhizomatic process itself built upon such factors as religious orientation, political arrangement, and economic structure which, far from being unchanging fixities, are in perennial motion, being made and unmade, deconstructed and rebuilt, and always in dialogue with each other.

To locate a literary figure within the realm of literature, it is important at the first instance to understand the nature, importance, and mode of functioning of culture since literature forms a distinct subsystem of culture.[2] In simple terms, culture can be defined as the memory of a community, as a mechanism for translating cumulative human experience as well as organising and preserving information in the consciousness of the community. This memory, which is connected to past historical experience, can only be retrospectively recollected, thereby implying that culture cannot be recorded at the moment of its experience but can only be perceived ex post facto.[3] Accordingly, the function of culture lies in the structural organisation of the world around man, a task it fulfils by creating a social sphere around man, thereby enabling the existence and performance of social life.[4] Structurally, culture is organised as a system — what Lotman calls the 'semiosphere' — and its operation is predicated upon the operations of language.[5] As a concentric system, culture-as-semiosphere consists of “obvious and logical structures” that are located in the centre with formations which function as structures despite being of dubious structural composition ranged on the periphery.[6] It is the relative disjunction between fixed core structures and variable peripheral quasi-structures that lends dynamism to the cultural system.[7] This systemic organisation of culture makes it a specifically demarcated sphere bracketed off against the background of nonculture and imparts to it a semiotic essence whereby culture appears as a system of signs.[8] Functionally, culture’s role as the repository of the memory of a community is governed by a system of rules whereby lived experience is translated into text, a functional extension of its structural organisation as a system. For an historical event to be assigned to a specific category, it must first be identified with a specific element in the language of the organisation which is committing it to memory and subsequently evaluated according to the hierarchic ties of that language. Only once such identification and (re)evaluation has been done can an event or experience be implanted in the text of collective memory, a process which parallels the process of linguistic translation.[9]

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[2] Yuri Lotman and B. A. Uspensky, "On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture," trans. George Mihaychuk, *NLH* 9, no. 2 (1978): 218.
[3] Lotman and Uspensky, "Semiotic Mechanism," 214.
[4] Lotman and Uspensky, "Semiotic Mechanism," 213–214.

As the long-term memory of a community, the semiotic behaviour of culture consists in the creation of ‘texts.’ Such textual morphogenesis is primarily guided by three factors — a quantitative increase in the amount of knowledge whereby the various nodes of culture’s hierarchic system are filled with texts, a redistribution of the nodular structure which leads to a reappraisal of what must be remembered and subsequently recorded in memory, and forgetting which brings about the natural omission of certain texts from culture’s memorial record.[10] As a semiotic system, culture functions on the structural principle of “heterogeneity of inner organization.” This means that culture consists of a composite of different structures which function as “little islands of ‘different’ organization” whose aim is to increase structural variety and overcome the entropy of structural automatization.[11] With this aim of structural variety, culture singles out special spheres of different organisation which, although they lie outside the general system of organisation, are nonetheless valued highly in an axiological sense. This principle of heterogeneity gives culture an almost atomic organisation whereby clusters of structures, characterised by their own individual systemic organisation, are functionally connected to the nucleus of cultural forms on the basis of their valuation.[12]

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[5] Yuri Lotman, *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, trans. Ann Shukman (London: I. B. Tauris, 1990), 123–124. This linguistic basis of culture implies that its transmission is guaranteed through the medium of agents where language is indispensable, such as orality as well as textuality. This reliance upon textuality, in turn, feeds into the representation of literature as a subset of culture.

[6] According to Lotman, the structural organisation of the semiosphere is characterised by asymmetry which is apparent in the distinction between centre and periphery, categories which are themselves constructed linguistically. See Lotman, *Universe of the Mind*, 127–128.

[7] Lotman and Uspensky, “Semiotic Mechanism,” 213.

[8] Lotman and Uspensky, “Semiotic Mechanism,” 211. Nonculture can conceptually be understood as a negation of culture, whereby all that does not belong to the realm of culture is automatically relegated to the field of nonculture. It is an oppositional force, and although the nature of this opposition may vary, its existence is essential for culture to function.

[9] Lotman and Uspensky, “Semiotic Mechanism,” 214.

[10] For Lotman and Uspensky, although culture’s impulse to record events in memory is, in essence, an impulse against forgetting, forgetting is an inevitable outcome of the process of selection which accompanies the formation of texts. As events with the maximum potential for translatability into elements of the text are selected (a process guided by factors which are historically contingent), non-

This structural formulation of culture as a semiotic system bracketed off against the background of non-culture, built as a concentric system of fixed core structures and variable peripheral quasi-structures guided by the principle of enhancing structural variety can be linked to Niklas Luhmann’s systems-theoretical conceptualisation of evolution in the social system. According to Luhmann, the social system (synonymous with the notion of culture) constitutes a self-sustaining unit that receives input from an environment (from which it is bracketed off, like the Lotmanian culture against non-culture) characterised by greater complexity, and in order to mitigate this difference in complexity, the social system alters its structures through a trifold process of evolution.[13] Evolution is characteristic of dynamic systems where an ever-changing complexity gradient between system and environment necessitates a continuous cycle of evolutionary paradigms. System evolution is cyclically patterned (what Luhmann refers to as the essence of ‘dynamic stability’) since, although the end-objective of evolution is to restore system stability via structural change, stability is also

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essential elements are relegated into the background and consequently forgotten. See Lotman and Uspensky, “Semiotic Mechanism,” 215–216.

[11] Lotman and Uspensky, “Semiotic Mechanism,” 226–227.

[12] Lotman includes monasteries (within the context of medieval ecclesiastical society) and poetry (within the context of Romanticism) as examples of such axiological structures. For the purposes of my argument, pantheons of pagan deities (within the context of a post-Christian society) might be regarded as one such cluster which, although organised on the basis of its own ineluctable structural logic and therefore beyond the purview of structural arrangement of a monotheistic dispensation such as Christianity, is nonetheless valued highly (by virtue of its durability in collective cultural memory) and accordingly contained within the atomic structure of religious culture in general.

[13] Luhmann’s theorisation of society as a system is a centrepiece of his thought, and his observations on the structural and functional organisation of systems (inspired by developments in the fields of cybernetics, game theory, and the biological sciences in addition to sociological theory) constitute the bulk of his prolific academic output. They are too complicated, detailed, and vast in scope to be elaborated via a cursory summary, and the reader is accordingly referred to, among other things, Peter Beyer’s introduction in Niklas Luhmann, *Religious Dogmatics and the Evolution of Societies*, trans. Peter Beyer (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1977) as well as Luhmann, *Introduction to Systems Theory*, ed. Dirk Baecker, trans. Peter Gilgen (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).

a necessary precondition for initiating evolution in the first place.[14] However, in order for the social system to continue to exist in a state of dynamism, it is necessary for the system to not *permanently* alter its structures to adapt to changing environmental conditions but only to *temporarily* attune itself to *temporary* states. This temporary attunement is only possible because the structural operations of the social system are based upon the triad of communication, information, and utterance which are in continual flux and which constitute the basis of language.[15] Thus, just as Lotman and Uspensky formulate a direct correlation between culture and language, Luhmann too discerns a linguistic basis in the evolutionary operations of the social system.

Luhmann distinguishes between three steps in the evolutionary process — variation, selection, and restabilisation. Variation, which is related to the elements of the system (which, in the case of the social system, consist of communications), is occasioned by the deviant reproduction of elements by the elements themselves, that is, by unexpected, surprising communication.[16] Variation occurs when communication rejects its own content, a trigger which functions as a self-contradiction within the system. Such deviant communication is contextually-determined, requiring material amenable to evolution to be produced on a massive scale and consequently to disappear again unused. However, aberrant communication, although it paves the way for the second step of the evolutionary process, does not necessarily happen with an eye to selection. This is because, as Luhmann observes, social reality is extremely conservative and does not lightly negate what exists and has proved its worth in favour of something unknown whose prospects of consensus have yet to be tested.[17] This ontological indeterminacy of future selection, together with the contextual specificity of the variation condition which makes it reliant on sociocultural contexts that are highly susceptible to currents of change, makes the relationship between variation and selection one of chance.[18] The degree of deviance in communication that sparks variation becomes even more pronounced in social systems which accept writing as the medium of dissemination. This is because with writing, communications achieve greater spatial and temporal reach, which means that unlike communication changes in interpersonal communication where the unity of the face-to-face interaction neutralises the spread of deviance to just the interlocutors physically present, aberrations in communication embodied in writing can potentially be spread among a diffuse group of readers as well as across epochs and generations.[19] The rejection of its own elements by communicative operations provokes conflict which is subsequently dealt with by the social system either by shifting the problem of deviation to the level of social roles where they are subsequently differentiated into success roles (which are used as exemplary aids for conflict regulation) and failure or misfortune-related roles (which are neutralised by assumptions influenced by social conditioning, such as the fear of the evil eye and witchcraft) only to be superseded by the establishment of effectual political rule, or by defusing such conflicts through the creation of instruments of social regulation such as the legal system.[20] However, for variation to be initiated, communications need to be perceived as deviant in the first place, a recognition which cannot take place without the existence of a predetermined semantic. This predetermined semantic depends upon the memory of the social system which must not only take store of already established structures but also be guided by what is known and normal and what can accordingly be expected (and what not). In times of radical and far-reaching changes in the social system, however, this fixing of a predetermined semantic and consequently the recognition of deviation necessary to trigger variation is complicated, with the result that variation can categorise problems incorrectly and communications can employ distinctions which are no longer appropriate.[21]

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[14] Niklas Luhmann, *Theory of Society, Volume 1*, trans. Rhodes Barrett (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2012), 259–260, originally published as *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft. Band I* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997). My following discussion of evolution in the social system is heavily reliant upon Chapter 3 ("Evolution") of this volume, in particular, pages 251–336.

[15] Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, 267.

[16] Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, 273.

[17] Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, 278.

[18] Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, 279.

The second step in the evolutionary process is selection which, unlike variation which is based upon the *elements* of the system, concerns itself with the *structures* of the social system, namely, expectations that steer communication. The function of selection is twofold: it simultaneously chooses from deviant communication those meanings which are promising for developing structures (guided by the principles of repetitive use as well as by the fixing and consolidation of expectations) and discards innovations that appear unsuitable as structure and are consequently unable to guarantee the continuance of communication.[22] All variation necessarily leads to selection, even in cases where structural change does not happen. Such instances are seen as cases of negative selection where what is selected is the unchanged state.[23] The fundamental requirement of evolution is that facilities for variation and selection remain separate, and no one-to-one correspondence can be assumed between variation events and selection since the structures eventually formed in the aftermath of selection can be significantly different from the expectations which prompted such selection in the first place.[24] According to Luhmann, selection takes place via the development of function-specific, symbolically generalised communication media. Symbolically generalised communication media (of which money can be seen as an example) can secure, through the conditionalisation of motives for acceptance and their rendering as expectable through such conditionalisation, the acceptance of communications with highly exigent content even under improbable conditions.[25] Such conditionalisation is achieved through a combination of dissolution and recombination which vastly augment the number of combinatorial options available to the system.[26] Such media are "loosely coupled, gigantic sets of elements" whose structural flexibility enables the formulation of new selection criteria that are freed from the pressure of perfection.[27]

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[19] Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, 279–280.
[20] Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, 281.
[21] Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, 282–283.
[22] Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, 273–274.

The third and final step in the process of evolution is what Luhmann terms restabilisation. Restabilisation is concerned with the state of the evolving system after selection (whether positive or negative) has taken place and with the adaptability of the social system to its environment. In the case of positive selection, social structures are changed which must subsequently be adapted not only to the system but also made to be compatible with the environment, a condition which makes the need for restabilisation fairly straightforward. However, even in the case of negative selection where social structures remain unchanged, restabilisation is needed precisely in order to cope with the realisation that something which was potentially possible has not been realised.[28] For Luhmann, restabilisation refers to "sequences of building structural changes into a system whose operations are structurally determined" and is triggered by the increase in system complexity which is the end-product of both positive and negative selection.[29] With the

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[23] Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, 285. According to Luhmann, selection is essentially a two-sided form, that is, it can only be either positive or negative.

[24] Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, 286. This reinforces the point articulated previously about the purely coincidental relationship between variation and selection.

[25] Luhmann talks about symbolically generalised communication media at length in Chapter 2 ("Communication Media") of the same work, in particular in pages 190–238.

[26] Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, 289.

[27] Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, 290.

[28] Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, 293. Luhmann sees such realisation as a necessary corollary of the correspondence between selection and the memory of the system (although variations can disappear into the unseen, selections are usually retained by the system's memory).

[29] Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, 294.

amplification of complexity, restabilisation attempts to deal with the problem by drawing up boundary lines with reduced complexity ranged within the zone of demarcation and structural incompatibilities externalised and relegated outside the boundary.[30] By its very function, then, restabilisation leads to system differentiation and consequently new system formation through the development of solutions that are historically specific, contextually determined, and dependent upon the dominant differentiation form. Forms of system differentiation follow a hierarchic pattern and transition from segmentary differentiation to centre-periphery differentiation to stratification and finally to functional differentiation. As complexity gradients change, selection criteria which can guarantee stability also change, thereby bringing about concomitant changes in the form of system differentiation (from segmentary to functional).[31] As the final form of system differentiation, functional systems are characterised by an order that is constituted self-substitutively, which means that structures are replaced only by other structures of the same type and which perform the same function, that is, by perfect substitutes. Through such self-substitution, stability thus becomes a dynamic principle which itself sets the stage for further variation, thereby making evolution an endlessly cyclical process.[32]

Evolution, observes Luhmann, takes place in time. By this Luhmann does not mean that evolutionary processes can be chronologically dated, but rather that certain forms of structural change are historically specific and arise out of situations that are either situationally unique or which manifest a certain typicality that makes evolutionary advances possible.[33] However, even though evolution itself is triggered by a historical context which is both temporally fixed as well as ontologically distinct, the processes of evolution themselves are connected by chance. How the system adapts to changing environmental conditions is governed not by a predetermined blueprint but by chance, because the environmental conditions themselves are reliant upon the vagaries of a specific historical moment. Accordingly, the nature of the resultant structural change is also unique to the historical situation at hand.[34] The objective of evolution is to mitigate the difference in complexity between a dynamic system and historically-contingent environmental conditions by establishing a solution which is suitable to the problem and has evolutionary advantageousness. This means that the solution must reduce complexity in such a way that the reduction is compatible with greater complexity in order for evolution to continue in the future. Complexity thus has a dual function — it is the surrounding complexity which limits the options only to those solutions which are advantageous to further evolution, and it is the complexity already attained by the system which determines the manner in which the problems present themselves and consequently the solutions which must be implemented to solve them.[35] In the final instance, evolution takes place when structures, which are reproduced as tradition, no longer fit with changing extra-systemic conditions, that is, the possibilities of present reproduction are no longer adequate for what is to be reproduced. As a discrepancy between social structure and semantics is produced, semantics is put under pressure to adapt. However, this also means that certain ideas are fixed in advance before being assigned social functions, and consequently structures evolve to fulfil those functions.[36] This functional-structural approach is a major cornerstone of the Luhmannian reformulation of evolutionary theory as applied to the social system and has particular salience for my treatment of the evolution of the figure of the Fairy King.

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[30] Luhmann points out that this externalisation of structural incompatibility is just a temporary solution, since as various systems deal with their complexity by pushing out incompatible structures, what results is structural incompatibilities *between* systems.

[31] Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, 294–296.

[32] Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, 296. However, Luhmann also points out that with the transition to functional systems, selection comes to be based on essentially unstable criteria. It can no longer be grounded on the basis of the quality of what is selected but only on the basis of the criteria themselves. As an example, Luhmann cites the case of religion which, from Christianity's confident reliance upon the mediation of the Church in the relationship between the soul of mankind and God, was roused to the crises of faith that began in the post-Reformation world and continued right up to the nineteenth century, occasioned by the increasing individualisation of the soul.

[33] Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, 302.

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This thesis begins with the observation that a transformation had taken place in the way in which the Fairy King was conceptualised in the literary imagination between the Middle Ages and the early modern period. Although the Fairy King of medieval literature is himself a revisionary figure, a hybrid identity born out of a composite admixture of pagan mythology, insular folklore, and Biblical parallels, this thesis contends that there is a change in the literary representation of the Fairy King from the medieval romance — where he is largely a mysterious, inscrutable, frequently sinister figure of alterity, positioned on the cusp of the Devil of Christian theology and the god of the classical Underworld while being ontologically aligned with a class of supernatural beings who were by definition unassimilable within any of the available registers — to early modern drama and poetry, where the emphasis is more on the regal status of the figure who is now largely shorn of his former diabolical associations and where he is a common fixture in the fabulous (albeit mythic) genealogies constructed by dynastic houses to prove the legitimacy of their political claims. Accordingly, this study attempts to demystify the complex of sociocultural and historical factors which might have contributed to this literary change, and the theoretical rationale for such demystification is provided both by Lotman's concept of culture-as-semiosphere as well as by Luhmann's theory of system evolution.

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[34] Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, 303.
[35] Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, 307.
[36] Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, 327.

Envisaging culture as a system (in the manner of Lotman's formulation), the figure of the Fairy King can be said to have been set on the path to evolution at moments of crises when the complexity-gradient had been shifted in the aftermath of a radical change. Applying the Luhmannian premise of correlation between evolutionary form and (historical and temporal) context to the evolutionary trajectory of the Fairy King, it can be demonstrated that the two primary modes of transformation — from a pagan god to a supernatural being in the Middle Ages and from a semi-diabolical, ontologically indeterminate figure to a regal figure associated with royal family trees and seen as the fairy progenitor of kings and queens in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries — occurred in the context of widespread cultural change brought about by radical shifts in the sphere of religion. With the introduction, spread, and consolidation of Christianity between late antiquity and the later Middle Ages, attempts began to accommodate the pagan gods within a new monotheistic eschatology, attempts which, depending upon its agents (be they theologians writing within the monastic scriptorium or literary artists writing and performing for court circles and thereby moving within a more secular milieu), could either denigrate such figures as the demonic remnants of a shamefully heathen past or absorb them into the fold by identifying parallels with equivalent beings in native mythology and fusing the two categories. This process was, of course, not as neatly demarcated as my observation implies, nor can it be dated with chronological exactitude. This was a diachronic process whose operations were characterised by numerous overlaps as well as fissures, and it is the aim of Chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis to shed greater light on this complicated process of development. The second moment of transformation will be shown to have been occasioned by the Reformation, a radical, revisionary change which unsettled the established certainties of the Catholic Church and brought about a re-evaluation of existing paradigms. In the post-Reformation world, the burden of anxiety about the supernatural was largely transferred from fairylore to witchcraft, thereby leaving the fairies relatively free to be handled in other ways. This attitudinal shift was accompanied by the energetic revival of a tradition which associated the foundation stories of dynastic lines with fairy ancestors, a revival which was probably encouraged by a decisive restructuring of the socio-political system (the end of feudalism and the growth of dynastic houses as well as the emergence of newly mobile middling sorts). A thorough exploration of this binary shift, together with an inquiry into the reasons behind the use of folklore by hegemonic powers, is the subject of Chapter 4 of this thesis. Both phases of evolution can be interpreted as being characterised by a structural transformation (from pagan god to liminal supernatural being to fairy ancestor) occasioned by changing modes of functional significance (identification between pagan gods and fairies brought about by shared ontologies of association with death, afterlife, burial practices and rituals of ancestral worship, as well as notions of fatedness and inexorability, and the gradual sublimation of fairy fear via displacement onto the new Other of witchcraft, thereby creating opportunities for the recuperation of historical connections between fairies and foundational myths and their subsequent utilisation as devices of genealogy-embellishment). However, Luhmann also cautions that systems do not evolve by permanently altering their structures, but by temporarily attuning structures to temporary states, a necessary requisite for evolutionary processes to continue in dynamic systems. This helps to explain why the Fairy King, having shed some of his classical lineaments, did not permanently solidify into the kind of liminal being of which the Fairy King of *Sir Orfeo* (discussed in detail in Chapter 3) is the clearest example, but continued to transform well into the early modern period.

Framed within the Luhmannian theorisation of variation as the initiatory step of evolution, both the transition to Christianity as well as the shift in religious dispensation from Catholicism to Protestant Christianity can be regarded as introducing deviations into the cultural system, with the consequence that its elements — cultural attitudes and modes of literary representation — exhibit a rejection of content — a polytheistic pantheon now fallen out of fashion and urgently in need of being dealt with either through banishment or recuperation, as well indigenous supernatural creatures whose conceptual non-accommodation must be sublimated via the creation of, and transference on to, a new Other. Although Luhmann observes a direct correlation between the incidence of deviation and the mode of communication, it is important to note that the mode of communication is, in most cases, also the technology of dissemination. In the course of development of the Fairy King, the technology of communication too changed from manuscript commentaries along exegetical lines practised primarily by theologians and schoolmen through the increasing secularisation of literature in the production and consumption of romances and finally on to published texts, assisted by the great technological developments of the fifteenth century and the invention of the printing press. In the case of the Fairy King, this thesis hypothesises that deviation-influenced conflict was managed either by viewing fairies as the relatively harmless residues of native folklore, associated with the mythography of the “lay” or “popular” classes (success roles) or denounced as dangerous interlocutors in league with demonic agents (misfortune-related roles) before being co-opted by hegemonic powers as the supernatural progenitors and ancestors of dynastic families (political decision-making). However, Luhmann’s comment that variation, although it leads to selection, does not necessarily begin with the certainty of such selection on account of the orthodoxy of society which does not easily accept change, helps to explain why aspects of traditional conservatism lingered on in newer conceptions of the Fairy King figure, especially in a text such as *Sir Orfeo* but even later in John Bourchier’s *Huon of Burdeux,* a sixteenth-century English prose translation of the eponymous medieval French *chanson de geste.*

As the following chapters will argue, for the Fairy King variation is followed by the selection of a group of ideas constellating around death, fate and fatedness, and lordship over a domain of alterity which are merged with figures from insular folklore embodying parallel virtues. Complementing such positive selection is a gradual rejection of the sinister and diabolical aspects of the figure (eventually transferred on to the figure of the witch) in favour of a more temperate mode of representation. Guiding this binary impulse of selection and rejection are the principles of repetitive use, whereby fairies as a distinct class of the supernatural continue to persist in literary usage, and the fixing and consolidation of expectations, whereby fairies become repositories of alterity, apparatuses that encode categories of the liminal and the unassimilable (a liminality arising both out of a fluid etymological history as well as by an ontological ambivalence that made ‘fairy’ an almost catch-all term for the indeterminate and the ambiguous). For the Fairy King, the symbolically generalised communication media guiding such selection can be regarded as the literary texts themselves, possessed of structural flexibility (theological commentary, romance narrative, prose romance, drama, poetry) and practising both strategies of dissolution (gradual omission of aspects which harked back to a pre-Christian provenance as well as reminiscent of Christian demonology) and recombination (traits and patterns compatible with indigenous mythography, ideas, rituals, and custom identified and fused together). Such texts helped to synthesise the pressing demands of exigent content (pagan and insular mythography) even under unexpected conditions (transformations between and within religious systems), which consequently led to the selection of a figure which served as a composite approximation of different and diverse registers of value. Such a figure could signal multiple traditions at the same time, unlocking numerous possibilities of creative treatment which could, when handled by a deft artist (like the *Orfeo*-poet), contribute to an enduring literary-textual relevance. However, as Luhmann has pointed out, the relationship between variation and selection is, above all, one of chance. The coincidental nature of this relationship can help to explain why the fairies (and not other creatures) were singled out as a conceptually unique branch of the supernatural and why only certain features were selected for retention whereas others were omitted in the development of the Fairy King.

In the case of the Fairy King, the final evolutionary step of restabilisation can be seen to work in the gradual coalescing of ideas about fairies as a distinct category of the supernatural which are retained whereas conflictual attitudes about fairy malevolence, diabolism, danger, and the fear generated by such beings are externalised either via transference (on to other supernatural beings such as witches) or forgetting. Externalisation of anxiety generated by fairylore is also achieved via the renewed exploitation of the historical and cultural cachet of fairies as founders of royal families practised by hegemonic political powers. According to Luhmann, restabilisation leads to changes in the form of system differentiation, from segmentary via centre-periphery distinction and stratification to functional differentiation. As the subsequent discussion will reveal, the transformation of the sociocultural system parallels these levels of transition, from the pagan milieu of the classical Graeco-Roman world (segmentary) to the radical realignment of values and priorities brought about by the introduction of Christianity (centre-periphery differentiation, whereby the unitary Christian God is placed at the centre and pluralistic pantheons of deities are relegated to the periphery), the subsequent consolidation and extension of the authority of the Church (stratification) before the final transition to a functional system (exemplified by the societal shift from a simple agrarian economy to one characterised by political, technological, and professional diversity and the emergence of new social classes patterned on economic mobility and vocational affiliation). However, Luhmann also points out that restabilisation is guided by the principle of dynamic stability, which is why a second evolutionary cycle can be argued as being kickstarted with the transition from Catholic to Protestant Christianity in the wake of the Reformation. With the transition to functional differentiation, structures are selected self-substitutively in favour of others of the same type. This principle of substitution of equivalent structures of parallel functionality helps to explain why the Fairy King was chosen as a perfect substitute for the Pluto/Dis figure of classical antiquity.

Above all, Luhmann posits that structural evolution occurs once certain ideas have been fixed and assigned social functions, thereby delineating a trajectory that moves from the functional to the structural. A similar trajectory can be discerned in the evolution of the Fairy King which emerged as a distinct literary figure to encode and embody a composite of ideas which were variable, indeterminate, and which often resisted ontological definition. One of the fundamental axes of my argument is that as a nucleus of ideas surrounding death, the unknowable (but ever-present as a source of both curiosity and anxiety, especially in the Christian mind) afterlife, transience, and fate, with related ideas of the inexorable, the ineffable, and the mysterious were affixed and concretised through ritual, custom, and literary practice, fairies as a unique signifying category within the body of the supernatural arose to meet the challenge of encapsulating such diverse strands of attitudes and belief, a development assisted in no small part by the etymological fluidity of the term 'fairy' itself. Later, as the threat of fairy alterity was externalised and sublimated via transference on to witchcraft, the potential of fairies to be used as instruments of political legitimation gained precedence as hegemonic regimes began to deploy fairylore in their constructions of mythic genealogies intended to bolster their regnal credentials. However, as is characteristic of all evolutionary impulses, these developments were both rooted within specific sociohistorical contexts as well as guided by chance, and I explore both subjects in detail in Chapters 3 and 4. This multi-layered and multi-faceted inter-relationship between the processes of cultural change and the development of a literary figure can be understood by bearing in mind the Lotmanian formulation of culture as a dynamic semiotic system (and of literature as a subset of culture). Culture's function of recording the memory of a community in text and preserving such collective memory through the operations of language can be argued as being akin to the way in which the Fairy King too becomes an historical signifier of collective memory which is given literary representation in text and propagated via the operations of language, both written (the texts under consideration in this thesis) as well as oral (folktales, legends, and myths). Further, culture's structural organisation into distinct islands of different organisation can help to explain the relationship between myth and culture, a subject I discuss in Chapter 1 in the context of the Orpheus myth. Lotman and Uspensky also observe that culture's translation of collective memory into text is achieved by a process which parallels the system of linguistic translation. I detect a similar movement in my discussion of the transmission of ideas from the Graeco-Roman world to the 'Celtic' lands in Chapter 2, where I explicitly apply the theoretical concept of 'cultural translation' (an idea itself based upon patterns of linguistic translation) as it is used in the fields of cultural anthropology and ethnography to explain such transfer of ideas.

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The complex of ideas and theoretical concepts delineated in this chapter will become clear as the chapters of the thesis unfold. I shall take recourse to these concepts again at various points further in the thesis, elaborating upon them in greater detail and linking them to the overall argument of each chapter. Such an approach will highlight the interconnectedness of cultural change, historical context, socioeconomic structure, political motivation, and religious organisation as factors influencing literary representation, and by the conclusion of this study, I will have answered the challenging but compelling question of how and why the literary figure of the Fairy King evolved in the way that it did.

CHAPTER ONE

THE LORD OF THE SHADES: HADES/DIS IN GRAECO-ROMAN THOUGHT AND LATIN LITERATURE

It would perhaps be overtly reductive to begin with the claim that fairies — those creatures which are usually associated with the tales of wonder, magic, and enchantment told as bedtime stories to children, or, to go much further back, with the apparatus of the fantastic supernatural that frequently embellished the narratives of texts from the Middle Ages onwards — did not exist in classical antiquity. This is because the cultural and mythopoeic roots of the beings known as fairies can be traced back to the pagan deities worshipped in the classical world. To be sure, these figures were very different from the diminutive, gossamer-winged, star-tipped wand-wielding creatures we have been accustomed to call fairies today. This happy picture of a bright, shimmering Fairyland peopled by magical beings who fulfil human wishes and reward good behaviour is owed largely to the Victorian refashioning of fairy tales in the nineteenth century. The fairies of tradition and the pagan gods who metaphorically birthed them were formidable figures, awesome and imposing both in stature and power, with spheres of control encompassing the living as well as the dead. It is the aim of this chapter to trace the lineage and development of the figure of the Fairy King through the classical cultures of Greece and Rome taking the myth of Orpheus as the case in point. Sociological and structuralist theories of myth (be it Roland Barthes' construction of myth as a semiotic system or Hans Blumenberg's literary-historical analyses of the function and importance of myth in cultures) can help answer the somewhat thorny questions of *why* certain myths evolved, why they coalesced around a certain figure (in this case, around the figure of the Fairy King), and how they spread across discrete cultural systems. It is to these questions that I now turn in this chapter as I focus on the figure of Dis/Pluto in the Orpheus myth and the literary representations of the myth in the *Georgics* of Virgil, the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid, and Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Discussing the provenance of the myth in Greek religious thought, I will move on to an examination of the Roman reformulation of Greek belief into Latin literature, focusing first on the works of the Augustan poets Virgil and Ovid before proceeding to an analysis of Boethius' philosophical rearrangement of the myth in early antiquity and finally concluding the chapter by situating the Orpheus legend within the context of semiotic and cultural theories of myth.

CHAPTER ONE

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In her astute analysis of the provenance of fairy beliefs, Diane Purkiss has observed that "the origin of fairies lies not in Northern Europe, but in the Mediterranean civilisations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece and Rome."[1] Though the word 'fairy' was never used by the authors of the texts in which such figures appeared, they behaved exactly as European fairies did in the medieval period. Classical demons and nymphs were the ancestors of the medieval fairies in their shared attributes of awful power, terrifyingly dark dwellings, and sinister potential of causing great harm. These characteristics were, however, also embodied in the gods of the classical pantheon. Like medieval fairies, pagan gods could be both benevolent and malevolent, fair and just or partial and arbitrary, rewarding virtue and things which pleased them as well as doling out punishment for impiety and transgressions of their will. While the analysis of Egyptian and Mesopotamian deities is sadly beyond the scope of this chapter, I will begin with a discussion of the Greek conception of the Underworld, in particular the figure of Hades/Pluto who might be seen as the classical progenitor of the Fairy King.

HADES IN GREEK RELIGIOUS CULTURE AND THE ORPHEUS LEGEND:

The Greeks, broadly speaking, distinguished between two categories of gods — the chthonians (Gr. *chthon* = earth) who dwelled on earth and the ouranians (Gr. *ouranos* = heaven) who belonged to the bright regions of the upper air beyond the clouds and whose abode was at the summit of Mount Olympus (for this reason, the terms *Ouraniōnes* and *Olympioi*, referring to the ouranians and the Olympian gods respectively, were often used interchangeably). The *chthonioi* were spirits who lived in the dark recesses of the earth.[2] The ouranic gods usually trafficked with the living whereas the chthonians had jurisdiction over the dead. Ceremonies of worship for the two categories of gods echoed their distinctiveness of character as well as positioning — contrasts of light and dark, living and dead, above and below the earth were reflected in daytime rituals on high altars directed upwards towards the sky for the ouranic deities and nocturnal sacrifices channelled down into the earth for the chthonic deities.[3] The earth was both the bearer of life (the realm of fertility and germination) as well as the receptacle of death (the place of interment of the dead). By virtue of this dual character of their abode, the chthonic gods also performed a double function — they ensured the fertility of the land and acted as guardians of the souls of the dead.[4] The name Hades, typically used to denote the Underworld of Greek religious imagination, was also applied to the lord of the *chthonioi*, thereby indicating that there was often no distinction made between the god and his dwelling-place.[5] As the deity tasked with the lordship of death, a state both unknowable by virtue of the mystery and uncertainty surrounding it as well as terrifying by virtue of its finality, Hades was seemingly feared more than he was worshipped, a fact illustrated by the absence of any grand temples or cult statues dedicated to him.[6] Reluctant to risk disrespecting a god wielding such dreadful power, the Greeks used the euphemism *Plouton* — the Rich One — to refer to Hades, preferring through this attribution to ascribe greater importance to his role as a spirit of the earth's fertility rather than to his function as the god of the dead.[7] His task was to maintain the line of demarcation drawn between life and death, ensuring that the living did not stray into the land of the dead and the dead did not escape back into the world of the living, a supervisory capacity which assumes particular significance with respect to the Orpheus myth. The organisation of gods into a pantheon and the distribution of functions between different classes of deities should not, however, convey the impression that Hellenic religion was a monolith. As is true of any dynamic cultural system — and living cultures are of necessity dynamic in nature — Greek religious ideas were constantly moulded and reshaped in the light of new socio-political and historical encounters, thereby producing a religious system that was both varied as well as unified.[8] These changes are borne out in the conception of the emplacement and architecture of the Underworld, which evolved from a location situated across the ocean in the earliest recorded account (that contained in Homer's *Odyssey*) to the gloomy underground portals which had become a stock feature of literary descriptions of the Underworld by the fifth century BCE.[9] This idea of a god dwelling in the nether regions of the earth and associated with both fertility and death was borrowed by the Romans from Hellenic mythology, although in later representations his position as a fertility god declined in importance whereas his lordship of the dead gained precedence.[10]

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[1] Purkiss, *Troublesome Things*, 12.

[2] Ken Dowden, "Olympian Gods, Olympian Pantheon," in *A Companion to Greek Religion*, ed. Daniel Ogden (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 47.

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[3] Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical*, trans. John Raffan (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1985), 199.

[4] D. Felton, "The Dead," in *A Companion to Greek Religion*, 90.

[5] Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 294. For a detailed account of the various ways in which Hades — both the god as well as the location — was conceived by the Greeks, see Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 48–76.

[6] The incomprehensibility and intransigence of death which crystallises in the Christian imagination as the fear of Hell and the Devil occupied a different position in Greek religious culture. Felton observes that "Hades, though he ruled over the souls of the dead underground, did not *cause* death, did not take souls, and was not an equivalent to the Christian Satan: Hades was not a fallen angel, was not evil, and did not lead mortals into sin. Likewise, the eponymous kingdom of Hades was not Hell; it was a Land of the Dead, a place for the souls of the deceased — at least for those of them who had been buried properly." (Felton, "The Dead," 90) It is, however, important to note that this was so only *within the context of Hellenic culture*; as this study will attempt to demonstrate, when transposed to the context of monotheistic Christianity, pagan beliefs were interpreted anew through the lens of scripture, and a figure such as Pluto was invested with precisely the kind of traits that Felton talks about.

[7] Felton, "The Dead," 90–91.

The chthonic deities often appeared in the Orphic myths and legends. Orphism is connected with the pseudo-historical, semi-legendary figure of Orpheus whose status in pre-classical Greece was that of human prophet or teacher. His doctrine, embodied in a collection of writings of varied provenance and authorship and commonly labelled under the term 'Orphica,' denoted a set of generalised practices of ritual participation in eschatological salvation. These cult practices, which were of an esoteric or soteriological nature, initiated a certain way of life and were more or less open to anyone.[11] Orpheus was believed to be of divine parentage, the son of a Muse (usually Calliope) and either Apollo or Oeagrus, a Thracian river-god. Localised in Thrace, he was renowned for the oracular and divinatory power of his knowledge and allied particularly strongly with the poetic and musical arts as well as with ritual performance. Much of his life is shrouded in mystery, though he is variously associated with the stories of the voyage of the Argonauts and the descent into the

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[8] For an illustration of the "periodic renewal" experienced by the Greek gods in the wake of cross-cultural interaction, see Dowden's case studies of Apollo and Artemis in "Olympian Gods," 49–52.

[9] Felton, "The Dead," 92. The fact of the possible oceanic location of the Underworld in early Greek thought seems particularly interesting in the light of the fact that many Celtic Otherworlds — frequently synonymous with the domain of the fairies and, as this thesis attempts to illustrate, insular equivalents of the Greek Underworld — were also located across aquatic passageways. For an analysis of the aquatic Otherworlds of Celtic literature, see Aisling Byrne, *Otherworlds: Fantasy and History in Medieval Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 97–106.

[10] Deities, cults, and religious ideas filtered into Rome from the Hellenic world between the third and sixth centuries BCE through the influence of the Etruscans, Roman commercial relations with Cumæ, and the Pyrrhic War, among other factors. Indeed, by 249 BCE, during the period of the First Punic War, Pluto and Persephone had been introduced into Rome as the deities Dis and Proserpina. See Jesse Benedict Carter, *The Religious Life of Ancient Rome: A Study in the Development of Religious Consciousness from the Foundation of the City until the Death of Gregory the Great* (Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, 2001), 39–43.

[11] Lars Albinus, *The House of Hades: Studies in Ancient Greek Eschatology* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2000), 103. For a detailed recent survey of treatments of the figure of Orpheus and Orphic material, see Radcliffe G. Edmonds III, *Redefining Ancient Orphism: A Study in Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 14–43.

Underworld to retrieve his wife Eurydice. This latter story is by far the most programmatic of the legends which surround the figure of Orpheus and forms a part of the motif of *katabasis* or the *descensus ad inferos* which was a relatively standard textual convention.[12] The theme of Orpheus' Underworld journey passed from the Alexandrians to the Romans, surfacing most forcefully in the works of Virgil and Ovid.

The particulars of the story of Orpheus' descent were not, however, universally consistent. Though the preamble — Eurydice's death caused by snakebite and Orpheus' voyage to the nether regions to bargain with the Underworld gods for Eurydice's release — remained unchanged in most accounts of the tale, the conclusion differed. The version of the ending most popularly known — the version which was handed down through Virgil's Roman reworking of the legend — shows Orpheus unsuccessful in his attempt to bring Eurydice back to the mortal world on account of his failure to keep to his promised word. However, references to the story of Orpheus in Euripides' *Alcestis*, Hermesianax's *Leontion*, and Isocrates' *Busiris* reveal that Orpheus was successful in his mission of rescuing Eurydice.[13] Nonetheless, the injunction against looking back lent itself more readily to the romantic and pathetic vein in which this legend was used in the literary exploits of the subsequent generations and is accordingly the version which has survived most prominently in the cultural imagination. Whatever facets of his personality and details of his biography may have transformed or mutated in the course of transmission of his legend, Orpheus' journey to the Underworld underscores the inexorable relationship between him and death, a connection which was to persist in all later reformulations of the tale. In such reiterations, it is not simply the figure of Orpheus but also the Underworld gods and the realm of the dead over which they preside which attain significance.

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[12] For an in-depth analysis of literary representations of the myth of the descent into the Underworld, see Radcliffe G. Edmonds III, *Myths of the Underworld Journey: Plato, Aristophanes, and the 'Orphic' Gold Tablets* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). In some accounts (such as in Plutarch's *Moralia*), Orpheus descends to the Underworld in order to receive oracular dreams, and there seems to be some disputation regarding the question of whether 'receiving a dream' and 'descending into the Underworld' were alternative expressions for the same event. See Albinus, *House of Hades*, 106.

[13] Monica R. Gale, "Poetry and the Backward Glance in Virgil's Georgics and Aeneid," *TAPA* 133 (2003): 333. I am referring particularly to footnote 31. Orpheus' successful retrieval of Eurydice could be an illustration of the pattern of cyclical regeneration — the restoration of nature to life after a period of barrenness — typical of ancient fertility myths. See Charles Segal, *Orpheus: The Myth of the Poet* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 9.

CHAPTER ONE

THE RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS OF THE ROMANS:

Before I turn to the examination of the Orpheus legend in Virgil and Ovid, it is important to contextualise my argument through a discussion of the nature of Roman religious mythography. Any discussion of "Roman religion" must begin with an acknowledgement of the nebulousness of the term.[14] It is important to note that there was no word for "religion" in Latin (or even Greek, for that matter), and the associations that have usually come to bear upon this semantic field — that of a coherent and uniform set of beliefs and practices — were rather different when applied to the context of the Roman empire.[15] The Latin lexicon seemed to prefer such terms as *sacer* or *pietas* to indicate sacrality and proper reverence to the divine respectively, and even when the word *religio* was used, the sense implied was a protean one, one which denoted one's obligation to the divine together with the negative connotation of 'prohibition' or 'scruple' but sometimes with the positive aspect of 'prescribed ritual' or 'customary behaviour.'[16] It is also important to bear in mind that the religious beliefs of the Romans were not primordial and constant but polyvalent and dynamic and developed within the context of inter-cultural contact. Traditionally, the Romans seem to have believed in the cult of the *lares* who had the dual character of household gods of the living family associated with food preparation and consumption in a domestic setting as well as protective spirits who safeguarded travellers. With their dominance over the hearth and the street corner, the *lares* were emphatically gods of place rather than myth, and seem to have been of genuinely indigenous provenance rather than a foreign importation, intimately associated as they were with the nature of the Italian landscape.[17]

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[14] It is expedient to bear in mind that religion does not denote a static, isolated field but rather a dynamic composite of structures of variant levels of organisation which interact with each other and with other domains (such as culture, society, and literature) by means of shifting modes of signification which are contextually and historically specific. Although one of the primary lines of investigation of this thesis is to investigate the concomitant changes in cultural (and, by extension, literary-textual) representation brought about by religious change, it should be emphasised that such currents of change are not uniform over time but, as Lotman and Luhmann observe of cultural change in general (and which is discussed in the previous chapter), dynamic and localised at particular moments of sociohistorical development. Perhaps it is better to speak of a religious *system*, especially with regard to a body of ideas as multifaceted and diffuse as those practised in pre-Christian Rome.

[15] James B. Rives talks about the difficulties of outlining the constituent elements of the field of Roman religion, not only on account of the shifting registers of meaning connoted by such terms as "religion" or the plural "religions," but also because the geographical extent of the Roman empire covered several distinct ethnic groups and cultural practices which frequently coexisted with Roman religious practice, thereby nullifying the homogenising tendencies implied by such bracket terms as "religion." For a detailed discussion of these problems, see Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 1–12 and 13–53.

[16] Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire*, 13–14.

Roman religious ideas were, however, also shaped by Rome's interaction with other civilisations and cultural systems.[18] Among these channels of influence, the greatest importance must be accorded to Greece, particularly Hellenic Greece. Roman civic and military expansion brought Latin culture into contact with the Greeks, and assimilationist tendencies which began between the eighth and the sixth centuries BCE had by the fourth century led to Roman importation of new deities and the elaboration of ritual practice as well as occasioned the large-scale adoption of Greek techniques of literary production by the third century.[19] The dominant Roman model for religion was not, however, expansionist but rather absorbing as gods, modes and sites of worship, as well as forms of cult practice were incorporated into indigenous traditions. Within the context of Graeco-Roman interaction, this led to the development of a Roman divine pantheon and mythic framework modelled along Greek lines, although this process was characterised by a syncretism which enabled Roman religious culture to retain its individuality rather than be regarded as an exact imitation of Hellenic culture.[20] The development and expansion of the state cult gained greater momentum with the movement of Roman political society into a Republic. The pantheon of gods was enlarged and the emphasis of belief now shifted towards the protection and welfare of the political community of the Romans at large rather than the individual household. Under Republican religion, the correct performance of ritual (*orthopraxis*) assumed particular importance and religious belief came to be increasingly allied with political authority.[21] Roman religion is thus a particularly fluid field and can only be meaningfully studied in the context of Rome's encounters with the various civilisations centred in and around the Mediterranean. In fact, given the primacy of Greek (particularly Hellenic) religious ideas in the shaping of Roman religious belief, it is probably better to refer to a shared Graeco-Roman religious tradition, a term which is free from the totalising implications of such a word as "religion."

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[17] The *lares* are the subject of Harriet I. Flower's work *The Dancing Lares and the Serpent in the Garden: Religion at the Roman Street Corner* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017). In her discussion of what Roman writers had to say about the *lares*, Flower makes an interesting observation which has significant implications for my subject under study. Citing the views of Varro, Flower points out how there was a tendency to associate the *lares* with the *larvae* (ghosts who were restless by virtue of not having received a proper burial and were often characterised as malicious) and the *dii manes* (a shared conceptual category to denote both the spirits of the deceased as well as the gods of the underworld). Although Flower's argument that the *lares* were gods of the hearth and the roadside is decisively against such a reading, it is important to note that in the minds of one of the writers of Latin antiquity, the traditional spirits of the land were associated with the *larvae* which (as I shall demonstrate in Chapter 3), together with the *parcae*, constitute possible etymological variants of the Latin root for "fairies." With the change in religious systems (from paganism to Christianity) and the concomitant changes in burial practices (from burials requiring oblations and ritual offerings to burials on hallowed ground or within the precincts of the Church), it is possible that ideas about the dead merged with each other. As my thesis seeks to argue, the effacing of the distance between spirits and ghosts led to the constellating of these ideas around the shared ontological category of the fairies. For an in-depth analysis of these ideas, see Flower, *The Dancing Lares*, 1–75. The most influential treatment of the development of attitudes towards death as well as towards practices, customs, and rites of burial associated with death continues to be Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death: The Classic History of Western Attitudes Toward Death Over the Last One Thousand Years*, trans. Helen Weaver, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage, 2008).

[18] For a useful overview of the influence of both native (such as Etruscan) and foreign cultures on Roman religious ideas, see Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire*, 54–88.

[19] Jörg Rüpke, "Roman Religion — Religions of Rome," in *A Companion to Roman Religion*, ed. Jörg Rüpke (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 2–3. According to Rüpke, this assimilationist impulse was aided by the nature of Hellenic culture itself which offered both "techniques of delocalization" that sought to universalise Greek traditions as well as "grids of history, a mythic geography that could integrate places and societies like Rome and the Romans."

[20] Christopher Smith, "The Religion of Archaic Rome," in *A Companion to Roman Religion*, 37.

Sociocultural beliefs about death and the afterlife in Roman tradition were many and varied and have to be reconstructed from a composite of sources, both literary and archaeological. While the evidence provided by such material objects as tombs, burial urns, epitaphs, and sarcophagi is a valuable source of gauging Roman attitudes towards death, such an examination is sadly beyond the scope of this thesis. What I choose to focus on in this brief discussion are conclusions drawn from analyses of primarily literary sources (although it must be borne in mind that writing was only available to a select élite of educated men, and the extant literary evidence is thus necessarily reflective of only this dominant social group and does not include the views of women, slaves, the illiterate, and other similarly disadvantaged classes). Within traditional Roman religious belief, there was a tendency to regard the dead with a mixture of fear and reverence. As the ancestors of the family, they were to be respected, but as spirits who could intrude upon the world of the living when displeased, they were also to be placated through correct ritual and ceremonial performance.[22] Although there was no ironclad certainty about the locus of habitation of souls after death, traditional modes of belief seem to have associated the tomb or the grave as the standard resting place of the dead. Over the course of time, however, alternative spaces, worlds, and locales were adopted to explain where the souls or spirits of the dead resided. Once again, the influence of Greek religious ideas on the amplification and development of the topography of the afterlife is paramount.[23] Central to this Latin refashioning of the Greek Underworld was Homer's description of Odysseus' account of his visit to the Underworld in the *Odyssey*, although in Roman reformulations the architecture of the Underworld was fleshed out in greater detail together with an elaboration of the moral and ethical aspects of the kingdom. The Roman Underworld was not simply the dwelling-place of souls after death but was also associated with the concepts of punishment and retributive justice whereby the dead would be rewarded or penalised in accordance with their behaviour and conduct on earth and in life (a clear parallel to the functional role of Heaven and Hell in the Christian imagination). Philosophical doctrines such as Platonism (particularly the Myth of Er in Plato's *Republic* together with its Latin equivalent in Cicero's *Dream of Scipio*) as well as esoteric mystery cults such as the Eleusinian Mysteries and Orphism also helped to mould Roman beliefs about death, afterlife, and the Underworld. There was also a tendency to associate the experience of death with the concept of fate, an equivalence probably prompted by the inexorable nature of both conceptual and experiential categories.[24] Death was thus a particularly fluid semantic field in Roman religious tradition, an overarching category which crystallised both native as well as Hellenic cultural attitudes towards the dead and ritual practices of burial, interment, and commemoration in its creation of an Underworld that was to have an enduring impact on all successive conceptions of the afterlife. Two exemplary exponents of this literary manoeuvre were the Augustan poets Virgil and Ovid, and it is to their versions of the Underworld (within the context of their separate treatments of the Orpheus myth) that I now turn.

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[21] Eric Orlin, "Urban Religion in the Middle and Late Republic," in *A Companion to Roman Religion*, 58–59.

[22] My discussion of Roman attitudes towards death is based upon Valerie M. Hope's work *Roman Death: The Dying and the Dead in Ancient Rome* (London: Continuum Books, 2009), 97–120. As beings who could straddle the porous boundaries between life and death, the conception of the dead gave rise to the belief in ghosts and revenants later. In the Middle Ages, the fairies were another class of beings who could travel between parallel realms of existence (the mortal world and Fairyland) which were often regarded as analogous to life and death. This probably helps to explain the persistent tendency to associate the fairies with the dead and Fairyland as a land of death.

DIS IN VIRGIL (*GEORGICS*, BOOK IV):

In both Virgil and Ovid, Hades/Pluto appears in connection with Orpheus' journey to the Underworld to retrieve his wife Eurydice, an episode well-known from the Orphic legends of pre-classical Greece and Alexandrian poetry.[25] The story of Orpheus' loss of Eurydice is narrated in Book IV of the *Georgics*. The *Georgics* is a multi-faceted, complex work, a digest of agricultural manual and political allegory. The title relates both to the Greek phrase for 'working the land' as well as to the noun *geourgos*, denoting farmer. In the *Georgics*, Virgil assimilated not only the learning of Greek and Roman prose treatises, but also the heroic narrative poems of Homer and Hesiod and the versification of the Alexandrian poets.[26] In the Orpheus epyllion of Book IV, Virgil describes how Eurydice dies after being bitten by a snake while fleeing from Aristaeus, a pastoral demi-god. After a prolonged period of mourning, Orpheus enters the Underworld in order to bring his wife back to earth. He plays the harp to appease the gods and the divine power of his music moves the hearts of Dis and Proserpina and brings about the cessation of the interminable torments of Hell. He is allowed to take Eurydice back on the condition that he should not look back while leading her out of Hell. Orpheus, however, fails to stick to his side of the bargain; propelled by love of his wife and fear of losing her, he looks back while exiting the gates of Hell and loses Eurydice forever. The description of Dis, though brief and cursory, nevertheless provides a valuable insight into his nature and the power he commands. The poet also offers a description of the Underworld which characterises it quite explicitly as the realm of the dead:

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[23] Hope, *Roman Death*, 103.

[24] The Fates or the *Moirae* were sister goddesses in Greek mythology whose functions — Clotho's spinning of the thread of life, Lachesis' measurement of the thread with her rod, and Atropos' cutting of the thread — were intended as allegorical representations of birth, the journey of life, and death respectively. Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos were imported into Roman mythology as the goddesses Nona, Decima, and Morta respectively. It is interesting to note that the etymological root of the word "fairy" can be traced to the mythological figures of the Fates. I shall have more to say on this topic in Chapter 3.

> Taenarias etiam fauces, alta ostia Ditis,
> et caligantem nigra formidine lucum
> ingressus, Manisque adiit regemque tremendum
> nesciaque humanis precibus mansuescere corda.
> at cantu commotae Erebi de sedibus imis
> umbrae ibant tenues simulacraque luce carentum,
> quam multa in foliis avium se milia condunt,
> Vesper ubi aut hibernus agit de montibus imber,
> matres atque viri defunctaque corpora vita
> magnanimum heroum, pueri innuptaeque puellae,
> impositique rogis iuvenes ante ora parentum,

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[25] The fullest description of the Virgilian conception of the Underworld is, however, to be found in Book VI (ll. 268–316) of the *Aeneid* in the context of Aeneas' descent to Avernus together with the Cumæan Sibyl in order to speak with his father Anchises. See Virgil, *Eclogues. Georgics, Aeneid: Books 1–6*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, rev. G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library 63 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 550–555.

[26] Elaine Fantham, introduction to the *Georgics* by Virgil, trans. Peter Fallon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), xv–xvi.

> quos circum limus niger et deformis harundo
> Cocyti tardaque palus inamabilis unda
> alligat et noviens Styx interfusa coercet.
> quin ipsae stupuere domus atque intima Leti
> Tartara caeruleosque implexae crinibus anguis
> Eumenides, tenuitque inhians tria Cerberus ora,
> atque Ixionii constitit orbis.
> Iamque pedem referens casus evaserat omnis,
> redditaque Eurydice superas veniebat ad auras,
> pone sequens (namque hanc dederat Proserpina legem),
> cum subita incautum dementia cepit amantem,
> ignoscenda quidem, scirent si ignoscere Manes:
> restitit, Eurydicenque suam iam luce sub ipsa
> immemor heu! Victusque animi respexit. ibi omnis
> effusus labor atque immitis rupta tyranni
> foedera, terque fragor stagnis auditus Avernis. [IV.467–493]

> He [Orpheus] even passed through the jaws of Taenarum, the lofty portals of Dis, the grove that is murky with black terror, and made his way to the land of the dead with its fearful king and hearts no human prayers can soften. Stirred by his song, up from the lowest realms of Erebus came the insubstantial shades, the phantoms of those who lie in darkness, as many as the myriads of birds that shelter among the leaves when evening or a wintry shower drives them from the hills — women and men, and figures of great-souled heroes, their life now done, boys and girls unwed, and sons placed on the pyre before their fathers' eyes. But round them are the black ooze and unsightly reeds of Cocytus, the unlovely mere enchaining them with its sluggish water, and Styx holding them fast within his ninefold circles. Still more: the very house of Death and deepest abysses of Hell were spellbound, and the Furies with livid snakes entwined in their hair; Cerberus stood agape and his triple jaws forgot to bark; the wind subsided, and Ixion's wheel came to a stop.
>
> And now, as he retraced his steps, he had avoided all mischance, and the regained Eurydice was nearing the upper world, following behind — for that condition had Proserpine imposed — when a sudden frenzy seized Orpheus, unwary in his love, a frenzy meet for pardon, did Hell know how to pardon! He halted, and on the very verge of light, unmindful, alas, and vanquished in purpose, on Eurydice, now regained looked back! In that instant all his toil was spilt like water, the ruthless tyrant's pact was broken, and thrice a peal of thunder was heard amid the pools of Avernus.[27]

Echoes of Greek ideas are to be found in Virgil's conception of the figure of Pluto, here (as elsewhere in Roman mythology) referred to as Dis. Historically, the name 'Dis' is the

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[27] Virgil, *Georgics*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, rev. G. P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 252–255.

shortened form of ‘Dis Pater,’ itself a diminution of ‘Dives Pater’ (meaning ‘wealthy father’) which was a calque for the Greek god of the Underworld.[28] However, Virgil also uses the term Manes (in its conjunctive form — *Manisque* — in line 469) to denote the domain of the dead, a usage which suggests that he had in mind both contemporary burial practices as well as traditional Roman religious beliefs about the spirits of the departed.[29]
In the Virgilian refashioning of the classical myth, Dis retains his omnipotence and foreboding majesty — he is the “fearful king” of the land of the dead, and both the topography and the supernatural architecture of his kingdom convey the sense of direful might and awesome power. Though Eurydice’s death is caused by the bite of a snake, it is reasonable to infer that Dis is responsible for her demise, an observation borne out by the evidence of both form (the reptilian cast of the agent of death) and identification (of Eurydice with Proserpina). Serpents were often believed to be emblematic of a chthonian deity, and as such the snake which caused Eurydice’s death can be read as a messenger of Dis.[30] Certain readings of the poem have also seen Eurydice as a mirror-image of the mythological figure of Proserpina, an identification which further underscores the fact that Dis (who is responsible for the abduction of Proserpina in myth) is to be held accountable for Eurydice’s death.[31] Orpheus is initially successful in securing the release of Eurydice — moved by the power of his harping, he is allowed to take his wife back with him to the mortal world. This leniency on the part of Dis is suggestive of the idea of divine pity or *pietas*, an important concept in Roman religion. *Pietas* denoted the proper and sincere performance of one’s duties to one’s fellow men which was binding upon every individual. The range of applicability of *pietas* was, however, expanded over time to include not just men but also the gods. Just as it was imperative for men to behave virtuously and honourably

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[28] Denis Feeney, *Literature and religion at Rome: Cultures, contexts, and beliefs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 29. Both Dis and his bride Proserpina were imported into Roman state cult in 249 BCE in the context of the secular games (*ludi saeculares*). These underworld deities later yielded place to the *Moirae* (Fates), the *Ilithyiae* (deities of childbirth), and the *Terra Mater* (Earth Mother), all of whom shared the twin characteristics of being Greek in nomenclature and without cult in Roman state religion.

[29] Contemporary Roman funerary epitaphs frequently contained the invocation ‘*Dis Manibus*’ to refer to the spirits of the deceased, a practice which became a standard feature of burial rites. See Valerie M. Hope, *Death in Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Routledge, 2007), 226. For the connection between the spirits of the dead, the *dii manes*, ghosts, and the underworld gods, see footnote 15.

[30] Pierre Bonnechere, “Divination,” in *A Companion to Greek Religion*, 151. Snakes were also often venerated as gods of place (particularly associated with the space of the garden) and frequently appeared in connection with the *genius* and the cult of the *lares* in iconographic representations. See Flower, *The Dancing Lares*, 63–70.

[31] An argument in favour of this identification of Eurydice with Proserpina is to be found in Patricia A. Johnston, “Eurydice and Proserpina in the *Georgics*,” *TAPA* 107 (1977): 161–172.

with other members of the human race, it was also binding upon them to fulfil their duties and show proper reverence to the gods.[32] The adherence to as well as the breach of *pietas* becomes crucial to the Orpheus episode. Orpheus subscribes to the concept of *pietas* in his appeal to the Underworld gods to free Eurydice, a request which requires expiation, provided in this case through the purity of Orpheus' harping. The gods too show *pietas* in accepting Orpheus' atonement and permitting him to take Eurydice away. Transactions with gods are, however, not ordinary affairs — the moral impetus behind all communications between divine and human beings necessitates the honouring of certain conditions. Eurydice is allowed back to Orpheus on the condition (imposed upon Proserpina's insistence) that he should not look back while leading her out of Hell. Orpheus' failure to keep to his promise is not only a violation of the sacrality of a divine bond but also significantly an infringement of *pietas*. Dis and Proserpina have obeyed the tenets of *pietas* by sticking to their side of the bargain; it is Orpheus who has been guilty of contravention of a divine pact, a transgression which results in his own undoing. Dis is thus figured not only as the fearsome lord of a terrifying domain but also as a scrupulous observer of divine agreements and a stern and unrelenting judge of human fallibility.

The Orpheus epyllion in Virgil has generally been viewed as a cautionary tale, as a statement on the dangers of uncontrolled, immoderate passion,[33] of the destructive effects of intense, selfish human attachment in opposition to the studied detachment required by Nature,[34] of the inevitable consequences of the human failure to overcome mortality,[35] and of the grim necessity of subsuming personal emotion to the civic virtues of moderation and disinterested reason.[36] It has also been read as a metaphor of the artist[37], with the backward glance of Orpheus as a symbol for the poetic longing for the memory of the past.[38] It has even been argued that Virgil's insertion of the Orpheus episode within the story of

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[32] *Pietas* is to be distinguished from the semantically related virtues of *humanitas*, which denoted the sense of self-respect that comes from one's status as a human being, and *religio*, which implied simple devotion to the gods. Specifically, *pietas* meant the fulfilment of duty and virtuous behaviour of men both to the gods and one another (particularly between blood relatives and relations by marriage). This principle of piety assumed particular significance under Augustus' reign since it was used to provide both a moral justification for Rome's expansionist military policy as well as a philosophical sanction for the goodness of the Augustan principate. See H. Wagenvoort, *Pietas: Selected Studies in Roman Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 1–20.

[33] C. G. Perkell, "A Reading of Virgil's Fourth Georgic," *Phoenix* 32, no. 3 (1978): 211–221.

[34] Charles Segal, "Orpheus and the Fourth *Georgic*: Vergil on Nature and Civilization," *AJP* 87, no. 3 (1966): 307–325.

[35] Dorothea S. Wender, "Resurrection in the Fourth *Georgic*," *AJP* 90, no. 4 (1969): 424–436.

[36] Jasper Griffin, "The Fourth *Georgic*, Virgil, and Rome," *Greece & Rome* 26, no. 1 (1979): 61–80.

[37] Harry C. Rutledge, "Vergil's Daedalus," *TCJ* 62, no. 7 (1967): 309–311.

[38] Gale, "Poetry and the Backward Glance," 323–352.

Aristaeus' bees was motivated by a personal reason — the intention to pay homage to the memory of Gallus, Virgil's Alexandrian master and friend.[39] Whatever may be the reasons which prompted Virgil to include the story of Orpheus in the *Georgics* and the perception of the episode as a whole, the significance of the epyllion lies not only in the artistic achievement of Virgil in bringing the different facets of traditional Italian religious belief and Greek anthropomorphism into a harmonious whole, but also in the forceful impact of the presentation and description of the Underworld on all subsequent versions of the legend.

OVID, MYTH, AND DIVINITY — DIS IN BOOK X OF THE *METAMORPHOSES*:

Much of what influenced Virgil in his creation of the divine apparatus was equally true of Ovid who inherited the literary and sociocultural traditions of Augustan Rome, though in the case of the latter it is the aetiology of myth which gains greater precedence. In late Republican and early Augustan Rome, myths or *fabulae* were universally understood as poetic fictions distinct from and opposed to historical narratives (*historia*) and coherently oriented plots (*argumentum*).[40] Myths could also be classified as heroic (seen as possessing historical value and therefore capable of being reconstructed historically as well as utilised for political argument) or divine (particularly suitable for allegorical readings of natural phenomena).[41] The aetiology of myth, concerned with the explanation and legitimation of social and natural phenomena, is infinitely adaptable to changing situations and thus lent itself with particular force to the theme of metamorphosis.[42] Given its aetiological function, then, myth was a particularly fortuitous choice for furnishing the subject matter of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, that great compendium of classical mythology beginning with the dawn of creation down to the poet's own age, the motif of miraculous change being its unifying theme. The stories and legends of the Graeco-Roman corpus which were treated with such gravitas and solemnity by Virgil are in Ovid's work attuned to a comparatively lighter vein

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[39] Robert Coleman, "Gallus, the Bucolics, and the Ending of the Fourth Georgic," *AJP* 83, no. 1 (1962): 55–71.

[40] There was an intrinsic relationship between myth and literature, particularly in the Augustan Age whose exponents rehearsed and fine-tuned the traditions they had inherited from their ancestors in the Hellenic Age. For more on this symbiotic relationship, see John Warden, "Introduction," in *Orpheus: The Metamorphoses of a Myth*, ed. John Warden (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), xi. I will return to these functions of myth — particularly to its role as an instrument of negotiation between man and divinity — in the concluding section of this chapter.

[41] Fritz Graf, "Myth in Ovid," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, ed. Philip Hardie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 108–109.

[42] Graf, "Myth in Ovid," 115–116.

(though this is not, of course, to say that the *Metamorphoses* is lacking in seriousness). Both Virgil and Ovid drew inspiration from a common mythological well; consequently, the tale of Orpheus and his journey into the Underworld, already utilised by Virgil in the *Georgics*, reappears again in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

The story of Orpheus as told by Ovid in Book X of the *Metamorphoses* is almost the same as Virgil, albeit with a minor difference — Eurydice dies after being bitten by a snake while she is strolling through the garden after her wedding feast and not because she is pursued by Aristaeus. Orpheus is also made to preface his song with a moving speech about his sorrow at the untimely loss of his wife and his eagerness to be reunited with Eurydice. Once again, the picture presented of Dis is one of terrible might and potency, a powerful monarch exercising supreme dominion over a vast kingdom. It is perhaps expedient to quote the whole passage in full:

> [Q]uam satis ad superas postquam Rhodopeius auras
> deflevit vates, ne non temptaret et umbras,
> ad Styga Taenaria est ausus descendere porta
> perque leves populos simulacraque functa sepulcro
> Persephonen adiit inamoenaque regna tenentem
> umbrarum dominum pulsisque ad carmina nervis
> sic ait: "o positi sub terra numina mundi,
> in quem reccidimus, quicquid mortale creamer,
> si licet et falsi positis ambagibus oris
> vera loqui sinitis, non huc, ut opaca viderem
> Tartara, descendi, nec uti villosa colubris
> terna Medusaei vincirem guttural monstri:
> causa viae est coniunx, in quam calcata venemum
> vipera diffudit crescentesque abstulit annos. […]"
>   Talia dicentem nervosque ad verba moventem
> exsangues flebant animae; nec Tantalus undam
> captavit refugam, stupuitque Ixionis orbis,
> nec carpsere iecur volucres, urnisque vacarunt
> Belides, inque tuo sedisti, Sisyphe, saxo.
> tunc primum lacrimis victarum carmine fama est
> Eumenidum maduisse genas, nec regia coniunx
> sustinet oranti nec, qui regit ima, negare,
> Eurydicenque vocant: umbras erat illa recentes
> inter et incessit passu de vulnere tardo.
> hanc simul et legem Rhodopeius accipit heros,

> ne flectat retro sua lumina, donec Avernas
> exierit valles; aut inrita dona futura.
> carpitur adclivis per muta silentia trames,
> arduus, obscurus, caligine densus opaca,
> nec pronul afuerunt telluris margine summae:
> hic, ne deficeret, metuens avidusque videndi
> flexit amans oculos, et protinus illa relapsa est,
> bracchiaque intendens prendique et prendere certans
> nil nisi cedentes infelix arripit auras. [X.11–59]

> When the bard of Rhodope had mourned her to the full in the upper world, that he might try the shades as well he dared to go down to the Stygian world through the gate of Taenarus. And through the unsubstantial throngs and the ghosts who had received burial, he came to Persephone and him who rules those unlovely realms, lord of the shades. Then, singing to the music of his lyre, he said: "O ye divinities who rule the world which lies beneath the earth, to which we all fall back who are born mortal, if it is lawful and you permit me to lay aside all false and doubtful speech and tell the simple truth: I have not come down hither to see dark Tartara, nor yet to bind the three necks of Medusa's monstrous offspring, rough with serpents. The cause of my journey is my wife, into whose body a trodden serpent shot his poison and so snatched away her budding years. […]"
>
> As he spoke thus, accompanying his words with the music of his lyre, the bloodless spirits wept; Tantalus did not catch at the fleeing wave; Ixion's wheel stopped in wonder; the vultures did not pluck at the liver; the Belides rested from their urns, and thou, O Sisyphus, didst sit upon thy stone. Then first, tradition says, conquered by the song, the cheeks of the Eumenides were wet with tears; nor could the queen nor he who rules the lower world refuse the suppliant. They called Eurydice. She was among the new shades and came with steps halting from her wound. Thus then the Thracian hero received his wife and with her this condition, that he should not turn his eyes backward until he had gone forth from the valley of Avernus, or else the gift would be in vain. They took the up-sloping path through places of utter silence, a steep path, indistinct and clouded in pitchy darkness. And now they were nearing the margin of the upper earth, when he, afraid that she might fail him, eager for sight of her, turned back his longing eyes; and instantly she slipped into the depths. He stretched out his arms, eager to catch her or to feel her clasp; but, unhappy one, he clasped nothing but the yielding air.[43]

As in Virgil, here too Dis is figured as the omnipotent monarch of the sub-terrestrial portals of the dead, though it is significant to note that nowhere in this passage is Dis mentioned explicitly by name; instead of direct address, Ovid chooses to refer to him by means of epithets (such as "lord of the shades," used in its declined form — *umbrarum dominum* —

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[43] Ovid, *Metamorphoses, Books 9–15*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, rev. G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library 43 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 64–69.

in line 16).[44] Orpheus, however, specifically uses the word *numen* (declined with the noun *mundus* — world — as *numina mundi* in line 17) in greeting Dis, a linguistic choice which has interesting implications in view of the word's various associations. From its etymological root meaning of 'movement,' *numen* was originally used to designate a moving force. Over time, its application was expanded to include divine action in general, with the consequence that the words *deus* and *numen* gradually came to be used interchangeably.[45] Thus, Dis is not only a god (*deus*) of the dead, but he is also a controlling force, a spirit who steers the movement of the subterranean world (*sub terra numina mundi*). The gods' decision to return Eurydice to Orpheus is figured as a "gift" (*dona* — the declined form of the neuter noun *donum* — in line 52), thereby implying that this is a reward for services rendered (the service in question being Orpheus' singing to the music of the lyre). This idea of repayment-in-lieu-of-service might be interpreted as suggesting a transactional economy reminiscent of the feudal ethos of lord-vassal relations in the Middle Ages (a somewhat laboured point, it is true, but one which has very interesting implications when we bear in mind the medievalisation of the legend in *Sir Orfeo*). There is also greater concretisation of the architecture and demographic constitution of the Underworld in Ovid's account, and in the temporary cessation of the torments of Hell in the wake of Orpheus' plaintive song, one may note a parallel with the grisly exhibit of human sufferers frozen in various states of torture at the Fairy King's palace in *Sir Orfeo*. A final point about the possible motivation behind the episode warrants consideration. Elaine Fantham has observed that in Ovid, "human artists are punished, or simply victimized, for challenging a god's professional expertise."[46] Referring to the contests between the Muses and the daughters of Pieros, Pallas Athena and Arachne, and Apollo and Pan, Fantham notes how competing with gods usually results in a loss of human identity.[47] In the light of this observation, is it possible to argue that Orpheus was punished because the Underworld gods viewed him as competition? Was the force of Orpheus' musical artistry potent enough for the Underworld deities to perceive him as a threat to their own superiority over mortals? Did Dis (and Proserpina) impose the condition of not looking back as a punitive measure, knowing fully well that Orpheus would fail? Though there is no direct evidence in the story to support such a reading, it would certainly be in keeping with the capricious, inconstant, and volatile nature of the Graeco-Roman gods in mythological representation in general.

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[44] Ovid mentions Dis by name in a related passage in Book IV (ll. 432–445) of the *Metamorphoses* in the context of Juno's visit to the Underworld to seek vengeance upon Ino, sister of Semele and foster-mother of Bacchus of whom she was jealous. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses, Books 1–8*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, rev. G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library 42 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 208–209. The passage in Book IV also contains a description of the Underworld and, like Virgil's account of Avernus in Book VI of the *Aeneid*, can be read as a companion piece to the excerpt under consideration. It is interesting to note that though Ovid uses the Roman terms 'Avernus' and 'Dis' (in Book IV) to refer to the Underworld and its king respectively, he calls Proserpina by her Greek name Persephone.

[45] See Wagenvoort, *Pietas*, 227–232.

[46] Elaine Fantham, *Ovid's* "*Metamorphoses*" (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 51.

[47] Fantham, *Ovid's* "*Metamorphoses*," 51–56.

Several interpretations have been offered for Ovid's usage of the Orpheus myth in the *Metamorphoses*. One mode of analysis has seen Orpheus as an unsuccessful Hercules, doomed to failure because he has been unable to embrace the fact of human mortality and has been under the blind influence of the illusion that the powers of art can conquer and outlive the inherent transience of the human condition.[48] Another line of reading has, however, offered a completely different perspective. According to this view, by expanding on the traditional account of the Underworld episode (making Orpheus verbally articulate his sorrow in the form of a song as well as describing the tears to which the spirits of the Underworld were moved upon hearing Orpheus' lament) and by presenting the details of Orpheus' life and subsequent death in the aftermath of his failure to retrieve Eurydice, Ovid has set up a sympathetic identification not only between Orpheus and the Underworld deities but also between himself and Orpheus as sentimental poetic artists.[49] An interesting position has been adopted by Elizabeth Marie Young, who has seen the Orpheus episode both as the apotheosis of the ideological ambitions of Augustan Rome which strove to incorporate the depths of Greek antiquity into the Roman present as well as the site where the realisation of Graeco-Roman literature as an organic, unified whole is achieved.[50] Variant approaches notwithstanding, Ovid's subtle reshaping of Virgil's Orpheus epyllion was to have a decisive influence on all subsequent treatments of the myth, a tendency of supreme importance in charting the pagan provenance of the Fairy King. With Ovid, the figure of Dis, the terrifying yet largely impassive figure in the Virgilian handling of the story, moves one step closer towards a more detailed delineation of character.

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[48] John Heath, "The *Stupor* of Orpheus: Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 10.64–71," *TCJ* 91, no. 4 (1996): 353–370.

[49] Charles Segal, "Ovid's Orpheus and Augustan Ideology," *TAPA* 103 (1972): 473–494.

[50] Elizabeth Marie Young, "Inscribing Orpheus: Ovid and the Invention of a Greco-Roman Corpus," *Representations* 101, no. 1 (2008): 1–31.

CHAPTER ONE

FROM THE ROMAN *IMPERIUM* TO THE MEDIEVAL SCHOOLROOM — TRANSMISSION, INTERPRETATION, AND COMMENTARY ON VIRGIL AND OVID:

"The celebrity of Virgil's works in the Roman world," writes R. J. Tarrant, "was immediate and lasting."[51] The *Eclogues*, the *Georgics*, and particularly the *Aeneid*, invited a veritable outpouring of commentary and analysis, an evaluative attitude which was to persist well beyond the wane of antiquity. From the intense albeit openly critical engagement of the Neronian period to the effusive praise and idealisation of the Flavian period, the vicissitudes of Virgilian reception in pre-Christian Rome helped to shape the afterlife of his works in the Christian world. Christopher Baswell distinguishes between three dominant approaches in the interpretation of Virgil across the early and late Middle Ages — the allegorical, romance, and pedagogical modes of interpretative exegesis.[52] The allegorical mode of interpretation adopted Christian ethics as its overarching frame of reference and was primarily concerned with offering scriptural equivalents of pagan material. The romance vision of Virgil's works aimed at transferring the imagined world of the ancient past on to the social and temporal milieu of the medieval redactor. With their shared impulse of accommodating Virgil to a contemporary socio-religious context, both the allegorical and romance approaches attempted to make Virgilian texts at once accessible and relevant.[53] In contradistinction to these approaches and by far the most prolific in its manifestation was the pedagogical mode of reading. This approach, adopted in the schools and centres of learning, was engaged in the grammatical and rhetorical explication of works of classical Latin with a view to reconstructing (within restricted scholarly limits) their historical, social, and geographical difference. The lines demarcating the three modes of interpretation were not, however, permanent; as the tradition of commentary, glossing, annotation, and translation proliferated, the three strands began to intermingle.

Changes in the system of education (from the monastic scriptorium and cathedral schools to universities and the Inns of Court) and upward social mobility (the growth of a moneyed bourgeois class with access to secular learning) influenced both literary taste as well as reading habits, thereby leading to an assimilation of the three (hitherto distinct) branches of Virgilian interpretation into one composite whole. There was a concomitant change in the tenor of critical commentary. From the spiritual allegoresis influenced by the doctrines of Platonism and Aristotelian metaphysics of late antiquity and the early medieval period, the later thirteenth and fourteenth centuries witnessed a form of exegesis, both literary and allegorical, characterised by a deepening moral tone. Texts from Latin antiquity were now approached as models for life in this world rather than as a means of transcendence and contempt of the world.[54] This mode of exegetical reading (which, in the case of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, was to culminate in such thorough moralisations as the anonymous *Ovide moralisé* and Pierre Bersuire's *Ovidius moralizatus*) was in England associated primarily with the activities of the classicising friars, a small group centred mainly in Oxford and Cambridge who made extensive use of classical material in their commentaries on the Bible.[55] The Virgilian tradition, marked as it was by diversification as well as fusion, was in a particularly protean state by the time Chaucer received it in the fourteenth century.[56] Through the multiple tributaries of philological commentary, spiritual allegorisation, and vernacular redaction, the stream of Virgilian texts and the stories (such as the myth of Orpheus in the *Georgics*) contained in them thus flowed into the late Middle Ages.

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[51] R. J. Tarrant, "Aspects of Virgil's reception in antiquity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*, ed. Charles Martindale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 56.

[52] Christopher Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England: Figuring the* Aeneid *from the twelfth century to Chaucer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 9.

[53] Baswell observes that both the allegorical and romance traditions attempted to evade (via the techniques of creative interpretation or active suppression) those elements which had, since patristic times, been perceived as most uncomfortable and controversial for Christian readers — the gods and the miraculous. See Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England*, 11.

The tradition of Roman poetic reformulation of Greek texts and Hellenistic mythography, of which Virgil was a notable exemplar, was continued by Ovid; indeed, Ovid, by whose time the works of Virgil had become canonical, responded to his literary predecessor with a mixture of both appreciation as well as jealous competition. Richard Tarrant, who argues that Ovid's generic ascent from the *Amores* to the *Heroides* to the *Ars amatoria* and the *Remedia amoris* parallels Virgil's progression from the *Eclogues* through the *Georgics* to the *Aeneid*, regards the *Metamorphoses* as Ovid's counterpart to Virgil's *magnum opus*.[57] Unlike Virgil, however, the reception of Ovid's works in early antiquity was not universally enthusiastic. Though he was admired and imitated by poets, his style and content earned the disapproval of rhetoricians and ethical writers, such as Seneca the Elder and Quintilian.[58] With the adoption of Christianity in the Latin world, Ovidian stories began to be mined for material which was either given scriptural rationalisation or used as invective to denounce the evils of pagan literature. This bifurcation of attitude — praise as well as condemnation — in the treatment of Ovid continued into the fifth century, a development further affected by the Vandal subjugation of the Romans. In the sixth century, Ovid influenced such authors as Boethius (whose account of Orpheus' journey to the Underworld in the *Consolation of Philosophy* closely paralleled that of Ovid's) and Fortunatus (through whom knowledge of Ovid — and the Latin classics in general — reached France) as well as the grammarians Eutyches and Priscian. From the early eighth century, however, the growth and development of centres of learning both in the royal courts (most notably that of Charlemagne) as well as in the monasteries acted as a stimulant to classical pedagogy. As libraries proliferated and the copying of manuscripts became a well-established practice, the need was felt to preserve contemporary connections with the classical past, a precious tradition whose luminosity had increasingly begun to dim. This conservatory impulse was strengthened as Europe moved into the Middle Ages, culminating in the flowering of classical learning in general (and the study of Ovid in particular) in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

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[54] Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England*, 137–138.
[55] Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England*, 158.
[56] Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England*, 220–221.
[57] Richard Tarrant, "Ovid and ancient literary history," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, 23–24.

Jeremy Dimmick has observed that for the Middle Ages, Ovid stood "as the single most important window into [the] imaginative world of secular contingency, power, passion, and the scope and limits of human art."[59] The study of Ovid in the medieval period followed a trajectory similar to that of medieval Virgilian exegesis. Like Baswell's identification of the allegorical, romance, and pedagogical modes of Virgilian interpretation, Frank T. Coulson discerns three similar strands of Ovidian reading in the Middle Ages — the ethical perspective which focused on moralistic reinterpretations of pagan material, the utilitarian perspective which sifted through the finer points of grammar and rhetoric, and an encompassing literary perspective which combined the features of the two in providing both grammatical instruction as well as an ethical framework within which to read the texts.[60] One of the most representative examples of medieval Ovidian interpretation is the thirteenth century "Vulgate" commentary, a composite digest of grammatical and syntactical commentary engaging with questions of mythography, science, and literary import. The "Vulgate" commentary was one of the first sustained attempts to confer Christian meaning to classical story and, in its systematic employment of the allegorical apparatus to interpret Ovid, was to anticipate the two most important moralisations of Ovid in the fourteenth century, the anonymous *Ovide moralisé* and Pierre Bersuire's *Ovidius moralizatus*.[61] The *Ovide moralisé*, composed in French octosyllabic couplets, was a vernacular redaction of the *Metamorphoses* which sought to impose the Biblical master narrative of sin and redemption — figuring, in particular, the Incarnation of Christ as the ultimate metamorphosis — upon the repertory of pagan tales contained in the work. Bersuire's *Ovidius moralizatus*, intended for the use of preachers seeking *exempla*, offered prose summaries of the different narratives of the *Metamorphoses* and reformulated them within a scriptural framework.[62] The *Metamorphoses* lent itself with particular force to Christian reformulations because it enabled philosophers, rhetoricians, and exegetes to probe and question cultural attitudes and classical assumptions about ethics, morality, and the nature of the divine.[63]

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[58] In this brief survey of Ovid's reception in antiquity, I draw primarily upon pages xii–xx of William S. Anderson's introduction in *Ovid: The Classical Heritage*, ed. William S. Anderson (New York: Garland Publishing, 1995).

[59] Jeremy Dimmick, "Ovid in the Middle Ages: authority and poetry," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, 266.

[60] Frank T. Coulson, "Ovid's Transformations in Medieval France (CA. 1100–CA. 1350)," in *Metamorphosis: The Changing Face of Ovid in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Alison Keith and Stephen Rupp (Toronto: CRRS Publications, 2007), 43.

A change in religious systems is accompanied by a parallel shift in cultural attitudes, changes which make their presence felt in both literary production as well as traditions of reading. Medieval Christian allegoresis of classical works was thus an attempt to recuperate the texts to a familiar and identifiable ethical, moral, and spiritual framework. It is important to remember, however, that manuscript commentary and vernacular redactions were not the only kinds of literary output available in the Middle Ages; oral poetic composition also played a significant role. Jeremy Dimmick has noted the influence of Ovid in Marie de France's *lai* of *Guigemar*, the first in a collection of short French narrative poems presumably drawn from oral Breton tradition.[64] If Ovid could leave an imprint on the work of Marie de France, is it not also conceivable that Ovidian stories (such as the tale of Orpheus in the *Metamorphoses*) could exercise an influence on a poem such as *Sir Orfeo*, which is believed to have descended, like Marie's *lai*, from the (now lost) Breton tradition of oral poetry? The implications are certainly very interesting and warrant a more detailed examination in a separate chapter.

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[61] For a detailed discussion of the "Vulgate" commentary, see Coulson, "Ovid's Transformations," 52–59.

[62] For a brief summary of the similarities and differences between the *Ovide moralisé* and the *Ovidius moralizatus*, see Dimmick, "Ovid in the Middle Ages," 278–280.

[63] Marilynn Desmond, "The Goddess Diana and the Ethics of Reading in the Ovide Moralisé," in *Metamorphosis: The Changing Face of Ovid*, 63–64.

[64] Dimmick, "Ovid in the Middle Ages," 264–266.

In medieval England, Ovid's works were known to both John Gower and Geoffrey Chaucer; Ovidian elements have been noted in Gower's *Vox clamantis* and *Confessio amantis* as well as in Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* and *The Legend of Good Women* (among others). English engagement with Ovid was to continue well into the early modern period, a relationship negotiated not only through poetic composition but also through translation (such as William Caxton's and Arthur Golding's translations of the *Metamorphoses*).[65] Through a variety of different paths — rhetorical commentary, Christian allegory, poetic reformulation, vernacular appropriation and transformation, as well as translation — the knowledge of Ovid and his works was handed down from antiquity down to the Middle Ages and beyond. In this temporal peregrination of vast scope, the story of Orpheus too travelled across the continent, moving from Rome to the British Isles where elements of Graeco-Roman myth mingled with indigenous folkloric traditions to produce a hybrid offspring with a characteristically insular flavour. I now turn to one of the mediating agents central to this transmission: Boethius.

BOETHIUS AND THE HANDLING OF CLASSICAL MYTH IN EARLY ANTIQUITY — THE ORPHEUS *METRUM* IN *THE CONSOLATION OF PHILOSOPHY*:

Boethius, writes John Marenbon, was "a sort of conduit by which ancient ideas were transmitted to the Middle Ages."[66] Writing in sixth-century Italy, Boethius belonged to a society which was interestingly positioned on the cusp of two vastly different and frequently conflicting traditions — paganism and Christianity. In the two centuries since the elevation of Christianity under the imperial support of Constantine and its subsequent adoption as the official state religion of the Roman Empire, the divine pantheon, secular beliefs and ideas, and the cultural mythography inherited from the pagan past had begun to be reshaped by the pressures exerted on them by an emergent, monolithic religious system.[67] These pressures were, however, not necessarily destructive. An entire pre-existing tradition could not simply be annihilated by the introduction of a new one; with the fortification and spread of Christianity, the socio-religious values of the secular, pre-Christian world were adapted and accommodated within the new cultural matrix. This coexistence of classical learning and scriptural belief can be found in Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* (Lat. *De Consolatione Philosophiæ*), one of the seminal works of the period. Combining the rigours of Greek thought with the restraint and poise of Biblical teaching, the *Consolation* was at once philosophical debate and theological treatise, "a fusion of the Platonic dialogue and the revelation discourse."[68] This binary nature of the text is a direct consequence, not only of the sociocultural milieu of Boethius' day, but also of the motives — bringing about a synthesis of the Latin intellectual tradition with the philosophical achievements of the Greeks — which prompted him to undertake the composition of his seminal work.[69] In his continued usage of Greek myths and philosophical doctrines, Boethius was upholding the practice inaugurated by his Latin forebears; in his insertion of sacred (though, significantly in the *Consolation*, not always explicitly identifiable as Christian) learning, he was responding to contemporary sociohistorical and cultural conditions.

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[65] Dimmick, "Ovid in the Middle Ages," 280–286; Raphael Lyne, "Ovid in English translation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, 249–263.

[66] John Marenbon, "Introduction: reading Boethius whole," in *The Cambridge Companion to Boethius*, ed. John Marenbon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 2.

[67] Michelle Renee Salzman, however, points out that the pattern of adoption of Christianity was not uniform throughout Italy but was significantly influenced by regional variations and characteristics. Focusing on the elite classes as the primary conduit for the propagation and consolidation of Christian ideas, Salzman notes differences between the type of Christianity (and consequently, the nature of the

In the *Consolation*, Boethius drew upon Platonic philosophy and Aristotelian metaphysics as well as the poetic vocabulary and rhetorical cadences of Cicero and Seneca to meditate upon questions of imprisonment and freedom, exile and return, slavery and tyranny, the rejection of the world, the understanding of man's existence and essence, and the pursuit of the *summum bonum* or the ultimate good.[70] The story of Orpheus, formerly encountered in Virgil and Ovid, here reappears within the framework of Lady Philosophy's didactic programme of teaching, instruction, and reform. The poetic persona of the author, who is guided through the unbearable torments of imprisonment by the moral lessons imparted by the personified figure of Philosophy, receives the story of Orpheus as a kind of Stoic *exemplum* to prepare him for the prospect of his imminent death. The tale, although it remains largely unchanged in particulars, is given a moral reinterpretation which seems to

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relationship between pre-existing pagan belief and newly emergent Christian ideas) practised in Rome, Aquileia, and Milan. See Salzman, "Christianity and Paganism, III: Italy," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity, Volume II: Constantine to c. 600,* eds. Augustine Casiday and Frederick W. Norris (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 210–230.

[68] Danuta Shanzer, "Interpreting the *Consolation*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Boethius*, 231.

[69] Helen Kirkby, "The Scholar and his Public," in *Boethius: His Life, Thought and Influence*, ed. Margaret Gibson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), 59.

[70] Anna Crabbe, "Literary Design in the *De Consolatione Philosophiae*," in *Boethius: His Life, Thought and Influence*, 240–241.

foreshadow the allegorical reformulations of the legend in the Middle Ages. In this philosophical reworking of the myth, Orpheus' act of looking back at Eurydice while leading her out of Hell becomes emblematic of the perils of earthly attachment and human fallibility. The wider moral of the fable seems to be that minds, once kindled to excellence, should not look back upon the inferior and the ignoble, since to do so is to renounce all happiness and prosperity:

> Felix qui potuit boni
> Fontem visere lucidum,
> Felix qui potuit gravis
> Terrae solvere vincula.
> Quondam funera coniugis
> Vates Threicius gemens
> Postquam flebilibus modis
> Silvas currere mobiles,
> Amnes stare coegerat,
> Iunxitque intrepidum latus
> Saevis cerva leonibus,
> Nec visum timuit lepus,
> Iam cantu placidum canem,
> Cum flagrantior intima
> Fervor pectoris ureret,
> Nec qui cuncta subegerant
> Mulcerent dominum modi,
> Inmites superos querens
> Infernas adiit domos.
> Illic blanda sonantibus
> Chordis carmina temperans
> Quidquid praecipuis deae
> Matris fontibus hauserat,
> Quod luctus dabat impotens,
> Quod luctum geminans amor,
> Deflet Taenara commovens
> Et dulci veniam prece
> Umbrarum dominos rogat. […]
> Tandem, 'Vincimur,' arbiter
> Umbrarum miserans ait,
> 'Donamus comitem viro
> Emptam carmine coniugem.

Sed lex dona coerceat,
Ne, dum Tartara liquerit,
Fas sit lumina flectere.’
Quis legem det amantibus?
Maior lex amor est sibi.
Heu, noctis prope terminos
Orpheus Eurydicen suam
Vidit, perdidit, occidit.
Vos haec fabula respicit
Quicumque in superum diem
Mentem ducere quaeritis.
Nam qui Tartareum in specus
Victus lumina flexerit,
Quidquid praecipuum trahit
Perdit, dum videt inferos. [III. m.XII, 1–58]

Happy was he who could look upon
The clear fount of the good;
Happy who could loose the bonds
Of heavy earth.
Of old the Thracian poet mourned
His wife’s sad death,
He who before had made the woods so nimbly run
And rivers stand
With his weeping measures,
And the hind’s fearless flank
Lay beside savage lions,
Nor was the hare afraid to look upon
The hound, made peaceful by his song;
When grief burned yet more fierce and hot
His inmost heart,
And measures that subdued all else
Soothed not their master,
Complaining of inexorable gods above
He approached the halls below.
There modulating gentle songs
On the sounding lyre
All that he drew from the foremost springs
Of his goddess mother,
All that his unquelled grief bestowed

And love, that doubles grief,
Make his laments; he moves Taenarian hearts,
And with sweet prayer
Asks pardon of the lords of Hades' shades. […]
At last 'We are overborne' in pity says
The ruler of the shades;
'We grant the man his wife to go with him,
Bought by his song;
Yet let our law restrict the gift,
That, while he Tartarus quits,
He shall not turn his gaze.'
Who can give lovers laws?
Love is a greater law unto itself.
Woe! By the very boundaries of Night
Orpheus his Eurydice
Saw, lost, and killed.
To you this tale refers,
Who seek to lead your mind
Into the upper day;
For he who overcome should turn back his gaze
Towards the Tartarean cave,
Whatever excellence he takes with him
He loses when he looks on those below.[71]

The Orpheus *metrum* in Boethius is thematically associated with two ideas — the Platonic doctrine of *anamnesis* or recollection and a hybrid concept of *amor* or love which is both classical and Christian, human and divine. According to the doctrine of *anamnesis*, the human quest for knowledge is a perennial search to retrieve what was once inscribed upon the soul, but was forgotten in the course of the fleshly incarnation of birth. For the soul to ascend to its former state of purity and wisdom, memory must return. The Orpheus story becomes an allegorical illustration of *anamnesis*, whereby Orpheus' act of looking back is seen as an instance of human failure to recover the memory of pure knowledge.[72] The soul can regain lost knowledge only by relinquishing human attachment and by an ascent from darkness to light. What Orpheus does, however, is exactly the opposite — he literally descends into the Underworld, figured as a realm of death and darkness, and also fails to overcome his longing for Eurydice. Orpheus' descent and ultimate failure are also intertwined with Boethius' attitude towards love. Boethius' predominant response to the idea of love seems to be one of ambivalence, for although the outcome of love in the case of Orpheus is one of defeat, there appears to be present at the same time a tacit acknowledgement of the potency of *amor*, especially conjugal love. This binary fission is also mirrored in the duality which characterises Boethius' contextual grounding of *amor* in a related love poem, II. m.VIII, which celebrates a cosmic love that is at once Pythagorean-Neoplatonic and Christian.[73] Through the Orpheus episode, Boethius attempts to demonstrate the paradox of love whose triumph only leads to a defeat. His point seems to be that although (conjugal) love is natural and inevitable, immoderate passion is not. Love which works through earthly bonds is ultimately to be tempered and subjugated to a greater end — the pursuit of excellence and the reclamation of forgotten knowledge. Through his sojourn in the Underworld, Orpheus fails to do both. The Underworld seems to echo Plato's parable of the cave in the *Republic* in reverse: the light outside the cave, emblematic of knowledge and illumination, motivates man to climb out of the (real and metaphoric) darkness of the cave; Orpheus' descent into the caverns of the Underworld not only marks a physical movement from light to darkness but also represents a fall (in Platonic terms) from understanding to ignorance.[74]

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[71] Boethius, *Theological Tractates. The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand, and S. J. Tester, Loeb Classical Library 74 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 306–311.
[72] For a deeper treatment of these ideas, see Crabbe, "Literary Design," 258–259 and Jo-Marie Claassen, "Literary *Anamnesis*: Boethius Remembers Ovid," *Helios* 34, no. 1 (2007): 1–35.

In Boethius' Platonic remoulding of the Orpheus legend, the Underworld thus becomes a locus of encumbrance and defeat. To descend into the Underworld is to remain mired in the morass of unproductive human attachment; it implies relinquishing all memory of true knowledge and embracing forgetfulness, thereby condemning the soul to continue and extend its imperfect existence (it is interesting to note that the waters of Lethe, one of the rivers described as belonging to the domain of Hades in classical accounts of the architecture of the Underworld, were believed to confer forgetfulness upon the drinker). As the overlord of this realm, the figure of Dis — whom Boethius, like Ovid before him, does not address by name, choosing instead the identical Ovidian epithet "lord of the shades" in its declined form, *umbrarum dominos* — would thus appear to be an embodiment of desire and concupiscence, the agent responsible for inhibiting the excellence that human souls aspire for. Boethius' language also seems to represent Dis as a legal arbiter: the condition imposed upon Orpheus is specifically figured as a “law” (*lex*) which is restrictive in its purpose (Boethius uses the conjugated form — *coerceat* — of the Latin verb *coercere*, which naturally brings to mind echoes of coercion and force).[75] The return of Eurydice is once again described as a “gift” (*dona*, declined form of *donum*), but gift-giving is depicted as a contractual agreement that is governed by its own set of rules which need to be scrupulously observed. The most interesting Boethian innovation is, however, the use of direct speech in the portrayal of Dis. For the first time, the Lord of the Underworld is allowed to speak for himself, an authorial move which makes his designs concrete and more impactful. By investing him with powers of articulation, Boethius offers the reader a direct glimpse into his mind and its workings. This is also the first time that the decision to release Eurydice is definitely shown to be Dis’ own: unlike earlier versions of the legend, there appears to be no mention of the involvement of Proserpina in the formulation of this edict. There is, however, also a sentimental strain to be detected in this presentation of Dis: his words not only act as verbal evidence of the fact that he has been successfully persuaded by Orpheus, but they are also explicitly characterised as prompted by “pity” (the participle *miserans* carries with it the connotations of lamenting or bewailing). This slight but significant emotional colouring is suggestive of a tonal shift away from the stern indifference of Virgil and other classical authors towards a more muted, impassioned response, the kind of emotional involvement typically characteristic of romance personae. The Boethian Dis has begun his ascent to greater autonomy and substantiality in speech, motive, temperament, and personality; the lineaments of this figure are beginning to be etched with greater clarity and assurance.

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[73] Claassen, "Literary *Anamnesis*," 10.
[74] Claassen, "Literary *Anamnesis*," 12.

THE *CONSOLATION* IN THE MIDDLE AGES:

The afterlife of the *Consolation*, especially from the eighth century onwards, was rich and varied. The work, which seems to have been little read or studied during the period between the death of Boethius and the late eighth century, rose to prominence with the revival of classical learning and the copying of classical texts inspired by Alcuin of York, who is credited with having introduced the *Consolation* to northern Europe in his journey back from Italy.[76] The text, which attracted a flurry of commentaries and dedicated glossing, eventually entered the schools and monastic centres and was established as part of the liberal arts curriculum. The commentators were mostly concerned with explaining the finer points of grammar and rhetoric as well as providing background information to aid the reader in comprehending the complex philosophical and mythological context of the work.[77] They usually used Christian precedent to interpret the secular concepts borrowed by Boethius from pagan philosophy.[78]

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[75] I will have more to say on this juridical framing of the sovereign figure (particularly in the context of James Wade’s borrowing of Giorgio Agamben’s conception of the sovereign as a living law or *lex animate* in his characterisation of fairy overlords) in Chapter 3.

With the introduction of the *Consolation* into the academic repertoire began the tradition of careful copying and systematic glossing, a manuscript culture which was to thrive first in the Carolingian monasteries and later elsewhere on the continent. The Christianising impulse of the glossatorial tradition intensified in the wake of the commentaries of Remigius of Auxerre and Bovo of Corvey in the tenth century as revisions began to appear, especially in England. The scriptural valence of such revisionary commentaries was particularly high owing to their possible utilisation in chastening sermons. The Orpheus myth, for instance, received a rigorous Biblical explanation. In these revisions, Orpheus represents the human soul which falls down and is ensconced in the metaphoric inferno of worldly venality. The classical Underworld begins to be identified more and more with the Christian conception of Hell, as its inhabitants are believed to be representatives of earthly sinners and the tribe of the damned. The entire episode is read as an allegory of the fate of the wicked and the torments they must endure in the fiery subterranean portals of Hell as punishment for earthly transgressions.[79] The eleventh century, however, presumably saw a comparative lull in the commentary tradition since, as orthodox attitudes became more entrenched, the study of the pagan classics began to be regarded as unnecessary at best and undesirable at worst.[80] This is not to say that Boethius was not read; indeed, such an explanation appears implausible in view of the work's establishment and utilisation as a schoolroom text. What is more certain is the fact of the resurgence of the commentary tradition from the late eleventh and the early twelfth centuries onwards in new forms, from the interlinear and marginal glosses of the earlier period to systematic and comprehensive commentaries which often circulated as autonomous works.[81] Through the vagaries of this dynamic intertextual tradition of revisionary commentary, knowledge of Boethius reached Chaucer in the fourteenth century.[82]

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[76] Jacqueline Beaumont, "The Latin Tradition of the *De Consolatione Philosophiae*," in *Boethius: His Life, Thought and Influence*, 279.
[77] Lodi Nauta, "The *Consolation*: the Latin commentary tradition, 800–1700," in *The Cambridge Companion to Boethius*, 257–258.
[78] Beaumont, "Latin Tradition," 287.
[79] Beaumont, "Latin Tradition," 289.
[80] Beaumont, "Latin Tradition," 295.

Thus, a steady stream of commentary and glossing transmitted the knowledge of Boethius down from early antiquity to the Middle Ages. As Boethian material passed through the hands of schoolmen and exegetes, the content of the *Consolation* began to take on a distinctly Christian colouring. In this scriptural remoulding, the Orpheus episode — and with it the characterisation of both Pluto/Dis and the Underworld — too began to shed its purely pagan exoskeleton. Borne upon the wings of religious change and facilitated within a context of cross-cultural interaction enabled both by Roman imperial ambitions as well as by a network of trade and economic relations, the Orpheus story reached the shores of Brittany where it was to merge with local Celtic traditions before it appeared in insular literature. Before I move on to an examination of Celtic mythology, however, mention should be made of a very important source of Boethian knowledge in England: King Alfred's Anglo-Saxon translation of the *Consolation* in the ninth century. In this translation, Alfred was to wed Boethian idealism to an Anglo-Saxon worldview of chance, mutability, despair, exile, and melancholy; to show "the semi-emergent Roman conception of Christianity, rationality, humility and renunciation lying side by side with tenacious old Anglo-Saxon emotions."[83] In his translation of the Orpheus metre, Alfred did not rely simply on Boethius, choosing instead to complement Boethian material with information culled from Virgil and Ovid.[84] The Christianising impetus was maintained as the Underworld was referred to specifically as "helle" and Pluto was described as "hellwara cyning" (king of Hell).[85] The fact that the *Consolation* was chosen to be a part of his translation project by a figure as important and respected as Alfred did much to ensure that the knowledge of the work (and the Orpheus episode in particular) would be disseminated within the British Isles where it would continue to circulate over the succeeding centuries. From their putative genesis in the pagan myths of classical Greece to their handling by a venerated Christian monarch of Anglo-Saxon England, the Underworld and its king have come a long way indeed, both geographically and temporally, formally and thematically.

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[81] Nauta, "The Latin commentary tradition," 259.

[82] The twelfth-century commentary of William of Conches, which melded together Platonic philosophy with Biblical teaching, influenced Nicholas Trevet's commentary on Boethius in the fourteenth century. The thirteenth-century commentary of William of Aragon, which applied Aristotelian principles to interpret the *Consolation*, had a direct impact on Jean de Meun, whose preface to his Old French translation of Boethius was a literal translation of Aragon's Latin prologue. Chaucer was, of course, familiar with the work of Jean de Meun, having translated (in verse) part of Meun's *Roman de la Rose* into Middle English. For an overview of Trevet's influence on Chaucer, see Alastair Minnis, "Aspects of the Medieval French and English Traditions of the *De Consolatione Philosophiae*," in *Boethius: His Life, Thought and Influence*, 314–342.

[83] Katherine Proppe, "King Alfred's *Consolation of Philosophy*," *NM* 74, no. 4 (1973): 648.

[84] Joseph S. Wittig, "King Alfred's *Boethius* and its Latin sources: a reconsideration," *Anglo-Saxon England* 11 (1982): 185.

[85] Walter J. Sedgefield, ed., *King Alfred's Old English Version of Boethius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899), 101–103.

MYTH AND THE QUESTIONS SURROUNDING IT — THE 'WHAT,' THE 'HOW,' AND THE 'WHY':

The journey of the story of Orpheus through time and through the cultures of Hellenic Greece, classical and pre-Christian Rome, and the Christianised world of early and late antiquity has traced the passage of one particular thing — a myth. I have discussed the various aspects of the 'myth' of Orpheus and what it entailed for different sociocultural and religious systems across literary epochs, but it is now time to probe and question the generic category itself. What is a myth? What constitutes mythology? How and why do myths move across time and space?[86] Attempting to answer these questions will not only assist in understanding the workings of a body of tales that is germane to the subject of this thesis but also enable the identification and comprehension of the cultural processes which influenced the development of a literary construct such as the Fairy King itself.

One of the central issues of dealing with a category as polyvalent and diffuse as myth is the problem of definition. It is very difficult to propose a working definition of myth which can fully capture the range of signification implied by the term. A helpful tool to mitigate such a problem is offered by semiotic theory. According to Roland Barthes, myth is not simply an object, a concept, or an idea, but a mode of signification.[87] The basis of myth is always and necessarily linguistic and can only be conveyed by means of a discourse.[88] There are no formal limits to myth, since myth is not defined on the basis of the object of its message but on the basis of its mode of utterance. Barthes proposes a deconstructive analysis of myth in which myth is seen as a semiological system. Building upon the Saussurean tradition of semiological analysis of language (which distinguishes between the acoustic image or the 'signifier,' the concept or the 'signified,' and the word or the 'sign' — the associative link between the signified and the signifier), Barthes reads myth as a second-order semiological system. Myth, argues Barthes, is based upon two semiological systems — a linguistic system (which he calls 'language-object') and a mythic system (which he calls 'metalanguage').[89] The signifier of myth is at once the first term of the mythic system as well as the final term of the linguistic system.[90] On the plane of language, this signifier constitutes 'meaning' whereas on the plane of myth, the signifier constitutes a 'form.' The meaning of myth is complete and self-sufficient; it "postulates a kind of knowledge, a past, a memory, a comparative order of facts, ideas, decisions."[91] When taken over by the form, however, meaning is emptied of itself. The transformation of meaning into form is not an act of suppression of the former but an erasure of historical charge — this is why myth is not rigid and unchangeable, tethered to a particular historical moment but flexible and malleable. The signified or the 'concept' of myth is the motivation which causes the myth to be uttered. The concept reconstitutes a chain of causes and effects,

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[86] However, even as answers are sought for questions devised by ourselves for the purpose of grasping what is, in effect, an extremely diffuse concept, perhaps it is important to remember that by virtue of being a dynamic and mobile sociocultural phenomenon, myth is not amenable to detached, clinical observation of the kind which generates straightforward questions with clear-cut, unambiguous answers. John Warden makes a similar point when he observes that "[t]he ultimate questions about myth distract from its continuing life. […] We should remember that if myth is a language it has a literature as well as a grammar. […] Myth has an immediate importance to us, not just as a static phenomenon to be studied. It is the currency in which our culture is transmitted. To understand this we must be conscious of myth in movement." See Warden, "Introduction," viii.

[87] My discussion of the semiotic bases of myth draws heavily upon Roland Barthes' *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: The Noonday Press, 1972), particularly pages 107–130.

[88] Radcliffe G. Edmonds III terms this 'mythic discourse' and defines it as that mode of communication involved in the telling of particular myths which is distinct from any genre such as epic, tragedy, comedy,

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or philosophical dialogue. The linguistic foundation of myth is in keeping with the etymological root of the Greek word *μῦθος* (*mûthos*) which refers to something told. Edmonds also offers a useful definition of myth which is sufficiently flexible to be adapted to different cultural contexts. According to him, a myth is "a telling of a traditional tale in which the teller shapes the traditional material in response to his context and audience, and in which aspects of the culture's models of the world are selected or rejected by the teller in his crafting of the story according to his view of the significant tensions and issues involved with the narrative." The traditional material of myth comprises motifs (people, places, and things familiar from other stories that have been passed down in the culture) and patterns of action (actions or sequences of actions that are recognisable from one story to another) that are familiar to the audience for whom the myth is composed, and the narrative of myth weaves both together to shape the story and evoke recognition from the audience. See Edmonds III, *Myths of the Underworld Journey*, 4–13. Hans Blumenberg offers a similar definition of myth in his sociological study of myth. According to Blumenberg, "[m]yths are stories that are distinguished by a high degree of constancy in their narrative core and by an equally pronounced capacity for marginal variation. These two characteristics make myths transmissible by tradition: their constancy produces the attraction of recognizing them in artistic or visual representation […] and their variability produces the attraction of trying out new and personal means of presenting them." See Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA & London: MIT Press. 1985), 34.

[89] Myth as a system which is itself constituted by a mythic system is akin to Luhmann's idea that systems can be repeated within themselves. See Luhmann, *Introduction to Systems Theory*, 13. The associative link between myth and language is underscored by Claude Lévi-Strauss who goes so far as to claim that the two are identical: "[M]yth *is* language: to be known, myth has to be told; it is a part of human speech." See Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," *JAF* 68, no. 270 (1955): 430.

[90] That is, the sign of the linguistic system (constituted as the associative total of the signifier and the signified) becomes the signifier of the mythic system.

[91] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 116.

motives and intentions, and through its functioning, a new history is implanted into the myth. The concept embodies a knowledge which is not an abstract, purified essence but rather a confused, shifting mass of associations. The 'signification' of myth is the dynamic interplay of meaning, form, and concept, an interaction in which the focus continually shifts between the meaning and the form, between language-object and metalanguage which is consequently gathered up in the concept.[92] Focussing too much on the form can lead to a kind of literal signification in which the concept dominates without ambiguity whereas concentrating too much on the meaning can lead to an undoing of the signification by magnifying the distortion imposed by the concept. Both contribute to the unmasking or demystification of the myth which ultimately leads to its destruction. To become a reader of myths, says Barthes, it is important to perceive the mythical signifier as a composite whole made of *both* meaning *and* form; doing so "consumes the myth according to the very ends built into its structure" and ensures that "the reader lives the myth as a story at once true and unreal."[93]

Taking recourse to semiotic theory can help to grasp the quintessentially protean nature of myth, to understand how an idea (or a cluster of ideas) achieves both semantic and formal concreteness through the functioning of myth, and how, despite being imbricated within a matrix of cultural processes of change and continuity which are historically informed, myth keeps history at a distance and its contingencies at bay. The emptying of the historical valence of mythical meaning by the form and its consequent alienation by the mythic concept contributes to the infinite adaptability of myth to a variety of cultures and historical circumstances — this is why the Orpheus myth could be repeatedly attuned to the contextual vicissitudes of both the classical Graeco-Roman as well as the post-Christian world. The semiotic structure of myth fits well with Lotman's definition of culture as a system of signs and culture's structural organisation upon the foundations of language. The dynamic functioning of myth as the cyclical interplay of form, meaning, and content is a reflection of culture's own dynamism. Lotman and Uspensky observe that cultural change, associated with epochs of radical socioreligious, political, and economic restructuring, brings with it a related increase in the degree and incidence of semiotic behaviour (examples of which include, among other things, changes in nomenclature, designation, as well as ritual practice).[94] As a semiotic system encoding similar modes of behaviour, myth is also affected by cultural change, a fact which helps to explain why the Orpheus myth was repeatedly chosen for literary treatment through periods of radical cultural realignment brought about by the shift in religious systems from the pre-Christian milieu of Virgil and Ovid to the post-Christian world of Boethius.

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[92] The signifier of myth has a dual character — as meaning, it is full whereas as form, it is empty. When the mythical signifier interacts with the signified, the meaning (which is manifest) is distorted by the concept. This distortion is, however, not an obliteration but a remoulding — Barthes' preferred term is 'alienation.'

[93] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 127.

Semiotic theory can enable us to understand the structure of myth by allowing us to isolate its constituent elements; it can, in other words, help us comprehend (structurally) *what* myth is. However, this still leaves open the questions of *why* myths originate and *how* they are transmitted over time and across discrete cultures. The answers to these pressing (albeit somewhat abstract) questions can be found in sociological theory. In his detailed study of the provenance, nature, functions, and applicability of myth, Hans Blumenberg attempts to highlight the reasons behind the existence of myths. According to Blumenberg, myth is a natural and indispensable outgrowth of the human condition, having been devised by man as a coping mechanism to deal with the anxiety produced by the absolutism of reality.[95] Extenuating circumstances capable of producing fear in man were typically dealt with through flight responses. However, with the change in biotope, it was not always possible to deal with threatening situations by running away. On such occasions, the anxiety generated by the situation had to be rationalised into the more manageable condition of fear, not through experience or knowledge, but through such devices as the substitution of the familiar for the unfamiliar, of explanations for the inexplicable, and of names for the unnameable. These devices form part of the functional apparatus of myth. Myths ensure that things strange and unknown are raised out of their unfamiliarity through naming and made accessible through the use of metaphor and the telling of stories. Stories are told in order to kill both time and fear, a fear that is generated not only through ignorance or lack of knowledge but of what one is not acquainted with.[96] The purpose of mythical storytelling is the elimination of the arbitrariness of the world.[97] Through the telling of stories, myth attempts to distance man from the quality of uncanniness by localising the hearer's standpoint in time in such a way that the fund of the monstrous and the unbearable recedes in relation to him.[98] This strategy of distancing simultaneously achieves the deflection or suspension of questionability. Myths are not engineered to answer questions but to make things unquestionable by relegating, through distance, demands for explanation of phenomena to a position where they are transformed instead into a legitimation of the rejection of such claims.[99] Although externally myths are capable of marginal variation, at their core they display a constancy and durability which facilitates their recurrence over the ages.[100] It is this dual character of myth — core constancy and surface variability — that ensures its survival over the ages across geographical territories in ways that are compatible with changing cultural contexts.[101] The endurance of myth is also, however, a natural corollary of the sociological and biological nature of mankind itself. Myth-making was not only indulged in by primitive man in an attempt to deal with the unfamiliarity of his surroundings. Despite the monumental leaps made by science and technology, conditions continue to exist which generate anxiety, and the impulse to rationalise such anxiety-producing situations through storytelling is a quintessential anthropological urge. As attempts to engage with the problems and obstacles that usually trouble mankind, myths are essential to the human condition; this is why myths have not been discarded with the emergence and consolidation of scientific theory but have continued to persist as accessories to scientific thought.

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[94] Lotman and Uspensky, “Semiotic Mechanism,” 211–212.

[95] Blumenberg uses specific terms to flesh out his theory of the reasons behind the emergence of myths. According to him, man’s essential condition — the state of nature in which his potential power is unknown, unexplored, and untested — is the ‘*status naturalis*.’ The ‘absolutism of reality’ refers to the totality of the conditions which can produce anxiety in the individual. The threshold of such absolutism is the ‘horizon,’ defined as not only the sum of the directions from which one has to be prepared for the appearance of undefined things, but also the sum of the directions to which anticipation of possibilities and reaching out towards them are oriented. Fundamental to the condition of myth-production is, however, the state of ‘anxiety.’ Blumenberg defines anxiety as the “pure state of indefinite anticipation;” as “intentionality of consciousness without an object.” Behaviourally, anxiety manifests itself through panic and paralysis whereas at its maximum limit, it assumes the form of existential anxiety (*Lebensangst*). For a more in-depth discussion of these terms, see Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, 3–9.

[96] Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, 34.

An aspect of human existence over which myth holds particular dominion is man's relations with divinity. One of the ways devised by myth to sublimate the terrors attendant upon the absolutism of reality is to attribute it to the operations of a higher power. This numinous power is characterised by the primary trait of holiness by virtue of its omnipotence, its ability to direct the course of man's fate over which he himself has no sway. Man's lack of control of both the conditions of his existence as well as the trajectories of his own life is thus explained as being in the hands of a superior force, and the terrible mystery of anxiety is reduced in intensity to the more manageable emotions of awe and reverence. Once anxiety has been levelled off, the powers attributed to the numinous are distributed among discrete entities, rituals, and objects.[102] However, at the same time, affairs must be arranged with the superior powers in such a way that their rule over man is not absolute or unchecked, since doing so does not really offer a solution to the original problem — the elimination of anxiety — but merely reshuffles the problem in another direction by offloading responsibility onto an external agent. The superior powers must be 'weakened' through myth-making in such a way that they retain characteristics that are helpful to man without being infallible.[103] Through this mythic strategy of division of powers emerges the genealogies of the gods, their personal histories, and essential characteristics.[104] The figures of the gods are familiarised and made graspable through the ascription, first of animal forms, then of anthropocentric features, and finally through the act of nomenclature.[105] One way in which the gods are distinguished is on the basis of fidelity, reliability, and trustworthiness, and those gods which identify themselves on the basis of the shared principles of the covenant begin to form a pantheon. The intensification of this drive leads to the concentration of these attributes from a group of divinities on to a single divine figure. That is how monotheistic religious systems such as Christianity emerge.[106] In the case of the Greeks, the alienating quality of the world was concentrated into forms that were later translated to the optical realm.[107] The pantheon of the Hellenic gods did not, however, disappear with the emergence and spread of Christianity; paradoxically, they continued to linger under the pressure of Christianity's requirement that they be forgotten. One way to recuperate this paradox was through the practice of othering, by regarding them either as the gods of others — foreign gods — or by theologically explaining them away as demons.[108] I shall have more to say on this later.

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[97] Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, 42–43.

[98] According to Blumenberg, one of the fundamental causal factors of anxiety is the quality of uncanniness. Two of the primary sources of such uncanniness are monsters and transitional forms (part-man, part-beast), phenomena which are perceived as particularly threatening to the human *eidos* (form or figure). See Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, 117. For the most influential standard discussion of the uncanny (*Unheimlich*), see Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, *Volume XVII (1917–1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works* (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1955), 217–256.

[99] Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, 126–127.

[100] Blumenberg calls this the 'iconic constancy' of myth.

[101] Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, 273.

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[102] Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, 62–63.

[103] Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, 125.

[104] The attribution of the absolutism of reality to the numinous and the subsequent compartmentalisation of the numinous into individual gods is regarded by Blumenberg as a transition from the 'Other' to the 'Other *One*,' a constructional leap which is a necessary prelude to physiognomic comprehension of divinity.

[105] The act of naming is of particular significance to the workings of myth. To name something is to make it explicit, an act of concretisation which helps to dispel fear and gain trust. This is why it is not simply enough to devolve the numinous into gods; to flesh them out, nomenclature is essential. A later step in the nomenclative process is the practice of assigning names which reflect the characteristics of the particular deity. There is also a direct correlation between naming and the physical forms of the gods. In the case of the Greeks, the practice of naming gods reached them through the Egyptians and the Pelasgians. The act of naming is also significantly a literary act, which explains why, at least for the Greeks, the torchbearers of this process were the poets rather than the priests. The boundaries between 'religion' and 'literature' are particularly blurred in mythology.

[106] The development of the gods from a pantheon to a unitary entity also marks a shift from the mythical mode of thought to dogmatic theology. For a detailed account of the differences between myth and dogma on the basis of ontology, chronology, as well as spatial and structural arrangement, see Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, 96–97, 125–126, 132, 237.

[107] Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, 14.

Sociological theory can thus offer an angle to explain why myths — particularly myths of the gods — originate. The genealogies of the gods evolve when, unable to bear the anxiety generated by the absolutism of reality, man attempts to rationalise it by attributing it to the workings of a superior force. This power has an abstract form initially — the numinous — but later solidifies, through the assumption of animal forms and subsequently through the process of anthropogenesis, into a pantheon of gods. The durability of myth ensures its persistence and distribution across temporal and spatial constructs which explains the recurrence and similarity of mythic structures between different cultural systems. Anthropologically, the injunction against looking back in the Orpheus myth — in many ways the crux of the legend — seems to be related to the fundamental human anxiety produced by man's inability to know what lies behind him at any given point of time.[109] The myth of Orpheus is a fundamental myth, one which is not related to that which is pre-given but one which remains visible in the end. It is in the nature of fundamental myths to endure through time; they do not simply vanish with the end of the epoch in which they appear but rather work to challenge the succeeding epochs to satisfy the needs that it had aroused.[110] This is why the Orpheus myth — and with it the figure of Pluto/Dis — lasted well into the Middle Ages, albeit in different forms.

The functional impulse of myth — to sublimate the anxiety generated by the absolutism of reality — can also be viewed within the schema of system evolution as theorised by Luhmann. The absolutism of reality that Blumenberg talks about is comparable to the complexity that acts as a trigger for system evolution. Through the step of restabilisation, boundary lines are drawn by the system and complexity is externalised to the zone of indeterminacy which lies outside the boundary. The functional strategy of myth to externalise anxiety is akin to such restabilisation, and the demarcation of boundaries can be paralleled with the sociological drive which led to the creation and organisation of divinity. Within the boundary lay events explicable as natural processes whereas those which could not be so rationalised were explained as part of the inscrutable and mysterious workings of divinity. The transition from polytheistic pantheons of deities to a monotheistic, omnipotent God that Blumenberg ascribes to the unifying and assimilationist tendency characteristic of man as an anthropological figure is an issue also taken up by Luhmann. Luhmann claims that the social restructuring brought about by the movement from arable farming to urban planning and city building reflected not just the increase in complexity which is an indispensable accompaniment to socioeconomic development (thereby setting the stage for evolution) but also functioned as a kind of disciplinary mechanism. This regulatory anthropological drive was mirrored in the domain of religion where the arbitrariness of behaviour of the gods was limited and disciplined in favour of a single god who would act as universal observer and judge.[111] The Luhmannian formulation adds a necessary corrective to the somewhat simplistic vision of Blumenberg by situating intra-religious change within a wider matrix of socioeconomic change and cultural evolution. It is important to remember that the shift from paganism to Christianity also coincided with civic and socio-political restructuring from the Greek *polis* to the urban planning of Republican Rome and the consequent restructuring along Christian lines initiated by Constantine and continued in the post-Constantinian era.[112] With shifting currents of development in societal structure, economic organisation, and religious affiliation, the conceptualisation and treatment of myth (itself situated within a dynamic semiotic cultural system) also changed, a pattern which can clearly be discerned in the changing face of the Orpheus myth from the detached formalism and use as an embellishing device in Virgil to its sentimental and pathetic recasting under Boethian philosophical reformulation.

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[108] Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, 141.
[109] Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, 175.
[110] Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, 187–188.

The structural construction of myth as a semiotic system based upon the dynamic interplay of form, meaning, and content makes it a subset of culture; functionally, its sociological role as a mechanism to externalise the anxiety produced by the absolutism of reality parallels the role of evolution within the sociocultural system which occurs (as Luhmann contends) in order to mitigate the difference in complexity between the system and its environment. The semiotic structure of myth is a necessary response to its functional purpose, and as cultures and societies evolve through processes of economic, political, civic, and religious development, their mythological corpora evolve in tandem. Just as in a semiotic system (of the kind Lotman discerns in the domain of culture), myth is also constructed as a semiosphere whereby permanent, unchanging structures are located in the centre while shifting, protean quasi-structures are ranged on the periphery. The transitory nature of these peripheral quasi-structures ensures the applicability of myth to individual historical contexts while its core constancy guarantees its durability across space and time. Thus, the myth of Orpheus, unchanged in essentials but adapted to a new socioreligious and cultural context via subtle modifications of specific tropes and motifs, could travel from the classical, pre-Christian milieu of the Graeco-Roman world to the fully Christianised society of the fourteenth century where it appeared in the Middle English romance of *Sir Orfeo*. One of the most significant modifications to the classical myth worked by this literary product of the Middle Ages was to substitute the figure of Dis/Pluto for a fairy monarch. However, before making the leap from the literary culture of the classical world to that of medieval England, it is important to consider the status of this figure within the context of the British Isles in general and insular literature in particular. The second chapter is devoted to an examination of this topic.

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[111] Luhmann, *Theory of Society,* 288–289.

[112] For detailed studies, see Kenneth Royce Moore, *Plato, Politics and a Practical Utopia: Social Constructivism and Civic Planning in the* Laws (London & New York: Continuum, 2012), Penelope J. E. Davies, *Architecture and Politics in Republican Rome* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), and Noel Lenski, *Constantine and the Cities: Imperial Authority and Civic Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

CHAPTER TWO

A PYGMY OF LOW STATURE: TRANSMISSION AND TRANSFORMATION IN THE BRITISH ISLES

The first chapter looked at the conceptualisation of the figure of Hades/Pluto in the Orphic legends of classical Greece and its subsequent reformulation as Dis in both Augustan Rome as well as post-Christian Italy. An examination of the classical provenance, together with a discussion of the nature and functions of myth, was necessary in order to understand the medievalisation of the Orpheus myth in the fourteenth-century romance of *Sir Orfeo*, which is the subject of the following chapter. Looking at the pagan roots of the medieval Fairy King and contending that the ruler of Fairyland emerged out of the mythography of classical Greece and Rome, however, tells only part of the story. In order to comprehend the *Orfeo*-poet's substitution of a fairy figure for a pagan god, it is also important to examine the sociohistorical and cultural milieu within which the medieval English poet was writing, for the British Isles had its own body of indigenous, insular mythology within which existed a similar figure who was not only roughly contemporaneous with Dis/Pluto but also shared certain traits in common with this deity from the classical world. This chapter is accordingly devoted to a discussion of the native mythographic corpus (commonly referred to under the bracket term 'Celtic') of the British Isles and to the figure of the Lord of the Celtic Otherworld, before moving on to an examination of the figure of Midir, the otherworldly ruler of the *síd*-mounds of Brí Léith and fairy lover of Étaín in the medieval Irish saga *Tochmarc Étaíne* (*The Wooing of Étaín*) as well as the Pygmy King in the tale of Herla in Walter Map's *De nugis curialium* (*Courtiers' Trifles*). A discussion of these two texts will pave the way for a detailed examination of the complex of insular traditions and ideas which influenced medieval conceptions of fairies and, by extension, the *Orfeo*-poet's conception of the Fairy King and Fairyland, in Chapter 3.

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The conception and characterisation of the figure of Midir in *Tochmarc Étaíne*, conjectured to have been composed sometime around the seventh or eighth century, seems to hark back to the mythography and insular folklore of the Celtic lands.[1] Occupying an ontologically interstitial space whereby he is both supernatural being and euhemerised hero at once, the character of Midir shows the influence of indigenous Celtic deities even as it anticipates the development of creatures who will eventually come to be labelled as 'fairies' in the British Isles. However, a detailed analysis of Midir will have to be preceded by a discussion of the mythological corpus and religious traditions of the Celtic world as well as by a contextualisation of the (relative) singularity of the Irish mythographic tradition. This discussion will also consider the possibility of existence of continuities and overlaps between the mythographies of the Graeco-Roman and the Celtic worlds, thereby suggesting not only that the Orpheus myth could have potentially travelled to the British Isles, but also that the Lord of the Celtic Otherworld — a figure which Midir seems to be an approximation of — was the insular cognate of Dis/Pluto.

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[1] The textual history of *Tochmarc Étaíne* is enormously complicated, with different manuscripts preserving different sections of the story. For an account of the tale's manuscript history, see Osborn Bergin and R. I. Best, "Tochmarc Étaíne," *Ériu* 12 (1938): 137–141; for a brief summary, see T. M.

THE CELTIC PEOPLES AND THE CASE OF IRELAND:

Moving away from mainland Europe to reach the British Isles, a different body of mythology is encountered, formed by the cultural efforts of a different set of peoples and shaped under different socio-religious and historical circumstances. The appellation 'Celtic' is usually used to refer to the inhabitants of this part of the world as well as their practices and beliefs, although the proper application of the term is linguistic rather than sociological.[2] Modern scholarship has been cautious in its application of the term 'Celtic' except in relation to people who are known to have called themselves 'Celts.' 'Celtic' as a scholarly term is also used as a convenient shorthand to refer to the well-defined group of Indo-European languages that also includes Irish and Welsh. It is, however, important to note that whereas the speakers of the Celtic languages certainly shared common elements of belief, cultural features were also shared with non-Celtic speakers in north-western Europe, thereby problematising the idea of a common Celtic or insular heritage.[3] Although scholars continue

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Charles-Edwards, "*Tochmarc Étaíne*: a literal interpretation," in *Ogma: Essays in Celtic Studies in honour of Próinséas Ní Chatháin*, eds. Michael Richter and Jean-Michel Picard (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002), 165–166.

[2] The area extends from Ireland and Spain in the west and Scotland in the north to the Czech Republic in the east and northern Italy in the south, with forays beyond Europe into Asia Minor, according to evidence gleaned from ancient literary sources, archaeological investigation, and linguistic study. See Miranda J. Green, "Introduction: Who were the Celts?" in *The Celtic World*, ed. Miranda J. Green (Oxford: Routledge, 1995), 3–7.

[3] Although I use the terms 'Celt' and 'Celtic' in keeping with standard scholarly practice, perhaps, as Patrick Sims-Williams points out, 'Indo-European' or 'indigenous' would be a more appropriate umbrella term. See Sims-Williams, *Irish Influence on Medieval Welsh Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4–8.

to be divided in their opinion of what constitutes the Celtic world, what is known with relative certainty is that classical sources reported how the civilisations of Greece and Rome encountered the *Keltoi* (or the *Galli*, as the Romans called them) within the context of political and territorial expansion.[4] The Hellenic world also interacted with the Celts through the medium of trade, particularly through the city of Massalia (present-day Marseille) which, by virtue of its geographical position and status as trading intermediary, was influenced by a blend of Hellenic, Roman, and Celtic cultural characteristics.[5] Celtic contacts with the Roman world are, however, of greater cultural significance in view of the pervasiveness of Latin influence on the Celts, a process which has ubiquitously come to be known as 'romanization.' Visible traces of this Romano-Celtic interaction, found not only in literature and art but also in the emergence during the third and second centuries BCE of urban centres stretching from southern Gaul to northern Britain, have led Barry C. Burnham to note that "interaction with the Roman world, directly or indirectly, before the conquest, via diplomacy and trade, provided a vital infrastructure upon which romanization could be built."[6] Through trade and military routes, the Celtic world thus came into contact with Greece and Rome, an interaction which was not simply economic and political, but also social and religious.[7]

This cultural intermingling had a decisive impact on the religious beliefs of the Celts which began to incorporate elements of Graeco-Roman paganism. The evidence for such religious assimilation, provided by sources both literary (accounts of classical writers) and archaeological (inscriptions and epigraphy), is, however, theoretically problematic. This is because classical (especially Roman) writers tended to view Celtic religious practices through the prism of their own indigenous belief and thereby grafted many of their own assumptions and prejudices upon the pagan Celts. Almost all of our knowledge about the gods of the Iron Age peoples has been derived from the writings of the Romans and is therefore necessarily one-dimensional. This strategy of *interpretatio Romana* — the Roman cultural project of identifying foreign or unknown gods with those of Greece and Rome —

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[4] For a concise account of early Greek and Roman interactions with the Celts, see David Rankin, "The Celts through Classical Eyes," in *The Celtic World*, 21–33. For a more detailed account of the precise references to the Celts in classical literature, see Rankin, *Celts and the Classical World* (London: Routledge, 1996), 1–33.

[5] Rankin, *Celts and the Classical World*, 42.

[6] Barry C. Burnham, "Celts and Romans: Towards a Romano-Celtic society," in *The Celtic World*, 129.

[7] The percolation of motifs from the Latin world into Celtic religious traditions is of particular importance to my study, especially for the representation of a figure like Midir who seems to have been a specific literary expression of a body of ideas associated with the conception of indigenous divinities and the divine pantheon of pre-Christian Ireland.

was typically practised by high-ranking members of the Roman army and civil administration. The Celtic world's encounter with Rome did not happen on an equal footing. The Celtic peoples were politically subjugated by a militarily superior force, and the resultant amalgamation of religious ideas occurred within a matrix of unequal power relations. The reshaping of indigenous divinities was thus a 'controlling strategy,' influenced as much by reasons of political expediency as it was by the forcible erasure of cultural difference exercised by a dominating power upon a colonised nation.[8] Archaeological sources too are not entirely reliable because the majority of the epigraphic and iconographic evidence dates from the Romano-Celtic rather than the free Celtic (that is, pre-Roman) period. These facts should not, however, detract us from making observations about Celtic religion; much valuable information can still be obtained bearing in mind the proviso that the evidence available is both incidental and subjective. Miranda J. Green in particular believes that although the basic principles underlying the conception of divinities — that is, the mythic substratum which served as the foundation of the religious imagination — were shared by both Roman and Celtic cultures, the gods of the Celtic world found physical representation only once it had imbibed the traditions of Mediterranean iconography.[9] Green's observation about the influence of classical divinities on Celtic religious iconography seems to support my contention that the Celts incorporated elements from the divine pantheon of the Graeco-Roman world, a pantheon which included, among other deities, the figure of Dis/Pluto.

The present state of knowledge thus seems to indicate that as the two worlds (Celtic and Graeco-Roman) encountered each other through martial and mercantile contacts, the native faith was modified as new beliefs were exchanged and assimilated to the old religion. This modification was less of a replacement than a fusion, as parallels and congruencies were noticed between the different strands of socio-religious and cultural practice. In the case of the British Isles, though it is difficult to accurately determine the date of arrival of the Celts, archaeological evidence seems to suggest the presence of a Celtic population in the island by the third century BCE.[10] While the interpenetration of ideas and traditions between the religious systems of the Graeco-Roman and the Celtic worlds can help to explain strands of continuity which persisted in insular literary works even in the Middle

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[8] Jane Webster, "A Dirty Window on the Iron Age? Recent Developments in the Archaeology of Pre-Roman Celtic Religion," in *Understanding Celtic Religion: Revisiting the Pagan Past*, eds. Katja Ritari and Alexandra Bergholm (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2015), 136.

[9] Miranda J. Green, "The Gods and the Supernatural," in *The Celtic World*, 466.

[10] Rankin, *Celts and the Classical World*, 12.

Ages (thereby accounting for a work such as Map's *De nugis*), it is important to bear in mind that Ireland, the putative place of origin of *Tochmarc Étaíne*, constituted a somewhat distinct linguistic and socioreligious subset of the British Isles. As noted earlier, the term 'Celtic' is more properly used in a philological rather than a sociocultural sense to denote the well-defined group of Indo-European languages found within the insular milieu of Britain, a group which included the Gaelic and Brittonic vernaculars. The idea of Ireland as 'Celtic' is a relatively recent phenomenon and can be traced back to "sixteenth and seventeenth-century perceptions of the original affinity between the Gaelic and Brittonic languages on the one hand and, on the other, of the linguistic and cultural similarities between the early Britons and the Continental peoples known to the ancient world as Celts."[11] Moreover, Ireland occupies the unique position of never having been politically subjugated by the Romans.

There has, however, been a tendency to exaggerate the extent to which Ireland was regarded as an isolated and discrete cultural unit, and the singularity of the Irish literary tradition has sometimes been overemphasised. Despite its political independence, the country did come into contact with Rome directly through the proselytising efforts of the missionaries Patrick and Palladius in the early fifth century CE and indirectly by means of trade through the intermediation of Britain as its closest neighbour.[12] Although there is scant evidence of the survival of manuscripts, it is reasonable to conjecture that texts from the continent reached Ireland through routes both commercial and ecclesiastical, a transmission which undoubtedly encouraged the development of (among other kinds) classical learning on the island.[13] Irish scholars' engagement with classical material, although initially limited, was to receive an unprecedented boost from the ninth century onwards, a development encouraged both by the emergent literary practice of saga-writing as well as by the attempt on the part of authors to construct an Irish national lineage which would parallel the illustrious genealogies of the classical Greeks and Romans. With an upsurge in the composition of sagas and vernacular historiographies and mythographies on Irish topics, scholars were motivated to try their hands at adapting foreign material.[14] The adaptation of Greek and Latin classics into narratives written in Middle Irish was also an attempt to configure Irish identity politics along literary and genealogical lines, a plurilinguistic project which itself mirrored the cultural ambitions of the Romans several centuries earlier to mould their self-image in the fashion of Hellenic Greece.[15] Thus, while it is certainly true that the existence of the Gaelic vernacular as well as the country's political independence from Rome gave Ireland a certain distinctiveness of status, it is also true that the religious, cultural, and literary practices of the Irish were influenced by developments elsewhere on the continent. The combination of ecclesiastical and secular learning (especially the knowledge of classical texts and authors) in Irish literary centres testifies to the existence of a shared sociocultural tradition which variously imbibed the tenets of Graeco-Roman paganism, indigenous mythology, and insular Christianity, and this common cultural domain functioned as the conduit through which ideas (and, by extension, figures such as Dis/Pluto of the Orpheus myth) were translated into the literary milieu of the British Isles.

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[11] Sims-Williams, *Irish Influence*, 4.

[12] For details about the Irish acquisition of *romanitas* supported by such archaeological evidence as the discovery of votive offerings, amphorae, vessels, and numismatic remains, see Jonathan M. Wooding, "Trade as a factor in the transmission of texts between Ireland and the continent in the sixth and seventh centuries," in *Ireland and Europe in the early Middle Ages: texts and transmission*, eds. Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002), 14–25 and Edel Bhreathnach, *Ireland in the medieval world, AD400–1000: Landscape, kingship and religion* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2014), 152–156.

[13] Wooding argues in favour of a directly proportional relationship between trade and textual transmission in his essay, a line of reasoning with which I find myself in agreement. On the unavailability of medieval Irish manuscripts of classical authors acting as negative evidence of classical influence, Brent Miles adds the helpful rejoinder that the "absence of surviving medieval Irish manuscripts of classical authors says nothing about the deficiencies of medieval Irish libraries. Their absence speaks only of the deficiencies of our own." See Miles, *Heroic Saga and Classical Epic in Medieval Ireland* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011), 21–22.

The cultural distance between classical Graeco-Roman antiquity and medieval Ireland was bridged through a combination of cross-reading and comparative writing. Classical source texts were adapted not only to the Irish language but also to Irish narrative norms through a sustained process of what Ralph O'Connor refers to as 'Gaelicization,' whereas indigenous history and legend were subjected to 'classicizing' techniques learned from the reading of classical literature as well as late-antique and early medieval commentaries, mythographic handbooks, and *florilegia*. In addition, equivalences and points of similarity between pagan Graeco-Roman antiquity and Ireland's mythic past were noted and exploited by authors, with the result that there emerged texts which were a hybrid of native and foreign traditions, at once legendary and pseudo-historical, quintessentially Irish in content yet bearing emphatic Graeco-Roman echoes.[16]

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[14] Ralph O'Connor, "Irish Narrative Literature and the Classical Tradition, 900–1300," in *Classical Literature and Learning in Medieval Irish Narrative*, ed. Ralph O'Connor (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2014), 9.

[15] Pádraic Moran, "Greek Dialectology and the Irish Origin Story," in *Early Medieval Ireland and Europe: Chronology, Contacts, Scholarship*, eds. Pádraic Moran and Immo Warntjes (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 508–509.

[16] O'Connor, "Irish Narrative Literature," 11.

TRANSLATION AS A METAPHOR FOR THE TRANSMISSION OF IDEAS:

In the previous section, I endeavoured to demonstrate that the Celts might have known about Dis/Pluto through their relations (mediated both by trade as well as military conquest) with the Graeco-Roman world, a cross-cultural interaction which has not only left lingering traces in the literary accounts of classical writers, but can also be retrospectively reconstructed through the archaeological investigation of extant material remains. However, a lot of the conclusions drawn have necessarily been conjectural in nature. For cultures and epochs separated from us by vast labyrinths of time, direct, unambiguous evidence is often notoriously difficult to obtain; where evidence is available, it is often incomplete, fragmentary, or distorted in nature, with the result that scholars have to often guess at conclusions which are most logically consistent with the information available at hand. This is not to say that such conclusions are worthless or deserve no merit — in cases where tangible material evidence is lacking and/or inaccessible, conjecture will have to do. However, a useful tool with which to bypass the historicist bias on evidence as the only means of arriving at conclusions can be found by looking into sociological theory. A helpful metaphor for the transference of ideas across spatial, temporal, geopolitical, and cultural boundaries can be found in the concept of translation, especially in the way the term is employed in the fields of ethnography and social anthropology.

In its simplest, most obvious sense, the primary meaning of the term ‘translation’ is linguistic where it usually refers to the act of mediating between different language systems by an individual interlocutor (or groups of interlocutors, called translators) or an institution for the purpose of exchanging ideas and mutual comprehension.[17] However, the recent critical turn in the fields of both linguistic and literary theory has expanded the semantic range of the term to include within its remit not only the question of language but also a variety of other applications. In fact, translation is now properly viewed as a complex, translingual act of communication tasked with the transcoding of cultural material.[18] Etymologically, the word ‘translation’ means ‘carried from one place to another,’ a kind of border-crossing that does not necessarily have to be limited to the linguistic field, but one which can transcend the barriers erected by the passage of time, spatial constructs, as well as sociocultural systems. Viewed in this way, a work can be said to be ‘translated’ when it has been displaced, transported, or carried across contexts, even when it is read in its original language by someone who belongs to another country or another culture and follows another discipline.[19]

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[17] Scholarship on translation studies is vast. For accessible overviews of the field, see Susan Bassnett, *Translation Studies*, 3rd ed. (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), Jeremy Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies* (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), and Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation*, 2nd ed. (London & New York: Routledge, 2008). Perhaps the most famous theorisation of the linguistic bases of translation was offered by Roman Jakobson who distinguished between three types of translation: interlingual (or translation proper), intralingual (or rewording), and intersemiotic (or transmutation). See Jakobson, “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation,” in *On Translation*, ed. R. A. Brower (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), 232–239.

A particular subset of this broader domain of translation is the concept of ‘cultural translation,’ a term which has especial currency in the fields of ethnography and social anthropology. Narrowly defined, cultural translation (as opposed to ‘linguistic’ or ‘grammatical’ translation) refers to those practices of literary translation that mediate cultural difference, convey extensive cultural background, or seek to represent another culture via the act of translation.[20] Viewed this way, cultural translation becomes less of a translation *strategy* and more of a *perspective* on translations, one that focuses on their emergence and impact as components in the ideological traffic between language groups. The semiotic structure of culture (what Lotman terms the ‘semiosphere’) implies that culture can be defined as a construct, an agreement, a matter of negotiation, a contract which must consequently always be ratified, confirmed, and contractually renewed. Conceived as a semiosphere, culture crucially involves the concept of translation within its dynamic operations, which thereby becomes a permanent process of not only collective hermeneutic recoding and readjustment (‘assimilation’) but also of potential erratic change (‘accommodation’) of the world.[21] Viewed as a system (in the sense of Luhmann’s formulation of the term), culture can be considered to be built upon foundations provided by communications, operations which are themselves built upon language.[22] Interactions between the communicative apparatuses of systems can thus be regarded as acts of translation, translation being (to use Douglas Howland's term) a complex act of communication.[23] The quintessentially linguistic nature of communication together with the construction of culture as a communicative system whose mode of functioning parallels that of translation itself illustrates that culture, language, and translation do not exist as untethered, floating categories but as a complex molecular structure with interconnected nuclei.

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[18] Douglas Howland, “The Predicament of Ideas in Culture: Translation and Historiography,” *History and Theory* 42, no. 1 (2003): 45–46.

[19] J. Hillis Miller, “Border Crossings, Translating Theory: Ruth,” in *The Translatability of Cultures: Figurations of the Space Between*, eds. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1996), 207. Hillis Miller notes the etymological parallel between both ‘translation’ and ‘metaphor,’ characterising translation as “a species of extended metaphorical equivalent in another language of an ‘original’ text.”

[20] The distinctions drawn between ‘cultural’ and ‘linguistic’ translation are for the purpose of theoretical convenience rather than a practical illustration since both the domain of culture and the act of translation have overlaps with the construction and use of language. The correspondence between translation and language is self-explanatory; the relationship between culture and language is seen as an essential component of their historical functioning. Lotman regarded the structural organisation of the world around man as the primary task of culture, a task which culture can only accomplish with the assistance and mediation of language. For a discussion of these views, see Lotman and Uspensky, “Semiotic Mechanism,” 213.

[21] “Als Semiosphäre gedacht, ist ‘Kultur’ mithin ein Konstrukt, eine Übereinkunft, Sache der Verhandlung, ein Kontrakt; und als solches ist sie stets neu zu ratifizieren, zu bestätigen,

More generally, however, cultural translation can be simply defined as a translation between discrete cultural contexts.[24] One of the most potent workings of such cross-cultural translation occurs in the domain of religion within the context of the translatability of gods and deities between different religious systems.[25] As one of the most important and characteristic components of culture, when different sociocultural systems encounter one

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kontrakterneuernd weiterzuführen. […] Übersetzens als eines permanenten Prozesses kollektiver hermeneutischer Rekodierung und Readjustierung [‘Assimilation’] — aber auch potentieller sprunghafter Veränderung [‘Akkommodation’] — von ‘Welt’.” See Andreas Mahler, “‘Übersetzen’ als Kulturprozess: Thesen zur Dynamis gemachter Welten,” *Anglia* 134, no. 4 (2016): 668–682.

[22] Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, 264–267.

[23] See footnote 18.

[24] See the entry on ‘cultural translation’ in the *Routledge Encyclopedia on Translation Studies*, eds. Mona Baker and Gabriela Saldanha, 2nd ed. (Oxford & New York: Routledge, 2009), 67–70. The concept of cultural translation which, by virtue of the nature and construction of the field has been an issue of particular concern to the discipline of ethnography, is not without its criticisms. In a landmark essay, Talal Asad pointed out that (ethnographic) cultural translation usually takes place in contexts marked by unequal power relations and the translating act performed by the ethnographer-translator is thus “inevitably enmeshed in conditions of power.” See Asad, “The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology,” in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, eds. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley & Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1986), 141–164. The textual bias — the view, held by such critics as Clifford Geertz, that cultures are like complex, palimpsistic texts capable of being ‘read’ — that colours much of anthropological and ethnographic study has also been called into question by such critics as Gísli Pálsson. For the former view, see Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973) and for the latter line of argument, see Pálsson, “Introduction: beyond boundaries,” in *Beyond Boundaries: Understanding, Translation and Anthropological Discourse*, ed. Gísli Pálsson (Oxford & Providence: Berg, 1993). Cultural translation is also an important concept in postcolonial theory where it is variously viewed as the alternation of colonised and colonising discourses leading to hybridity in language and cultural identity as well as an ongoing, dynamic process of intermixing and mutual contamination between cultures. For illustrations of each view, see Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994) and Michaela Wolf, “The Third Space in Postcolonial Representation,” in *Changing the Terms: Translating in the Postcolonial Era*, eds. Sherry Simon and Paul St-Pierre (Ottawa, Canada: University of Ottawa Press, 2000), 127–145 respectively.

[25] For an overview of different arguments tackling the question of the interpenetration of religion and translation, see the essays contained in *Translating Religion*, eds. Anita Houck and Mary Doak (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013).

another in contexts which can range from commercial and economic to political and military, there is usually a concomitant impact on the religious beliefs of both cultures. This kind of religiously-orientated cultural translation crucially involves the notion of 'translatability,' generally defined as involving specific equations or identifications of deities across cultures and the larger recognition of the deities of other cultures in connection to one's own pantheon of divinities.[26] The centrality of religion as a promoter of intercultural translatability has been intensively studied by Jan Assmann who has noted the practice of equating comparable deities across cultures, particularly within the context of the religious systems of the Ancient Near East.[27] Hailing this inter-religious translatability as one of "the major cultural achievements of the ancient world," Assmann observes how, despite external differences between ancient cultures — differences of language, nomenclature, iconography, ritual, and so on — there were some fundamental similarities in their formulations of divinities as well as elements of religious belief. According to Assmann, this essential commonality makes religion a powerful counterfoil to the process of 'pseudo-speciation.' Borrowing the term from the psychologist Erik H. Erikson who used it to refer to the formation of artificial sub-groups within the same biological species, Assmann applies 'pseudo-speciation' to denote the process of cultural differentiation in the human world. Although the creation of a unique cultural identity — the usual outcome of cultural pseudo-speciation — is not necessarily a bad thing, at its most harmful extreme it can result in the elaboration of absolute strangeness, isolation, avoidance, otherisation, and even abomination.[28] However, such effects can be mitigated by factors promoting intercultural communication and translation. One such factor was the establishment of political and commercial relations between cultures through trade and foreign policy. According to Assmann, cross-religious translation (which included the practice of translating foreign pantheons) as a corrective to cultural pseudo-speciation must be regarded within the context of this general emergence of a common world with integrated networks of commercial, political, and cultural contact.[29] Assmann distinguishes between three main types of religiously-orientated cultural translation — syncretistic translation (or ‘cosmotheistic monotheism’) in which different divinities are not only translated into each other but into a third and overarching form which forms a kind of common background; assimilatory or competitive translation in which divinities are translated into a dominating language or cultural system; and mutual translation in which divinities are translated on the principle of mutuality or reciprocity within exchange networks developed in the context of international law and commerce.[30]

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[26] Mark S. Smith, *God in Translation: Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse in the Biblical World* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 6. A broader definition of the term is offered by Wolfgang Iser who views translatability as "an umbrella concept that allows us to inspect the interpenetration of different cultures and intracultural levels without necessarily organizing these encounters." See Iser, "Coda to the Discussion," in *The Translatability of Cultures*, 295.

[27] My subsequent discussion of Assmann is primarily based on his illuminating essay "Translating Gods: Religion as a Factor of Cultural (Un)Translatability," in *The Translatability of Cultures*, 25–36. Assmann writes that the Babylonians were the first to equate distinct deities on the basis of their common functional definition or cosmic manifestation, a method which he terms "theological onomasiology." Onomasiology aims to discover how a given unit of meaning is expressed in different languages, and is therefore necessarily cross-cultural and interlingual.

[28] Assmann, "Translating Gods," 27.

The Luhmannian concept of system evolution can be applied to explain the rationale behind cross-religious translation. According to Luhmann, the function of religion (much like what Blumenberg contended in the case of myth) is to externalise anxiety about the unknown through the demarcation of an ‘unmarked space,’ an impulse which is shared by the evolutionary process which likewise attempts (through the step of restabilisation) to externalise incompatible structures resulting from system complexity by drawing up boundary lines.[31] Within an intra-systemic level, the difference in complexity between system and environment required to trigger the process of evolution can be compared to the process of cultural pseudo-speciation. Just as evolution occurs (through the trifold process of variation, selection, and restabilisation) to mitigate the imbalance in complexity between system and environment and is triggered by factors which are rooted in a specific historical context, religious translation also functions as a means of combating cultural pseudo-speciation and is facilitated by distinct networks of political, economic, and sociocultural relations. Within the schema outlined by Luhmann, the act of (religious) translation itself approximates the role played in the evolutionary process by symbolically generalized communication media. As a specific example of such selection media, cross-religious translation thus remedies the differentiation brought about by cultural pseudo-speciation (variation) and restabilises the religious system in favour of either a new syncretistic divine pantheon, an assimilationist system in which one sociocultural entity predominates, or a symbiotic structure characterized by mutual transference and sharing of attributes.

Assmann also observes how such intercultural, cross-religious translation in late antiquity was facilitated through the medium of Hellenism.[32] Distinguishing Hellenism from

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[29] Assmann, “Translating Gods,” 28.
[30] Assmann, “Translating Gods,” 34–36.
[31] Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, 139.
[32] In this postulation, Assmann builds upon the work of G. W. Bowersock who regarded Hellenism as a medium rather than a message; as a bracket term encompassing language, thought, mythology, and

Hellenisation (which would imply the erasure of cultural and religious difference through the overarching and forcible imposition of Greek culture), Assmann points out how Greek — both the language as well as the cultural heritage — functioned as a common semiotic system for late antique religious culture which found in Hellenism a new way of giving voice to local tradition and indigenous practice.[33] Through the mediating influence of Hellenism, a new kind of religious and cultural cross-fertilisation was achieved which can be described as 'syncretism.' Syncretism implies the fusing of cultural elements in such a way that a new varnish is added to pre-existing traditions and conditions without necessarily altering or demolishing their original appearance.[34] When applied to the domain of religion, syncretism would imply the merging of religious practice through either the positive identification of two or more gods or the tendency to mix different cults through the coalescing of symbols unique to particular deities or both.[35] In a discussion of religious syncretism as evidenced in iconographic representation, Moshe Barasch points out how a particular image or sculpture, its shape unchanged or only slightly modified, could be viewed in different ways by different cultures. A figure, viewed in a certain way by one religious culture, will be seen through an entirely different set of customs, practices, and traditions by the adherents of a different religion, even when there is no outward difference in form. This kind of semiotic transfer requires only a shift in reading and entails a 'tilting' or 'reversal' of meaning while the form remains unchanged. The tilting or reversible image of religious iconography is thus, according to Barasch, the consequence of a perspectival shift brought about by a change in audience and context rather than the formal constitution of the figure.[36]

The transference of myths (such as that of Orpheus), ideas (about death, afterlife, burial practice, and the jurisdiction of the gods), and figures (in particular, the pagan god of the

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images "that constituted an extraordinarily flexible medium of both cultural and religious expression." See Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 7.

[33] Assmann, "Translating Gods," 33–34.

[34] Assmann, "Translating Gods," 34.

[35] Moshe Barasch, "Visual Syncretism: A Case Study," in *The Translatability of Cultures*, 37.

[36] Barasch, "Visual Syncretism," 39. Barasch distinguishes between two categories of syncretistic images — the 'manifest' image and the 'tilting' or 'reversible' image. In the manifest image, details of cultural and religious affiliation are made unambiguously apparent, and for an accurate reading of such an image the audience must be well-versed in the religious trends of the time. The tilting or reversible image is, however, deliberately overlain with ambiguity so that its interpretation depends more upon the cultural attitudes of the spectator. By choosing to focus on certain aspects at the expense of others, the spectator can selectively deconstruct the tilting or reversible image which will accordingly assume a completely new form in his/her creative imagination as opposed to its actual material form. For a detailed discussion, see Barasch, "Visual Syncretism," 52–53.

Underworld) from the Graeco-Roman to the Celtic world can be better understood with the application of translation theory, both the concept of cultural translation as well as, more specifically, cultural translatability in the sphere of religion. Translation is an apt metaphor to describe the kind of cross-cultural journey undertaken by the figure of Dis/Pluto that I have charted in the preceding sections, not only because of its etymological significance (translation as a kind of border-crossing) but also in view of recent critical developments in the field of translation studies which have contributed to an expansion of the discipline from its former purely linguistic contours to its present polyvalent, protean structure. As an instance of cultural translation, the Graeco-Roman Dis/Pluto may be said to have been *translated* into the Celtic world where it subsequently appeared in textual culture in a slightly modified form. This kind of divine translatability also occurred within the context of mercantile contact (trade relations between the Celts and Greeks) and political arbitration (the Celtic world was militarily subjugated by the Romans), a cross-cultural transaction between distinct political, economic, and socio-religious systems in which Greek language and Hellenic heritage played a central part (the moulding of Celtic, particularly Irish, literary culture along Roman lines which had itself been modelled on Greek exemplars). Mark S. Smith has observed how the Graeco-Roman world in particular witnessed an unprecedented proliferation in the utilisation of translatability as a tool of religious typology, aided primarily by the increased mobility of people occasioned by such factors as the creation of new libraries and the expansion of existing libraries together with the employment of scholarly staff, the practice of tutelage with the elaboration of the scribal curriculum (people were hired as tutors for kings and princes), and the greater permeability of borders territorial and political.[37] Although translatability of divinities was not a unique achievement of the Graeco-Roman world, having existed at least as early as the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age, in the Graeco-Roman period translatability was built into the very fabric of cultural discourse, appearing in multilingual texts and treatises, blessings and curses, historiographical writing, as well as philosophical tracts. Graeco-Roman translatability saw the passage from the implicit interpretation of deities characteristic of earlier periods to the explicit translation of divinities in which older, indigenous information about deities was correlated with newer methods of interpretation.[38] This type of Graeco-Roman translatability was transferred on to the Celtic world when the two cultures encountered each other within networks both commercial and political, a form of cultural translation that arranged itself according to assimilationist principles. This inter-religious cultural translation was at once horizontal — taking place across contemporaneous cultures — as well as vertical — having taken place through time — and thereby occupies the distinction of being simultaneously synchronic and diachronic in character.[39] The outcome of such translation practices (of which the *interpretatio Romana* discussed in the previous section is an example) was the emergence of hybrid, syncretistic figures which incorporated elements of the dominating religious culture even as they preserved aspects of their original identity. The figure approximately known as the Lord of the Celtic Otherworld (being a Celticised version of Dis/Pluto) may be regarded as an example of this representational class. Indeed, this Graeco-Roman god of the Underworld turned into a quasi-divine, quasi-legendary otherworldly being of ambiguous ontological status in Celtic literary culture can properly be regarded as a tilting or reversible figure in the manner of Barasch's formulation, one which retained extrinsic formal similarities even as it gave rise to new modes of interpretation by virtue of having been transposed to a different audience and context.

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[37] Smith, *God in Translation*, 261–266.

[38] One such method was the practice of euhemerism (associated with the name of the fourth-century figure Euhemerus of Messene) which viewed deities of traditional mythology as human beings accorded divine honour after their deaths because of their achievements or benefactions to humanity. This practice

However, one final fact must be taken into consideration. In tracing the translation of the Dis/Pluto figure from the Graeco-Roman to the Celtic world, it must be remembered that this movement was not a one-time trade-off isolated at a particular point in time, but a sustained process of chronological transport, one which perhaps most significantly witnessed the radical transformation of the dominant religious system from paganism to Christianity. Most of the theoretical literature cited so far (the studies of Assmann and Smith in particular) has explored inter-religious translation across cultures united, despite all other extraneous differentiating factors, by one common theme — the existence of a polytheistic religious system. Assmann's formulation of religion as a counterpoint to the effects of cultural pseudo-speciation is applicable only as long as the interacting cultures under

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becomes particularly significant in the case of Ireland where the similar practice of 'divinization' was employed, as I shall show in the following section.

[39] Smith, *God in Translation*, 272–273. Smith observes that this kind of horizontal translatability linked with vertical translatability was often practiced by regional writers who wished to stake their local claims over and against the larger enterprise of Hellenistic learning, and cites the example of Philo of Byblos who in his writings compared the Phoenician god Beelsamem with the Greek Zeus, Chousor (traced back to the Ugaritic Kothar wa-Hasis) with Hephaistos, El (the head of the Ugaritic pantheon) with Kronos, and the Phoenician Astarte with Aphrodite. Translation along lines both vertical and horizontal has also been discussed by Karlheinz Stierle in the context of the etymological evolution of the word 'translation' itself, from *transferre*/*translatio* in the Middle Ages to its various linguistic ramifications in the Romance languages in the early modern period. See Stierle, "Translatio Studii and Renaissance: From Vertical to Horizontal Translation," in *The Translatability of Cultures*, 55–56.

question are pagan and polytheistic in nature. With the implementation and spread of a monotheistic religious dispensation such as Christianity, translatability is changed in interesting ways. Recognising the general reputation of religion as one of the most potent forces *of* cultural difference, one which typically *problematises* rather than *encourages* cultural assimilation, Assmann has taken stock of what he calls 'second-degree pseudo-speciation.' According to Assmann, second-degree pseudo-speciation arises under 'minority conditions,' specific political and cultural conditions which emerge within the context of a hegemonic culture's attempt to dominate and subsume a culturally and ethnically distinct group. Under such minority conditions, the cultural system being dominated attempts to construct a deliberate counter-identity against the dominating system as a form of resistance.[40] Such attempts in the arena of religion lead to the emergence of 'second-degree' or 'secondary' religions which largely defy translatability as they are entered by conversion and left via apostasy.[41] Christianity can be regarded as one such secondary religion.

Once again, the Luhmannian model can help to demystify the particularities of such radical and complex religious change. Applying Luhmann's precepts to Assmann's observations, minority conditions, by virtue of their historically contextual nature, would thus furnish the necessary trigger (what Luhmann calls 'deviations') for evolution in the religious system, and the emergence of secondary religions could thus be interpreted as the evolutionary drive to restabilise the system in favour of a new form, proceeding from segmentary differentiation (the construction of multiple pantheons of divinities characteristic of paganism) to centre-periphery differentiation (monotheistic Christianity established at the core of the religious system and structural incompatibilities resulting from outmoded forms of heathen worship externalised to the periphery) and subsequently to stratification (the authority of the Church is consolidated and extended). Minority conditions produced by Rome's transition from polytheism to monotheism and the gradual emergence of Christianity as the dominant religious system, particularly in the wake of the efforts of Constantine (the Edict of Milan of 313 CE decriminalising Christian worship and the separation of the Western Roman Church from the Eastern Orthodox Church after 380 CE), had far-reaching effects on all subsequent cultural translatability. Applying Assmann's threefold distinction, one can thereby postulate that cultural translation between the Graeco-Roman and the Celtic world, which had formerly been both assimilatory (the translation of Celtic divinities with the aid of Roman cultural apparatus in view of Rome's military dominance over the Celts) as well as mutual (reciprocal relations between Greece and the Celtic world in the context of cross-national commerce) in nature, began to assume the form of cosmotheistic monotheism (translation of the gods not only into each other but also into a third, overarching Biblical register) with the introduction and consolidation of Christianity. This process can be fruitfully illustrated with the example of Ireland, to a discussion of which I now turn.

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[40] This is comparable to the concept of 'hybridity' in postcolonial criticism where it is "the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal" adopted by the colonised subject in the face of imposition of colonialist authority. See Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 111–112.

[41] Assmann, "Translating Gods," 28–29.

IRISH DEITIES AND IRISH RELIGIOUS BELIEF:

Native Irish divinities were akin to localised spirits associated with specific places, peoples, and aspects of the natural world.[42] Numerous both in number and variety, these deities were (like many Indo-European divinities) believed to accept propitiation in the form of animal sacrifices. They were not, however, explicitly organised in the form of a pantheon (unlike the Graeco-Roman gods, for instance), a feature which can be accounted for by a combination of factors. One possibility could be that pre-Christian Ireland developed its own pantheon independently of the Gauls and Britons, although, as Mark Williams observes, this is an unlikely hypothesis in view of the fact that the status of Ireland as a rural, decentralised, and politically fragmented society both pre- and post-conversion was not conducive to the creation of a national family of gods. A more probable explanation is that the envisaging of gods in the form of a pantheon was related to the vocational composition of the professional classes. Those classes which were organised on the basis of skill (such as the druids or the religious elite as well as the *áes dána* or the people of art/talent) were more likely to think in terms of a pantheon of gods as opposed to the agrarian classes who primarily believed in localised fertility spirits.[43] Moreover, a constant and immutable pantheon of divinities could not exist in view of the immense changes in socio-economic structure, agricultural composition, and political makeup brought about by the introduction of Christianity. It is also difficult to accurately estimate whether some divine figures were indigenous to Ireland, whether they were wholesale importations from Roman Britain in the pre-Christian period, or whether they were mutations of local gods influenced by the pressures exerted on them by the twin forces of Christianity and Graeco-Roman paganism. This problem of indeterminacy is compounded by the fact that all our information about the Irish divine canon comes, not from the pagan period, but from Christian Ireland. The shadowy figures of the gods, which had their origin in oral myths and legends, were given textual embodiment only in the post-conversion period, a development assisted by the fact that Christianity was primarily a religion of the book and enabled the writing of texts in the Roman alphabet. Chronological exactitude is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to provide, since the introduction and spread of Christianity did not happen overnight but were rather gradual developments. Although the Christian Church was legally established as a privileged religious order during the sixth century, and although the thriving of monasticism, ecclesiastical learning, and Latin education meant that by the seventh century Irish society had already been converted on the level of hierarchy and education, occasional and sporadic manifestations of non-Christian pagan religion continued at least until the turn of the eighth century.[44] The earliest *written* traces of the pagan divinities of Ireland stem from around the beginning of this time.[45] Scriptural dispensation mandated that divinity in the Biblical sense could not be ascribed to the pagan gods; in order to ensure their survival in a Christian world, pagan deities had to be invested with new kinds of significance through such strategies as association with the ideology of kingship or with native systems of knowledge. This kind of secular retrofitting often produced properties which were mutually exclusive and incompatible — hence the bewildering complexity in the literary representation of the Irish gods.[46]

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[42] My discussion of the Irish divine and mythological canon draws heavily upon Mark Williams' examination of the subject in *Ireland's Immortals: A History of the Gods of Irish Myth* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016), particularly Chapters 1 ("Hidden Beginnings: From Cult to Conversion," 3–29) and 2 ("Earthly Gods: Pagan Deities, Christian Meanings," 30–71).

[43] A comparable pattern can be noted in the conception of divinities in pre-Christian Italy. As explained in the previous chapter, traditional Italian religious belief (intimately associated with the nature of the Italian landscape) was organised around the cult of the *lares* or the household spirits. The emergence of pantheons of deities was occasioned by Italy's increased contacts with the classical (particularly Greek) world, a development which was given even greater impetus by the imperial ambitions of Republican Rome.

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[44] Williams, *Ireland's Immortals*, 4.

[45] For a fuller discussion of the early Irish literary scene, see Elva Johnston, *Literacy and Identity in Early Medieval Ireland* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2013).

[46] Williams offers the example of Manannán mac Lir in *Immram Brain* (*The Voyage of Bran*), a figure whose representation evoked multiple ontological registers. As the god of the sea, Manannán is reminiscent of pagan water deities, and the description of his first appearance seems to contain echoes of the introduction of the Roman sea-god Neptune at the beginning of Virgil's *Aeneid*. However, Manannán is also made to discuss such decidedly Christian matters as the Fall of Man and the Incarnation, and his superior knowledge is interpreted by Williams as an instance of wish-fulfilment by clerical men of learning. For a fuller discussion of Manannán in this text and the multiple modes of signification embodied by the figure, see Williams, *Ireland's Immortals*, 56–68. It is interesting to note that Manannán

Despite the confusing variety in characterisation, what united these figures was their abode or dwelling place — the *síde* or hollow hills. These supernatural residences were unique to Irish paganism and typically denoted a hill, a megalithic tumulus, or a pre-Celtic grave-hill.[47] Etymologically, the word *síd* comes from the Celtic **sīdos*, 'abode,' derived from a root related to English 'seat' and 'settle.' The core meaning of 'settlement' narrowed over time to apply specifically to the abode of divinities in Ireland, a singular development not paralleled anywhere else in the Celtic lands. Their inhabitants resembled human beings but were superior to humanity — not only were they more beautiful, but they also possessed magical powers and could usually outlive ordinary mortals; indeed, they were frequently immortal. *Síd*-mounds were usually synonymous with the Otherworld (or multiple otherworlds) which stood for an intermittently accessible parallel dimension in the Irish imagination.[48] Viewed as the remnants of a primordial past, *síd*-mounds were believed to represent a spiritual connection to the land, a kind of ancestral belonging which was both perpetual and immanent, and which thus became the locus of ritual practice as well as the site of veneration of the spirits of the departed.[49] For Christian authors, such *síd*-mounds, together with their human-like residents, their associations with a collective memory that was simultaneously primeval and regional, as well as their ritual significance as loci of ancestor worship and burial, offered fertile ground for utilisation as the dwelling-place of non-Christian divinities without running the risk of explicitly describing them as gods. These *síd*-mounds belonged neither to the Biblical binary of Heaven and Hell, nor were they akin to the aerial and sub-terrestrial abodes of the pagan gods of Greece and Rome; they constituted a third, independent and unassimilable autochthonous category which could therefore be used to accommodate figures incapable of either being included within the

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makes a brief appearance in the postscript to *Tochmarc Étaíne* as the executioner of Midir and his wife Fuamnach. I will discuss this text in the following section.

[47] Williams, *Ireland's Immortals*, 30. Quoted from Jacqueline Borsje, "Monotheistic to a Certain Extent: The 'Good Neighbours' of God in Ireland," in *The Boundaries of Monotheism: Interdisciplinary Explorations into the Foundations of Western Monotheism*, eds. A. M. Korte and M. de Haardt (Leiden & Boston, 2009), 58.

[48] The *síd* was at once the Otherworld, its inhabitants, as well as the earthly portals which led to such spaces. The range of signification of the term '*síd*' is reminiscent of Hades which denoted both the underworld deity as well as his kingdom in Greek religious imagination.

[49] Tok Thompson, "Hosting the Dead: Thanatopic Aspects of the Irish Sidhe," in *Communicating with the Spirits*, eds. Gábor Klaniczay and Éva Pócs (Budapest & New York: Central European University Press, 2005), 200.

ranks of a divinity modelled on monotheistic lines or discarded wholesale as spurious fabrications.[50]

In early literary productions, these liminal figures — supernatural entities who were neither entirely human nor wholly divine — frequently appeared within the context of Christian allegory. Williams sees this as an instance of the operation of the doctrine of 'divinization' in literature by which human beings might become gods.[51] Talking about the artistic impulse of clerical authors, Williams observes that there was a tendency, particularly in literate, scholarly circles, to implement the practice of Biblical exegesis and scriptural analogy learned in the monastic schoolroom in the identification of Christian figures with indigenous divinities.[52] However, just as 'divinization' was a necessary outcome of the authors' Christian conditioning, their pedagogical training, which had exposed them to the works of classical Greek and Latin authors, ensured that these supernatural beings retained many of their pagan traits and characteristics. Consequently, what emerged out of this cultural process of syncretistic translation was a multifaceted literary hybrid, simultaneously native and continental, pagan and scriptural.

With the passage of time, however, the nature of literary composition changed, bringing with it concomitant changes in the portrayal of pagan divinities. The years which initially followed the island's conversion to Christianity were marked by a theological anxiety whereby the indigenous deities of Ireland's pagan past needed to be accommodated within a new radically different religious order. In the realm of literature, this anxiety channelled itself into the production of allegorical texts with a distinctively monastic flavour. Once the situation had stabilised and Ireland had begun to settle into a newly configured religious, cultural, economic, and political system, these anxieties largely dissipated. As social conditions changed, so too did the motivations behind literary endeavours, a transformation which was mirrored in the movement from allegorical composition to saga-writing. Politically, as Ireland encountered the Vikings and the Normans (the late eighth and the late twelfth centuries mark the initiatory points for the Viking raids and the Norman incursions respectively), a need was felt to champion indigenous history and native Irish legacy against the genealogical credentials of the outsiders. The literary form of the saga furnished the ideal training ground to rehearse such nationalist aims.[53] With increasing specialisation of the classes, storytelling and authorship came under the purview of the *filid* or the professional poets who were frequently backed by aristocratic patrons. Medieval Irish sagas were thus composed by highly ranked, influential men of letters for elite educated audiences. These sagas offered a reimagined history of the island's illustrious past, a grand chronicle of epic proportions in which the pagan divinities were the primary participants. These literary representations of the pagan gods were intended to "underpin ideas of social cohesion or the assertion of particular political claims," and the sagas in general came to function as a body of narratives in which the claims and ambitions of the present were "justified and advanced by reference to the complex body of legendary tradition and genealogy known as *senchas*, 'historical lore'."[54] Whereas the attitude of literary authors towards the pagan gods elsewhere in Europe frequently vacillated between viewing them either as merciful angels sent before the coming of Christianity to announce the advent of a new religious order, as half-fallen angels who by failing to take sides in the rebellion of Satan against God were stuck in a sort of limbo, or as diabolical forces deserving of outright condemnation, in Ireland the dominant strategy seems to have been one of euhemerism by which the ancient gods were reclaimed either as unfallen human beings or as neutral angels.[55] Since the practice of construing gods as mortal men who had been elevated to divinity by virtue of their renown had no scriptural warrant whatsoever, it is also an eloquent testimony to the creative powers and imaginative potential of medieval Irish saga-writers.

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[50] The tendency of Christian writers to choose the *síd*-mounds with all their pre-Christian associations as the setting of a group of divinities has been regarded as an attempt to situate Ireland within the context of universal Christian history and European culture by crafting a syncretistic interpretation of the island's collective past, its mythic heritage, and its culture of the supernatural. However, in adopting such a mode of interpretation, Lisa Bitel has cautioned against assuming an evolutionary, teleological model of historical and religious change which valorises a linear process of development by which druidic paganism is seen as being superseded by Christianity. In reality, the process was far more complex and cannot be whittled down to such neat categorisations. For an in-depth examination of the *síd* and its utilisation in Irish textual culture, see Bitel, "Secrets of the Síd: The Supernatural in Medieval Irish Texts," in *Fairies, Demons, and Nature Spirits: 'Small Gods' at the Margins of Christendom*, ed. Michael Ostling (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 79–101.

[51] For a more in-depth discussion of the doctrine of 'divinization' complemented by specific Biblical parallels, see Williams, *Ireland's Immortals*, 54–55.

[52] Williams, *Ireland's Immortals*, 56.

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[53] The championing of indigenous history as well as the extolling of figures and events from native mythology in literary works during moments of political uncertainty was not exclusive to medieval Ireland, but a rallying mechanism of bolstering and upholding national (or regional) pride that was adopted elsewhere on the British Isles. The legendary figure of Arthur was appropriated and used as a national hero by the Welsh to articulate their claims to autonomy and independence in the face of English colonial incursions. I shall have more to say on this topic in Chapter 4.

[54] Williams, *Ireland's Immortals*, 75, 76. For overviews of the different kinds of literary works produced in medieval Ireland, see Miles, *Heroic Saga*, Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *An introduction to early Irish literature* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009), and John Carey and Kevin Murray, *The mythological cycle of medieval Irish literature* (Cork: Cork Studies in Celtic Literatures, 2018).

[55] Williams, *Ireland's Immortals*, 78–83. For a detailed, albeit dated, discussion of the practice of euhemerism, see John Daniel Cooke, "Euhemerism: A Mediaeval Interpretation of Classical Paganism," *Speculum* 2, no. 4 (1927): 396–410.

It is to a discussion of one such saga — *Tochmarc Étaíne* — and one such divine figure — Midir — that I now turn.

MIDIR, BRÍ LÉITH, AND THE *TOCHMARC ÉTAÍNE*:

Generally regarded as belonging to the Mythological Cycle of tales, *Tochmarc Étaíne* is divided into three sub-tales, all of which involve the figure of Midir, lord of the *síd*-mounds of Brí Léith.[56] This inter-generational tale of reincarnation, star-crossed love, supernatural liaisons, and fantastic occurrences has a plot which (by modern standards at the very least) is as extraordinary as it is confusing and necessitates a somewhat detailed summary. The first sub-tale relates the story of how Aengus is (illegitimately) begotten upon Eithne (or Boand), the wife of Elcmar of the Brug by Eochaid Ollathair, the famous king of the Tuatha Dé who was also known as the Dagda. In order to shield the identity of Aengus from Elcmar, the boy is fostered by Midir, ruler of the elfmounds of Brí Léith and friend of the Dagda. Aengus grows up unaware of the identity of his father until one day he is taunted by Triath, son of Febal of the Fir Bolg who laughs at Aengus' ignorance of his parentage. Upon being confronted by him, Midir tells Aengus that he is the son of Eochaid Ollathair, following which he takes the boy to the Dagda and asks the king to make amends by granting land to his son. Acting on the advice of the Dagda, Aengus obtains land from Elcmar by means of a carefully contrived piece of verbal trickery. When Aengus has settled down in his newly acquired land in the Brug, Midir goes to visit his foster son. He is, however, injured in the eye by a holly branch when he goes to intervene in a quarrel that had broken out among the boys in the Brug. Although he is promptly cured by Dian Cécht, the divine healer, Midir demands of Aengus that he be rewarded for his pains through (among other things) marriage to Étaín Echraide, daughter of Ailill, king of north-eastern Ireland, and the fairest lady in the country. Aengus accordingly goes to Ailill to seek the hand of Étaín for his foster father, but Ailill cannot be persuaded to agree to the match until Aengus has performed a series of tasks for him. With the assistance of the Dagda, Aengus manages to successfully accomplish the tasks imposed by Ailill (which include the clearing of plains, the diverting of rivers to the sea, and the payment of gold and silver in an amount equivalent to his daughter's weight) and Midir takes Étaín as his wife. Midir's first wife Fuamnach is, however, not pleased with this new union. A pupil and fosterling of the druid Bresal, Fuamnach is learned in the arts of enchantment which she uses to turn Étaín into a pool of water. Through heat and evaporation, the pool of water turns into a worm and consequently into a beautiful purple fly with magical properties. Midir knows the fly to be Étaín and she keeps him company until one day she is buffeted and blown off course by a powerful wind conjured by Fuamnach. After wandering for seven years, the fly alights upon Aengus who recognises it as Étaín and offers her sanctuary in a sun-bower. Fuamnach, however, reappears and summons another powerful blast of wind which drives Étaín out who, powerless and exhausted, finally drops into a golden beaker in the household of Étar in Ulster. Drinking out of the cup, Étar's wife swallows the fly and consequently, Étaín is conceived in her womb and reborn as the daughter of Étar, one thousand and twelve years after her first begetting as the daughter of Ailill. The first sub-tale concludes with a mention of how Aengus, upon discovering that the fly had gone missing from his bower, pursues Fuamnach to the house of Bresal and strikes off her head as punishment for her deeds.

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[56] Scholars have tended to divide the Irish sagas into four categories — the Ulster, Fenian, King, and Mythological Cycles — on the basis of content. These divisions are, however, arbitrary and are primarily for the purpose of academic convenience. The Irish authors themselves showed an inclination towards arranging stories thematically, such as 'wooings,' 'cattle raids,' 'violent deaths,' 'elopements,' and so on. See Williams, *Ireland's Immortals*, 73–74, footnote 7.

The second sub-tale begins by relating how Eochaid Airem ascends to the kingship of Ireland and soon begins his search for a wife when his subjects protest that the Festival of Tara (which Eochaid had requested be held) would not be convened until they have a queen. As the fairest maiden in Ireland, Étaín is chosen for Eochaid and the two are married. Eochaid's brother Ailill Ánguba, however, falls sick with love for Étaín, a pining which actually drives him to the verge of death. When Eochaid leaves for the customary monarchical circuit of Ireland, Étaín nurses Ailill, administering food and water and helping to heal Ailill's wounds. When she learns the cause of his sickness, she consents to Ailill's veiled proposition of sexual union in order to cure him completely (although the text does not explicitly mention sex, it is heavily implied by Étaín's decision to meet Ailill discreetly in a place separate from the king's bedchamber since she is unwilling to "shame" Eochaid). Étaín makes three attempts to meet Ailill but each time an enchanted sleep comes upon him and Étaín is hoodwinked into interacting with a man impersonating Ailill. At the third encounter, Étaín commands the stranger to disclose his identity and it is revealed that the man is none other than Midir who introduces himself to Étaín as her husband. Midir confesses that it was he who had filled Ailill with longing for Étaín so that this meeting could be arranged. He also asks Étaín to come away with him to Brí Léith, but she refuses to do so until Eochaid himself gives his permission.

The third sub-tale opens with an account of Midir's visit to Eochaid at Tara on a warm summer's day. Dressed in the fashion of a warrior, Midir introduces himself to Eochaid and (without any apparent reason or motivation) proposes a game of chess. They agree to play for stakes and it is decided that if Eochaid wins the stake, Midir will repay him richly with fifty prized horses. Eochaid wins the stake and Midir keeps to his word. On the second day, they agree to play once more for even higher stakes as Midir agrees to reward Eochaid with lavish gifts of cattle, apparel, and weaponry should he succeed. Eochaid's foster-father recognises the magical potential of Midir and convinces Eochaid to make Midir perform such arduous tasks as clear Meath of stones and build a causeway over Móin Lámraige. Having fulfilled his promise upon Eochaid's victory, Midir proposes to play at chess for a third time. This time Midir is triumphant, and when Eochaid asks him what he would like as a reward, he asks for a kiss from Étaín together with the permission to embrace her. Eochaid is silent initially but asks Midir to come a month hence in order to obtain his prize.[57] On the appointed day, Eochaid surrounds his fort at Tara with the most accomplished warriors of Ireland and places himself and Étaín at the centre of the house. Midir arrives looking resplendent and after exchanging words with Eochaid (during which he reveals that Étaín herself had said that she would join Midir only if her husband agreed) is allowed to embrace Étaín in the middle of the room. As Midir puts his arms around Étaín, the two are transformed into swans and they rise up through the skylight, flying away from Tara. Eochaid and his train follow the two in hot pursuit, digging up every elfmound they encounter on their way. The writer chronicles how it takes a year and three months for the soldiers to dig up the mound at Síd Ban Find, since all that they dug up in one day would be undone the next day. As they are engaged in their task of digging, Midir appears and accuses Eochaid of wrongdoing. Eochaid declares his intention of retrieving his wife, and Midir asks him to go home, assuring him that Étaín will be returned to him on the morrow. The following day, however, fifty women all in the shape and likeness of Étaín are sent to Eochaid. Eochaid claims that he will recognise his wife on the basis of the elegance with which she pours a drink, and accordingly he conducts a test following which he chooses one of the women whom he believes to be Étaín. One day, however, Midir returns and divulges to Eochaid that he had made a mistake in his choice — the woman he had chosen was not

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[57] At this point in the manuscript, a possibly interpolated passage narrates the story of how Midir had attempted to woo Étaín with a song a year ago, probably soon after the tryst with Ailill. Although a separate addition, this poem is important as it provides a rare insight into the world of Fairyland chronicled by its ruler himself. I shall return to this passage in my discussion of Midir and Brí Léith.

Étaín but his own daughter, since his wife had been pregnant when Midir took her away from Tara. Eochaid is inflamed with shame as he realises that he has impregnated his own daughter who is presently with child. In an Oedipal conclusion to the tale, the writer narrates how Eochaid attempts to dispose of his illegitimate child by throwing her into the fire in the house of a herdsman, but the child is rescued and raised by the kindly herdsman and his wife. She grows up to be the most accomplished at embroidery, and is subsequently married (albeit by force) to Etarscél with whom she bears Conaire. In a short postscript, the author adds how Eochaid was slain by Midir's grandson Sigmall Cael (the genealogy is deliberately obscure, although it seems to be that Sigmall is the son of Oicnia, the daughter of Midir and Fuamnach), while Midir and Fuamnach themselves fell at the hands of Manannán at Brí Léith (a factual inconsistency, since the story formerly mentions that Fuamnach was slain by Aengus).

The figure of Midir in *Tochmarc Étaíne* is a curious amalgam of opposing personality traits and features — at times his divinity shines through with peculiar force whereas at other times he seems to act with the kind of obsession that usually characterises fallible human characters; his sudden infatuation with and enduring dedication to Étaín are unexplained and appear to have no concrete motivation, as is his rather unjust behaviour towards his own wife Fuamnach; while his devoted, relentless pursuit of Étaín is evidently meant to paint him as a steadfast lover unwavering in his loyalty and affection, he has no qualms about resorting to trickery and deceit to achieve his aims (such as his orchestration of Ailill's love-sickness and hoodwinking Eochaid into choosing his wife incorrectly and thereby committing the crime of incest). Midir is thus represented as a hybrid figure whose personality and temperament combines the fickleness, unpredictability, and dishonesty that is typically characteristic of pagan gods with the kind of constancy, fidelity, and devotion that were regarded as the traits of a good Christian. Such a contradictory picture is fully in keeping with a culture that witnessed its pagan heritage being overlain with a new theological dispensation and deific system.

Although Midir is present as an integral character from the first sub-tale, it is only in the third sub-tale that the reader is permitted a physical description:

> Fuan corc*r*a imbé, 7 mong orbuide fair co brane a dha imdáe. Rosc caindleach glas ina chind. Sleg coicrind ina laim. Sciath tuilgel ina laim co ngemaib oir f*ur*ri.

> A purple tunic about him, and golden yellow hair on him to the edge of his shoulders. A shining blue eye in his head. A five-pointed spear in one hand, a white-bossed shield in the other, with golden gems thereon.[58]

In the first sub-tale, Midir's friendship with the Dagda — who is explicitly identified as one of the Tuatha Dé — seems to ally him with the race of the god peoples.[59] In the third sub-tale, however, he is described as one who appears in the fashion of a warrior, an account which is more closely reminiscent of stock descriptions of heroes in romances. This identification is further borne out by the fact that for the rest of the story, Midir's primary role is that of loyal lover of Étaín — his divine potential is largely subsumed by the force of his passionate devotion to his earthly consort. A similar observation is made by Mark Williams who notes a shift in the ontological status of the divinities between the first sub-tale and the third. Pointing out the sexual profligacy of the Dagda in the first sub-tale, Williams discerns a parallel between the Dagda and Zeus/Jupiter of the Graeco-Roman pantheon, adding that the two were not only reflexes of the reconstructed Indo-European deity the 'Sky-Father,' but that they would also have been known to the Irish through Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*. By contrast, Midir, who as a friend of the Dagda's is also to be read as a god in the first sub-tale, describes himself as belonging to the tribe of unfallen human beings in the courtship song related in the third sub-tale.[60] This poem, though a possible interpolation, offers a crucial glimpse into Midir's world and is therefore worth quoting in full:

> A Bé Find, in ragha lium.
> a tír n-ingnadh i fil rind.
> is barr sobairci folt and.
> is dath snechta f*or* corp slim.
>
> Is an*n* nád bí muí na tuí
> gel ded and dubai a brai.
> is lí sula lín ar sluag.

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[58] Bergin and Best, "Tochmarc Étaíne," 174–175. All subsequent references to the text are to this edition by page number.

[59] Another episode from the story would seem to reinforce the view that Midir has quasi-divine associations. His escape from Eochaid's palace at Tara with Étaín in the guise of a swan seems to be in keeping with the avian disguises frequently adopted by the *áes síde* or the magical deities of the *síd*-mounds. See Bitel, "Secrets of the Síd," 95.

[60] Williams, *Ireland's Immortals*, 86–87.

is dath síon and gach gruadh.

Is corcair muighi cach muín.
is lí sula ugai luin.
cidh cain deicsiu Muighe Fail.
anam iar ngnais Muigi Mair.

Cidh caín lib coírm Insi Fail,
is mescu cuirm Thiri Mair.
amrai tíre tír asber.
ni théid óc an*n* ré sén.

Srotha téith millsi tar tír.
rogha dé midh 7 fín.
daine delgnaide cen ón.
combart cen pecadh cen chol.

Atchiam cach for cach leath.
7 nícon aice nech.
teimel imorb*uis* Adaim
dodonarcheil ar araim.

[A ben día ris mo thuaith tind
is barr oir bias fort chind U.]
mil fín laith lemnacht la lind
rod bia lium and, a Bé Find.

O Bé Find wilt thou come with me
to the wondrous land wherein harmony is,
hair is like the crown of the primrose there,
and the body smooth and white as snow.
There, is neither mine nor thine,
white are teeth there, dark the brows.
A delight of the eye the number of our hosts,
every cheek there is of the hue of the foxglove.
A gillyflower is each one’s neck,
a delight of the eye are blackbirds’ eggs,
Though fair the prospect of Mag Fáil,
‘tis desolate after frequenting Mag Már.
Though choice you deem the ale of Inis Fáil,

more intoxicating is the ale of Tír Már.
A wondrous land is the land I tell of;
youth departs not there before eld.
Warm sweet streams flow through the land,
the choice of mead and wine.
Stately folk without blemish,
conception without sin, without lust.
We see everyone on every side,
and no one seeth us.
It is the darkness of Adam's transgression
that hath prevented us from being counted.
[O Woman, if thou come to my proud folk,
a crown of gold shall be upon thy head]
honey, wine, ale, fresh milk, and drink,
thou shalt have with me there, O Bé Find. (180–183)

Midir's description of Fairyland appears to be a conglomeration of the deepest desires of the human race — immortality, sinlessness, everlasting youth, and abundant and unceasing supply of food and drink; it is an elysian, wish-fulfilling paradise of eternal happiness.[61] In Irish mythology, however, *topos* is never merely a poetic embellishment — places have an organic function to perform and the deities who inhabit them are almost always inextricably linked to the geography of the site. Brí Léith (which roughly translates to 'Hill of a Grey One') is as much an identifiable location (Ardagh Hill in Co. Longford) as it is a fabulous domain.[62] The denoting of space in Irish literary texts is also frequently charged with references to contemporary political history.[63] The divinities who populate Irish mythology were believed to have removed themselves at some point in the past to subterranean dwellings from where they could venture out to mingle among humans. This seems to be the case with Midir's kingdom which, though ultimately un-navigable, was nevertheless located by Eochaid and his men shortly after Midir's escape from Tara. Fairyland in *Tochmarc Étaíne* thus seems to be a realm contiguous with human dwellings, a fantastic place which is at once a purely imaginative creation as it is a site reachable by human beings and locatable on a map. This idea of Fairyland as a liminal, alternative space intermittently accessed by mortals was to gain greater currency in the romances of the Middle Ages.

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[61] John Carey associates the fantasies of abundance and realisations of impossibilities typically embodied in Irish descriptions of the Otherworld with the imaginative potential of the creative process itself as expressed in the domain of narrative. See Carey, "Otherworlds and Verbal Worlds in Middle Irish Narrative," *PHCC* 9 (1989): 31–32. In a separate essay, Carey finds the influence of Welsh sources on Irish texts, noting how the representation of the Welsh Otherworld *Annwfn* (later *Annwn*) inspired equivalent representations in Irish narrative. For Carey, the singularities of nomenclature, location, and characteristics of the Otherworld are ultimately the literary testaments of a unique insular tradition which were unparalleled elsewhere. See Carey, "Ireland, Wales, and Faerie: The Otherworld of Romance and the Celtic Literatures," in *Timely Voices: Romance Writing in English Literature*, ed. Goran Stanivukovic (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 140–158.

[62] Williams, *Ireland's Immortals*, 89.

[63] In the delineation of the territorial limits of the Dagda's land, Williams finds echoes of the political geography of the southern Uí Néill, a powerful Irish dynasty who ruled between the seventh and the ninth centuries and in the juxtaposition of the Fir Bolg and the Túatha Dé, he sees a replication of the social relationship between the Uí Néill and the unfree vassal-peoples under their subjugation. See Williams, *Ireland's Immortals*, 90–92.

From the middle of the first sub-tale, all of Midir's activities are directly or indirectly associated with the figure of Étaín. It is she who provides the driving force behind all his actions and these actions help to foreground Midir's character. Étaín has often been read as an embodiment of the Sovereignty Goddess, the divine representative of the land and its fertility who must marry a king in order to rule justly and preserve peace.[64] However, even though in traditional mythic belief the Sovereignty Goddess is usually made to circulate sexually among several men, the author of *Tochmarc Étaíne* seems to be at pains to present the story as a poignant tale of faithful conjugal love. The idealised world evoked by Midir in his song for Étaín implicitly suggests that theirs was a prelapsarian universe of innocence, fidelity, and sexual purity. Within this line of interpretation, Étaín's marriage to Eochaid is seen as a temporary setback brought about by a moment of unwilled forgetfulness. Eochaid thus loses Étaín because he was never meant to have her in the first place; she belongs exclusively to Midir since their union is divinely ordained and providentially sanctioned. Another possible reason behind Eochaid's ultimate failure to secure Étaín is because unlike Midir he treats her as a mere piece of property. The parallels set up by the author between the tasks performed by Aengus to win the hand of Étaín for his foster-father and the tasks performed by Midir in fulfilment of the stakes laid down by Eochaid during the first two games of chess support this reading. The transactional nature of the rewards stipulated by Eochaid — acts which will provide Midir with a crucial bargaining chip later when he asks for an embrace and a kiss from Étaín — figure Midir's interaction with Étaín on the fated day at Tara as an act of bride purchase.[65] Midir had respected Étaín's autonomy when, after the episode involving Ailill, he had asked her to accompany him back to Brí Léith and she had turned him down. Not only had he actively sought her consent but he had also honoured her refusal to grant such consent. Eochaid, by contrast, had violated his marital duty when he entered into a pact with Midir involving Étaín without so much as informing her. The expected prerogative of a husband is to protect and safeguard his wife; Eochaid, however, practically traded Étaín away to another man in the aftermath of a game. This is why Midir is ultimately successful whereas Eochaid isn't — Midir has been both singularly faithful, never allowing his love for Étaín to wane despite the passage of a millennium, and he has also treated her with courtesy and deference; he is, in short, the prototype of the ideal lover, dedicated and selfless. *Tochmarc Étaíne* represents a unique moment in the literary evolution of the Fairy King — it is almost as if Midir is a better version of Orpheus. Freed from the insecurity and human fallibility that had characterised the classical Orpheus, Midir almost approximates (and indirectly anticipates) the figure of Orfeo in the medieval romance centred on him. For once, the Fairy King (here portrayed as the twin embodiment of divinity and unfallen humanity) has become the heroic protagonist rather than the unpleasant antagonist he was usually wont to be in literary representation.

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[64] See Charles-Edwards, "*Tochmarc Étaíne*," 172–174 and Williams, *Ireland's Immortals*, 88.

[65] See Charles-Edwards' discussion of this aspect in "*Tochmarc Étaíne*," 179–181.

WALTER MAP AND TWELFTH-CENTURY ENGLAND:

The previous sections of this chapter have explored the conception and representation of the Otherworld and its ruler in insular literature, specifically in Irish medieval narrative. However, in order to highlight the conceptual diversity of the medieval literary milieu of the British Isles, I would like to focus on another figure — that of the Pygmy King in the tale of Herla, one of the numerous stories which make up the composite narrative fabric of the *De nugis curialium* of Walter Map. The Pygmy King occupies a somewhat unique position within the insular literary tradition, at once a dynamic admixture of established Celtic and classical motifs as well as an individual narrative achievement of the author. Between them, Midir and the Pygmy King can be seen as constituting the two poles of the spectrum within which insular representations of otherworldly domains and their overlords ranged. The literary scene was not, however, uniform across the different linguistic and sociocultural constituencies of the British Isles but was fundamentally dependent upon specific historico-regional contexts. Map in particular held the singular distinction of belonging to a Welsh heritage while operating within the cultural milieu of twelfth-century England and writing, not in the Welsh or English vernaculars, but in Latin, the language of learned ecclesiastical circles. It is thus prudent to begin with a brief note on the ecclesiastical and secular organisation of England in the twelfth century.[66]

Between the tenth and the thirteenth centuries, church organisation in England began to change from a pastoral system dominated by minsters to a more decentralised, local system in which small churches and chapels served the needs of towns and villages. This transformation was facilitated by the gradual dismantling of the feudal system and the concomitant fragmentation of lordship. Since much of this chapter has been concerned with the question of 'pagan' beliefs and their consequent survival in a post-conversion world, it is worth pausing a minute to reflect upon how the English church dealt with the thorny problem of paganism. Perhaps the most significant observation that can be made is that with the passage of time, the semantic field of paganism altered to encompass not just those who believed in a multiplicity of gods who, by virtue of being non-Christian, were patently false and degenerate, but the very field of the secular itself, a denotative category which had contracted in the wake of the mining and appropriation of material that was most amenable to their creed by the Christians.[67] This change in signification of the term 'pagan,' together with the difficulty of reconstructing 'true' and 'authentic' pagan practices from amongst the welter of available evidence from the Middle Ages, begs a reconsideration of the question of pagan survival. Carl Watkins is of the opinion that scholars have tended to overemphasise the fact of pagan continuities in the Christian era, noting that whereas it is undoubtedly true that pagan beliefs and practices were passed on into the medieval world, it would be erroneous to ascribe to them any significant level of autonomy. Deeply entrenched elements of pagan cultic practice and ritual observation could not, of course, be dealt a sudden death-blow which would permanently sever them from the body of wider cultural belief. The strategy to be adopted had to be one of 'deliberate gradualism' whereby troublesome aspects of the old religion would be suppressed whereas those features more congenial to Christianity would be re-appropriated and re-contextualised within a Biblical frame of reference.[68] Pagan beliefs and ritual practices were therefore not so much imbibed as gathered and moulded by the church to suit its needs.

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[66] For my overview of this section, I have relied heavily upon Carl Watkins' *History and the Supernatural in Medieval England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), particularly the introduction (1–22) as well as Chapters 1 ("Thinking about the Supernatural," 23–67) and 2 ("Inventing Pagans," 68–106).

[67] Robert Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 16. However, Markus has also pointed out how the widening rift between paganism and Christianity was a creation of the later centuries, observing that prior to the late fourth century CE, paganism was not only never characterised as an organised, distinct cult, but also that perceived differences between the newly emerging Christian community and the pagan aristocracy were slight, both groups seen as belonging to a shared heritage of custom and traditions inherited from a common past. For a more in-depth discussion, see Markus, *Ancient Christianity*, 27–29.

Watkins crucially observes that within medieval England, 'pagan' as a description of malpractice within Christendom was beginning to cede ground instead to 'magical,' 'superstitious,' and 'heretical' as markers of false belief. The conflation of paganism and magic in particular has interesting consequences in view of my examination of the ontological status of the Fairy King as a magical, otherworldly being with diabolical associations. Although paganism and magic were theoretically separable, the former (by virtue of offering alternative cosmologies and substitute objects of veneration) typically regarded as more dangerous than the latter (which provided rival means of protection and cure in a world where such prerogative should rightly rest only with the Almighty), the two were often compared and condemned as equally execrable by Churchmen who adopted the convenient and reductionist approach of tarring *all* non-Christian ritual practices with the same brush.[69] This interrelation between paganism and magic was commonly a feature of clerical textual praxis, forming a part of that body of (primarily ecclesiastical) writing which dealt with the supernatural in general. To the medieval mind, the category of the supernatural comprised such elements as miracles, signs, and demons. The belief in miracles (and their articulation by means of signs or *signa*) was posited against the burgeoning belief in nature as a regular, autonomously organised unit which operated in contradistinction to divine design. Miracles and signs were commonly interpreted either as a manifestation of magical mechanisms or as a demonstration of divine will, anomalous events which erupted in the ordinary course of things in order to enforce a moral or for purely prudential purposes. Demonology had a deeper history whereby the church fathers had over successive generations stressed the essentially evil nature of demons as well as conjectured about their physical forms (aerial, animal, disguised as human, or a grotesque admixture of these) and dwelling places (typically the lower air). Between the miraculous and the demonic, however, existed an interstitial, liminal space inhabited by supernatural beings which resisted easy and reductive classification into watertight compartments.[70] These ambiguous spirits were seen as the denizens of a mysterious, parallel realm which stood out in stark opposition not only to established theological truths but also against a nature that in the twelfth century was increasingly seen as patterned and regular. This liminality was endlessly fascinating for medieval writers and consequently the ambiguous supernatural made repeated appearances in twelfth-century textual culture. However, even as this ambiguity intrigued, it also bred an indeterminacy that was as linguistic as it was conceptual. These intermediate beings were variously described as demons, *portuni*, *effigies* or phantoms, fauns, and fairies or 'Fates,' thereby suggesting that the Latin language did not contain within its arsenal of spirit-names enough terms which could be appropriately applied to these abstruse productions of vernacular culture. These beliefs about the ambiguous supernatural which frequently illustrated medieval literary texts together with the theological imperatives behind them coloured Map's portrayal of the Pygmy King in the *De nugis curialium*. I now turn to a brief overview of his life and to a discussion of the work in general and the tale of Herla in particular.

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[68] Watkins, *History and the Supernatural*, 82. This kind of remoulding of existing belief in such a way that new elements are introduced even as older aspects are preserved can once again be read as an instance of inter-religious cultural translatability, particularly in the light of Assmann's theorisation of syncretism and Barasch's formulation of the tilting or reversible image. In fact, Watkins himself uses the term 'syncretistic' to refer to the conversion strategies adopted by the process of Christianisation.

[69] Watkins, *History and the Supernatural*, 90–91.

[70] In its broadest sense, this liminal space is comparable to Bhabha's theorisation (along linguistic lines) of 'Third Space,' an intermediate passage geared towards the production of meaning which, though

THE STORY OF KING HERLA IN THE *DE NUGIS CURIALIUM*:

Walter Map was born at Herefordshire on the border of England and Wales and was a Welshman by descent.[71] Despite his marcher origins, he seems to have identified himself as an Englishman, harbouring a rather poor opinion of the Welsh. Educated at Gloucester (presumably) and Paris, Map's ecclesiastical career saw him serve under Gilbert Foliot, bishop of Hereford and later London, as well as being appointed to the position of canon of St. Paul's and later archdeacon of Oxford. By 1173 he was also installed as a royal clerk in the court of Henry II, and there is evidence that he acted as one of Henry's representatives at the Third Lateran Council. Map was thus poised on the cusp of both the ecclesiastical world of the church and the secular realm of the court, a unique position which helped to hone his literary talents. Henry II's court was particularly fertile for literary activity. It was characterised by the vernacularisation of culture, multilingualism, multiculturalism, and

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unrepresentable in itself, constitutes "the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew." See Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 36–37.

[71] For a more detailed overview of Map's life and literary output, see the introduction in Walter Map, *De nugis curialium* [Courtiers' Trifles], ed. and trans. M. R. James, rev. C. N. L. Brooke and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), xiii–l.

cultural permeability.[72] Henry's court in both Normandy and England also attracted troubadours, thereby serving as a markedly fecund site for the proliferation of a rich oral culture. Map was thus a man who had at his command the best of both worlds — the religious education he received at Gloucester and Paris equipped him to access the reservoir of classical and patristic learning meticulously taught in the schools whereas his stint at the Henrician court offered him valuable exposure to the corpus of oral Celtic legend disseminated by itinerant Breton *jongleurs* and minstrels. The shared influence of these traditions is discernible in the *De nugis curialium*, a curious digest of personal anecdote, court satire, jokes, history, pseudo-history, and folklore, and the only literary work definitively attributable to Map.[73] My study will concentrate upon the tale of King Herla, particularly on the figure of the Pygmy King, found in the eleventh chapter of the First Distinction of the book. It will be helpful to begin with a brief summary of the tale.

Herla, the king of the Britons, is visited by a mysterious figure who is described as the Pygmy King. The pygmy prophesies Herla's marriage with the daughter of the Frankish king and invites himself to the anticipated wedding feast, remarking that Herla should repay the favour by attending the pygmy's wedding a year hence. The prophecy comes true and on the appointed day, the pygmy appears with a huge train of servants bearing rich gifts and food aplenty. Before disappearing at cock-crow, the pygmy reminds Herla of his promise and requests him to keep to his word. Exactly a year later the pygmy reappears, calling on Herla to fulfil the agreement, and Herla and his subjects are led through a cave in a cliff on to the Pygmy King's lavish domain where his wedding is celebrated with much fanfare. Before taking his leave, the pygmy presents Herla with a bloodhound to carry, enjoining that none of the party should alight from their horses before the dog has jumped from the arms of its bearer. Herla makes his way back to his kingdom where he meets an old shepherd and enquires about his realm and his queen. The shepherd is visibly astonished and remarks that by virtue of being a Saxon, he finds it difficult to comprehend Herla's Briton speech. He further informs Herla that he has heard the name of the queen only in legends which spoke about how Herla, the ancient king of the Britons, disappeared into a cliff with a pygmy and was never seen again. Herla, who had believed that he had been away for a span of just three days, is stunned to discover that it has been two hundred years since the Saxons took over the kingdom from the Britons. Shocked and alarmed, one of the men in Herla's train hurriedly alights from his horse and is instantly turned into dust, following which Herla expressly forbids the rest of his men from disembarking. The dog, the narrator tells us tongue firmly in cheek, has not yet alighted, and Herla and his band of followers are doomed to continue their restless circumambulation.

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[72] Ian Short, "Literary Culture at the Court of Henry II," in *Henry II: New Interpretations*, eds. Christopher Harper-Bill and Nicholas Vincent (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), 340.

[73] It is ironic that the *De nugis curialium* was virtually unknown in the medieval world. Map's literary reputation in the Middle Ages rested upon a body of secular Latin verse and medieval romances reputedly attributed to him as well as the *Dissuasio Valerii ad Ruffinum philosophum ne uxorem ducat*, an antifeminist anti-matrimonial treatise which enjoyed widespread popularity. Whereas scholars are mostly sceptical of the claim that Map was a romance writer and versifier, the *Dissuasio Valerii* forms a part of the *De nugis* as we have it today, although it was probably written earlier and almost certainly circulated independently in the Middle Ages.

A variant version of this story is found in the thirteenth chapter of the Fourth Distinction. In this version (which was presumably written earlier), the story of Herla's rendezvous with the Pygmy King is entirely omitted.[74] What Map tells us is that the "household of Herlethingus," a nocturnal squadron of troops comprising "carts and sumpter horses, pack-saddles and panniers, hawks and hounds, and a concourse of men and women," was last seen at the beginning of Henry II's reign. This group ostensibly consisted of the dead and the departed and were given to aimlessly wandering about without apparent purpose or motivation. The version narrated by Map in the Fourth Distinction has widely been read as an allusion to the Wild Hunt, a popular motif found typically in the folklore of northern Europe. Discussing the characteristics of the Hunt, Patrick Joseph Schwieterman observes that it usually had a night-time setting (although appearances at noon were not uncommon), consisted of a mounted host led by a rider with otherworldly connections as well as the presence of persons whom witnesses knew to be dead (occasionally, the appearance of demons within the context of penitential torment marked the more explicitly religious instances), and generally evoked a quasi-solemn, quasi-frenzied atmosphere with periodic episodes of noisy tumult, including the shouts of the riders, the baying of hunting dogs, and the blowing of horns.[75] The Wild Hunt, which was typically associated with a vision of the restless dead in the mythical imagination of the Middle Ages, was used as a satiric tool by Map to critique the chaotic peregrinations of the Henrician court. Having provided a cursory account of the *familia Herlethingi*, Map wryly observes that the wanderings of this doomed band seem to have been transmitted to his fellow courtiers who too roam about purposelessly, a comparison which he subsequently elaborates into a general commentary on the wastefulness and sloth of the present generation. This truncated version is, however, expanded considerably in the First Distinction, an amplification which, by chronicling the provenance of the Wild Hunt, significantly alters the thrust of the narrative.[76] Outfitted in Celtic garb and provided with a new character — the figure of the Pygmy King — the revised version of the story allies Map's literary project more closely with an emphatically insular setting, invokes the memory of an illustrious (though almost lost) British past, and echoes contemporary Welsh concerns about kingship.

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[74] For a discussion of the textual history of the work, particularly the contention that the Fourth Distinction was the first to be composed, see Brooke and Mynors' comments in their introduction to the *De nugis*, xxiv–xxx. Joshua Byron Smith agrees with Brooke and Mynors' conclusion although he is at pains to emphasise that Map's work is not, as his former editors imply, "the untidy legacy of an untidy mind," but a living document that was actively involved in a process of sustained revision. For Smith's updated textual study of the *De nugis*, together with his observations on the "doublets" that characterise the work, see his *Walter Map and the Matter of Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 37–62.

[75] Patrick Joseph Schwieterman, "Fairies, Kingship, and the British Past in Walter Map's *De Nugis Curialium* and *Sir Orfeo*" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2010), 10.

The story recounted by Map in the First Distinction revolves not just around Herla, here identified as a great king of the ancient Britons, but significantly also around the curious figure of the Pygmy King whose appearance at Herla's court is as logically inexplicable as it is uncannily prophetic. One characteristic of this figure which is immediately striking is his physical disposition, an intriguing hybrid of the anthropoid and the bestial which is both fascinating as well as unsettling by virtue of its simultaneous grotesqueness and hilarity:

> […] Herlam regem antiquissimorum Britonum positum ad racionem ab altero rege, qui pigmeus uidebatur modicitate stature, que non excedebat simiam. Institit homuncio capro maximo secundum fabulam insidens, uir qualis describi posset Pan, ardenti facie, capite maximo, barba rubente prolixa pectus contingente, nebride preclarum stellate, cui uenter hispidus et crura pedes in caprinos degenerabant.
>
> A king of the most ancient Britons, Herla, it is said, was on a time interviewed by another king who was a pygmy in respect of his low stature, not above that of a monkey. This little creature was mounted on a large goat, says the tale, and might be described in the same terms as Pan; his visage was fiery red, his head huge; he had a long red beard reaching to his chest, which was gaily attired in a spotted fawn's skin: his belly was hairy and his legs declined into goats' hoofs.[77]

The description of the Pygmy King offered by Map instantly marks him off as a figure of alterity — although he possesses some human traits, Map insistently foregrounds his animal aspect through his comparisons which emphasise his caprine and simian connections.[78] These animalistic echoes add multiple dimensions to the adjective "low" (*modicitate*, from the Latin *modicus*, meaning small) — the pygmy's low stature is both a reference to his height as well as a suggestion that he is in many respects lesser than Herla, a qualificatory deflation of position. The identification of the pygmy with Pan, a classical god, is particularly significant not only because it testifies to the persistence of (pagan) pre-Christian elements in medieval literary culture, but also because it offers a key to interpreting the personality of the pygmy. The son of Hermes and the favourite of Dionysus, Pan was a goat-horned goat-legged divinity who was worshipped by the ancient Greeks as a fertility god (a feature partially reminiscent of the chthonic gods — such as Pluto — who were also associated with fertility, albeit of the land). He was known for his erratic temperament, an irascible deity who was capable of inspiring sudden fear in the hearts of both men and animals.[79] Interestingly enough, the figure of Pan was also used as a reference point for iconographic representations of the Devil in the Middle Ages.[80] The association with Pan both classicises as well as complicates the description of the Pygmy King — being compared to a god does seem to impart a certain elevation and nobility which complements his status as king, but it also seems to hint at an essential intractability which lies at the heart of this figure. Further, through the (implicit) connection between Pan and Lucifer, there is a subtle undercurrent of the diabolical about the pygmy.[81] The medieval reader is forewarned early on in the tale that this is a figure whom they cannot unconditionally trust.

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[76] For a comparison of the similarities (and differences) between the two versions of the story of Herla, see Smith, *Map and the Matter of Britain*, 90–93.

[77] Map, *De nugis*, 26–27. All subsequent references to the text are to this edition by page number.

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[78] By virtue of this duality — half-human, half-bestial — in nature, the Pygmy King would seem to belong to the *genus mixtum* or 'mixed species' of medieval thought which, on account of this ontological ambivalence, was often regarded with fear and suspicion. The theory of the *genus mixtum* was attributed by Johannes Nider in his *Theologi Preceptorium* of 1438 to Albertus Magnus. Referring specifically to the pygmies, Nider writes: "Aliquando sunt Pigmei, quod animal secundum Albertus in De Animalibus, vbi prius est multum simile homini, quia erecte incedit, minibus vtitur ad opera quaedam, loquitur lingua. Et tamen simpliciter plus est bestia quam homo: licet sit nobilius animalium infra hominem. Aliquando etiam daemones in siluis apparent esse homines vel feminae, vt decipiant incautores" ("Sometimes they are Pigmies, which, according to Albertus Magnus in *De Animalibus*, is a kind of animal much like a man, because it walks upright, uses its hands for certain tasks, and employs language; and yet it is clearly more beast than man, although more noble than the other animals below man. Also sometimes they are demons who appear to be men or women in the woods, in order to deceive the unwary.") Since fairies were also considered to be of uncertain ontological status, liminal beings who straddled the boundaries of the mortal and supernatural worlds, some clerical authors tended to view them as a class of creatures also belonging to the *genus mixtum*, thereby leading to a conflation between fairies and pygmies (and, by dual extension, with demons). The theory of the *genus mixtum* adds an interesting dimension to my argument on the equivalences between Map's Pygmy King and medieval fairies, a point on which I elaborate further in the following pages. I shall have more to say about the liminal status of fairies in the next chapter. My attention was drawn to Nider's formulation (via attribution) of the *genus mixtum* through footnote 13 of Chapter 1 ("Believing in Fairies") of Richard Firth Green's *Elf Queens and Holy Friars: Fairy Beliefs and the Medieval Church* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 210–211.

[79] For a more detailed description of this deity, see the entry on Pan in *A Dictionary of World Mythology* (Oxford University Press, 2003), accessed August 17, 2017. doi: 10.1093/acre/9780192177476.001.0001.

[80] Jeffrey Burton Russell has pointed out that, like Pan, the Devil was often depicted in medieval iconography as a horned, hooved figure covered with goathair, possessing a large phallus and a large nose, and invested with Saturnine features. See Russell, *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1984), 68.

The Pygmy King is also invested with powers of divination. He appears at Herla's court and foretells the king's impending marriage to the daughter of the Frankish king, a matrimonial prospect Herla seems to have had no inkling of. The sense of uncanniness initially aroused by the pygmy's strange physical appearance is further compounded by his preternatural power of prophecy. Map allows the pygmy to introduce himself:

> Ait pigmeus: 'Ego rex multorum regum et principum, innumerabilis et infini populi, missus ab eis ad te libens uenio, tibi quidem ignotus, sed de fama que te super alios reges extulit exultans, quoniam et optimus es et loco michi proximus et sanguine, dignusque qui nupcias tuas me conuiua gloriose uenustes, cum tibi Francorum rex filiam suam dederit, quod quidem te nesciente disponitur, et ecce legati ueniunt hodie. Sitque fedus eternum inter nos, quod tuis primum intersim nupciis, et tu meis consimili die post annum.' His dictis ei tygride uelocius et terga uertit et se rapuit ab oculis eius.
>
> [The pygmy said:] 'I am the king over many kings and princes, an unnumbered and innumerable people, and am sent, a willing messenger, by them to you. I am unknown to you, it is true, but I glory in the renown which has exalted you above other monarchs, inasmuch as you are a hero and also closely connected with me in place and descent, and so deserve that your wedding should be brilliantly adorned by my presence as a guest, so soon as the King of the Franks has bestowed his daughter upon you. This matter is being already arranged, though you know it not, and the ambassadors will be here this very day. Let this be a lasting arrangement between us, that I shall first attend your wedding and you mine on the same day a year hence.' With these words, swifter than a tiger, he turned and vanished from view. (26–27)

Throughout the speech there seems to be an attempt on the part of the pygmy to equate his royal position with that of Herla's — according to the pygmy, both he and Herla are allied in that they lay equal claims to eminence and prestige on the basis of nobility of status (*loco*, from *locus*, denoting place) and ancestry (*sanguine*, from *sanguis*, denoting blood). As the ruler of the Britons, Herla has already been (implicitly) characterised as a renowned monarch of a worthy race. By announcing himself as the overlord of many kings and principalities and by detailing their shared attributes of superior rank and lofty pedigree, the Pygmy King claims kinship with a sovereign and a kingdom of distinction. It is important to bear in mind that so far we have only the pygmy's own words for this; we have to wait for Map's description of Herla's wedding feast for proof of the Pygmy King's largesse:

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[81] Schwieterman has noted similarities between the reference to Pan in the passage describing the appearance of the Pygmy King and the almost explicit comparison of the satyr with the figure of Pan in the story (adopted from Jerome's *Life of Paul of Thebes*) of the hermit Anthony's search for Paul in Chapter 15, Distinction 2. I find myself in agreement with Schwieterman when he concludes that despite containing echoes of the demonic, Map's characterisation of Pan is theologically ambivalent; see Schwieterman, "Fairies, Kingship, and the British Past," 23–25.

> Quo residente solempniter ad nupcias, ecce pigmeus ante prima fercula, cum tanta multitudine sibi consimilium quod mensis repletis plures foris quam intus discumberent in papilionibus pigmei propriis in momento protensis; prosiliunt ab eisdem ministri cum uasis ex lapidibus preciosis et integris et artificio non imitabili conpactis, regiam et papiliones implent aurea uel lapidea suppellectile, nichil in argento uel ligno propinant uel apponunt; ubicunque desiderantur assunt, et non de regio uel alieno ministrant, totum de proprio effundunt, et de secum allatis omnium excedunt preces et uota. Salua sunt Herle que preparauerat; sui sedent in ocio ministri, qui nec petuntur nec tribuunt. Circumeunt pigmei, graciam ab omnibus consecuti, preciositate uestium gemmarumque quasi luminaria pre ceteris accensi, nemini uerbo uel opere uel presencia uel absencia tediosi.

> When he took his place in state on the wedding day, before the first course the pygmy made his appearance, with so vast a crowd of similar beings that the tables were filled and a larger number sat down to meat outside the hall than within it, in pavilions brought by the pygmy, which were set up in a moment of time. Out of these pavilions darted servants bearing vessels each made of a single precious stone, by some not imitable art, and filled the palaces and the tents with plate of gold and jewels; no food or drink was served in silver or wood. Wherever they were wanted, they were at hand: nothing that they brought was from the royal stock or elsewhere; they lavished their own provision throughout, and what they had brought with them more than satisfied the utmost wishes of all. Nothing of Herla's preparations was touched: his own servants sat with their hands before them, neither called for nor offering aid. Round went the pygmies, gaining golden opinions from everyone: their splendid clothing and jewels made them shine like burning lights among the company: never importunate, never out of the way, they vexed no one by act or word. (26–29)

The emphasis in this passage seems to be on the magnanimity of the pygmy. Like Midir in the *Tochmarc Étaine*, the Pygmy King is presented as the purveyor of immense riches, lavishing gifts upon Herla in a spectacular show of his power of generosity and economic might. Map gives meticulous attention to detail — the luxurious pavilions, precious metals, sumptuous clothing, and opulent jewellery and gemstones all testify to the pygmy's wealth, and this unmistakeable focus on the material articulates a crucial point — that the display of largesse is almost as potent a marker of kingship as good governance. Map concludes his description of the wedding with the pygmy's reminder to Herla to honour his promise and subsequent disappearance at cock-crow. Two minor details are worth noting: first, the pygmy begins by invoking the name of god (‘*Rex optime, Deo teste uobis assum iuxta pactum nostrum in nupciis uestris*’ — ‘Noble King, I take God to witness that I am here present at your wedding in accordance with our agreement’), a fact that seems to suggest that despite his otherworldliness, he cannot be dismissed outright as a demon. As a churchman who had undoubtedly received a clerical education, Map’s theology would have been sufficiently clear-cut to make him unable to put god’s name in the mouth of a diabolical spirit. The Pygmy King occupies a more liminal, ambiguous position; Map refuses to allow his readers to jump to facile, hasty conclusions. A second detail specifies the time of the pygmy’s departure — at cock-crow (*gallicinium*). Poised on the threshold of day and night, light and darkness, dawn and dusk are diurnal events whose defining characteristic is their in-betweenness and which are consequently usually associated with the activities of other beings who also occupy the ambiguous space between clearly defined categories. In fact, appearances and disappearances at cock-crow and twilight were a particular characteristic of Celtic fairies.[82] As a liminal figure who is unlikely to be a demonic spirit, could the Pygmy King be viewed as a fairy, a race usually affiliated with the ambiguous supernatural? I shall return to this question shortly together with a brief discussion of the tale’s (supposed) Celticity.

The reader’s impression of the Pygmy King as a materially prosperous and wealthy monarch is further amplified by Map’s description of his realm:

> Cauernam igitur altissime rupis ingrediuntur, et post aliquantas tenebras in lumine, quod non uidebatur solis aut lune sed lampadarum multarum, ad domos pigmei transeunt, mansionem quidem honestam per omnia qualem Naso regiam describit Solis.
>
> The party entered a cave in a high cliff, and after an interval of darkness, passed, in a light which seemed to proceed not from the sun or moon, but from a multitude of lamps, to the mansion of the pygmy. This was as comely in every part as the palace of the Sun described by Naso. (28–29)

This cursory description reiterates with pithiness and brevity the opinion which the reader has by now been encouraged to cultivate — that the Pygmy King is the ruler of a magnificent, otherworldly domain. Map embellishes his account with subtle details which help to flesh out the nature of the Pygmy King. The fact that the pygmy’s kingdom is only accessible through a cavernous cliff-side passage is reminiscent of entrances to the Otherworld in Celtic mythology which could typically only be navigated through subterranean, terrestrial (such as rocky passages in mountains, hillsides, or cliffs), or aquatic pathways. Like the Otherworld, the pygmy's kingdom too seems to enjoy a parallel, largely hidden existence. In her illuminating monograph *Otherworlds: Fantasy and History in Medieval Literature*, Aisling Byrne has offered a unique interpretation of the concept of the Otherworld. Byrne views the Otherworld as an *imaginative* (as distinct from *imaginary*) field rather than an ontological or ideological category. Instead of seeing the Otherworld as marking the boundary between the real and the unreal, the natural and the supernatural (as the term has too often been interpreted by scholars), she considers it as constituting a wholly new horizon of expectations within the text. The encounter with the Otherworld typically produces a shift in the horizon of expectations that the reader and the protagonist bring to bear on the action of the text, a movement which is analogous to the shift in cognitive expectation brought about by an encounter with the fictional text itself. This leads her to conclude that the Otherworld is a "fiction within a fiction."[83] Borrowing from J. R. R. Tolkien's postulation of 'primary' and 'secondary' worlds (referring to the reader's own world and the world of the fictional text respectively), Byrne goes on to apply her conceptualisation of the Otherworld as a metafictional literary field to a third category — that of the 'tertiary' world. The tertiary world of a narrative can, by dismantling the binarism of the primary and secondary worlds, permit a considerably broader range of interpretative combinations which can thereby significantly enrich the semiotic field of the text. As the signifier of absolute strangeness and alterity, the tertiary world can also push the secondary world of the text closer to the reader's own world when it is contrasted against itself.[84] The pygmy's kingdom seems to fit within Byrne's concept of the tertiary world, where the primary world refers to the reader's own world (and the Henrician court) and the secondary world connotes Herla's kingdom. Offset against the mysterious and baffling alterity of the pygmy's domain, both Henry's and Herla's courts (and, by extension, the world of the audience) come to be allied more closely together, a fact made apparent by Map himself in his explicit comparison of Herla's rootless wandering with the peripatetic lifestyle of the Henrician court in Chapter 13, Distinction 4 (which, as I have formerly pointed out, is an earlier version of the Herla story in Distinction 1). The pygmy's realm is also brilliantly illuminated, but this is significantly not a natural illumination — the light comes, not from celestial bodies, but from an artificial source. For all its posturing and glamour, the kingdom of the Pygmy King is one where the ordinary, natural rhythms of life are suspended. This detail is particularly crucial since it is repeated almost verbatim two centuries later by the *Orfeo*-poet in his description of the kingdom of the Fairy King.[85] Map has been insidiously elaborating upon the sense of the *unheimlich* generated at the opening of the tale, an artistic technique which has its crowning glory in the pygmy's gift of the bloodhound to Herla.

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[82] Sharon Paice MacLeod, *Celtic Myth and Religion. A Study of Traditional Belief, with Newly Translated Prayers, Poems and Songs* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2012), 148.

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[83] Byrne, *Otherworlds*, 21–22. I discuss Byrne's formulation of the Otherworld in greater detail in the following chapter.
[84] Byrne, *Otherworlds*, 27.

Just like his visit to Herla's kingdom, the pygmy's gift of the bloodhound to Herla appears unmotivated and arbitrary, an act made all the more peculiar by the condition attached to its use. The Pygmy King's instruction that none of the members of Herla's troop must alight from their horses until the dog has leapt from the lap of its carrier imposes an unnatural, indeed unnecessary restraint — there is no logical connection between the dog's movement and the act of disembarkation. It is, however, entirely in keeping with the whimsical commands frequently issued by fairies. Human interactions with fairies typically involve the imposition and observance of certain rules in order to preserve the secrecy of the fairy realm and the identity of its inhabitants. It is a literary commonplace, particularly in romance narratives, that the human participants (by virtue of an innate fallibility of nature) almost invariably fail to honour the pact made with the fairies, a transgression for which they are punished usually by being barred forever from accessing the fairy world. Gifts given by fairies also assume a special function, either offering supernatural protection or by acting as a relic of powerful enchantment, thereby facilitating an extension of the inscrutable magic so characteristic of their domain.[86] The cord of such a magical connection, once snapped, could have grave and unfortunate consequences. Something similar seems to take place in the story of Herla. On questioning an old shepherd upon his return to his kingdom, Herla discovers that two hundred years have lapsed since the day of his journey to the pygmy's realm, a revelation which is as extraordinary as it is unbelievable, not only because to Herla the interim had appeared to be nothing more than the passage of three days, but also because despite this incredible accruing of years, Herla and his band appear physically unchanged. However, when one of the men alights from his horse in shock before the bloodhound has moved, he crumbles into dust. He pays a terrible price, not only because he has disobeyed the orders of the pygmy, but also because he has removed himself from the orbit of the bloodhound's magical protection. The rest of Herla's train remains unscathed as long as the bloodhound remains unmoving; it is as if their life-force is somehow tethered to the hound which here nearly adopts the status of a magical artefact. By acting as a living relic of the pygmy's kingdom, the bloodhound appears to extend the timelessness and immortality of that realm on to the human visitors handpicked by the Pygmy King himself. Human beings are forever changed after their encounter with the fairy world and find it impossible to return to their former mode of life. The restless, eternal drifting of Herla's troops henceforth thereby seems to suggest that the pygmy whom they had met and interacted with was, in fact, a member of the race of the fairies.

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[85] The reference to Ovid — 'Naso' — is an interesting detail, suggesting Map's direct acquaintance with the works of the Roman poet and thereby testifying to a kind of shared literary heritage carried across time, space, and cultural contexts. This kind of chronological, spatial, and cultural transport is in keeping with the modes of functioning of both myth and cultural translation that I have discussed over the course of Chapters 1 and 2.

[86] For illustrations of these features of fairy rule-keeping (and punishment for disobedience) and gift-giving, see Cooper, *English Romance*, 173–217, Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural*, 179–206, and Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance*. I shall have more to say about the characteristics of medieval fairies in Chapter 3.

The argument in favour of reading the tale of Herla within the context of insular fairylore has been advanced by Schwieterman who has identified the common motifs shared by both Map's story and medieval fairy narratives.[87] However, even as Map embroiders his narrative with threads drawn from the fabric of British (emphatically Welsh) fairylore, he also attempts to blur the boundary between the insular and the classical. Schwieterman believes that in building up the Pygmy King as a "Pan-like fairy," Map attempts to hark back to an illustrious British past which owes its origins to the "prestigious culture of the pagans of the classical Mediterranean." Map's avowed purpose in writing the tale of Herla, according to Schwieterman, seems to be not only to offer a satirical picture of the chaotic Henrician court, but also to provide a trenchant political commentary by which the sinking of Herla's band into the waters of the Wye during the initial years of Henry's reign is seen as the suppression of several decades of Welsh military aggression by the Normans and the integration of the British Isles into a unified political entity with a luminous classical heritage.[88] Such a view is reiterated by Smith who opines that in serving up a story seasoned with motifs drawn from Celtic, particularly Welsh, folklore, Map enacts a literary politics which he terms as 'Britonicization' — an attempt to explicitly situate the text within the contemporary literary milieu of the Matter of Britain.[89] Whatever may have been his reasons behind writing the tale of Herla, Map's portrayal of the pygmy as a prototype of the Fairy King shows the increasing assimilation of this figure to insular Celtic fairylore, whereas the lingering traces of classical pagan myth in his description hint at the possible roots of this figure in the pre-Christian world, connections which I have been tracing throughout the course of this chapter. However, even as the Fairy King mingled with his Celtic counterparts in the literary and mythical imagination of the medieval writers, he was also beginning to be worked upon by the forces of Christianisation, a process which becomes more prominent in a text such as *Sir Orfeo* where the Fairy King — unequivocally named so for the first time — is presented as the ruler of a kingdom whose description owes as much to Biblical imagery (an amalgam of Hell as well as New Jerusalem) as it does to the Celtic Otherworld. Before I turn to a discussion of the Fairy King in *Orfeo* in the following chapter, I would like to conclude this section by citing a story bearing several similarities with the tale of Herla, albeit with a markedly eschatological import. Dating from the first part of the thirteenth century, this story demonstrates that the process of Christianisation had already been set in motion:

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[87] Schwieterman, "Fairies, Kingship, and the British Past," 21–22. To this list may be added the motif of the double invitation, usually between two friends, which was already well-established in oral narrative and which found its way into a number of written texts that began to take on a decidedly scriptural tone; on this point, see Giuseppe Gatto, "Le voyage au paradis: La christianisation des traditions folkloriques au Moyen Âge," trans. Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 34, no. 5 (1979): 931–934.

[88] Schwieterman argues that Map's dating of the disappearance of Herla's band to the first year of Henry II's reign must be read within the historical context of the fraught relationship between England and Wales in the twelfth century. The reassertion of autonomy by Welsh princes during the reign of Henry's immediate predecessor Stephen of Blois was dealt with by Henry by launching major expeditions against

> Eberhard, évêque de Bamberg, de retour d'Italie où il avait suivi Frédéric I^{er}, s'arrête dans un monastère clunisien des Alpes d'Italie (*in Alpibus Italiae*). A la requête de l'évêque, l'abbé raconte l'extraordinaire histoire de la fondation du monastère. Son fondateur était un duc, dont le fils unique allait se marier. De nombreux nobles avaient été invités à la noce, mais il manquait un invité, auquel le marié tenait beaucoup: l'ange (*defuit adhuc unus, angelum dico*). Le jeune homme avait coutume de prier plusieurs fois dans la journée: le soir venu, il se rendit à cheval à l'église située sur le flanc d'une colline, et il fut exaucé.

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the insurgent Welsh, a military manoeuvre which was successful in achieving the submission of Owain Gwynned and Rhys ap Gruffudd, two of the most important princes of the rebel faction. Intermittent hostilities were, however, to continue until Henry adopted the strategy of rapprochement in late 1171 which was to usher in a period of peace (lasting until Henry's death in 1189) and which succeeded in confirming Henrician lordship over the Welsh marches. Having formerly argued in favour of the early 1180s as the probable period of composition of the First Distinction, Schwieterman accordingly contends that for Map's contemporaries, the "description of Herla and his frenzied rout sinking into the waters of the Wye during the first year of Henry's reign would […] have served to evoke Henry's success in bringing Wales back to the political orbit of England as well as the relative calm that followed." For a more detailed discussion of these views, see Schwieterman, "Fairies, Kingship, and the British Past" 28–31.

[89] Smith, *Map and the Matter of Britain*, 83–105.

Sur le chemin du retour, il voit un vieillard vêtu de blanc, et monté sur un mulet blanc; le jeune homme répond à son salut et l'invite à la noce. A la question du jeune homme, le vieillard répond qu'il est ‹‹son ami›› (*amicus tuus sum*). Le jeune homme lui confie l'organisation de toute la fête nuptiale, qui dure deux ou trois jours (*biduo triduove*), sans que diminue jamais l'abondance des mets. Quand il prend congé, son hôte l'accompagne jusqu'à l'endroit où ils s'étaient rencontrés. Il voudrait le suivre plus loin, mais le vieillard lui dit qu'il le reverra trois jours plus tard, quand il donnera une fête (*sollempnitas est mihi*) à laquelle il l'invite: que le jeune homme revienne au même endroit, et il y trouvera le mulet, qui le guidera jusqu'à lui par un sentier inconnu de tous, sauf de lui-même et de son animal.

Le jeune homme fait ce qui lui a été dit, trouve le mulet, renvoie ses chevaliers, leur donne rendez-vous le lendemain en cet endroit, et part. Un étroit defile le conduit sur un vaste plateau couvert de toutes sortes de fleurs, d'arbres chargés de fruits et peuplés d'une multitude d'oiseaux, etc. Un vol d'oiseaux vient à sa rencontre, qui de son chant le guide et semble annoncer son arrivée. Il arrive à un camp de tentes (*tabernacula*), qu'habitent des hommes heureux qui l'accueillent en chantant et l'accompagnent jusqu'à un deuxième campement, où des hommes plus heureux encore le reçoivent. En compagnie des premiers et des seconds, il parvient à une troisième *statio*; le bonheur y est incommensurable et il en est aussitôt enivré. Enfin, dans ‹‹une quatrième demeure›› (*in quarta dein mansione*), il trouve son hôte, entouré de personnes vêtues de blanc et la tête couronnée. Le mulet s'arrête. Le vieillard et sa suite de jeunes gens vêtus de blanc s'avancent pour l'accueillir: sa joie est si grande que les trois cents années qu'il passe là lui paraissent trois heures, ou au plus une journée.

Entre temps, les siens, ne le voyant pas revenir, le font chercher en vain par monts et par vaux. Ne le trouvant pas, certains pensent qu'il a connu le sort d'Enoch et d'Elie. Alors, ses parents transforment leur château en un monastère. Quant à son épouse, elle lui reste fidèle jusqu'à la mort, avant d'être ensevelie dans l'église auprès de ses beaux-parents.

Pendant ce temps, le jeune homme, qui fut comme un étranger parmi les vivants, se souvient des siens et veut retourner parmi eux. Le vieillard cherche en vain à l'en dissuader, puis lui prête son mulet, qui le ramène à son point de départ. Dès que le jeune homme met pied à terre, l'animal s'en retourne.

Mais rien n'est plus comme avant: encore vêtu de ses habits de noce, il ne reconnaît rien ni personne, et nul ne le reconnaît. Il s'étonne de voir le château transformé en monastère. Il frappe à la porte, et au portier qui lui demande qui il est, il dit combien il est surpris par les transformations de ce lieu qu'il a quitté la veille. Le portier court prévenir l'abbé, qui reçoit avec joie le jeune homme et lui montre la sépulture de ses parents et de son épouse. Tous les moines accourent pour voir le prince ‹‹que l'on avait jadis perdu›› (*olim amissum*) et il raconte son aventure.

L'abbé fait dresser une grande table (*fecit cenam magnam*), invitant beaucoup de gens en l'honneur du prince. Le jeune homme ne veut pas manger, puis finit par céder à la prière de son hôte. Mais dès qu'il porte le pain à sa bouche, il devient un vieillard chenu. On le porte à l'église, où il meurt après avoir reçu les derniers sacrements, et où il est enseveli dans la même tombe que son épouse.

Eberhard, the bishop of Bamberg, returning from Italy where he had followed Frederick I, stopped at a Clunisian monastery in the Italian Alps. At the request of the bishop, the abbot told the extraordinary story of the foundation of the monastery. Its founder was a duke, whose only son was going to be married. Many nobles had been invited to the wedding, but one guest was missing, of whom the groom was very fond: the angel. The young man used to pray several times during the day: that evening, he went on horseback to a church situated on the side of a hill, and he was answered.

On the way back, he saw an old man dressed in white perched on a white mule; the boy responded to his greeting and invited him to his wedding. On the boy's questioning, the old man replied that he is "his friend." The boy entrusted the organisation of the entire nuptial feast to the old man. The wedding lasted for two or three days and there was an unceasing abundance of food. When the old man took his leave, his host accompanied him to the point where they had first met. The boy would have followed him further, but the old man replied that he will meet him again after three days, when he will organise a feast to which the boy is invited. The boy should return to the same place where he will find the mule who will guide him down a beaten track unknown to all except to himself and his animal.

The young man did as he had been told, found the mule, sent back his knights, asked them to meet him tomorrow at the same place, and departed. A narrow path led him through a vast plateau covered with all sorts of flowers, dotted with trees laden with fruits, and populated by a multitude of birds. A flock of birds flew to meet the boy and with their song guided him and seemed to announce his arrival. The boy arrived at a camp of tents which were inhabited by joyous men who welcomed him with song and accompanied him to a second encampment where the men were once again ecstatic to receive him. Escorted by the first and the second groups of men, he reached a third *statio*. The happiness was immeasurable and he was immediately elated. At last, in the fourth dwelling, the boy found his host surrounded by people dressed in white and with his head crowned. The mule stopped. The old man and his suite of young men apparelled in white came forward to greet the boy: his joy was so great that the passage of three hundred years appeared to him like the passing of three hours or no more than a day.

In the meantime, his own people, upon finding that he had not returned, searched for the young man over hill and dale. When they could not find him, they assumed that he had met the fate of the blessed prophets Enoch and Elijah. As a result, his parents rebuilt their castle into a monastery. As for his wife, she remained faithful to him until her death, and was buried in the same church beside her parents-in-law.

During this time, the young man, who had begun to feel like a stranger amongst the living, remembered his men and longed to return to them. The old man tried in vain to dissuade him, but eventually offered the boy his mule who returned him to where he had taken his leave. As soon as the young man had placed his feet on the ground, the mule went back.

But much had changed while he was gone: still dressed in his wedding garments, the young man did not recognise a single person, and no one recognised him. He was surprised to see the castle turned into a monastery. He knocked at the gate, and to the porter who answered and asked him who he was, he remarked that he was greatly surprised by the transformations worked upon the place that he had left only the day before. The porter ran to inform the abbot who received the young man with

> much joy and showed him the graves of his parents and his wife. All the monks hurried to see the "long lost" prince and the young man recounted his adventure.
>
> The abbot drew up a big table and invited many people to honour the prince. The young man did not wish to eat, but eventually gave in to the request of his host. But when he brought the loaf of bread to his mouth, he became an old man hoary with age. He was taken to the church where he died after receiving the last sacraments and where he was buried in the same tomb as his wife.[90]

There are several intriguing parallels with Map's tale of Herla — the nuptial setting (although in the story recounted by Gatto, Map's Pygmy King has been replaced by an old man), the reciprocal arrangement promised as a gesture of repayment for services rendered (like the pygmy who helped Herla with rich provisions and lavish gifts on his wedding day, the old man also helps the duke's son by arranging for an unceasing supply of food on the day of his marriage and, like the pygmy, demands that the young man respond to his call in order to return the favour in the future), and the preternatural passage of time of which the human protagonist is entirely oblivious; even the mule in the story appears to be a substitute for Map's bloodhound, animal consorts who travel between the mortal and the supernatural worlds. In certain aspects, however, the story seems to anticipate several elements that will later be included by the *Orfeo*-poet in his narrative, such as the pleasant and charming appearance of the otherworldly landscape (although, as I shall show in the following chapter, Orfeo quickly discovers that Fairyland's surface appeal belies a sinister and threatening interior), the emphasis on the colour white (the retinue of the Fairy King — which includes the hunting ladies Orfeo later meets during his exile — are all apparelled in white), and the presence of the porter at the gate (although in *Orfeo*, the porter guards the gate to the Fairy King's palace and is thus ostensibly a part of the fairy universe unlike the porter in this story who, by virtue of guarding the gate to the Clunisian monastery, firmly belongs to the world of human inhabitants).[91] The author of the Latin story has, however, embellished his account with emphatic Biblical echoes (change of setting from a royal kingdom to a monastery, details of scenery and habitation, presence of abbots, bishops, and other members of the clergy together with the importance accorded to the rites of burial and sacrament) whereby the otherworld visited by the young man and its aged inhabitants are more immediately suggestive of heavenly topography and angelic choirs respectively rather than the baffling and more ethically ambiguous realm of the Pygmy King visited by Herla and his company. The process of imparting a more clearly discernible scriptural colouring to narratives uncomfortably reminiscent of the pagan past had already begun by the thirteenth century, and a tale such as the one contained in the Poznan manuscript offers a valuable example of this Christianising process, positioned as it is on the cusp of the transition from a story such as Map's to the one recounted by the *Orfeo*-poet in the fourteenth-century Middle English romance of the same name.[92] It is to this romance that I now turn.

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[90] This story, originally in Latin, was recounted by Giuseppe Gatto in his essay on the process by which the folkloric motif of the Otherworld journey was Christianised into the voyage to Paradise. I have made use of Jean-Claude Schmitt's French translation of Gatto's essay which was originally written in Italian. The English translation is my own. See Gatto, "Le voyage au paradis," 929–930. The original Latin text summarised by Gatto is preserved in a manuscript contained in the Raczynski Library in Poznan and the full text is reproduced in J. Schwarzer, "Visionslegende," *ZDP* 13 (1882): 338–351.

[91] I do not wish to suggest that the *Orfeo*-poet had any direct knowledge of either the Latin story in the Poznan manuscript or the tale of Herla in the *De nugis*. While scholars have argued that Map's text was probably largely unknown in the Middle Ages, I am not familiar with the textual history of the Poznan manuscript, which means that both possibilities — the *Orfeo*-poet was familiar with the Latin text or had no prior knowledge of it — may be equally viable. What seems to be of greater relevance is that narratives of this kind — human visits to a supernatural otherworld and interactions with its denizens — seem to have been part of the wider literary-textual culture of the medieval world.

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[92] Another story bearing interesting parallels with *Orfeo* (although characterised once again by a decidedly Biblical tone) can be found in the second book of the thirteenth-century Belgian Dominican Thomas of Cantimpré's *Bonum Universale de Apibus*. In this story, Thomas relates how in early thirteenth-century Germany a heretic given to demonic visitations sought to enlist the services of the noted anti-heretic preacher Master Conrad (Conrad of Höxter) by claiming to arrange the friar's audience with Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the blessed saints. On the appointed day, the heretic leads Conrad to a spacious palace located in a cave in the mountainside where a sumptuously attired king, his beautiful queen, and a host of older men resembling patriarchs or prophets accompanied by legions of angels are found sitting in the throne room. The entire thing is, however, revealed to be a demonic illusion when Conrad, who had secretly carried a pyx containing the Eucharist along with him, brandishes the Host. His erroneous ways exposed, the heretic learns his lesson and returns to the true Christian faith. Details of both the palace's location and its splendid façade evoke echoes of the Fairy King's palace in *Orfeo*, although in Thomas' story there is a strong Christian colouring whereby the personnel of the palace appear to be a mimesis of the Holy Family but are, in fact, false shadows conjured by devils (*dusii*). For the Latin original, see Thomas de Cantiprato, *Bonum Universale de Apibus* (Duacum, 1627), 553–555; for a recapitulation of the story together with its contextual placement within medieval clerical thinking about fairies as well as the similarities between Thomas' story and other medieval fairy narratives (including *Orfeo*), see Green, *Elf Queens*, 16–18.

CHAPTER THREE

ÞE KING O FAIRY WIÞ HIS ROUT: THE FAIRY KING IN *SIR ORFEO* AND LATE MEDIEVAL POETRY

In the previous chapters I discussed how the pagan god Dis/Pluto figured in the poetic works of the Latin poets Virgil and Ovid who recounted the story of Orpheus' journey into the Underworld in Book IV of the *Georgics* and Book X of the *Metamorphoses* respectively. I also looked at Boethius' philosophical reconfiguration of the Orpheus legend in the sixth century before moving on to a consideration of the Celtic and insular parallels of the deity in the person of Midir in the medieval Irish saga *Tochmarc Étaíne* and the Pygmy King in the tale of Herla in Walter Map's twelfth-century Latin text *De nugis curialium*. In this chapter, I explore how these different traditions interact with each other to coalesce into a figure who is explicitly identified as a fairy — the Fairy King of the medieval romance *Sir Orfeo*, a fourteenth-century retelling of the Orpheus episode in Middle English. The ontological status of the figure whose antecedents I have been tracing has so far exhibited a variety that is as much protean as it is confusing — from the chthonic overlord of the dead in classical Greece (and in subsequent Roman literary importation) to a supernatural entity who is simultaneously human and divine in pre-Christian Ireland to a dwarfish figure who is as reminiscent of the pagan god Pan as he is of the Devil of medieval clerical imagination. The Fairy King of *Sir Orfeo* is suggestive of all these modes of representation without however being an exact simulacrum of any one particular figuration. This is because in characterising the figure as the King of the *fairies*, the *Orfeo*-poet has adopted an entirely different system of classification, a literary manoeuvre which necessitates the wholesale redrawing of all hermeneutic boundaries. Before proceeding to an analysis of the Fairy King in the poem, it is therefore crucial to begin with an examination of the provenance and nature of medieval fairies together with an exploration of the contexts within which ideas about them flourished.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ETYMOLOGY OF THE WORD 'FAIRY' AND FAIRY BELIEF:

In order to decode the numerous levels of signification inherent within the nebulous word "fairy," it is perhaps expedient to begin with a brief discussion of its etymology.[1] The word "fairy" seems to have been derived from Latin *fatum*, which denoted 'thing said.' The neuter plural *fata*, which took on the added meaning of 'fate,' was misinterpreted in the course of time as the feminine singular, with the implication that *fata* eventually came to connote 'female fate' or 'goddess.' These female goddesses of fate were identified with their Greek parallels Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos and eventually, through the Roman conquest of the Celts, applied to Celtic female deities who were traditionally represented as tripartite. Through the process of linguistic and phonetic development from Latin to Old French, the /t/ was dropped from the word, and *fata* evolved to **fa'a* or **fae*. As the usage of the word stabilised (common variants of the noun included *fai*, *fae*, or *fay*) to refer to an individual female possessing supernatural powers (best translated as 'enchantress'), the substantive *faierie* came to denote the state of 'enchantment.' With the passage of time, the semantic field of the word *faierie* expanded to include not just a state or condition, but also the sense of 'abode' or 'dwelling-place' (as in Fairyland) as well as the supernatural beings themselves.[2]

The notion of 'fatedness' encapsulated within the Latin *fata* meant that the word came to be conceptually aligned with the idea of death. There is in the idea of 'fatedness' a certain sense of the inexorable and the inevitable, the implication of a force more potent than humanity that can orchestrate the destiny of mankind, which makes it in many respects a natural corollary of death. These denotative attributes were also shared by the Old English *faege*, 'doomed to die' and the Scottish *fey*, and as the application of the word began to be extended to such variant meanings as 'accursed,' 'destined,' 'dead', 'fated,' 'feeble,' and 'cowardly,' the associative meaning of a supernatural power or a principle of divine selection also grew in importance. There existed sufficient semantic parallels between the Old English *faege* and the Anglo-Norman *faierie* to enable the emergence of the word

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[1] My discussion of fairy etymology is based upon Noel Williams' thorough article "The Semantics of the Word *Fairy*: Making Meaning Out of Thin Air," in *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays*, ed. Peter Narváez (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1991), 462–472.

[2] Richard Firth Green offers a more rigorous definition of fairies as a "class of numinous, social, humanoid creatures who were widely believed to live at the fringes of the human lifeworld and interact intermittently with human beings. In this they differed from those solitary creatures who inhabited the wilderness (giants and the like) or the social creatures who lived among humans (the various kinds of household spirit)." See Green, *Elf Queens*, 4–5.

"fairy" in Middle English which incorporated the tenets of each.[3] However, it is also important to remember that the word "fairy" was primarily a literary word which with its complex of meanings was first carried into the Middle English romances around the middle of the thirteenth century, making its appearance in the texts recorded in the Auchinleck manuscript. Morphologically at least, the meaning of "fairy" cannot be whittled down to a single mode of usage but has to be derived from a composite contextual framework which includes, among other things, linguistic parallels with extant words of a similar nature, pre-existing traditions and systems of belief, the trajectory of historical development of the word, rhetorical constraints on usage and fashions in diction, as well as cultural assumptions concerning the supernatural. According to Noel Williams, the semiotic field of fairy is thus charged with associations drawn as much from the texts in which it explicitly appears as from those works where it is an unspoken and yet very tangible presence.[4]

Although the conceptual roots of the fairies lie in the figures of the Fates — the Parcae or the Destinies as they were often called — as well as the sylvan nymphs of Graeco-Roman myth, what distinguishes medieval fairies from their classical forebears is the element of the erotic about them.[5] Medieval fairies were not simply passive observers of the behaviour of mortals but actively intruded upon the human world in ways which would have significant consequences for the mortals involved. When it came to beliefs about fairies, however, there existed a certain gulf between theological dispensation and popular imagination.[6] Within the Biblical scheme of things, fairies were seen either as fallen angels who had consorted with Satan in his rebellion and were consequently doomed or as neutral figures who, by virtue of their unwillingness to take a side in the Heavenly War, had forfeited the right to remain in Heaven and had therefore been consigned to an intermediate plane of existence, a state of limbo which existed in parallel to the material plane of human existence.[7] In both lines of reasoning, fairies came uncomfortably close to the openly diabolical, a feature which caused them to be viewed with significant clerical suspicion and distaste.[8] However, within popular culture — the culture of the laity and the predominantly agrarian folk population — there was a tendency to view the fairies either as spirits of the departed, ghosts, and guardians of the dead or as constituting the collective memory of ancestor races.[9] It is important to mention at this point that the distinction between 'learned' (clerical and scholastic) culture and 'popular' (folk) culture is not a clear-cut binary but one of blurred boundaries.[10] Aron Gurevich observes that even though the laity had assimilated Christian beliefs and ideas, there persisted a complex of traditions, superstitions, ritual customs, as well as patterns of behaviour which were intricately connected to the primordial magico-religious conception of the land. There was the simultaneous coexistence of indigenous folk belief as well as new ideas imbibed from Christianity, and out of this mutual interpenetration arose a unity which, although fraught with ambivalence and contradiction, nevertheless saw the commingling of traditional magical beliefs and Biblical teaching.[11] The division between clerical and lay culture is also untenable in view of the fact that folk belief, embodied in stories, legends, and tales which were often not recorded in writing,

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[3] Williams points out that Laȝamon's *Brut*, one of the last works to use *faege* extensively, also uses *aluen* to describe creatures associated with the birth, weapon, and death of Arthur. The term *aluen* (elven) is probably derived from the Anglo-Saxon *ælfe* which is cognate with the Norse *álfr*, and is used to denote "corporeal anthropomorphic beings mirroring the human in-groups which believed in them." See Alaric Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England: Matters of Belief, Health, Gender and Identity* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2007) and Jacqueline Simpson, "On the Ambiguity of Elves," *Folklore* 122, no. 1 (2011): 76–83. [The phrase quoted is from page 68 of Hall's work]. This suggests that the Germanic peoples had their own term(s) for supernatural creatures who also vacillated between divine and diabolical. The discussion of the Germanic tradition is, however, beyond the scope of this work.

[4] Williams, "The Semantics of the Word *Fairy*," 472.

[5] Laurence Harf-Lancner, *Les fées au Moyen Âge: Morgane et Mélusine; La naissance des fées* (Geneva: Editions Slatkine, 1984), 17. The eroticism of which Harf-Lancner speaks is particularly pronounced in the case of female fairies.

[6] Clerical opinion on supernatural beings was also tinged with ambivalence. Certain Christian writers, for instance, tended to conflate fairies with the class of 'neutral' or 'passive' angels. This group occupied the interstitial space between the binaries of angels and demons. Expelled from Heaven and disbarred from Hell, these neutral angels led an intermediate, liminal existence and trafficked frequently with human beings — features which allied them with the fairies. By virtue of being almost exclusively the creations of a clerical imagination, the neutral angels were, however, significantly more religious in nature. Acting often like saints and heavenly angels, these neutral spirits typically appeared in stories which described situations in which human souls were imperilled and had to be guided down the right path. In such cases, the neutral angels would act as heavenly intercessors charged with reinforcing the

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bond between mortals and God by helping, advising, guarding, protecting, and assisting the human participants on the road to salvation. For a more detailed discussion, see Coree Newman, "The Good, the Bad and the Unholy: Ambivalent Angels in the Middle Ages," in *Fairies, Demons, and Nature Spirits*, 103–122.

[7] C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 134–138, Cooper, *English Romance*, 179. Their ambiguous positioning prompted Lewis to refer to the fairies as *longaevi* or the long-livers, a term he borrowed from Martianus Capella.

[8] The welter of medieval ecclesiastical ideas about fairies is complex and confusing, and it is beyond the purposes of my study to offer a summary of the numerous (and often contradictory) lines of clerical thinking about fairies which persisted in the Middle Ages. For a comprehensive survey of such positions, see Green, *Elf Queens*.

[9] Lizanne Henderson and Edward J. Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief: A History* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2007), 19–24.

[10] Carl Watkins is particularly averse to the general practice of bracketing off "folklore" from the wider network of medieval belief, maintaining that a more helpful division is between "official" and "unofficial" belief where the former refers to ideas mandated by Biblical teaching and endorsed by the Church and the latter includes all forms not accepted by the former. See Watkins, "'Folklore' and 'popular religion' in Britain during the middle ages," *Folklore* 115, no. 2 (2004): 140–150.

[11] Aron Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception*, trans. János M. Bak and Paul A. Hollingsworth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 90–91.

having been passed down the generations primarily through oral transmission, is notoriously difficult to trace with any degree of certainty. What is important to note is that these two traditions — distinct though not necessarily dichotomous — seem to have intermingled in the production of secular literature, of which the medieval romance is an example. As fears about the possible diabolical origins of fairies and deep-rooted ideas about their spectral status coalesced, a new type of fairy emerged — the literary fairy.[12]

As the repository of collective memory and as the retrospective embodiment of ancestral spirits, fairies and fairylore can be fitted within the Lotmanian schema of culture.[13] According to Lotman and Uspensky, the implanting of a fact into collective memory follows a two-step process — it is first recognised and acknowledged as existing and subsequently evaluated according to the hierarchic ties of language. The second step in particular leads to the 'translation' (the linguistic aspect being significant here) of that fact into the text of memory.[14] As an enduring element of culture, fairies can thus also be seen as being translated into text, an observation which becomes significant in view of the association between fairylore and its textual representation within the genre of the medieval romance. Furthermore, fairylore as a tangible expression of collective memory and its translation into cultural text can also be regarded as an act of communication in the Luhmannian sense of the term. According to Luhmann, evolution in a system is triggered by communicative operations which inaugurate the initiatory step of variation. The spatial and temporal reach of communication is enhanced in systems where writing is accepted as a dissemination medium, thereby increasing the possibilities of variation.[15] Viewing medieval literary culture as a system which began making increasing use of writing as the production and dissemination of manuscripts proliferated, the representation of fairies in medieval romances and their consequent circulation can also be interpreted as part of the technology of communication which was to subsequently amplify the possibilities of variation in the evolutionary trajectory of the fairies in general and the Fairy King in particular.[16] In fact, the medium of the medieval romance itself can be seen as the embodiment of the symbolically generalised communication media with the help of which selection mechanisms operate to pilot system evolution and steer the system into the state of restabilisation. Symbolically generalised communication media, which mediate the acceptance or rejection of communicative operations and thereby coordinate the process of selection, require large, complex societies where writing is practiced for their optimum functioning.[17] Within the complex cultural fabric of medieval society, characterised by technological advancements in writing and communication — advancements which would eventually usher in the age of print — the medieval romance can accordingly be regarded as a form of such communication media. The appearance of fairies in medieval romances was a consequence of the romance's tendency to employ supernatural machinery in its narrative structure. To explain the affinity of the medieval romance for the ambiguous supernatural, however, it is important in the first place to understand the formal constitution of the genre itself.

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[12] Harf-Lancner, *Les fées*, 25.

[13] "[C]ulture [is] the nonhereditary memory of the community, a memory expressing itself in a system of constraints and prescriptions. […] Insofar as culture is memory or, in other words, a record in the memory of what the community has experienced, it is, of necessity, connected to past historical experience. Consequently, at the moment of its appearance, culture cannot be recorded as such, for it is only perceived ex post facto." See Lotman and Uspensky, "Semiotic Mechanism," 213–214.

[14] Lotman and Uspensky, "Semiotic Mechanism," 214.

[15] Luhmann, *Theory of Society,* 275–280.

[16] Michael Johnston and Michael Van Dussen, "Introduction: manuscripts and cultural history," in *The Medieval Manuscript Book: Cultural Approaches*, eds. Johnston and Van Dussen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 2–3. Regarding writing as a form of technology is an approach shared by Walter J. Ong. Observing that "[t]echnologies are not mere exterior aids but also interior

THE GENERIC CONTOURS OF THE MEDIEVAL ROMANCE:

While fairies were discussed (often in pejorative fashion) in the ecclesiastical works of clerical authors and while they made occasional forays into the legendary apparatus of the *chansons de geste*, they most frequently appeared in the romances, that vast body of secular literature which constituted one of the most dominant generic categories of the textual culture of the Middle Ages. However, this association of fairies with romances — a connective link which appears almost organic in view of its recurrence — has to be explained within the context of the structure and functions of the genre of romance itself. One of the most sustained analyses of the generic contours of the medieval romance has been offered by Fredric Jameson.[18] For Jameson, the generic affiliation of a work (which he envisages in terms of a contractual agreement between writers and readers) is a crucial prerequisite to situating the work within its specific cultural context, mediating the

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transformations of consciousness," Ong considers writing as technology in the light of the capacity of the written word to affect and heighten consciousness. See Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982; repr., Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 80–82. The extract cited is from the 2012 edition.

[17] Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, 193–194.

[18] The following discussion is heavily based upon Jameson's observations in the article entitled "Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre," *NLH* 7, no. 1 (1975): 135–163.

relationship between the continually shifting rhythms of social change and the dynamics of the text-world itself. Jameson conceptualises the relationship between genres and individual literary works in the form of a system. Building upon the Saussurean model of viewing the system as a series of synchronic states in which different generic composites pulsate, shift, and interact with each other through difference, Jameson sees the generic system as constituting a kind of environment for the text, a binary arrangement which not only determines the relationship of an individual work to its generic identity but also serves to clarify the nature of the work itself.[19] Thus, for Jameson, understanding a particular medieval romance (in the sense of an individual text) requires a foreknowledge of the genre of the romance itself.

Jameson distinguishes between two dominant strands of contemporary genre criticism — the semantic or phenomenological approach which attempts to provide the meaning of the genre and apprehends that meaning in terms of a mode, and the syntactic or structural approach which attempts the construction of a model of genre in which the genre is dealt with in terms of fixed form.[20] For the structural analysis of romance as fixed form, Jameson takes Vladimir Propp's morphological dissection of folk narratives as the starting point.[21] Propp's axiomatic examination of the features of folktales is criticised by Jameson for being too clinical and not abstract enough. Jameson feels that Propp is overtly reductive in his approach, since his outline of the typical characteristics of folk narratives seems to suggest that there is only one way to view such tales, a stance which robs the folktale of much of its polyvalent, protean creative potential.[22] Jameson takes particular issue with Propp's analysis of 'character,' a term he finds laden with the ideological implications of outdated notions of bourgeois individualism, preferring to use the term 'actants' instead. Considering romance characters as 'actants' enables the reader to appreciate them as participants capable of bearing multiple modes of signification and to situate their actions within the complex web of cause-and-effect which propels the narrative forward.[23] In the fullest sense of the term, fairies in medieval romances can thus be seen not as mere

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[19] Jameson, "Magical Narratives," 153. The system-environment distinction is, of course, heavily reminiscent of Luhmann's theories.

[20] Jameson, "Magical Narratives," 136–137.

[21] Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. Laurence Scott, rev. and ed. Louis A. Wagner, 2nd ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968).

[22] In his response to Propp, Jameson builds upon the earlier criticism of Claude Lévi-Strauss. See Lévi-Strauss, "L'Analyse morphologique des contes russes," *International Journal of Slavic Linguistics and Poetics* 3 (1960): 122–149.

[23] Jameson, "Magical Narratives," 148–149.

'characters' crowding the figurative landscape of the work, but rather as 'actants' whose functioning constitutes the axis upon which the entire apparatus of the romance narrative rotates.

For the category of describing romance as a mode, Jameson cites the example of Northrop Frye who viewed the medieval romance as a species of fantasy fiction, articulating the desire for an unfettered wish-fulfilment which would either restore the world of everyday reality to some blissfully pure, transcendent state of prelapsarian happiness or inaugurate a new order from which the imperfections and shortcomings of the old have been effaced.[24] For Frye, this transfigurative impulse is in the hands of participants who seek to bring about such changes through the use of magic, either of a baleful or malicious kind (such as the power wielded by the villains) or of a positive, beneficent kind (adopted by the protagonists — the heroes — who resist the tyrants). The basic dialectic of the medieval romance thus becomes an opposition between polarised powers, between realms higher and lower and forces angelic and demonic. Jameson, however, takes issue with Frye's attribution of all power to the hero who is consequently elevated to messianic status. Disagreeing with Frye's characterisation of romance as an essentially episodic medium in which action predominates, Jameson contends that romance is more fundamentally concerned with 'states of being' rather than individual acts. Viewed in this way, the primeval opposition of good and evil in the romance gains significance by virtue of being considered within the context of the overarching social structure in which such binary modes of thinking were often attached fundamental importance.[25] The championing of good and the condemnation of evil was linked to society's ideological project of containing subversion and keeping internal deviancy at bay. Jameson refuses to see the conflict of good and evil as an automatic extension of the anthropological condition of mankind, a line of thinking which borders uncomfortably close to esoteric beliefs in the numinous and the abstract while discounting the crucial role played by sociocultural systems and historical context. Jameson chooses to view the genre of the romance as a cultural artefact instead, contending that the romance enjoyed its heyday in the Middle Ages because the structure of medieval society was uniquely equipped to support the emergence of this particular kind of literary text. Romance becomes operative as a mode in the presence of distinct and contextually specific 'codes' which are furnished by contemporary sociocultural, economic, and political conditions.[26] Viewed in this way, the irruption of otherworldly forces into a dominant, almost exclusively aristocratic society — an intrusion which by recalibrating the existing dynamics of the social order of the romance typically constitutes the expository dialectic of the narrative — can be seen as a fictive representation of the vigorous mechanics of the feudal structure of medieval society.[27]

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[24] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[25] Jameson, "Magical Narratives," 140.

The elemental conflict between good and evil is one of the codes of romance. According to Jameson, the literary form of the romance is an attempt to grapple with the contradiction between the positional notion of evil (by which the enemy is otherised as evil, not by virtue of any innate characteristics, but simply by virtue of his/their position relative to the dominant class) and the ontological notion of evil (the enemy as an inherently negative force, both in conduct and identity, whereby the distinction between the hero/dominant group and the enemy is one of absolute difference) by expelling it from the world of human affairs and attributing it to an alternate, supernatural realm — the world of magic.[28] It is this superimposition of a magical universe upon the earthly, purely social world which, according to Jameson, is the defining characteristic of romance as a genre. Indeed, Jameson observes that the oppositional dialectic of good and evil and the realm of magic are inextricably interlinked (belief in binaries of good and evil is itself a kind of magical thought mode, whereas conflicts between magical forces automatically arrange themselves into categories of good and evil as positive white magic and negative black magic) and serve to focus attention on the economic organisation of society, its political attributes, as well as its relations with the world of nature.[29] This reliance of the romance genre on the workings of magic helps to explain why fairies were included so frequently within romance narratives. As magical beings belonging to a dimension which, although in contact with the human world was, nonetheless, in some significant aspects markedly different from it, fairies helped to enact and rehearse the problematics of the oppositional paradigm of good versus evil, one of the fundamental ethical preoccupations of the medieval romance. One of the most important features of fairies was, however, their ultimately unassimilable nature, an aspect which served to enrich the semantic field of the romances in which they appeared. Even as they help to manifest the contest between the forces of good and evil, their ontological positioning is not always clear. They can be ranged either on the side of the beneficent forces or positioned within the negative end of the spectrum; frequently, their emplacement navigates the entire breadth of available ethical possibilities. As markers of alterity, fairies also help to dismantle neat and comfortable binaries, thereby enabling romance authors to utilise them for a variety of purposes in a variety of vastly different situations.

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[26] Jameson, "Magical Narratives," 142–143.

[27] Jameson, "Magical Narratives," 158. The most thorough study of medieval feudalism remains the pioneering work of the social historian Marc Bloch belonging to the highly influential French *Annales* school of historiography. See Bloch, *Feudal Society*, trans. L. A. Manyon, 2 vols. (London & New York: Routledge, 1965).

[28] Jameson, "Magical Narratives," 161.

[29] Jameson, "Magical Narratives," 141.

FAIRIES IN ROMANCE — THEIR NATURE AND FUNCTIONS:

The distinctiveness of romance as a literary genre lies, among other things, in its deployment of a standard set of motifs which recur across narratives and epochs.[30] These motifs (or, as Jameson would call them, 'codes'), which can be either figures or plot devices or thematic constructs, usually exhibit a remarkable degree of cultural endurance and stability. Although medieval authors could (and did) manipulate the particulars of these motifs to suit their individual creative purposes, their overarching form remained largely unchanged. Such motifs and conventions could indeed be termed as a 'meme,' defined as "an idea that behaves like a gene in its ability to replicate faithfully and abundantly, but also on occasion to adapt, mutate, and therefore survive in different forms and cultures."[31] Fairies constitute one such meme. Belonging to the ambiguous supernatural, fairies were frequently used by romance authors in view of their largely fluid ontological status which made them amenable to a variety of literary treatments. Employed this way, fairies were a crucial component of a text's 'internal folklore' — text-worlds governed by a distinctive set of rules which worked in tandem with audience expectation.[32] However, although the internal folklore of each text is unique to that particular narrative, there are several continuities in fairy representation across literary works.

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[30] For a comprehensive survey of the literary form of the romance, a summary history of the genre, and its most characteristic features, see Cooper's introduction to *English Romance*, 1–44.

[31] Cooper, *English Romance*, 3. The idea of the meme, originally put forward by Richard Dawkins, is applied by Cooper to such romance commonplaces as the quest, magic and the supernatural, feminine desire and sexuality, and questions of rightful inheritance.

[32] Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance*, 3. My subsequent discussion of the role of fairies in romance owes much to Wade's study.

One of the primary identifying attributes of fairies is their unique ontological positioning within the text-worlds of the narratives in which they appear, a singularity related to the fact that their very nature — neither human nor strictly divine, neither angelic nor wholly demonic — actively resists assimilation into clearly defined categories. They occupy a unique conceptual space whereby the laws, rules, ethical norms, and social mores which regulate the lives of the other (human) characters in the romance simply do not apply to them. James Wade has termed this type of positioning as 'adoxic' and the hermeneutic niche occupied by the fairies as a 'state of exception' whereby they inhabit a third space distinct from the categories of both orthodoxy and unorthodoxy.[33] These 'states of exception' are anomic intra-diegetic spaces which are free from the logical, physical, and moral structures of the human world and where the fairies, acting as adoxic figures of sovereign power, create their own set of laws. These laws cannot be interpreted using any of the juridical or political contexts that usually apply to the human world, and though arbitrary and outside the purview of commonplace legality, they nonetheless assume the full force of the legal apparatus — this is the fairies' sovereign ban and the 'non-law' that animates it.[34]

The fairies constitute an alternative order which cannot be fully integrated within the ordinary schemes of action, causation, and even temporality, a feature which is not so much an exclusionist strategy as it is an investiture of autonomy. It is their freedom from the strictures that usually govern human existence that makes fairies so particularly powerful, able to act as they please without worrying about the consequences (whether social, legal, political, or divine) of their actions. Indeed, it is by virtue of this absolute power that fairies possess a dual advantage — the capacity to influence human action while remaining largely impervious to mortal activity. However, even as their adoxic positioning marks them off as powerful, indomitable creatures enjoying considerable autonomy, it also places their intentions and desires beyond the reach of ordinary modes of understanding. Fairies are figures of alterity — the Other — on account of their unassimilable nature, and this difference is also responsible for a certain inscrutability about them.[35] It is impossible to have access to a fairy's thoughts, feelings, objectives, and motivations, not simply because there is often no information provided by the authors of the texts they appear in, but also because the interior of a fairy's mind is quintessentially unknowable. This fundamental impenetrability of fairies' interior selves is responsible for our interpretations of their actions as illogical, capricious, and arbitrary. Fairies frequently act in ways that are unexpected and inconsistent and are capable of showing both boundless magnanimity as well as relentless cruelty.

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[33] Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance*, 15.

[34] Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance*, 76. Wade draws upon Giorgio Agamben's postulation of the 'state of exception' and the role of the sovereign as a *lex animate* ("living law") within that state to extend the application of these strictly political concepts to the fairy realm.

[35] According to Cooper, fairies are Other not so much because of unfamiliarity, sexual or cultural difference, or social and geographic distance — aspects which constitute the usual semantic field of the Other — but because they come from an entirely different dimension altogether, that of the Otherworld. See Cooper, *English Romance*, 173–174.

Another feature of the fairies is their association with the power of prophecy, a characteristic borne out of their earliest etymological identification with the Fates of Graeco-Roman mythology and assisted by the medieval worldview of fairies as constituting a third order distinct from both the divine and the diabolic. Helen Cooper observes that whereas the knowledge stemming from God was considered sacred and forbidden and was consequently accessible to only the divinely-ordained elect, knowledge arising from the Devil was profane, impure, and dangerous, and therefore to be actively avoided. The fairies' prophetic abilities offered a third way out of this quandary by falling outside the summit of both sacrosanct divine and subversive infernal knowledge.[36] Fairies' powers of divination and foresight also make them particularly potent arbiters of justice. Possessing superior knowledge as well as being free from the taint of fallibility and erroneousness that characterises most human attempts at dispensing justice, fairies can pronounce verdicts which bypass the contingencies of mortal legislation, a feature related once again to their adoxic nature and sovereign power. Although the justice enacted by the fairies may be either incomprehensible or indefensible from the viewpoint of the human participants, they usually follow a stock set of rules which are hermetically sealed off from human understanding. This implicit code also governs fairies' behaviour which, although frequently unpredictable and unreliable, ostensibly adheres to a standard acknowledged by (and available to) others only of their own kind.

One final characteristic of the literary fairies of romance is that they are often fashioned as users of magic. Romances which deal predominantly with the supernatural often utilise magic as an essential accessory of the supernatural sphere, and the use of such magic is usually consigned to the standard figure of the ambiguous supernatural in romance — the fairies. Portraying human figures as practitioners of magic was an authorial move guaranteed to produce a certain anxiety, especially since magic sat rather uncomfortably within medieval religious discourse.[37] One way to deal with such anxieties of representation was to offset magic on to beings who were themselves liminal and unassimilable. Such a role was fulfilled by the fairies. The magic practised by the fairies in medieval romances is not, however, absolutely indispensable to the plot. Fairies could use magic both as an instrument of wish fulfilment as well as a vehicle to engineer an ostensibly insurmountable challenge.[38] Whereas the former is usually associated with the bounty and largesse of benevolent fairies, the latter took precedence in many romances which featured fairy monarchs and mistresses. Indeed, it is worth noting that what is originally intended by the fairy as a gift may just as easily be transformed into a curse or a taboo depending upon the context. The rationale behind characterising fairies as magic users seems to lie in their role as testing agents; in defeating or besting a fairy adversary who is also proficient in magic, the heroics of the romance protagonist, already a cut above the rest, are shown to be truly extraordinary. This type of magic is termed by Cooper as ‘non-functioning magic’ or ‘magic that does not work.’ Such non-functioning magic does not add much to the plot; rather, its primary purpose is to the highlight the full redemptive potential of humanity.[39]

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[36] Cooper, *English Romance*, 187.

It is, however, important to note that the fairies of medieval romances, for all their behavioural and ontological complexity, are conscious *literary* creations. Their presence and characterisation within a particular romance narrative is entirely dependent upon the world-constructive powers of the author who can, by introducing variations on the norm that usually governs fairy depictions, generate interesting creative effects and sustain the reader’s interest. Wade believes that romance authors who include fairies as part of the supernatural machinery of their texts deliberately create an internal folklore that is incomplete and open-ended so that several registers of interpretation are available to readers who can consequently draw their own conclusions.[40] Working as a meme (to borrow Cooper’s formulation), fairy narratives share certain generic traits which encourage readers to group them under a common fictional network, but it is the mark of a powerful author who can utilise such intertextual parallels to set up readers’ expectations only to subvert them by furnishing particulars which compel readers to re-evaluate fairy characters.[41] Such an active creative process, characterised by an authorial ingenuity which necessitates active participation and cognitive engagement on the part of the readers, works to create a multi-layered text offering diverse avenues of interpretation whose literary worth can transcend the lexical boundaries of the narrative as well as the generic (and temporal) frame of the medieval romance. *Sir Orfeo* is one such text which has continued to attract sustained scholarly interest. Before I turn to an examination of the romance, however, a final word needs to be said on a related aspect of fairy representation in literary works: the fairies' dwelling-place, the Fairy Otherworld or Fairyland.

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[37] For a comprehensive survey of the relation between magic and religion in the Middle Ages, see Catherine Rider, *Magic and Religion in Medieval England* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012).

[38] Wade distinguishes between two categories of fairies — the fairies of wish fulfilment and dangerous fairies — and further demarcates them from other opponents that inhabit the text worlds of romance. For a detailed discussion, see Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance*, 73–74.

[39] Cooper, *English Romance*, 147–148.

[40] Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance*, 25–26..

[41] Cooper, *English Romance*, 15.

THE OTHERWORLD OF FAIRY:

Although the fairies of medieval romance frequently interacted with members of the human world, they belonged to a realm very different from that inhabited by mortals. This world, which was sometimes explicitly characterised as 'Fairyland,' can more appropriately be subsumed under the nebulous term 'Otherworld.' The Otherworld of romance was the dwelling-place of the ambiguous supernatural, a domain entirely divorced from the laws, social structures, and temporal patterns that govern the human world even as it maintained an existence parallel to that of the natural order. The 'otherness' of this world is a consequence of its alterity, its difference from the more 'ordinary' worlds of human habitation — the secular world of the court, the spiritual world of the Church, the (typically aristocratic) world of the protagonists, and the sociocultural world of the reader/audience.

Offering such a broad definition of the Otherworld, however, has its own pitfalls. Describing the Otherworld as a liminal space of alterity relative to the operations of the 'real' world has the danger of making the semantic range of the term *too* vast to offer any degree of clarity. It is important to note that the term 'Otherworld' is a scholarly term and not one used by medieval writers themselves. Medieval authors exhibited a wide range of attitudes in thinking (and writing) about the Otherworld, and a recognition of this plurality is crucial in order to avoid lumping together the diverse possibilities offered by the field into a single overarching, totalising concept. Dichotomies (such as the distinction drawn between 'secular' and 'religious' Otherworlds) also do not help in theorising about the Otherworld since there were often significant overlaps between literary representations. Calling for a reappraisal of the term 'Otherworld' that would remove the "absolutizing and dichotomizing associations" that usually characterise scholarly treatments of the term, Aisling Byrne offers a helpful solution in which the Otherworld is viewed as an *imaginative* (as opposed to *imaginary*, which is suggestive of a vapid fictitiousness) field rather than an ontological or ideological category.[42] Byrne suggests a new and novel reclamation of the notion of 'boundary' that generally characterises scholarly thinking about the Otherworld. Instead of seeing the Otherworld as the line of demarcation between the natural and the supernatural, Byrne suggests viewing the Otherworld as a boundary where both the audience's and the protagonist's horizon of expectations shift in a manner analogous to the shift in cognitive expectation that occurs when a narrative text is encountered — an experience that is analogous to the workings of fiction itself. Conceived in this way, the Otherworld becomes a fiction within a fiction.[43] Reformulated in these terms, it becomes easy to see why the Otherworld becomes such an important concept in the medieval romance. The primary functional impulse of the romance is the creation and the subsequent mitigation of oppositions. As a signifier of unassimilable alterity, the Otherworld stands as an absolute oppositional force, the ultimate hurdle to be crossed by the narrative's arc of resolution. It also functions as a third term of comparison in addition to the reductive binaries of real and fictional, thereby amplifying the interpretative possibilities of the text and enhancing the range of applicability of the narrative to the reader's own world.[44] One of the most persistent applications of the Otherworld in romance was to the realm of fairy, a combination particularly suitable in view of their common ontological status — both are 'Other' in the sense of being inassimilable, share attributes of alterity and liminality, and designate a plurality of signification which cannot be retrofitted to facile, watertight categories.

The Otherworld of Fairy is usually described as a realm of endless wonder and enchantment, one which stands out for its extraordinary beauty, richness, and luxury, where the seasons are fair and temperate and the landscape is in perennial bloom, and where material wealth is abundant and unceasing. These details seem to mark Fairyland as an arena of blissful wish-fulfilment, a domain where the deepest yearnings of the human heart are ostensibly turned to reality. As the topological manifestation of unattainable human desire, the Fairy Otherworld and its array of delights held particular imaginative resonance for an audience whose ordinary existence, marked as it was by turbulent socioeconomic conditions, the threat of famine, drought, and pestilence, and rigid Church governance, was very different. Jeff Rider sees such an Otherworld as a dreamscape, one where the repressed and frustrated ambitions and longings of medieval audiences found creative expression, sublimated on to ecstasies of joyous realisation of abundance and satisfaction of desires material, emotional, as well as sexual.[45] However, this grandeur is usually superfluous and frequently masks the threat of violence, a duality consistent with the unpredictable and intractable nature of its fairy inhabitants. Indeed, one of the characteristic features of the Fairy Otherworld is the simultaneous coexistence of the pristinely beautiful as well as the viscerally horrific; the hermeneutic boundaries are porous and variable, and what appears delightful and alluring might just as easily turn sinister and menacing.[46] From the viewpoint of literary construction, the abundance of detail with which medieval authors embellish their accounts of the Fairy Otherworld is not simply intended as an elaborate semiotic system implicitly hinting at how the realm is to be interpreted but also a conscious creative strategy to engage the audience's willingness to make-believe. Byrne calls these descriptions 'pseudo-mimetic' because the profusion of detail enacts a mimesis of reality while ultimately conveying a fantasy.[47]

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[42] Byrne, *Otherworlds*, 21. My subsequent discussion of the Otherworld relies heavily upon Byrne's analysis.
[43] Byrne, *Otherworlds*, 25.
[44] Byrne, *Otherworlds*, 29.

Although the Fairy Otherworld may be viewed as a domain of unbridled wish-fulfilment, it is also often associated with death. The notion of boundary-crossing (both as a physical journey from the human world to that of fairy as well as a process of ontological transfer) inherent in travels to the Fairy Otherworld can serve as a potent metaphor for the one experience which is the ultimate form of border-crossing — death. Journeys to the Otherworld offer both freedom from the limitations that constrain human existence as well as a break from the finitude of linear time. Death seems to be the only experience analogous to a rupture so absolute and immutable.[48] The comparison of the Otherworld with the experience of death is also prompted by the fact that just as human beings are powerless in the face of a fate as inevitable and inexorable as death, romance characters who travel (either willingly or under compulsion) to the Otherworld are frequently rendered impotent in the face of the power and authority embodied by this supernatural space.[49] The thematic link between the two realms is sustained by the pagan tradition of associating death with the Underworld (the connection between the chthonic deities and their guardianship of the dead has already been explored in Chapter 1) as well as the Christian tradition of the everlasting afterlife. Indeed, these traditions often merged in medieval accounts of Fairyland, as I shall show in the case of *Sir Orfeo*.

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[45] Jeff Rider, "The other worlds of romance," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, 121–122.

[46] Several of these ambiguities are explored by Saunders in *Magic and the Supernatural*, 179–206.

[47] Byrne, *Otherworlds*, 31.

[48] Byrne, *Otherworlds*, 58–59.

[49] Byrne, *Otherworlds*, 63.

As a space of unassimilable alterity, as a tertiary world which lies outside the boundaries of the primary and secondary worlds of the reader's own world and the world of the fictional text respectively even as it remains connected to both in the form of an alternate, parallel dimension, and as an imaginative dreamscape of wish-fulfilment and realisation of deep-rooted, instinctual, and primeval fantasies, the Fairy Otherworld is pervaded by an atmosphere that in some aspects is reminiscent of Mikhail Bakhtin's conception of the carnival.[50] Bakhtin localises the carnival spirit in the folk culture of humour, marketplace festivity, as well as literary and verbal parody that served as an alternative to the staid gravity and seriousness of official culture, both ecclesiastical and secular. This cultural complex of ritual celebration and spectacle encompassed such activities as pageants and processions, feasting, the setting up of fairs, and the performance of amusements both physical (such as dancing) and aural. Carnival festivities, which offered an outlet to channel and dissipate the tensions arising out of the solemnities of feudal social structures and Church regulations, was crucially consecrated upon the ritual of laughter. Carnival culture is fundamentally predicated upon otherness, providing avenues of expression not only to forbidden impulses, prohibited modes of behaviour (such as displays of unbridled sexuality), as well as profane and unrefined acts (such as bodily functions, particularly of reproduction and excretion), but also to characters such as clowns and fools (voluntary occupational choices) and such figures of alterity as monsters, dwarfs, giants, and animals (where such alterity is typically associated with deviance attributable either to ontological aberrations or non-human status). Stemming from pagan agrarian rites and tangentially connected to the feasts of the Christian Church, carnival festivities initially combined both comic and serious rituals by means of which gods and deities were mocked and satirised. However, with the feudal stratification of society in the Middle Ages and the delineation of social classes, the comic forms were transferred on to non-official culture where they consequently became axiomatic indices of folk identity. As a signifier of difference, the carnival gave free rein to the sensuous, the erotic, and the subversive, impulses which were shunned from the domain of official culture on account of their transgressive potential. Positioned on the cusp between art and life, reality and imagination, the carnival evolved its own spatio-temporal laws.[51] Through the temporary suspension of ordered rule, the carnival was essentially characterised by inversion whereby social mores of appropriate and expected behaviour and conduct, hierarchies of rank and position, as well as prohibitions and interdictions of all sorts were turned on their head.[52] Indeed, to borrow another Bakhtinian term, the 'chronotope' of carnival traditionally demarcates a space of alterity and otherness charged with multiple levels of signification, one where temporal categories are characterised by a kind of inexorable cyclicity and are therefore divorced from the usual patterns of linear time that typically govern human life.[53]

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[50] Bakhtin's fullest treatment of the carnival theme can be found in his seminal work *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984). My subsequent discussion of the carnival draws heavily upon various sections of this text.

The Otherworld of Fairy can, in certain respects, be said to possess a carnivalesque atmosphere. As the projected site of unfettered wish-fulfilment, the Fairy Otherworld approximates the leeway offered by the carnival to the realisation of deep-rooted, untranslatable human desire. Like the carnival spirit, the Fairy Otherworld too is a signifier of alterity, a marker of otherness which, by virtue of its intrinsically unassimilable nature, permits the harnessing of emotions, behaviours, thoughts, ideas, beliefs, and actions which are prohibited, repressed, transgressive, immoral, or ethically questionable and are thereby banished from the bounds of respectable, orthodox, and hierarchical medieval society. Inhabited by liminal beings of ambiguous ontological status, the Fairy Otherworld, like the carnival, is also characterised by the inversion of values. Outside and beyond the jurisdiction of the world of ordinary mortals, the adoxic positioning of fairies allows them to create their own legality by virtue of which they can act in ways which are inconsistent, baffling, and mysterious, appearing as distorted reflections of modes of normal human behaviour. Like the carnival, the Fairy Otherworld is an upside-down universe, one which mirrors the natural world but which, like all mirror images, is laterally (and longitudinally) inverted. Just as the carnival hangs in the balance between life and art, the Otherworld of Fairy occupies a limit position on the boundaries of human and supernatural existence, a third space of liminality, a tertiary textual world bordering on the contested horizon of the primary and secondary worlds of fiction. And like the carnival chronotope, the Fairy Otherworld is also outfitted with a polysemous space of shifting signification, heavily reliant on the dazzling surface of spectacle, aerated by a time which is both cyclical and static, inexorable and immobile, sharply disjointed from linear human time.

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[51] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 7.

[52] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 10–11.

[53] The idea of the 'chronotope' was elaborated by Bakhtin in his landmark essay "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics," collected in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84–258. Bakhtin describes the chronotope as a constitutive category which expresses "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships artistically expressed in literature." Towards the close of the essay, Bakhtin provides an analysis of the chronotopes of the medieval chivalric romance, certain features of which are also applicable to fairy romance narratives.

The curiously multivalent nature of the Fairy Otherworld can be better understood by applying to it Michel Foucault's concept of the 'heterotopia.'[54] Unlike utopias (emplacements which do not have any real basis, which maintain a general relation of direct or inverse analogy with the real space of society, and which generally constitute perfected or reversed versions of society), heterotopias are defined by Foucault as real emplacements built into the very structure of society in which all other emplacements found within culture are simultaneously represented, contested, and reversed.[55] These heterotopias are so called because, despite being localisable, they are outside all places — a paradox of positioning. Foucault begins by describing the 'crisis heterotopias' of preliterate societies. In such societies, spaces of privilege, sacredness, or prohibition were created for individuals (such as adolescents, menstruating women, women in labour, and the elderly) who, by virtue of being in experiential states of an intermediate and transitory nature, were generally regarded as being in a state of crisis relative to society.[56] The functioning of heterotopias is entirely dependent upon cultural context. With societal evolution, the same heterotopia can come to function in radically different ways. Heterotopias have the unique ability to juxtapose several otherwise incompatible emplacements within a single space. Heterotopias enact a break with traditional temporal categories, functioning at full capacity only when its human participants are separated from their traditional time.[57] Foucault distinguishes between two kinds of heterotopias on the basis of their temporal functioning — heterotopias which accumulate time in an indefinite pattern (such as libraries and museums) and ones which are associated with the ludic, cyclical aspect of festival time. A further paradox of heterotopias emerges from their construction as spaces which are simultaneously open and closed, isolated yet permeable at the same time. Access to such heterotopic spaces are granted only by special permission and after the performance of rituals of purification. Finally, heterotopias are tasked with the establishment of parallel spaces which work either to denounce real space by gathering together emplacements within which human life is partitioned off (heterotopias of illusion) or which serve to reveal the disorganised, ill-arranged, and muddled spaces of real existence by creating alternate spaces which are perfect, meticulous, and well-arranged.

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[54] Foucault enshrined his ideas on the 'heterotopia' in a lecture presented to the Architectural Studies Circle in March 1967. I have made use of Robert Hurley's translation of the lecture in the essay entitled "Different Spaces," collected in *Aesthetics, Methods, and Epistemology*, ed. James D. Faubion, Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984, Volume Two (New York: The New Press, 1998), 175–185.

[55] Foucault, "Different Spaces," 178.

[56] According to Foucault, crisis heterotopias have given way to heterotopias of deviation in the modern world. In such heterotopias, individuals whose behaviour is considered as an aberration with respect to sanctioned societal norms are incarcerated in such institutions as prisons, psychiatric hospitals, and old age homes.

[57] Foucault applies the term 'heterochronia' to this distinctive temporality of the heterotopic space.

By its very nature, the Fairy Otherworld can be classed as a heterotopia. Like heterotopias, the Fairy Otherworld is one which leads both a strictly conceptual as well as a physically localisable existence.[58] As in the crisis heterotopia, the Fairy Otherworld too has an organic connection with liminal, in-between spaces and transitory states, a constitutive feature influenced by the nature of its denizens. Fairy Otherworlds typically present a beguiling, glittering surface which frequently belies a sinister, uncanny interior, a division which seems to echo the heterotopia's capacity of juxtaposing contradictory emplacements within a single space. Like heterotopias, the Otherworlds of Fairy wrench human beings out of normal human time, imposing upon them a heterochronia that approximates the cyclicity of festival time.[59] Like heterotopias, Fairy Otherworlds are also solitary spaces which can only be accessed by human intermediaries either through express permission (such as a direct invitation by the fairies) or through the performance of rituals of purification and penance (such as Orfeo's pursuit of the hunting ladies into Fairyland after his decade-long atonement through exile in the forest). Finally, like heterotopias, Fairy Otherworlds can also be seen as establishing alternate spaces which are generally cordoned off from human society and which, through the presentation of an immaculate, splendid exterior (although the inner reality may be very different), serve to expose (even if temporarily) the confusions and disorder of ordinary human spaces. Viewing the Otherworld of Fairy through the lens of Bakhtinian and Foucauldian analysis thus allows not only an ontological deconstruction of the space but also an appreciation and understanding of the essentially protean nature of such a fictive construct.

The Fairy Otherworld is an appropriate vehicle for the concretisation of the absolutism that the fairy world represents. Thematising an "interest in indescribable or transcendent states, such as death" as well as enacting an "engagement with fundamental human differences, such as gender," the topos of Fairyland extends the alterity and liminality characteristic of fairy existence, thereby providing an immersive and engaging literary experience.[60] There is, however, another reason behind the use of the Fairy Otherworld in romances. According to Rider, the Otherworld of Fairy is a fictive world posited in contrast to an equally fictive aristocratic world. The nature of the interaction between the two worlds is determined by the state of the aristocratic society at the heart of the narrative. If the central society is in a state of peace and well-being, the incursion of the Otherworld can introduce a threat which must subsequently be resolved. However, the Otherworld may also be a crucial instrument of restoring equilibrium in cases where the central society is plagued by pre-existing problems which it cannot remedy on its own.[61] In either case, the Fairy Otherworld functions as an engine to propel the action forward, thereby acting as a crucial instrument of narrative structuring and plot construction.

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[58] This is reminiscent of Midir's *síd* at Brí Léith in *Tochmarc Étaíne*, which is both the imaginative locus of Irish conceptions of Fairyland as well as a concrete geographical site explicitly identified with the physical location of Ardagh Hill in Co. Longford.

[59] This Foucauldian festival time is strongly suggestive of Bakhtinian carnival time.

SIR ORFEO — BRIEF HISTORY AND SUMMARY:

Sir Orfeo is a Middle English romance currently extant in three manuscripts — Auchinleck MS Advocates' 19.2.1, Harley MS 3810, and Ashmole MS 61. The version of the poem contained in the Auchinleck MS seems to be the oldest and the most complete and dates from around the beginning of the fourteenth century. The versions contained in the Harley and the Ashmole MSS are later variants, dating from around the beginning and end of the fifteenth century respectively.[62] It is important to remember, however, that these dates are not the dates of composition of the poem, but merely the (conjectured) dates of compilation of the manuscripts containing the work. According to A. J. Bliss, the Middle English *Sir Orfeo* is descended from an Old French or Anglo-Norman intermediary which was itself a translation of the *Lai d'Orphey*, a Breton lay which is no longer extant but references to which have been found in three other works: *Le Conte de Floire et Blanchefleur*, the *Lai de l'Espine*, and the *Prose Lancelot*. The term 'Breton lay' is applied to poetic works produced between approximately 1150 and 1450 which claim to be literary versions of lays sung by ancient Bretons usually to the accompaniment of the harp.[63] The credit for codifying the genre goes to the twelfth century Anglo-Norman writer Marie de France who composed twelve lays as a sort of tribute to the Breton tradition of musical storytelling. The lays of Marie de France typically catered to a multilingual, aristocratic audience, were usually set in Brittany, Wales, or Normandy, and dealt with themes of courtesy, chivalry, and courtly love. Old French imitations of Marie's lays probably influenced the composition of the Middle English lays usually regarded as belonging to the generic framework of the Breton lay. These lays, which include (apart from *Sir Orfeo*) *Sir Degaré*, *Lay le Freine*, *Erle of Tolous*, *Emaré*, *Sir Gowther*, and *Sir Launfal*, are all believed to have been composed between the late thirteenth or early fourteenth and the early fifteenth century. Bliss also contended that the versions of the poem contained in the Harley and the Ashmole MSS descended from a common ancestor coeval with the Auchinleck version and were therefore independent of the Auchinleck text. Bliss' study has usually been accepted without question and has been the predominant view in scholarship on *Sir Orfeo*. Recent research conducted by Patrick Joseph Schwieterman has, however, modified Bliss' conclusions, positing not only that the Middle English *Sir Orfeo* was not so much a translation (through an intermediary) of a now-lost Breton lay but a conscious literary endeavour written in response to references to the *Lai d'Orphey* (itself the product of a collaborative literary fiction rather than an actual text which formerly existed) contained in other works, but also that the Harley and Ashmole texts of the poem derive from a common antecedent copied from the Auchinleck version after its prologue had been excised.[64]

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[60] Byrne, *Otherworlds*, 66.

[61] Rider, "The other worlds of romance," 115–120.

[62] The most authoritative discussion of the poem's provenance and textual history is A. J. Bliss' introduction in *Sir Orfeo*, ed. A. J. Bliss, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), ix–li.

[63] For a more detailed discussion of the Breton lay, its form and literary conventions, and the cultural context within which it flourished, see Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, "General Introduction," in Anne

Its tangled (and debatable) textual history notwithstanding, what can be definitively said about *Sir Orfeo* is that it is a medieval re-conceptualisation of the classical legend of Orpheus, albeit with some important changes. Orfeo is introduced as the king of England, possessed of a semi-divine lineage (his parents are said to be Pluto and Juno, although the Auchinleck text quite curiously refers to both parents as "kings") and governing an impressive kingdom from his capital at Thrace (which is explicitly identified with

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Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, eds., *The Middle English Breton Lays* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), 1–8, http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/laskaya-and-salisbury-middle-english-breton-lays-general-introduction. A thorough recent examination of the structure of the Breton lay, its interconnections with the genre of romance, as well as a study of the common motifs that characterise it is the subject of Claire Vial's work *'There and Back Again': The Middle English Breton Lays, A Journey Through Uncertainties* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2013). The nomenclature is, however, not without its problems, especially since critics continue to debate what is exactly meant by the constituent terms 'Breton' and 'lay.' For an overview of these problems, see the introduction in Leah Jean Larson, "Love, Troth and Magnanimity: The *Weltanschauung* of the Breton Lay from Marie de France to Chaucer" (PhD diss., University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1996).

[64] See Chapters 2 ("Manuscripts and Editions of *Sir Orfeo*"), 32–92 and 3 ("*Sir Orfeo*, Classical Mythology, and the *Lai d'Orphey*"), 93–119 in Schwieterman, "Fairies, Kingship, and the British Past."

Winchester). The king is said to be well-loved by all his subjects and peace, amity, and concord characterise his reign. On a balmy May morning, Orfeo's beloved wife, the queen Heurodis goes to the orchard with her train of ladies-in-waiting to enjoy the pleasant sunshine and falls asleep under a grafted tree. However, she awakes with a scream a little past noon and promptly falls into a paroxysm of agitation, tearing at her hair and clothes and scratching her face. She is taken to her bedchamber and shortly afterwards the king is summoned. Upon his concerned enquiry, the queen reveals that she had been visited by the King of the Fairies who had forcibly taken her to his kingdom, showing her the riches contained therein. The tour of his splendid kingdom concluded, the Fairy King had returned Heurodis to the orchard, leaving her with the command that she was to be ready to be taken by the fairies the following morning, warning that her refusal to comply would be met with violence before her subsequent (and inevitable) removal to Fairyland. Orfeo is naturally alarmed by Heurodis' report and decides to employ the full strength of his army to protect the queen. His military fortification is, however, rendered moot when the queen disappears from the midst of a heavily armed regiment the following day. Heartbroken and inconsolable at the loss of his wife, Orfeo resolves to forever quit the company of men and women, isolating himself from society by exiling himself to the woods. He entrusts his faithful steward with the administration of his kingdom, charges his subjects to elect a new king upon receiving the news of his death, and, taking his harp and a pilgrim's mantle, retires to the wilderness. For ten years, Orfeo lives in a state of penurious contrition, scrounging off wild fruits and berries, and the passage detailing his change of state from the comforts of royal living to the depredations of exile in the hostile wilderness is one of the most poignant and poetically sublime descriptions in medieval literature. The king's only companion was his harp, and when he would play the instrument, the force of his divinely inspired artistry would seem to draw even the beasts of the wild into a shared, civilised community of entranced listeners. One day, however, Orfeo comes across a group of ladies who were out hunting and, upon following them, is stunned to find Heurodis a part of the company. Neither shares a word with each other, although the tears fall from Heurodis' eyes. As the queen is whisked away by the hunting company, Orfeo resolves to follow them in an attempt to discover the whereabouts of his kidnapped wife. He follows the ladies through a rocky passage and comes out into a beautiful plain land dappled with light. In the middle of the land is a castle made of crystal, decorated with rich metalwork and studded with precious gemstones. Orfeo has entered Fairyland and the castle he espies is the palace of the Fairy King. Upon knocking at the gate, he is answered by a porter to whom he introduces himself as a minstrel. Orfeo is admitted into the palace and upon entering beholds a grisly exhibition of human beings in suspended animation, bodies contorted in various states of violence, seemingly entrapped in an endless cycle of agony and pain. He silently proceeds to the king's chamber and offers to regale the emperor with the music of his harp as a minstrel was wont to do. When the Fairy King, well-pleased with Orfeo's musical entertainment asks him what he would like as a reward, Orfeo requests that he be allowed to take Heurodis back with him. Initially the Fairy King is reluctant to grant Orfeo's wish, claiming that it was unbecoming of a lady so beautiful and regal as Heurodis to be in the company of a pilgrim so haggard and careworn as Orfeo. However, when Orfeo reminds him that it would be a greater shame for a king of his stature to renege on his promise, the Fairy King agrees to set Heurodis free. Reunited at last, the royal couple make their way back to Winchester. Upon arriving, Orfeo seeks tidings of his kingdom and is answered by a beggar who, reporting the disappearance of the queen and the king's subsequent departure, notes how the steward has faithfully discharged his duties. Orfeo decides to test his steward's loyalty and, still in the guise of a minstrel, enters his palace. When the steward asks him how he had come across the harp that he now carried, Orfeo feigns that he had stumbled upon the king's corpse in the wilderness, ravaged by lions and wolves. The steward is devastated to hear the news and falls down in a swoon. Convinced by the sincerity of his grief, Orfeo is reassured of the fidelity of his steward and finally reveals his true identity. The poem concludes on a celebratory note as the entire kingdom rejoices in the return of their beloved king and queen together with the claim that Breton harpers, having heard the marvellous story of Orfeo, had composed a lay and named it after the illustrious English king, and that the present poem has faithfully related the contents of that lay.

Sir Orfeo takes the classical myth of Orpheus and transposes it on to a medieval, insular setting. The Thracian harper whose wife is killed by snakebite has been transformed into a powerful English king who loses his wife to fairy abduction. The terrifyingly black portals of the classical Underworld have made way for the glittering realm of fairy, and Pluto, the ruler of the Underworld and the sinister overlord of death has been refigured as the King of the Fairies. Perhaps the most significant change introduced by the *Orfeo*-poet is Orfeo's successful reunion with Heurodis and their return to Winchester at the conclusion of the poem. Unlike the classical Orpheus who bargained with the god of the Underworld and subsequently lost his wife owing to his personal failure to adhere to the terms of the contract, Orfeo successfully manages to secure his wife's release by holding the Fairy King to his word and obtaining a release unencumbered by the imposition of any limiting conditions.

The poem's self-avowed status as a poetic creation of the Bretons, the localisation of Orfeo's kingdom in Winchester (in Auchinleck; Harley and Ashmole situate his kingdom in "Crassens" and "Tracyens" respectively), and the representation of the Fairy Otherworld have led many scholars to over-emphasise the poem's indebtedness to an insular, specifically Celtic milieu while largely undermining the work's reliance on classical Graeco-Roman material.[65] Schwieterman, however, attributes to the *Orfeo*-poet a greater degree of knowledge of classical literature than has hitherto been acknowledged. Taking issue with such critics as A. C. Spearing and J. Burke Severs who claimed that the *Orfeo*-poet was largely ignorant of the classical antecedents of the story, Schwieterman notes such parallels as the Auchinleck text's awareness of the formerly divine status of Orfeo's parents, the similarity between Orfeo's self-imposed exile and the classical Orpheus' rejection of society (which, in Ovid's account, takes the form of an explicit rejection of women and Orpheus' consequent adoption of a homosexual lifestyle), the foreshowing of the permanent loss of Eurydice in Orfeo's chance encounter with Heurodis in the wilderness and her subsequent removal by the hunting party, and Ovidian echoes of Orpheus' death at the hands of the crazed Maenads in the fiction of his death that Orfeo relates to his steward as evidence of the poet's awareness of the classical literary background of the Orpheus legend.[66] According to Schwieterman, the *Orfeo*-poet has consciously adopted classical material and revised it to fit his own cultural milieu in an attempt to claim for his literary creation the status of true original.[67]

Chapter 1 of this thesis outlined the development of the Greek myth of Orpheus and its subsequent representation in Latin literature while Chapter 2 discussed the gods of the Irish pantheon and the role played by them in the Celtic cultural imagination together with an analysis of the evolution of a parallel figure (in the case of this study, the pygmy) in insular literature. In its active utilisation of native fairy traditions both oral and written as well as its conscious deployment of classical material, *Sir Orfeo* represents a confluence of the diverse strands of literary and cultural belief enumerated in Chapters 1 and 2. Nowhere is this fusion more evident than in the romance's portrayal of the Fairy King and its depiction of Fairyland, and it is to an examination of these that I now turn.

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[65] One of the earliest and most influential proponents of this idea was George Lyman Kittredge. See Kittredge, "Sir Orfeo," *AJP* 7, no. 2 (1886): 176–202. The Breton identification is borne out in the prologue to the poem which, although missing in the Auchinleck text by virtue of mutilated foliation, exists in the Harley and Ashmole versions. In his edition of *Sir Orfeo*, Bliss reconstructs the missing prologue of the Auchinleck text using the prologue to the *Lay le Freine*. The reasons behind such an editorial choice are provided in his introduction.

[66] The observations on the Virgilian and Ovidian echoes in *Sir Orfeo* are not all Schwieterman's own. By his own admission, Schwieterman has drawn upon the conclusions reached independently by David Salter and Roy M. Liuzza. See Schwieterman, "Fairies, Kingship, and the British Past," 93–96.

[67] Schwieterman, "Fairies, Kingship, and the British Past," 97.

THE FAIRY KING IN *SIR ORFEO*:

The first appearance of the Fairy King in *Sir Orfeo* is in the context of Heurodis' first ravishment during her noontime siesta under the tree in the palace orchard. Although the reader's only impression of him at this point in the narrative is necessarily coloured by Heurodis' anguished report of an experience which has been understandably traumatic for her, the *Orfeo*-poet provides subtle clues to assist the reader in the task of interpretation. These include details of setting — the time of day at which Heurodis is abducted, the location in an orchard, and the specific placement beneath an "ympe-tre" — as well as Heurodis' subsequent hysteria. Heurodis' abduction takes place at "vndrentide," a time of day which is usually glossed to mean noon. In the scriptural commentaries of the scholiasts and patristic writers of the Middle Ages, noon was the time of day most closely associated with diabolical activity, a line of thinking harking back to the reference to the *daemonio meridiano* ('noon-day demon') of Psalm 90 and St. Jerome's subsequent interpretation of the figure as a reference to Satan. Devilish activity was believed to be particularly pronounced at noon when the lassitude provoked by the heat of day (and the *Orfeo*-poet does in fact characterise the day on which Heurodis is abducted in her sleep as "miri & hot") would render man especially susceptible to demonic influence. This identification of the Fairy King with Christian devils in general and Satan in particular was also sustained by medieval commentaries on, and manuscript illustrations of, the Orpheus myth. In the wake of Boethius' philosophical reformulation of the Orpheus episode in the *Consolation*, patristic exegesis usually interpreted the figure of Eurydice as a symbol of concupiscence and therefore as fair prey for Satan. Building upon the tradition of viewing the snake responsible for the death of Eurydice in the Virgilian and Ovidian versions of the Orpheus story as a figural embodiment of Satan's temptation of Eve, manuscript illustrations of the myth frequently depicted Eurydice being kidnapped by winged dragons and serpents, artistic equivalents of the popular conception of Satan as the draconopede (man-headed dragon).[68] The Fairy King's appearance at noon would thus seem to ally him with Satan when judged from the vantage point of medieval Christian discourse. An interesting dimension is also added by the fact of Heurodis' abduction from beneath an "ympe-tre." Curtis R. H. Jirsa notes that the term *ympe* (whose French equivalent is *ente*) referred to a grafted tree of any species and thereby denoted an arboricultural category. He also argues that the implications of Heurodis' decision to sleep in the shadow of the "ympe-tre" can only be appreciated by taking recourse to classical and medieval arboreal lore which often detailed the malevolent properties of trees and the fatal effects of tree shadows.[69] Abduction by supernatural beings from beneath grafted trees was, however, a well-established motif in medieval romances written in both French and English, and it is this association that medieval audiences would probably have been most responsive to.[70] The *topos* of the orchard together with its historical and cultural associations adds further significance to these readings. In the Middle Ages, orchards in royal palaces were typically walled, enclosed spaces intended for the delectation and amusement of the queen and her female consorts. Orchards, however, also had a Biblical resonance. The cultivated space of the orchard where horticultural practices were intended to domesticate nature could also be evocative of Paradise, the idyllic gardens of the Song of Songs, as well as a post-lapsarian Eden.[71] When viewed within these contexts, it becomes clear that the Fairy King is meant to evoke and sustain multiple modes of identification — there is sufficient scriptural precedent to encourage the reader/audience to view him as diabolical and the act of his abduction as a specific reference to the Temptation and the Fall even as his activities are entirely in keeping with the intractable behaviour of supernatural beings, particularly fairies, in contemporary insular literature. The anxieties generated by these sinister associations come to a head with Heurodis' frenzied self-maiming upon awakening. The *Orfeo*-poet dwells upon the horror of this scene by contrasting the beauty, composure, and staid placidity of her former countenance with her scratched, bleeding, and ragged self post-kidnapping. The violence of her self-mutilation implies not only that what she has undergone is peculiarly harrowing as well as (both literally and figuratively) scarring, but also that her ostensible madness has been perpetrated by something — or someone — more than merely human.[72] To be permitted to know exactly *what* has happened, however, the reader will have to wait for her own words.

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[68] For an influential reading of the Fairy King within the context of medieval Christian literary and artistic discourse, see John Block Friedman, "Eurydice, Heurodis, and the Noon-Day Demon," *Speculum* 41, no. 1 (1966): 22–29.

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[69] Curtis R. H. Jirsa, "In the Shadow of the Ympe-Tre: Arboreal Folklore in *Sir Orfeo*," *ES* 89, no. 2 (2008): 141–151.

[70] Although the references to grafted trees in medieval romances are too numerous to note, some particularly memorable incidents of kidnapping of mortals by supernatural creatures (albeit in pointedly erotic contexts) occur in *Sir Gowther*, *Tydorel*, *Lancelot*, *Thomas of Erceldoune*, and *Launfal*. Trees with magical, Otherworldly properties also abounded in Irish literature.

[71] The point about the orchard as a locus of the Fall is made in David Lyle Jeffrey, "The Exiled King: Sir Orfeo's Harp and the Second Death of Eurydice," *Mosaic* 9, no. 2 (1976): 45–60 and the similarities between Orfeo's orchard with its "fructiferous warmth of early spring" and the luscious gardens of the Song of Songs are noted by Robert M. Longsworth, "*Sir Orfeo*, The Minstrel, and the Minstrel's Art," *SP* 79, no. 1 (1982): 1–11.

The sense of foreboding built up by Heurodis' hysteric outburst — a mode of behaviour particularly incongruous given the calmness of the spring afternoon and the queen's (ostensibly) peaceful slumber just moments before — is given further depth through her report of what had transpired. For the first time in the narrative, the reader/audience is offered a glimpse into the world of the Fairy King, his mien and royal train, and his arbitrary behaviour. There is something undeniably sinister about the Fairy King: not only is the whole encounter engineered purely to cater to his whims (Heurodis has no say in the matter, and the visit to Fairyland is an imposition rather than an invitation), but it is also accompanied by the threat of gruesome violence that will be inflicted upon the queen should she refuse to cooperate. It is worth quoting the passage in full:

> As ich lay þis vnder-tide
> & slepe vnder our orchard-side
> Þer come to me to fair kniȝtes,
> Wele y-armed al to riȝtes,
> & bad me comen an heiȝing
> & speke wiþ her lord þe kinge;
> And ich answerd at words bold,
> Y no durst nouȝt, no y nold.
> Þai priked oȝain as þai miȝt driue.
> Þo com her king, also bliue,
> Wiþ an hundred kniȝtes & mo,
> & damisels an hundred al-so,
> Al on snowe-white stedes;
> As white as milke were her wedes.
> Y no seiȝe neuer ȝete bifore
> So fair creatours y-core.

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[72] An interesting reading of Heurodis' outburst as psychosis has been forwarded by Elliot Kendall. Viewing both the initial description of her beauty as well as her sojourn within the circumscribed space of the orchard as patriarchal strategies of placing a premium upon women's physical appearance as the only source of their worth while curtailing their political, economic, and social agency, Kendall interprets the incursion of the Fairy King as a symbolic irruption of the deepest patriarchal structures which have their apotheosis in the fairy realm and which now break through their repressive surface to bring about the onset of psychosis in the queen. See Kendall, "Family, *Familia*, and the Uncanny in *Sir Orfeo*," *SAC* 35 (2013): 316.

Þe kinge hadde a croun on hed;
It nas of siluer, no of gold red,
Ac it was of a precious ston
— As briȝt as þe sonne it schon;
&, as son as he to me cam,
Wold ich nold ich, he me nam,
& made me wiþ him ride
Opon a palfray bi his side;
& brouȝt me to his palays,
Wele atird in ich ways,
& schewed me castels & tours,
Riuers, forestes, friþ wiþ flours,
& his riche stedes ichon;
& seþþen brouȝt oȝain hom
In-to our owhen orchard,
& said to me þus after-ward,
"Loke, dame, to-morwe þatow be
Riȝt here vnder þis ympe-tre,
& þan þou schalt wiþ ous go,
& liue wiþ ous euer-mo;
& ȝif þou makest ous y-let
Whar þou be, þou worst y-fet,
& to-tore þine limes al,
þat noþing help þe no schal;
& þei þou best so to-torn,
Ȝete þou worst wiþ ous y-born."

As I lay sleeping in the orchard this afternoon, there came to me two knights, well-armed and fair, and bade me come in haste and speak to their lord the king. I answered boldly that I would not, but they spurred on their horses. Then came the king, also in a hurry, with over a hundred knights and around a hundred ladies, all on snow-white steeds, their garments as white as milk. Indeed, I have never before seen creatures so fair. The king had on his head a crown, neither of silver nor of reddish gold, but one carved out of a precious stone which shone as brightly as the sun. As soon as he came to me, the king took me with him and made me ride on a palfrey by his side. He brought me to his palace which was impressively decked out and showed me castles and towers, rivers, forests, flowering woodlands, and his rich horses. Having shown me all this, he brought me back again to the orchard and said to me, "Lady, make sure that tomorrow you wait right under this same tree. You are to come with us and live with us evermore. If you do not do as you are told, wherever you may be, you shall be hunted down

> and your limbs shall be torn apart — nothing will be able to help you. Even if you are mortally injured, you will still be borne away with us."[73]

Heurodis' report paints a rather impressive picture of the Fairy King. Not only does he command a legion of heavily-armed knights, but he also governs a vast domain comprising a mighty palace, well-bred horses, and extensive lands. He is accompanied by a train of beautiful ladies, and they are all sumptuously attired in spotless white. The crown he wears is not made of any identifiable metal but fashioned through some exquisite lapidary art, one whose inexplicable radiance can dwarf even the sun in its brilliance. Visually, the spectacle is a stunning one. Beneath the glittering surface is, however, a menacing interior. For all the beauty and splendour of his royal entourage, the king reveals that he is not averse to using physical violence to enforce his arbitrary conditions. He will brook no opposition — non-compliance will be severely punished. The tour of his kingdom has not been a philanthropic gesture intended to demonstrate his largesse; it has been an unsolicited expedition aimed at stunning his audience — Heurodis — into submission through a display of the awful power of his many possessions. It is interesting to note that in the account of the contrast between his former joys and present pains during Orfeo's self-exile, a phrase from Heurodis' description of the Fairy King's domain is repeated almost verbatim in the description of Orfeo's kingdom — "He þat hadde castels & tours / Riuer, forest, friþ wiþ flours" (ll. 245–246). Although this similarity is presented at a later point in the narrative, the detail can in retrospect be taken to imply that, on a certain level, the poet has intended to equate the two kingdoms together. Outwardly at least, on the level of material wealth, both Orfeo and the Fairy King seem to be on an equal footing. The true import of the fairy kingdom is, however, revealed only when Orfeo steps inside the palace, and it is at that point that the reader realises that, though comparable in terms of outward surface, the two kings rule over vastly different realms.

It should be noted that up until this point, there has been no mention of the word "fairy"; in fact, the term does not appear until line 193, when Heurodis' disappearance is explicitly identified as fairy abduction — "Wiþ fairi forþ y-nome." From Heurodis' report, it almost appears as if a rival king attempted to claim the queen as his own. This might explain Orfeo's (ultimately vain) attempts at military fortification as a defensive measure. However, the seemingly innocuous details with multiple registers of meaning (classical, Christian, and native folklore) together with the fact that despite the ostensible occurrence of the events in Heurodis' mind rather than in reality (she wasn't bodily transported, a fact attested by the presence of her ladies-in-waiting in the orchard) they do come true the following day seem to indicate that the adversary at hand is supernatural and otherworldly rather than human. The reasons behind the queen's abduction also remain inscrutable, although several explanations have been suggested by critics. Building upon the patristic tradition of comparing the figure of Heurodis to Eve, David Lyle Jeffrey reads the abduction as a foreshadowing of the Biblical Fall of Man and the "beginning of human eros-longing in Judaeo-Christian terms."[74] Constance Davies finds an association between the narrative's lack of a clear-cut motive for Heurodis' abduction and the literary context which informed the romance's portrayal of the queen. According to Davies, the character of Heurodis is powered by a literary-cultural complex whereby she is reminiscent both of the classical goddess Proserpina as well as the royal ladies of Welsh and Irish tales (such as Creiddylad and Guinevere) who are typically the victims of amorous abduction. Thus, when regarded within the obvious parallel of the Orpheus legend, Heurodis-as-Eurydice ought to have died; however, when considered within the context of classical and insular narratives of kidnapping, Heurodis-as-Proserpina/Creiddylad/Guinevere should have been stolen for love. Since an incompatibility results from such multiple modes of reading, the *Orfeo*-poet, according to Davies, resolves the problem by omitting the provision of a specific cause for the queen's abduction.[75] N. H. Keeble also regards the lack of an explicit motive as a deliberate poetic choice intended to highlight the full extent of Orfeo's helplessness when faced by an adversary so powerful and yet whose actions are so inscrutable, sudden, and arbitrary. This very inscrutability elevates the Fairy King to the status of supreme opponent, terrifying in his unpredictability, a fact which makes Orfeo's eventual victory appear all the more sweeter.[76] Andrea G. Pisani Babich, on the other hand, believes that Heurodis' abduction does not actually have anything to do with her; rather, it is designed to gain Orfeo's attention. The queen's kidnapping is a calculated move on the part of the Fairy King intended as a test of Orfeo's prowess as king. The Fairy King's avowed purpose is to expose Orfeo's weakness and to demonstrate his own might in this imaginary contest of authority between two powerful monarchs. According to Babich, this is why the Fairy King does not abduct Heurodis straightaway but returns her after giving her a tour of his kingdom. Not only is the (enforced) tour a symbolic act of muscle-flexing, but by giving Orfeo the opportunity to fortify his defences and then successfully wrenching Heurodis away from the centre of the enforcements, the Fairy King desires to humiliate Orfeo, denouncing him as an impotent ruler whose material wealth and military strength are ultimately insufficient to protect the queen.[77]

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[73] Bliss, *Sir Orfeo*, 12–16, ll. 133–174. All subsequent references are to this edition by line number. All quoted excerpts are from the Auchinleck version of the poem. All translations of quoted passages are my own. They are loose translations since I have aimed at capturing the essence of the words rather than producing an exact prose equivalent.

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[74] Jeffrey, "The Exiled King," 48.

[75] Constance Davies, "Classical Threads in 'Orfeo,'" *MLR* 56, no. 2 (1961): 161–163. The Eurydice/Proserpina identification is interesting because both women had associations with Pluto — Proserpina had herself been abducted by Pluto whereas Eurydice had been taken into Pluto's realm after her death.

[76] N. H. Keeble, "The narrative achievement of *Sir Orfeo*," *ES* 56, no. 3 (1975): 197. Keeble, however, appears to disagree with critics such as Davies and Friedman who, in seeking to offer classical and Biblical parallels for the Fairy King figure, have seen echoes of both Pluto and Satan in his representation. While I certainly believe that the *Orfeo*-poet was a consummate craftsman whose portrayal of the Fairy King, although evocative of pagan mythology as well as Christian belief, was not intended to signify or privilege just one particular and definitive line of interpretation, I am unable to agree with Keeble in his observation that classical and Christian equivalents cannot be applied to the poem owing to such reasons

Whatever be the cause of Heurodis' abduction (the poet seems to be unwilling to offer an explicit reason, preferring to let readers make up their own minds instead), it is clear that the Fairy King has been introduced as a supernatural foe, the fairy nemesis of Orfeo. From Heurodis' report, it is evident that this is a royal figure of considerable social standing with rich properties at his disposal; from the extremity of her self-harm, it is implied that the Fairy King is a sinister, dangerous, and violent figure, a fact which is corroborated by the graphic nature of the warning he issues to the queen; from his ability to kidnap Heurodis in the face of the English king's entire military might, it becomes apparent that this is an adversary of superhuman capacity, a powerful magical being who cannot be bested by simple acts of physical resistance but who will have to be reckoned with by other means. This initial picture of the Fairy King as an all-powerful force is complemented by the occasional glimpses that Orfeo catches of him and his royal train during his exile in the wilderness:

> He miȝt se him bisides
> (Oft in hot vnder-tides)
> Þe king o fairy wiþ his rout
> Com to hunt him al about

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as "the emphatic purity of Heurodis, the lack of any clear suggestion that the Fairy King is diabolical, and the absence of any consistent allegory". Keeble's emphasis on inscrutability is, however, compatible with the ontological status of medieval fairies in general.

[77] Andrea G. Pisani Babich, "The Power of the Kingdom and the Ties that Bind in *Sir Orfeo*," *Neophilologus* 82, no. 3 (1998): 477–480. In the Fairy King's decision to return Heurodis the first time and then abduct her from the midst of Orfeo's military fortification, Babich notes a parallel with Midir's deliberate loss at the first two games of *fidchell* and his consequent kidnapping of Étaín from the centre of Eochaid's armed troops at Tara in *Tochmarc Étaíne*.

> Wiþ dim cri & bloweing,
> & houndes also wiþ him berking;
> Ac no best þai no nome,
> No neuer he nist whider þai bi-come.
> & oþer while he miȝt him se
> As a gret ost bi him te,
> Wele atourned, ten hundred kniȝtes,
> Ich y-armed to his riȝtes,
> Of cuntenaunce stout & fers,
> Wiþ mani desplaid baners,
> & ich his swerd y-drawe hold
> — Ac neuer he nist whider þai wold.
> & oþer while he seiȝe oþer þing:
> Kniȝtes & leuedis com daunceing
> In queynt attire, gisely,
> Queynt pas & softly;
> Tabours & trunpes ȝede hem bi,
> & al maner menstraci. (ll. 281–302)

> On hot afternoons, Orfeo would often see the Fairy King out hunting with his train. There were cries and blows of hunting horns as well as the barking of hounds. However, Orfeo could never tell where they came from. At other times he might see the King approaching him as a great host would, accompanied by an army of a thousand knights, all well-equipped and properly armed. Fierce in appearance and of stout countenance, the knights would ride with their swords drawn and with many banners displayed proudly. However, Orfeo could never tell where they would disappear to. Sometimes he would see a band of knights and ladies skilfully attired in elegant clothing, passing by at a soft pace, dancing to the music of tabors, trumpets, and all kinds of minstrelsy.[78]

The Fairy King with all his regalia (the hunting troupe replete with hounds, the well-armed cavalry, the group of beautifully-dressed dancing men and ladies) is clearly constructed in the mode of a powerful medieval king. For all his uncanniness and hostility, there is also an undeniable finesse and sophistication about him — he indulges in regal pastimes and has the wherewithal to both furnish his armed troops with a multitude of weapons as well as dress his subjects with lavish and expensive articles of clothing. There is a certain performativity about the fairy monarch; indeed, the hunting rounds, the display of arms and banners, and the dancing parties seem to be carefully-curated pieces of theatrics whose primary purpose is to awe and impress. These expectations of the Fairy King as a consummate artist, a showman who dabbles in spectacle and bedazzlement, come to a head with the narrative's presentation of Fairyland.

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[78] The details about musical performance might be a clever ploy on the part of the poet to subtly introduce the idea that the Fairy King is a connoisseur of the minstrel's art. Orfeo might have subconsciously picked up the idea of adopting the guise of a minstrel and entertaining the King with the melody of his harp from here, and this otherwise innocuous detail might help to explain Orfeo's eventual victory.

THE FAIRY PALACE AND FAIRYLAND:

The riches and largesse of the Fairy King, hinted at throughout the course of the narrative, have their apotheosis in the poem's presentation of Fairyland. As Orfeo follows the train of ladies into Fairyland, he is transported to a magnificent realm where the landscape is a summery pleasance, crowned by the stunning edifice of the Fairy King's royal palace. This realm is also, however, not a part of the natural world. The first indication that the domain encountered is a supernatural one is provided by the crucial detail of Orfeo's entrance into Fairyland. Like Herla's entry into the Pygmy King's realm in Walter Map's story, Orfeo too gains access to Fairyland through a rock-side passage, a standard motif of Celtic tales featuring journeys to the Otherworld. The suggestion of the otherworldly nature of the Fairy King's kingdom is intensified by the poem's description of his palace, a visual spectacle crafted out of precious metals, priceless gemstones, and the most luxurious finery that the medieval imagination was capable of conceiving:

> In at a roche þe leuedis rideþ,
> & he after, & nouȝt abideþ.
> When he was in þe roche y-go
> Wele þre mile, oþer mo,
> He com in-to a fair cuntray,
> As briȝt so sonne on somers day,
> Smoþe & plain & al grene
> — Hille no dale nas þer non y-sene.
> Amide þe lond a castel he siȝe,
> Riche & real & wonder heiȝe:
> Al þe vt-mast wal
> Was clere & schine as cristal;
> An hundred tours þer were about,
> Degiselich & bataild stout;
> Þe butras com out of þe diche
> Of rede gold y-arched riche;

Þe vousour was auowed al
Of ich maner diuers aumal.
Wiþ-in þer wer wide wones,
Al of precious stones;
Þe werst piler on to biholde
Was al of burnist gold.
Al þat lond was euer liȝt,
For when it schuld be þerk & niȝt
Þe riche stones liȝt gonne
As briȝt as doþ at none þe sonne.
No man may telle, no þenche in þouȝt,
Þe riche werk þat þer was wrouȝt:
Bi al þing him þink þat it is
Þe proude court of Paradis. (ll. 347–376)

> The ladies rode in through a rock and Orfeo followed them. When he had gone through the rock for a distance of about three miles, he came in to a fair country. As bright as the sun on a summer's day, the land was smooth and covered in green, rolling plains — no hill or dale interrupted the undulation of the land. In the middle of the land he saw a castle, richly bedecked and wonderful to behold. The outermost wall was transparent and shone like crystal. Circling the façade were a hundred towers, stoutly built. The buttress protruded out of the moat, arched with red-hued gold. The vaulting was adorned with diverse kinds of enamelwork. The dwelling-places of the interior were all constructed out of precious stones; indeed, even the worst-looking pillar was made out of burnished gold. The land was perennially enveloped in light, since even when it should be dark during night-time, the irradiance of the gemstones would make the land sparkle as brightly as though it were lit up by the midday sun. No man could describe or even conceive in thought all the riches that were wrought in the fairy palace; in fact, for all intents and purposes, he might think that he was standing at the threshold of Paradise.

There is a superabundance of riches in the fairy palace which combine to give the impression of a visually stunning edifice. This is an architectural marvel, engineered with the choicest techniques of construction and decoration to have maximum impact upon the beholder. The profusion of splendours serves not only to stupefy the senses of the person viewing the palace but also as an index of the (material) worth of the ruler of such a palace. Through the meticulous inventory of valuables, the reader/audience is encouraged to see the Fairy King as a formidable overlord, ostentatious in show perhaps, but one who is nonetheless extremely wealthy and has at his disposition both the financial and artistic resources to erect such an imposing structure. The aesthetics of the topography with its presentation of a castle on plain land seem to suggest an allegorical landscape, evoking simultaneous echoes of the round of medieval morality plays, classical temples dedicated to such goddesses as Fortuna or Venus, as well as the indeterminacy of Dante's Limbo.[79]

However, the *Orfeo*-poet has embellished his account of the exterior of the fairy palace with details which can be better appreciated by keeping in mind the material culture of the Middle Ages. Seth Lerer has pointed out how the description of Fairyland borrows the technical vocabulary of both thirteenth and fourteenth-century English painting as well as contemporary architecture. In particular, the precious enamelwork of the palace would have suggested the latest in decorative technique to medieval readers and audiences.[80] Indeed, as Dominique Battles has demonstrated, the architectural details of the fairy palace — such as the moat, the crystal walls, the well-fortified towers, and the buttresses — appear to contain references to Norman castle architecture in post-Conquest England.[81] Technicalities of construction notwithstanding, there is reason to believe that medieval audiences would have more readily responded to another line of association more self-evident and obvious than architectural theory — the connection between the fairy palace and Biblical imagery. Aisling Byrne has demonstrated that the details of the exterior of the Fairy King's palace are heavily reliant on descriptions of New Jerusalem found in the Book of Revelation, an observation that gains greater salience when we bear in mind that the poet himself writes that the palace's appearance reminded Orfeo of "þe proude court of Paradis."[82] Thus, the external appearance of the fairy palace seems to convey a plethora of impressions — while the sumptuousness of the structure's decoration and adornment serves as a spectacle of superlative excess which could potentially hint at the artificiality of the realm (an observation complemented by the fact that the kingdom never sees darkness on account of the perennially twinkling lights), specific details also seem to carry a distinctively eschatological import, thereby suggesting that the domain is also, in certain respects, closer to heavenly topography. The reader/audience is encouraged to view the Fairy King not only as a powerful overlord who wishes to make an emphatic statement of his material and symbolic status, but also as an artist and curator who has consciously fashioned his residence to resemble the divine court of Paradise. The (relatively) benign expectations set up by the palace exterior are, however, radically overturned when Orfeo steps into the courtyard of the palace.

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[79] E. C. Ronquist, "The Powers of Poetry in *Sir Orfeo*," *PQ* 64, no. 1 (1985): 103.

[80] Seth Lerer, "Artifice and Artistry in *Sir Orfeo*," *Speculum* 60, no. 1 (1985): 98–101. Lerer, however, reads the catalogue of riches as evidence of a superfluity that is indicative of the Fairy King's moral vacuity. All the splendour and bounty is an outcome of artifice; when counterpoised against Orfeo's Winchester, powered by the civilising force of community, concord, harmony, and peace and laced together with Orfeo's divine power of harping, a symbol of true artistry, Fairyland is nothing more than an empty signifying spectacle.

[81] Dominique Battles, "*Sir Orfeo* and English Identity," *SP* 107, no. 2 (2010): 186–196.

[82] Byrne, *Otherworlds*, 91–96. Byrne points out that the *Orfeo*-poet has adopted not only specific details — the size of the castle, the crystal walls, the use of precious stones as building materials, and the everlasting brightness of the land — but also the precise order of their presentation in the account of Revelation 21. The text's self-avowed admission of the paradisiacal association of the edifice is, for Byrne, a crucial index, not only of how medieval audiences would have interpreted the scene, but also of how Orfeo himself responds to it. See Byrne, *Otherworlds*, 95.

Of all the scenes in *Sir Orfeo*, the gallery of victims inexplicably exhibited in the courtyard of the fairy palace has attracted the most scholarly attention, a fact unsurprising in view of not only the macabre violence of the scene but also on account of the absolutely unwarranted nature of such cruelty. Just when both Orfeo's and the reader's/audience's view of the Fairy King had begun to settle down into a sort of grudging (if somewhat uncomfortable) admiration of the gorgeous artistry and the quasi-divine echoes of the palace exterior, the presentation of a grisly exhibit of mortals entrapped in seemingly endless cycles of torture, mutilation, and horrific punishments in the courtyard of the palace produces a markedly disturbing effect. As with the abduction of Heurodis, no cause or reason is proffered to help the reader/audience make sense of what is being witnessed. The appearance of this mute gallery of helpless souls immediately after the description of the pristine landscape and the architectural marvels of the palace's construction serves to thoroughly dismantle whatever expectations may have been created of the Fairy King's aesthetic sensibilities and his creative temperament — it is like the world has been turned upside-down the moment Orfeo steps inside the palace. The brutality of the privations suffered by the victims together with the uncertainty about their ontological status (are they alive or dead?) drastically magnifies the uncanniness of Fairyland:

> Þan he gan bihold about al
> & seiȝe liggeand wiþ-in þe wal
> Of folk þat were þider y-brouȝt,
> & þouȝt dede, & nare nouȝt.
> Sum stode wiþ-outen hade,
> & sum non armes nade,
> & sum þurth þe bodi hadde wounde,
> & sum lay wode, y-bounde,
> & sum armed on hors sete,
> & sum astrangled as þai ete;
> & sum were in water adreynt,
> & sum wiþ fire al for-schreynt.

> Wiues þer lay on child-bedde,
> Sum ded & sum awedde,
> & wonder fele þer lay bisides:
> Riȝt as þai slepe her vnder-tides
> Eche was þus in þis warld y-nome,
> Wiþ fairi þider y-come. (ll. 387–404)

> Then Orfeo looked around him and saw lying within the palace walls folk that had been brought there and were thought to be dead, although they were not. Some stood without heads, some had had their arms ripped off, some had been bodily wounded, some lay bound in the throes of insanity, some sat armed on horseback, some were being strangled as they ate, some were being drowned in water, while still others were being immolated by fire. There were wives on childbed, some dead and some who had been driven to madness. There were many others who lay there right as they had been sleeping in the afternoon. Each of them had thus been brought into this world by the fairies.

The passage, while it details the torments faced by a miscellaneous assortment of victims ranging from armed men on horseback to pregnant women, is curiously silent about *why* this particular group of individuals is being subjected to such visceral punishments. There is also a certain degree of confusion about whether these unfortunate men and women have been subjected to these tortures *in Fairyland* or whether they had been snatched away at the precise moment in which they experienced such afflictions *in the mortal world* and consequently imprisoned in limbo in Fairyland. The latter proposition would seem to be complicated by the passage's claim that the victims had been sleeping in "vnder-tides" at the moment of abduction, thereby suggesting that the torments had been inflicted *after* their appearance in the fairy palace. If that is indeed the case, then why is Heurodis — whom Orfeo shortly sees sleeping under an "ympe-tre," looking relatively unharmed — spared such horrific maltreatment, given that she too has been abducted from the human world like her fellow prisoners? The most obvious contradiction, however, is provided by the line which states that the victims were "þouȝt dede, & *nare nouȝt*," implying that they were dead *only in appearance*. How can people who have ostensibly been decapitated, cleaved in half, drowned, or burnt only *appear* to be dead? At one point (line 400) the passage admits that some of the pregnant women had indeed died — how does that square with the earlier claim that the individuals were actually *not* dead? Does this mean that the whole tableau is an elaborate illusion, an empty simulacrum of death and suffering? If so, then what purpose is such a tableau intended to serve? The poem itself stolidly refuses to provide clear-cut answers to such questions and all hermeneutic judgments are left at the discretion of the reader/audience. Consequently, critics too have been puzzled about how to precisely interpret this passage, offering a range of divergent views.

Bruce Mitchell believes that the unprecedented violence of the scene clashes unfavourably with the placid atmosphere of the rest of the poem, concluding that the offending passage is therefore inevitably an interpolation.[83] Constance Davies notes parallels between the gallery in the fairy courtyard and the architecture of the Underworld as presented by Virgil in Book VI of the *Aeneid* in the context of Aeneas' descent into Orcus.[84] This association (through the identification with the Underworld) of *Orfeo*'s Fairyland with death is further intensified by the classical connections between sleep, death, and death's kingdom (Hades/Dis/Orcus). Thus, according to Davies, the "ympe-tre" in Fairyland takes on the added dimension of the Elm of Dreams of classical mythology, and the facts both of Heurodis' initial abduction while sleeping in the orchard of Orfeo's palace and her later presentation in the gallery of the Fairy King as sleeping under the "ympe-tre" are indicative of Fairyland's status as a realm of death.[85] Dorena Allen, however, disagrees with Davies' conclusions, arguing that the gallery of victims is not so much reminiscent of classical mythology as it is evocative of indigenous folk superstition. According to Allen, the logistical complication of how the victims could be thought to be dead despite the poet's insistence that they were not can be explained by taking recourse to insular (particularly Irish) belief whereby the dead were often believed to be 'taken' by the fairies.[86] To be 'taken' typically meant the metonymic transportation of bodies in earthly flesh and blood to another, parallel dimension, a line of thinking which was a more comfortable alternative to the absolute irretrievability denoted by death. The ontological uncertainty of the victims is thus an eloquent testimony to the poet's conscious decision to firmly root his narrative within the corpus of native 'Celtic' mythography.[87] Felicity Riddy emphasises the tableau-like quality of the gallery, pointing out that these "images of grotesquerie" are suggestive of the macabre and the horrific.[88]

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[83] Bruce Mitchell, "The Faery World of *Sir Orfeo*," *Neophilologus* 48, no. 2 (1964): 155–159. There is, however, no concrete reason to believe that this passage is an interpolation. Holding on the opinion that "the faery world is a pleasant place," Mitchell regards this passage as an "insensitive artistic blemish" that is out of joint with the remainder of the poem, an observation corroborated by the fact that these lines are entirely missing from the version of the poem contained in the Harley MS. The absence of the passage in a variant manuscript does not, however, automatically suggest an interpolation in the Auchinleck MS; indeed, the Harley redactor may have consciously omitted the lines (either discomfited by the graphic violence or in an attempt to lessen the uncanniness of Fairyland) or they may simply have been lost during transmission. I am also inclined to believe that the presentation of this passage was a deliberate artistic choice on the part of the *Orfeo*-poet in order to problematise the assumption of overtly simplistic, reductive, and unitary conclusions by readers and audiences. The quick succession of pleasing exterior and intensely disturbing interior is also entirely consistent with the ambivalences typically associated with fairies and the generic expectations of fairy otherworlds. As such, far from being an artistic blemish, the inclusion of the passage would actually testify to the superior artistic skills of the poet, one which embraces and utilises the creative possibilities inherent in the offering of viewpoints which admit of multiple interpretative modes. A similar view is echoed by Seth Lerer who opines that the description of the gallery was a rhetorical exercise on the part of the poet to give voice to an experience as alienating, intractable, and disorienting as the human encounter with the fairy world. See Lerer, "Artifice and Artistry," 107.

[84] Davies, "Classical Threads," 164–165.

[85] Davies, "Classical Threads," 165.

[86] Dorena Allen, "Orpheus and Orfeo: The Dead and the Taken," *MA* 33, no. 1 (1964): 102–111.

More recent critical evaluations of the gallery have paid attention to the aesthetics of its curation, arrangement, and presentation. Tara Williams has interpreted the gallery within the context of medieval wonder theory whereby the specular properties of the exhibit serve both as an index of fairy magic and visual spectacle as well as work to adumbrate the moral code by which the fairies operate. According to Williams, this status of the gallery as a signifier of fairy morality is what helps to explain the difference between Heurodis' unharmed condition and the sufferings of others in the gallery. Since Heurodis did not mount any opposition to the Fairy King's injunction that she would be treated with violence if she resisted her transportation to Fairyland (the opposition instead came from her husband who attempted to organise armed forces to thwart the Fairy King), she is rewarded by being kept whole and displayed as an aesthetic object of beauty. The violent fate of the others seems to suggest that they did not comply with the Fairy King's demands, transgressions which were suitably met with brutal punishments. Thus, the gallery fulfils a dual function — by highlighting the artistic sensibilities of the Fairy King, it offers a rationale behind the abduction of Heurodis (aesthetic rather than erotic) and by providing a correlation between compliance to wishes and reward, it suggests that the Fairy King, questionable though his motives and his aesthetics might be in human terms, adheres to his word, a fact which helps to explain why Orfeo is eventually successful in bringing Heurodis back.[89] Anne Marie D'Arcy has read the gallery as a depiction of statues in the round, an architectural practice that would not only have suggested the diabolical associations of idolatry to medieval

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[87] Allen, "Orpheus and Orfeo," 109.

[88] Felicity Riddy, "The Uses of the Past in *Sir Orfeo*," *YES* 6 (1976): 5–15. Riddy, however, believes that the poem's quick transition from the grotesque gallery to the "semly siȝt" of the Fairy King's throne room implies that the irruption of the horrific and the uncanny is only temporary and is not intended to counteract the overall serenity of the poem. As with Mitchell, I am unable to find myself in agreement with this view.

[89] Tara Williams, "Fairy Magic, Wonder, and Morality in *Sir Orfeo*," *PQ* 91, no. 4 (2012): 537–568. Williams' reading of the random demands imposed by fairies upon their human quarry and their subsequent dispensation of rewards and punishments consistent with their self-appointed regulations is in keeping with Wade's observations on the adoxic positioning and the arbitrary non-law of the fairies.

Christian audiences, but that was also representative of Roman imperial demagoguery.[90] Thus, the gallery has both a theological as well as a political significance, harking back both to a pagan, imperial past as well as answering to contemporary fears of the demonic nature of antique statuary. Within such a reading, the Fairy King becomes an imperial monarch and Fairyland serves as an embodiment of the limits of his *imperium*.[91] An interesting interpretation has recently been offered by Amy Morgan who has read the Fairy Otherworld of the poem within the semantic field of 'queerness.' Considering queerness in the broadest sense as an umbrella term which encompasses not only all those bodies, structures, acts, and practices which challenge normativity but also as an arena where normative expectations are themselves subverted, destabilised, and transformed, Morgan regards fairies with their liminality and indeterminacy as 'queer' beings. Applied to the context of the poem, the gallery in particular becomes a symbolic representation of queerness. By obfuscating questions of ontology (are the bodies living or dead?) and the stasis/motion paradigm (are the bodies frozen in state or are they subjected to repetitive cycles of suffering?), as well as by its juxtaposition both to the ordered and glamorous exterior of Fairyland and the respectable and decorous interiors of the Fairy King's throne-room, the gallery, according to Morgan, embodies a queering of spatial and temporal constructs in keeping with the queer nature of Fairyland's denizens themselves.[92] A final persuasive reading of the gallery has been offered by Alan J. Fletcher who has argued that the interpretative resonances of the spectacle can only be appreciated within the framework of a triad of discourses — the discourse of late medieval Christianity, the discourse of astrology, and the discourse of Fairyland.[93] Within the discourse of Christianity, the victims represent not a motley collection of unfortunate individuals, but were rather deliberately chosen in view of their capacity to kindle deep-seated theological uncertainties. As embodiments of uncomfortable deaths, the victims would have been deprived of proper Christian burials (burials on consecrated land and services ministered by a priest) and would therefore have generated anxieties about the afterlife.[94] Within the discourse of astrology, medieval audiences would have recognised the victims as those affected by the inclement activities of the planets Mars and Saturn. Within the discourse of Fairyland (by far the most elusive of the three for Fletcher, relying largely on oral legends and tales and therefore unlikely to leave tangible traces), readers' expectations would have been conditioned by available narratives about fairies and the indeterminate status of Fairyland.[95] Thus, according to Fletcher, the three discourses of Christianity, astrology, and Fairyland collide with each other, and the uncanniness of the episode stems from the narrative's refusal to allow these contradictions to resolve themselves into one totalising explanation.

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[90] Anne Marie D'Arcy, "The Faerie King's *Kunstkammer*: Imperial Discourse and the Wondrous in *Sir Orfeo*," *RES* 58, no. 233 (2007): 10–33.

[91] D'Arcy, "The Faerie King's *Kunstkammer*," 13.

[92] Amy Morgan, "Fairies, Monsters and the Queer Otherworld: Otherness in *Sir Orfeo*," in *On the Fringes: Outsiders and Otherness in the Medieval and Early Modern Worlds*, eds. Natalie Goodison and Alexander J. Wilson (Durham: Institute of Medieval and Early Modern Studies, 2015), 45–66.

[93] Alan J. Fletcher, "*Sir Orfeo* and the Flight from the Enchanters," *SAC* 22 (2000): 141–177.

[94] Fletcher, "Flight from the Enchanters," 153–154.

Critical opinion has been unable to reach a unifying consensus about the true nature, import, and meaning of Fairyland. That is, however, precisely the point. I would like to argue that the inability of readers/audiences (and scholars) to adopt one dominant strand of interpretation in trying to make hermeneutic sense of Fairyland is a conscious and deliberate artistic choice made by the *Orfeo*-poet in order to highlight the liminality of Fairyland and its potential to produce profound moral, theological, and ontological discomfort. As an accomplished craftsman responding to contemporary literary and cultural expectations about fairies, the *Orfeo*-poet has couched his presentation of Fairyland within the context of multiple, not always or even necessarily compatible, discourses and traditions. As an obvious medievalisation of a classical myth, the poem has retained many of its 'pagan' qualities by which (as Davies observes) Fairyland becomes the medieval equivalent of the Underworld and the Fairy King the romance equivalent of Dis/Pluto. In transposing classical material to a medieval milieu, the poet also borrowed details from the supernatural apparatus of insular folklore, thereby synthesising native superstitions about death, burial practices, the afterlife, and their organic connection with fairies (as argued by Allen). This confluence of Graeco-Roman and insular elements was also undoubtedly informed by attitudes conditioned by the dominant religious discourse of Christianity (a view partly echoed by Fletcher). The *Orfeo*-poet must have been aware not only of the common association between fairies and diabolical agents made predominantly by the Church Fathers, but also of concurrent Christian interpretations of the Orpheus legend by exegetes and patristic writers. Thus, the Fairy King also seems to evoke medieval conceptions of Satan (as pointed out by Friedman) while Fairyland is suggestive at various points (perhaps most clearly in the gallery) of the architectonics and the depredations of Hell. The *Orfeo*-poet does not, however, permit either of these wider discourses to take the upper hand, preferring instead to exploit the creative possibilities inherent in the dynamic interplay of the three. Just as contemporaneous (non-clerical) opinion on fairies was marked by ambivalence, the poet creates a Fairyland whose internal mechanics are complicated by external appearance. Thus, the destabilising effect of the gallery is pointedly counterpoised against a glittering surface which, in addition to the accomplishments of technical skill, decorative craft, and aesthetic design, also recalls (as Byrne has noted) the divine sublimity of the Heavenly Jerusalem of the Biblical imagination. Thematically, the diverse readings both of Fairyland as queer space (as Morgan views it) as well as of the gallery as a curatorial artefact whose aesthetics, though questionable and problematic, are nonetheless suggestive of the ineluctable moral code of the fairies (in Williams' opinion) and as a sculptural show whose function is to obliquely demonstrate the quasi-imperial status of its ruler (as D'Arcy argues) have equal salience, given my argument about the poet's intended purpose of constructing a multi-faceted Fairyland of shifting perspectives, one whose artistic durability is a direct consequence of its negation of all efforts to eke out simplistic and reductive explanations.

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[95] According to Fletcher, there is, however, one way in which the gallery problematises even the discourse of Fairyland. Believing that the sufferings experienced by the victims were caused during the course of their life in the real world, Fletcher points out that within the terms of the poem, no explicit causality can be attributed to the fairies' taking of them and their consequent presentation in Fairyland. This is at odds with contemporary traditions of seeing fairies as the *producers* of suffering, a rupture which only serves to exacerbate their terrifying potential.

There is, however, another way in which such variant readings of Fairyland can be reconciled — by applying Bakhtinian and Foucauldian concepts of the carnival and the heterotopia to the space of Fairyland. Just as carnival culture is built upon the principle of inversion, *Orfeo*'s Fairyland too enacts an inversion of values, an inversion demonstrated most pointedly in the sharp contrast of the exterior of the fairy palace and the gallery of victims contained in the interior. There is a veritable upturning of expectations the moment the threshold of the palace is crossed as all hopes of temperance and congeniality encouraged by surface appearance are disturbed by the violent spectacle of torture in the palace courtyard. Just as the participants in carnival culture are figures of alterity, the victims exhibited in the gallery are also fundamentally 'Other.' They are Other by virtue of their indeterminate ontological status, an indeterminacy which is dual not only because it is not clearly known whether they are alive or dead, but also because they are stuck in limbo, having been forcibly wrenched from the human world and yet not been naturalised to the supernatural kingdom of the fairies. *Orfeo*'s Fairyland is also suggestive of the Foucauldian heterotopia. As a heterotopia, Fairyland too reveals a paradox of positioning. Although localisable (Orfeo follows the train of ladies through a rock-side passage), it is at the same time outside all known places. Like a heterotopia, Fairyland is also isolated and yet permeable, access to which is granted via special permission and by the performance of special rites. Although its whereabouts were hitherto unknown to him, Orfeo gains entry to Fairyland by following the ladies and later also gains admittance to the fairy palace by claiming to be a minstrel. As in a heterotopia, temporal categories in Fairyland are also subverted, separating human participants from the linear structures of human time and imprisoning them within cycles of non-linear, ludic time. Thus, the victims in the gallery appear frozen in time, condemned either to suffer their punishments in endlessly repetitive cycles or entrapped in the same somnolent condition in which they had been abducted. The heterochronia of Fairyland is also reminiscent of the cyclicity of the Bakhtinian chronotope as the synchronic progression of time is derailed in favour of a looping, circular temporality. Finally, as in a heterotopia, Fairyland too encloses emplacements where human life is partitioned off, a characteristic most forcibly highlighted in the space of the fairy palace. In the courtyard of the palace, human lives are quite literally partitioned off from the normal rhythms that govern mortal existence, an illusive space of alterity entirely divorced from all normative categories. Crucially structured upon the principle of heterogeneity, both Bakhtin's carnival and Foucault's heterotopia form a natural correlative to the multifariousness of Fairyland. Reading *Orfeo*'s Fairyland within the framework of the carnival and as a heterotopic space can thus help to explain how multiple modes of signification can coexist without necessarily neutralising each other.

ORFEO'S ENCOUNTER WITH THE FAIRY KING:

Once Orfeo has passed by the gallery of victims in the courtyard, a mute spectator to the theatrics of torture on display, he proceeds to the central hall of the fairy palace. Once again there is an inversion of expectations as the apparently motiveless violence of the courtyard exhibit suddenly gives way to a sight that is impressive in its majesty, consistent with the splendour and monumentality of the palace façade:

> & when he hadde bihold þis meruails alle
> He went in-to þe kinges halle.
> Þan seiȝe he þer a semly siȝt,
> A tabernacle blisseful & briȝt.
> Þer-in her maister king sete,
> & her quen, fair & swete:
> Her crounes, her cloþes schine so briȝt
> Þat vnneþe bihold he hem miȝt. (ll. 409–416)

> When Orfeo had beheld all the marvels of the palace, he went in to the king's hall. There he was greeted by a pleasant sight. There was a tabernacle blissful and bright in which was seated the king, the master of the palace and his queen, a lady fair and beautiful. Their crowns and their clothes shone so brightly that scarcely could anyone look upon them, blinded as they were by the radiance.

Although the description begins with the more neutral term "meruail," the use of the word "tabernacle" later in the passage lends a distinctive Christian flavour to the setting. In the Middle Ages, the semantic field of the 'marvellous' was astonishingly broad and could variously encompass aspects of the magical, the uncanny, the strange, or even the inexplicable wonders of nature.[96] With its connotations of the ambiguous, 'marvel' was, however, most frequently applied to that other realm of ambivalence and ambiguity — the kingdom of the fairies. Both the wonders of the architecture of the exterior as well as the uncanniness of the gallery in the courtyard can thus be accurately described as fairy 'marvels.' The word "tabernacle," however, has a range of application which is almost exclusively religious, specifically Christian. A tabernacle can variously mean a temporary dwelling, a niche or recess in a wall to contain an image, a portable altar (for idolatrous worship), an elaborate canopied structure such as over a tomb, or an ornamented receptacle for containing the consecrated Host.[97] Most instances of its usage are derived from the Bible. Thus, the Fairy King's seat within a tabernacle appears to construct him in a quasi-divine light, a representation bolstered by the irradiance of his royal finery and the gemstones which bedeck his crown. Had this description of the Fairy King immediately followed Orfeo's initial view of the palace, the identification of the fairy monarch as a god-like figure would have had greater credibility. Its appearance immediately after a graphic and gruesome scene of purposeless violence, however, enforces a further destabilisation of presuppositions. This, then, is a figure who *appears* divine and whose palace invokes memories of a celestial paradise by its outward form, but whose former actions (the abduction of Heurodis and other unfortunate men and women together with the possible engineering of the torments they endlessly suffer) hint at a sinister nature and the spatial arrangements of whose dwelling-place suggest an inexplicable brutality.

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[96] Together with the concepts of the 'wondrous' (*monstrum*, with the negative connotation of the monstrous, that which was typically undefined) and the 'prodigy' (*prodigium*), the category of the 'marvellous' (*mirum*/*mirabilium*) was typically applied to the ambiguous supernatural. These were "elastic terms," free-floating signifiers as opposed to the more theologically precise classes of the 'miraculous' (*miracula*) and the 'portentous' (*signa*/*portenta*) which were usually used in eschatological contexts to denote the workings of God and/or demonic agents. See Watkins, *History and the Supernatural*, 18. For a detailed account of the full range of meanings connoted by the category of the 'marvellous' in the Middle Ages, see Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural*.

[97] OED Online, s.v. "tabernacle, n." accessed September 18, 2018, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/196763?rskey=8HIetS&result=1#eid. It is interesting to note that whereas the Ashmole MS too uses the term "tabernakylle" to describe the Fairy King's throne, the Harley MS omits it, an erasure which is consistent with the manuscript's earlier omission of the gallery of victims.

The final utterance of the ambiguity which characterises the Fairy King's representation is revealed in the gap between the King's response to Orfeo's initial greeting and his eventual behaviour in the wake of Orfeo's musical entertainment. When Orfeo offers his respects to the Fairy King, there is a sense that he has given offence by appearing within the fairy palace uninvited:

> He kneled adoun bifor þe king:
> 'O Lord,' he seyd, 'Ʒif it þi wille were,
> Mi menstraci þou schust y-here.'
> Þe king answerd: 'What man artow
> Þat art hider y-comen now?
> Ich, no non þat is wiþ me,
> No sent neuer after þe.
> Seþþen þat ich here regni gan
> Y no fond neuer so fole-hardi man
> Þat hider to ous durst wende,
> Bot þat ichim wald of-sende.' (ll. 418–428)

> Orfeo kneeled down before the king and said, "O Lord, if it be your will, you should listen to my minstrelsy." The king answered, "What man are you that have come here at this moment? Neither I nor anyone in my kingdom has sent for you. Ever since I have reigned here, I have never seen such a foolhardy man as you to have come here without being asked for."

The Fairy King's words seem to imply that the only individuals who can enter Fairyland are those who have either been expressly asked to do so by the fairies or who have been personally brought there by the fairies themselves. Fairyland is, in a sense, a private, exclusive space of privilege to which only a select few are granted access. By having stumbled upon Fairyland almost by accident, Orfeo does not fit into either of the two categories of guests the Fairy King is willing to entertain. There is a risk involved in Orfeo's conversation with the Fairy King: by appearing in Fairyland uninvited, Orfeo could potentially be viewed as an intruder, something which is sure to earn the displeasure (and perhaps even hostility) of the Fairy King. In fact, to the Fairy King, Orfeo's actions appear reckless and foolhardy — he has blundered into an unknown, secret, possibly dangerous realm without paying any heed to his safety or even pausing to consider how such an act of trespass might play out for him. At this point in the narrative, the *Orfeo*-poet lingers for a moment on the suspense-generating possibilities of the encounter. There is a high likelihood that Orfeo's presumption, both in entering Fairyland without permission and in actively seeking direct audience with the dread ruler of such a strange and discomfiting realm, will be met with punitive action. Conditioned by the Fairy King's ruthless kidnapping of Heurodis and by the macabre spectacle of torture in the palace courtyard, the reader is very likely to expect the worst. In the light of these expectations, the Fairy King's eventual decision (after an initial reluctance) to reward Orfeo by allowing the release of Heurodis comes as both a relief as well as a surprise. As the entire fairy court is transported by the sublime melody of Orfeo's harping, the King too is visibly moved and offers to lavishly recompense the minstrel for his skills:

> Bifor þe king he sat adoun
> & tok his harp so miri of soun,
> & tempreþ his harp as he wele can,
> & blisseful notes he þer gan,
> Þat al þat in þe palays were
> Com to him forto here,
> & liggeþ adoun to his fete,
> Hem þenkeþ his melody so swete.
> Þe king herkneþ & sitt ful stille;
> To here his gle he haþ gode wille.
> Gode bourde he hadde of his gle;
> Þe riche quen al-so hadde he.
> When he hadde stint his harping
> Þan seyd to him þe king:
> 'Menstrel, me likeþ wel þi gle.
> Now aske of me what it be,
> Largelich ichil þe pay:
> Now speke, & tow miȝt asay.' (ll. 435–452)

> Orfeo sat down before the king, took his harp so sweet of sound, and tempered it as best as he could. Then he began to pipe blissful notes, so melodious and beautiful that all the denizens of the palace came to him and laid down at his feet, transported by the sweetness of the music. The King sat still and

> listened intently — he was eager to hear the gleeful notes of Orfeo's harp. He derived considerable enjoyment from the harping; the queen was also much pleased. When Orfeo had ceased to play, the King said, "Minstrel, I am much impressed by your musical skill. Now ask of me what you want, and I shall reward you handsomely."

The Fairy King's initial disapproval of Orfeo's imprudence disappears in the wake of his musical artistry. Buttressed by the powerful symbolism of the harp (which, in addition to its association with the figures of David and Apollo was also regarded in the Middle Ages as an instrument of harmony, ratio, divine order, and as a spiritual salve for distressed hearts and minds), Orfeo's music has the power to affect even the fairies, supernatural creatures who are ordinarily far removed from the weaknesses and proclivities of the human race.[98] The spell of Orfeo's divinely-inspired harping works upon the Fairy King too: noticeably stirred by the powerful melody of the music, the Fairy King offers to reward Orfeo, an emphatic demonstration of his generosity and largesse. The nature of the prize he expects Orfeo to ask for is, however, most probably material — hence his claim that he will pay "largelich," abundantly. It is perhaps unsurprising that the Fairy King assumes that Orfeo will ask for a financial reward. The ravages of a decade of exile have taken their toll on Orfeo's body which, coupled with his adoption of the guise of a poor minstrel, undoubtedly present Orfeo as a lowly, impoverished figure, resembling almost a beggar in appearance. The common assumption when confronted by such a figure is an expectation of monetary assistance. Further, as the decoration of the palace exterior and the throne-room exemplifies, the Fairy King is clearly proud of his material wealth and does not hesitate to make an elaborate show of it. Thus, it is unsurprising that the Fairy King concludes that a poverty-stricken troubadour like Orfeo would be looking for material gains. Orfeo's demand is, however, very different from what the Fairy King expected. Shocked by the revelation of Orfeo's request to be given a lady as beautiful and noble as Heurodis, the Fairy King balks, objecting to what is for him a clearly ridiculous stipulation:

> 'Sir,' he seyd, 'Ich biseche þe
> Þatow woldest ȝiue me
> Þat ich leuedi, briȝt on ble,
> Þat slepeþ vnder þe ympe-tre.'
> 'Nay:' quaþ þe king, 'þat nouȝt nere!

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[98] For an overview of the symbolic resonance of the harp in the Middle Ages, see Jeffrey, "The Exiled King," 50–51.

> A sori couple of ȝou it were,
> For þou art lene, rowe & blac,
> & sche is louesum, wiþ-outen lac:
> A loþlich þing it were, forþi,
> To sen hir in þi compayni.’ (ll. 453–462)

> “Sir,” said Orfeo, “I beseech you to give me that lady, bright of complexion, who sleeps under the grafted tree.” “Nay!” exclaimed the King, “that cannot be, for the two of you shall make a very sorry couple indeed! You are lean, unkempt, and haggard whereas she is lovely, beautiful, and unblemished. It would be a loathsome thing for her to be seen in your company.”

As Tara Williams has observed, the Fairy King’s objection to Orfeo’s demand is an aesthetic one. The union of a shabby, dishevelled minstrel with a charming, graceful woman is a violation of the aesthetic code of the fairies which seeks to maintain a clear separation between the beautiful and the ugly. The inappropriateness of Orfeo’s request stems not so much from the fact that as an ostensibly destitute jongleur he is clearly overreaching in asking for a royal lady, but because the spectacle of their joint appearance would be an atrocity, an aesthetic blight too hideous to be pardoned. The Fairy King’s status as a connoisseur and curator of beauty, hitherto only hinted at, is here made concrete. Having handpicked Heurodis to be one of the items on display in the cabinet of attractions he has personally arranged in his palace, the Fairy King is unwilling to give her away to such an unworthy contender as a loathly minstrel. As a king he is also, however, bound to his word. Orfeo manages to successfully negotiate his claim by pointing out that a greater offence than an aesthetic transgression is a king who goes back on his word:

> ‘O, Sir!’ he seyd, ‘Gentil King!
> Ȝete were it a wele fouler þing
> To here a lesing of þi mouþe:
> So, Sir, as ȝe seyd nouþe
> What ich wold aski haue y schold,
> & nedes þou most þi word hold.’
> Þe king seyd: ‘Seþþen it is so
> Take hir bi þe hond & go:
> Of hir ichil þatow be bliþe!’ (ll. 463–471)

> Orfeo exclaimed, “O Sir, gentle King! It would be a still fouler thing to hear a lie from your mouth. Thus, you must hold true to your word by which you promised me that I should be given whatever I

> ask for." The Fairy King said, "Since it is so, take the lady by the hand and depart. May she give you happiness!"

This clash of the fairies' aesthetic sensibilities (by virtue of which they abhor ugliness) and their moral code (which demands that they adhere to promises made, however repugnant) is resolved by Orfeo by explaining the moral in terms of the aesthetic — the Fairy King's reneging on his word constitutes a figurative blemish on his character which is a greater failing than the aesthetic blemish of an unharmonious pairing.[99] The Fairy King's acquiescence is thus in keeping with the legislative principles of medieval fairies by which adherence to the laws of their own devising (which, although typically incomprehensible by human standards, nonetheless have their own ineluctable logic) is valued over and above everything else. The Fairy King's honouring of his promise is also consistent with the classical tradition of the Orpheus myth in which Dis/Pluto keeps to his word and returns Eurydice to Orpheus. Unlike the classical myth, however, no conditions are imposed in this case — the fulfilment of the demand is unsullied by any extenuating circumstances, and Orfeo freely exits Fairyland with his bride. With his transformation from a pagan god to a fairy, it seems that the Fairy King has become easier to please and reason with. His actions might still not be entirely graspable and his motivations might still be largely beyond the pale of human understanding, but there is a sense in which he is no longer as intractable and rigid as his classical progenitor. The Fairy King has begun to show greater pliability, a characteristic which will gain more predominance in later artistic representations.

The Fairy King of *Sir Orfeo* is constructed within a matrix of diverse and distinct traditions. He is not only the medieval equivalent of the pagan Dis/Pluto but also bears similarities with certain aspects of figures culled from indigenous folk literature (Midir in *Tochmarc Étaíne* as well as the Pygmy King in Map's tale of Herla) and exhibits features reminiscent of contemporary clerical writings about the Devil and other diabolical creatures. However, even though he recalls a multitude of traditions, he does not definitively belong to any one. In fact, in this ontological to-and-fro between discrete conventional and generic frameworks, the Fairy King is characterised by an ambivalence and indeterminacy that allies him most forcibly with the tribe of the fairies, liminal beings who functioned in the popular imagination of the Middle Ages as intermediaries between the human and the supernatural worlds. His ambiguity is a direct consequence of his inassimilable nature, and his actions are inscrutable because he operates outside the realm of human judgment.[100] His kingdom of Fairyland is a picture of puzzling contradictions in which received expectations are subverted and destabilised at every step. Although the landscape is pleasing and the exterior of the palace presents a luxuriant constellation of riches, the interior hides a gruesome spectacle of torture and punishment and no rationale is provided within the narrative of the poem to explicitly justify its presence. Indeed, the superabundance of material wealth is indicative of an unnecessary excess and generates an uncanny effect which is concomitant with the suppositional horror of the unknown.[101] The presentation of the gallery reinforces the status of *Orfeo*'s Fairyland — like fairy otherworlds in general — as a locus of chaotic signification, one whose disorienting impact is analogous to an experience of moral and cognitive entropy.[102] However, the *Orfeo*-poet refuses to let the final verdict settle in favour of the absolutely wicked and the monstrous. Just when cognitive expectations of the nefariousness of Fairyland have begun to solidify, the poet presents a picture of a hall whose construction is reminiscent of Biblical architecture and whose patron behaves not only like a connoisseur of the aesthetic arts of beauty (although his aesthetics are, in many respects, questionable from the standpoint of a human observer) but also acts in accordance to his word. This constant oscillation of both the Fairy King and Fairyland between divergent modes is, in my reading, not only a direct consequence of cultural attitudes about supernatural creatures in general and fairies in particular, but also a conscious artistic flourish on the part of a consummate craftsman, one who was alert to the greater attractiveness of texts which resisted closed, monolithic explanations in favour of letting readers and audiences choose which interpretative pathways to take.

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[99] Williams, "Fairy Magic," 547–548.

THE FAIRY KING IN LATE MEDIEVAL POETRY:

I would like to conclude this chapter by briefly examining alternative representations of the Fairy King in late medieval poetry. For this purpose, I would like to focus on two texts in which this figure appears albeit in quite different contexts. The first is *The Merchant's Tale* of Geoffrey Chaucer in which the King of the Fairies is given the name of his pagan progenitor, and the second is Robert Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice*, a retelling of the Orpheus myth in Middle Scots and showing an indebtedness not only to the Boethian treatment of the myth but also to Nicholas Trevet's commentary on the episode in the *Consolation of Philosophy*. The two texts are separated roughly by a century — whereas Chaucer's story, constituting a part of the *Canterbury Tales*, was produced in England around the second half of the fourteenth century and is therefore roughly contemporaneous with *Sir Orfeo*, Henryson's work dates from fifteenth century Scotland. It is interesting to note that both texts feature Pluto among their cast of characters, but whereas Chaucer introduces the character into a fabliau setting which humorously exposes the trials and tribulations suffered by naïve husbands in marriage, Henryson chooses to hark back to the classical story of Orpheus while overlaying it with the gloss of late medieval morality. An examination of each of the texts in turn will make this representational difference clearer to grasp and will also serve to highlight the various ways in which the medieval mind could conceive of and give artistic expression to the figure of the Fairy King.

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[100] Mary Hynes-Berry, "Cohesion in *King Horn* and *Sir Orfeo*," *Speculum* 50, no. 4 (1975): 655.
[101] Rosalind Clark, "*Sir Orfeo*: the Otherworld vs. Faithful Human Love," *Enarratio* 2 (1993): 72.
[102] Neil Cartlidge, "Sir Orfeo in the Otherworld: Courting Chaos?" *SAC* 26 (2004): 200.

The *Merchant's Tale* usually comprises one of the tales found in the fourth fragment of the *Canterbury Tales*. In his prologue to the story, the Merchant laments his misfortune at having a shrewish and garrulous wife and, as an illustration of the universal evils of wives who rain down a volley of terrors upon poor, unsuspecting husbands, the Merchant proceeds to relate the story of the cuckolding of the old knight Januarie by his beautiful young bride May. Determined in the advanced years of his life to experience the joys of matrimony, the lecherous Januarie decides to take a young virginal beauty as his wife, eventually deciding in favour of the charming and attractive May. Ignoring the counsel of his brother Justinus who in a quintessentially antifeminist diatribe firmly advises against marriage, Januarie takes May as his bride. The Merchant-narrator's cheeky description of the wedding night makes it amply clear that the old and enfeebled Januarie is incapable of performing well sexually, although having fortified himself with a motley of aphrodisiacs and elixirs meant to heighten virility, Januarie is completely oblivious of this fact. While the old knight is enamoured by the graces of his youthful wife, it seems to be obvious (although the Merchant does not explicitly admit it) that May derives no pleasure whatsoever from this sexual union. When the young squire Damian, smitten by May's beauty begins to languish in her love, she (perhaps understandably) redirects her attention to him. Once again, however, Januarie appears to be in the dark — selfishly obsessed only with his own lusting for his wife, he fails (or does not care enough) to perceive the new subject of May's affection. Januarie's metaphorical blindness to May and Damian's affair translates to literal blindness as his sight actually begins to fail. With the failure of eyesight, however, his jealousy multiplies — no longer able to keep a watchful eye on his bride, Januarie insists that May accompany him everywhere, fearful of what may transpire in his absence. In a comically deflating echo of the Biblical parallel, Januarie creates a garden for the exclusive enjoyment of himself and his wife, a paradisiacal pleasance to which access is restricted by a single key which Januarie always keeps in his possession. Exploiting the blindness of her husband, however, May has a counterfeit key made so that she could disport with Damian when Januarie was otherwise occupied. The climactic episode of the tale centres on a bright morning in which Pluto, the King of the Fairies, appears in the garden with his wife Proserpina and their train of attendant fairies. In a rehearsal of the misogynist views formerly espoused by both the Merchant and Justinus, Pluto expounds upon the treasonous and deceitful nature of women, promising to restore Januarie's sight should he be cuckolded by May (which, by this point in the narrative, has become a thoroughly expected inevitability). Proserpina offers a suitable rejoinder not only by denouncing the authorities cited by Pluto in his speech but also by claiming that for her own part she will inspire May with such faculty of persuasive speech that she will be able to falsely convince Januarie of her innocence. Overpowered by his wife's harangue, Pluto admits defeat, although he insists that he will be bound to his word of restoring Januarie's eyesight in the event of the knight's cuckolding. The conjectured scenario outlined in the deities' debate is translated into reality as May, strolling in the garden with Januarie, takes advantage of her guileless husband to feign an urgent craving for pears and climbs a pear tree to couple with Damian whom she had already alerted beforehand. Honour-bound to his former proclamation, Pluto returns Januarie's eyesight as the foolish knight explodes in indignation at his beloved wife's sexual transgression. However, Proserpina too acts as promised, providing May with a ready answer by which she manages to convince Januarie not only that her "strugle" with Damian was a deliberately-crafted plan to restore her husband's eyesight which has ostensibly worked, but also that the compromising position in which the two had been caught was but a mere figment of Januarie's temporarily imperfect vision. The story concludes with the gormless Januarie's wilful acceptance of May's excuse and with the implication that the hapless knight will continue to be cuckolded by his unfaithful wife.

Critical studies of Chaucer's possible sources for the intervention of classical gods in the affairs of an aged merchant and his shrewish wife have suggested that two textual traditions would have been available to the poet — one derived from the *Il Novellino*, an Italian novella dating from the late thirteenth or the early fourteenth century in which God and St. Peter play the role of divine interlocutors, and one based on the *Disciplina Clericalis* of Petrus Alphonsi, a work composed in Spain in either Hebrew or Arabic in the first half of the twelfth century and consequently translated into Latin which deals with a similar setting in which the participants are, however, the pagan gods Jupiter and Mercury.[103] This was grafted on to the framework of the pear-tree tale, a motif purportedly originating in stories of Oriental provenance which had been introduced into Europe through the Islamic conquest of Spain, and the section was consequently fitted into the overall fabliau-like structure of the Merchant's story.[104] This begs the obvious question of *why* Chaucer transformed the Biblical parallels of (one of) his primary sources into classical gods and why he insisted on identifying them specifically with the fairies:

> Bright was the day, and blew the firmament; […]
> And so bifel, that brighte morwe-tyde
> That in that gardyn, in the ferther syde,
> *Pluto, that is kyng of Fayerye*,
> And many a lady in his compaignye,
> Folwynge his wyf, the queene Proserpyna,
> Which that he ravysshed out of [Ethna]
> Whil that she gadered floures in the mede —
> In Claudyan ye may the stories rede,
> How in his grisely carte he hire fette —
> *This kyng of Fairye* thanne adoun hym sette
> Upon a bench of turves, fressh and grene, […].

> It was a bright day and the sky was blue. It so happened that on that bright morrow there appeared on the far side of the garden Pluto, who is the King of the Fairies, and many ladies in his company. He was followed by his wife, the queen Proserpina, whom he had abducted from Etna while she gathered flowers upon the mead. You may read this story in Claudian who described how Pluto had kidnapped her in his grisly chariot. The King of the Fairies seated himself upon a grassy bench, filled with fresh and green leaves […].[105]

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[103] Elizabeth Simmons-O'Neill, "Love in Hell: The Role of Pluto and Proserpine in Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale*," *MLQ* 51, no. 3 (1990): 393.

[104] N. S. Thompson, "The Merchant's Tale," in *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales, Volume II*, eds. Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), 479–486 and Aiman Sanad Al-Garrallah, "'The cunning wife/fruit tree' syndrome: Chaucer's *The Merchant's Tale* and seven Arabic stories," *Neohelicon* 42 (2015): 671–686.

[105] Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Merchant's Tale," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 165–166, ll. 2219–2235. The italics are mine. The translation is my own.

The selection of Pluto and Proserpina as the deities in question is a fortuitous choice, not only on account of the similarities they share with the other married couple of the story, Januarie and May, but also in view of Chaucer's overall treatment of the thematic structure of the tale. There is a sense in which Pluto and Proserpina mirror Januarie and May — in both cases, the men are aged and feckless, having bound unwilling women into matrimony who eventually embrace the virtues of manipulation to keep the upper hand in marriage. Given the tale's structural and tonal qualities evocative of the fabliau, the representation of the Biblical God and Christian saints as the intercessors, together with the attendant seriousness and gravity of such a choice, would have been counterproductive to the primarily jocular mood suggested by Chaucer; conversely, even among pagan deities, the parallels in personality and behaviour shared by the two sets of married couples in the tale ensured that Pluto and Proserpina were more fruitful artistic options than Jupiter and Mercury.[106] However, there is another sense in which Pluto and Proserpina appear to be the most appropriate representational choice — the mythological context of Pluto's rape of Proserpina. In classical myth, Proserpina had been abducted by Pluto against her will and imprisoned for six months at a time within the Underworld; similarly, May has been coerced into marriage by a lustful old man and entrapped within a sexually and emotionally unfulfilling union.[107] The motif of *raptus* joins both pairs, and the connective link would have been particularly suggestive to Chaucer in view of (one of) the tale's wider preoccupations about the circumscribing of feminine agency by masculine authority.[108] A final parallel suggests itself in nomenclature. The name ‘Januarie’ and its association with the coldness and frigidity of winter is appropriate not only for a character who is in the declining years of his life and whose sexual prowess borders dangerously on impotency, but also as a complement to the pagan god of the dreary and dark Underworld. Similarly, the implications of springtime fertility and rejuvenation suggested by the name ‘May’ make it an appropriate equivalent to Proserpina whose return to her mother Ceres for one half of the year in the Plutonian myth coincides with the advent of spring.[109]

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[106] I am unable to share the reservation of such traditionalist critics of the story as George Lyman Kittredge, J. S. P. Tatlock, and Robert R. Edwards who view the *Merchant's Tale* as a harsh, savage, and unrelenting attack on marriage and moral values, as a scathing indictment of the bleakness of human relationships. See Kittredge, "Chaucer's Discussion of Marriage," *MP* 9, no. 4 (1912): 435–467, Tatlock, "Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale*," *MP* 33, no. 4 (1936): 367–381, and Edwards, "Narration and Doctrine in the *Merchant's Tale*," *Speculum* 66, no. 2 (1991): 342–367 for illustrations of this view.

[107] The mythological parallel is made explicit in Chaucer's own reference to Claudian who related the story of Proserpina's abduction in the *De Raptu Proserpinae*, an unfinished Latin epic dating from the late fourth century CE. In fact, Mortimer J. Donovan has argued that Chaucer consciously modelled his tale on Claudian's work, replicating specific details and even the chronology of events as they appeared in the Latin text. Given this deliberate homological patterning, Donovan claims that the choice of Pluto and Proserpina as the intervening deities was only natural. See Donovan, "The Image of Pluto and Proserpine in the *Merchant's Tale*," *PQ* 36 (1957): 49–60 for a close reading of the two texts. However, Donovan's observation that "[i]n the *Merchant's Tale*, when a thoroughly humanized Pluto and Proserpine take sides and do their utmost to help January and May respectively, they do only what might be expected of two deities, after whom Chaucer seems to have modeled his ancient knight and young lady from the start" (57–58) seems to me to be too charitable a conclusion.

[108] Simmons-O'Neill, "Love in Hell," 394–395, 397. However, in her reading, Simmons-O'Neill suggests that both Januarie and May are victims — May suffers under the yoke of an old, doting husband's extremes of (sexual) affection and jealousy, while Januarie himself is victimised by the literary-cultural tradition of the romance which expects knights to aggressively pursue their ladies and relies upon the eventual capitulation of the women to the superior desires and needs of the men. The

The question of why Chaucer identifies his pagan gods specifically with the fairies is less easy to answer, although an attempt can be made by keeping in mind the overall social milieu of the *Canterbury Tales* in general. Although Chaucer borrows figures from pagan antiquity, he adapts his material to a characteristically medieval setting. While he does not Christianise his divine intercessors because doing so was irrelevant to the larger comic purposes of his tale, he identifies them with creatures who, by virtue of belonging to the ambiguous supernatural, were thoroughly familiar to a medieval audience, both lay and clerical. Such a move was in keeping with Chaucer’s poetic method in general, whereby he did not either take a retrospective look at classical antiquity from the vantage point of the present or position himself in place of his pagan ancestors and create a speculative picture of a distant and as-yet unattained future, but rather culled materials from the past and moulded them in specific ways to suit a contemporary medieval context.[110] Chaucer was building upon the tradition of transposing pagan gods from Graeco-Roman antiquity on to a contemporaneous medieval backdrop through an identification with insular folk equivalents already begun by such texts as *Sir Orfeo*, and in so doing he was thoroughly a

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thorny question of agency and the issues surrounding the gendered expectations regarding the exercise of authority set up (and dismantled) by the tale have been abiding concerns in Chaucerian criticism. For recent critical evaluations, see Joseph D. Parry, “Interpreting Female Agency and Responsibility in *The Miller’s Tale* and *The Merchant’s Tale*,” *PQ* 80, no. 2 (2001): 133–167, Holly A. Crocker, “Performative Passivity and Fantasies of Masculinity in the *Merchant’s Tale*,” *CR* 38, no. 2 (2003): 178–198, Chad Schrock, “The Ends of Reading in the *Merchant’s Tale*,” *PQ* 91, no. 4 (2012): 591–609, John Zedolik, “‘The Gardyn is Enclosed Al Aboute’: The Inversion of Exclusivity in the *Merchant’s Tale*,” *SP* 112, no. 3 (2015): 490–503, and Tison Pugh, “Gender, Vulgarity, and the Phantom Debates of Chaucer’s *Merchant’s Tale*,” *SP* 114, no. 3 (2017): 473–496. For a discussion of what the semantic field of *raptus* entailed in the Middle Ages and its specific application to Chaucer’s works, see Corinne Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001).

[109] For further discussions of the significance of names in the *Merchant’s Tale*, see Emerson Brown, Jr., “Chaucer and a Proper Name: January in the *Merchant’s Tale*,” *Names* 31, no. 2 (1983): 79–88 and Jessica Cooke, “Januarie and May in Chaucer’s *Merchant’s Tale*,” *ES* 78, no. 5 (1997): 407–416.

[110] John P. McCall, *Chaucer Among the Gods: The Poetics of Classical Myth* (University Park & London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979), 2.

part of the wider network of medieval textual commerce whereby ideas, themes, and figures often belonged to a symbolic matrix of shared cultural attributes and literary associations.[111]

Robert Henryson's fifteenth-century poem *Orpheus and Eurydice* takes as its subject matter the Boethian treatment of the myth of Orpheus, and although the text demonstrates a greater reliance upon the classical versions of the legend (the 'Celtic' elements of Otherworld enchantment and magic which served to aerate the narrative of *Sir Orfeo* are, for instance, entirely missing in this poem), it also rehearses several features of the edifying commentaries offered on the Orpheus myth in the Middle Ages in the elaborate *moralitas* which concludes the poem. The first part of the poem — the *narratio* — relates the story of Orpheus' loss of Eurydices. Beginning with a general statement on the excellence that is to be expected of persons belonging to families of noble lineage, Henryson traces the illustrious genealogy of Orpheus (grandson of Jupiter and Mnemosyne or "Memoria" and son of the muse Calliope and Apollo, Henryson's "Phebus") and his ascendance to the throne of Thrace by marriage to the Thracian queen Eurydices.[112] However, walking upon a lush green meadow on a fine May morning, Eurydices is pursued by the shepherd Arresteus and in her frantic escape, she steps upon a venomous snake. As the poison begins to course through Eurydices' body, Proserpyne, the "goddes infernall" claims her for her own.[113] Alerted by the cries of the queen's maid, Orpheus rushes in and is informed by the hapless maiden that Eurydices has been taken by the "phary" (line 119). Consumed by grief, Orpheus departs with his harp to the wilderness and plays a plaintive lament to allay his sorrow. When the music fails to heal him, however, Orpheus rises to the heavens to ask his divine ancestors about Eurydices' whereabouts. Traversing through the various celestial spheres, Orpheus asks a host of deities — his grandfather Jupiter, his father Phebus, as well as the gods Venus and Mercury — for help, but to no avail.[114] Having travelled through the breadth of the upper realm, Orpheus descends to the Underworld and enters the portals of Hell, variously encountering Cerberus, the three Furies, Ixion, Tantalus, and Tityus, all of whom he placates with the music of his harp. Finally arriving at "hiddous hellis hous" (line 307), Orpheus sees a vast group of figures both atheist and Christian, pagan and contemporary who were being tormented and punished for their earthly sins. Espying his beloved queen among the rabble, Orpheus plays upon his harp and the emotional force of the melody moves Pluto and Proserpyne to tears. Orpheus is allowed to name his prize, and when he expectedly asks for Eurydices' return, his request is granted, although Proserpyne imposes the familiar injunction against looking back. However, as in the classical myth, Orpheus fails to keep to his word, and as he turns behind to catch a glimpse of his wife, Pluto arrives in person to whisk Eurydices away. The poem concludes with a somewhat laborious and clunky *moralitas* by which Henryson reiterates the common medieval interpretation of Orpheus as the "pairte intellective" (line 428) and Eurydices as the affective part of the human soul while arguing in favour of the necessity of the intellect to control and restrain fleshly appetite.

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[111] As I have discussed, *Sir Orfeo* transformed Dis/Pluto into the Fairy King within the specific context of the Orpheus myth. In an influential essay of 1941, Laura Hibbard Loomis argued that at some point of time Chaucer must have had direct access to the poems contained in the Auchinleck MS (of which *Orfeo* is one) in view of the many felicitous correspondences between the various stories of the *Canterbury Tales* and the Auchinleck texts. See Loomis, "Chaucer and the Breton Lays of the Auchinleck MS," *SP* 38, no. 1 (1941): 14–33. For the purposes of my argument, it is not necessary to prove that Chaucer directly consulted the manuscript — based upon available textual evidence, such conclusions can be conjectural at best (and misleading at worst). I am more interested in exploring Chaucer's literary milieu, one in which texts that represented an alliance between classical gods and fairies (as the example of *Orfeo* testifies) were potentially commonplace fixtures.

[112] Henryson introduces an interesting innovation by making Eurydices pursue Orpheus, attributing to her a far more active role than she is given in any of the classical or medieval versions of the myth. It is also significant that Orpheus, for all his noble and divine qualities, is not a king by birth but by marriage — it is his union with Eurydices that confers political power upon him. In introducing modifications such as these (and others over the course of the poem), Henryson asserts his originality and demonstrates his uniqueness.

[113] Robert Henryson, "Orpheus and Eurydice," in *Robert Henryson: The Complete Works*, ed. David J. Parkinson, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 2010), 122, line 111. All subsequent references are to this edition by line number.

The first part of Henryson's poem is a pastiche of elements borrowed from the Virgilian, Ovidian, and Boethian versions of the Orpheus legend. At the same time, Henryson embellishes his narrative with motifs either of his own devising (such as Eurydices' courtship of Orpheus, Orpheus' journey through both the celestial and the infernal realms to seek Eurydices, and the specific details of Orpheus' cessation of the torments suffered by the victims in Hell) or imbibed from such contemporary sources as *Sir Orfeo* (the emphasis on the love between Orpheus and Eurydices and the courtly bent of their romance, the importance of music in the achievement of Orpheus' aim, and the fairy identification of the Underworld rulers).[115] Although Henryson's *narratio* is largely faithful to the classical tale, once again there is an identification of the pagan gods with fairies:

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[114] In his account of Orpheus' wanderings, Henryson takes a somewhat abrupt *excursus* to reveal his knowledge of contemporary musical arts as Orpheus is shown to gain mastery of the various notes and registers of music. This probably explains his subsequent expertise at harping at Pluto and Proserpyne's court by which he manages to secure Eurydices' release. Orpheus was always a skilled harper, but his sojourn in the heavens adds a divine touch and gives him the requisite competence needed to sway the hearts of the Underworld gods.

[115] For an overview of Henryson's possible sources, see Alessandra Petrina, "Robert Henryson's 'Orpheus and Eurydice' and Its Sources," *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 33 (2008): 198–217. For a discussion

> And quhen scho vaneist was and unvisible,
> Hir madyn wepit with a wofull cheir,
> Cryand with mony schowt and voce terrible
> Quhill at the last king Orpheus can heir
> And of hir cry the caus sone cowth he speir.
> Scho said, “Allace, Euridices your quene
> *Is with the phary tane befoir my ene*.”
> This noble king inflammit all in yre […]
> Sperid the maner and the maid said thus,
> “Scho strampit on a serpent venemus
> And fell on swoun. With that *the quene of fary*
> Clawcht hir up sone and furth with hir cowth cary.” (ll. 113–126)

> When Eurydices had vanished and could no longer be seen, her maid wept fiercely, crying with loud shouts and in a terrible voice until Orpheus heard her and came to ask about the cause behind her grief. The maid replied, “Alas, the queen Eurydices was taken by the fairies before my very eyes.” The king was inflamed with anger and urgently asked for more details. The maid said, “She [Eurydices] stepped on a venomous serpent and fell swooning. At that moment, the Queen of the Fairies seized her and carried her off.”[116]

The maid attributes Eurydices’ disappearance specifically to the fairies, and although the rest of the poem makes it clear that the Hell visited by Orpheus and the deities which preside over it are cast more in the classical mould (indeed, Henryson refers to him as “Rodomantus” later in the poem, closely echoing the Virgilian Rhadamanthus of the *Aeneid*), the maid’s identification of fairy enchantment serves to hint at a subtle undercurrent of an alternative belief system. Unlike Orpheus and his queen, the maid is most probably not a member of the nobility. The difference in class is also suggestive of a difference in beliefs and value systems — whereas Orpheus and Eurydices with their noble (and, in Orpheus’ case, semi-divine) lineages traffic with the classical gods, the maid, by virtue of being a member of a lower social class, subscribes to the ‘popular’ folk belief in the fairies. However, if this reading appears forced, there is plenty of precedent to understand why Henryson might have conflated his pagan deities with fairies — not only is the phrase “with the phary tane” a close parallel of *Orfeo*’s “wiþ fairi forþ y-nome,” the same strategy had

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of the Latin and vernacular textual contexts informing Henryson’s work, see Ian Johnson, “Hellish Complexity in Henryson’s *Orpheus*,” *FMLS* 38, no. 4 (2002): 412–419.

[116] The italics are mine and the translation is my own.

also been adopted (as shown in the previous section) by Chaucer in the *Merchant's Tale*, a work which must have surely been known to Henryson.[117] Further, although the poem does not explicitly talk about a *King* of the Fairies, the maid's observation about "the quene of fary" would seem to logically suggest the existence of a Fairy King.[118] Once again, the lord of the Underworld has been associated with the fairies, though by this time neither characterisation triumphs over the other but rather coexist simultaneously.

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This chapter has traced the gradual abridgement of the gap between the pagan gods and the fairies in the Middle Ages. The medieval poetic imagination, informed both by the classical traditions of antiquity as well as by indigenous systems of belief and practice and concomitantly shaped by the overarching religious discourse of Christianity, adopted various combinatory possibilities of the three in its literary output. These three traditions — classical, insular, and Christian — dovetail in a text such as *Sir Orfeo* to present a composite and multi-layered picture of the Fairy King and Fairyland. In *Orfeo*, however, at least as far as nomenclature goes, the Fairy King is a *substitute* for the pagan Pluto (although his characterisation contains clear echoes of the classical god). By the time we reach the poetry of Geoffrey Chaucer and Robert Henryson in the late-fourteenth and late-fifteenth centuries respectively, such replacement has given way to simultaneous identification. Both Chaucer and Henryson portray a pagan deity but choose to characterise (explicitly in Chaucer and implicitly in Henryson) him as a King of the Fairies, an authorial manoeuvre which seems to suggest that by the late Middle Ages, there was no distinction between the two. The pagan gods, which had formerly jostled alongside the Biblical angels and demons as well as native euhemerised deities, had by now been absorbed within the broader category of the ambiguous supernatural. The tensions which were palpable in the early years of the introduction of Christianity in the British Isles — tensions which manifested themselves in the persistent clerical preoccupation of denouncing the pagan gods as diabolical agents — largely dissipated as Christianity gradually consolidated its position as the dominant religious system. Once the inviolable supremacy of the Biblical God over heathen deities had been firmly established and extraneous threats to Christianity eliminated, clerical denigration of paganism was no longer necessary. By the late Middle Ages, the pagan gods were not always categorically dismissed as infernal but could be viewed in a variety of ways, of which their fairy affiliation was one. With the merging of the pagan and the fairy traditions, much of their fearful potential was lost — indeed, Chaucer could feature Pluto, re-branded as a fairy overlord, within a comic fabliau framework with impunity. Thus, by the beginning of the sixteenth century, the accommodation of the pagan gods into native fairy traditions was complete — the classical Pluto, the lord of the Celtic Otherworld, and the Fairy King were now one and the same. In the early modern period, however, a final transformation occurs — the name 'Oberon' becomes the universal prototype of the Fairy King. Henceforth, almost all narratives featuring a male fairy monarch choose the name Oberon. It is to an exploration of this development that I now turn.

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[117] Henryson's poetic corpus also includes *The Testament of Cresseid*, a work explicitly indebted to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. Given his familiarity with Chaucer's body of work, there is good reason to believe that Henryson might also have known the *Canterbury Tales*, specifically (for the purposes of my argument) the *Merchant's Tale*.

[118] Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis notes the Chaucerian connection too, but according to him, the fairy identification is indicative of Henryson's confusion between the classical Underworld and the Celtic Otherworld. See Gros Louis, "Robert Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice* and the Orpheus Traditions of the Middle Ages," *Speculum* 41, no. 4 (1966): 643–655. However, I choose to read the fairy attribution as a deliberate and self-conscious poetic choice, one that is in keeping with Henryson's syncretistic attitude to the poem in general. Even though he works with a classical story, many of whose distinctive features he retains, Henryson also medievalises his narrative in significant ways, a practice most clearly illustrated in the appending of the *moralitas* to the poem. The two approaches — the classicising and the medievalising — are complementary rather than substitutive. In such a case, the inclusion of a line of belief (espoused by a member of the lay classes) which views the pagan gods as native fairies adds both credibility and depth to an otherwise largely unilateral myth.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DWARFE OF THE FAYRE: OBERON AS THE PROTOTYPE OF THE FAIRY KING IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

As I have attempted to demonstrate in the previous chapter, literary productions of the Middle Ages which featured the Fairy King could manifest a range of attitudes towards the representation of this figure. While both Chaucer and Henryson could talk of fairy monarchs and pagan deities in terms which were almost interchangeable, a romance such as *Sir Orfeo* could create a patchwork, composite entity of its Fairy King who exhibited, in varying degrees, elements borrowed from classical mythology, insular (Celtic) folklore, as well as Christian demonology. These texts foreground the multiplicity of ways in which fairies as a distinct class of supernatural beings were conceived of in the late medieval imagination, cultural modes which were to be inherited by the literary (both poetic and dramatic) artists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[1] This inheritance was, however, not without its transformations. Buffeted by the winds of widespread social, economic, and political change together with the paradigm shift in religious life brought about by the Protestant Reformation, forms of thinking about supernatural beings also registered significant changes. As one subset of the supernatural, fairies too began to reflect these developments in miniature. The conceptual and attitudinal lineaments of fairy belief were marked by simultaneous currents of continuity and change whereby some aspects of earlier modes of thinking lingered even as others were overlain by newer practices and perspectives.

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[1] I have made a conscious effort to avoid the use of reductive categorisations such as 'medieval' and 'early modern' or 'Renaissance,' preferring instead to denote the particular centuries/dates of occurrence. The primary reason behind this is that periodisations were predominantly arbitrary impositions made by nineteenth and early-twentieth century scholars for the sake of convenience. The people living in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries did not regard themselves as 'early modern' any more than the men of the twelfth century saw themselves as 'medieval.' There has also been a tendency in traditionalist scholarship to privilege (rather unfairly) the achievements of the 'Renaissance' to the detriment of the Middle Ages which have been dismissed as upholding a 'medieval' aesthetic that is backward, unsophisticated, and vacuous. Although such views have largely been challenged by contemporary scholars who have contended that the differences between the two epochal categories have been overstated and demonstrated that there was far more continuity than disjunction between them, using terms such as 'medieval' and 'Renaissance' might lead both the critic and the reader to fall back into the familiar reductionist trap. "It was the Renaissance that invented the Middle Ages," cautioned A. C. Spearing, going on to note that the category of the 'Renaissance' itself was not only an invention of nineteenth-century scholarship, but also that it denoted "not a single phenomenon but an untidy cluster of related phenomena" which straddled various cultural fields and time periods. See Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1–14. For a recent espousal of a similar idea, see Andrew King and Matthew Woodcock, "Introduction," in *Medieval into Renaissance: Essays for Helen Cooper*, eds. King and Woodcock (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2016), 1–14.

This chapter will attempt to chart these currents of development together with a consideration of their implications for literary constructions of fairies, specifically the figure of the Fairy King, in sixteenth-century England. Framing the argument with discussions of the fraught question of fairy 'belief,' the historical cachet of fairies (particularly the figures of Arthur and Mélusine) and the theoretical rationale behind the utilisation of fairy narratives by political regimes, as well as the deployment of fairylore in Tudor performative culture, especially during the reign of Elizabeth I, the chapter will move on to an analysis of John Bourchier's translation of the medieval French *chanson de geste* of *Huon of Burdeux*, Book II of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, and Robert Greene's *The Scottish Historie of James IV* in order to evaluate the emergence of the character of Oberon as the prototypical King of the Fairies. Prior to William Shakespeare's use of the figure in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (a work which arguably marks the apotheosis of representation of this fairy figure), these three texts constitute the most significant extant renderings of the Fairy King in sixteenth-century England. With Bourchier's *Huon*, the character of Oberon was not only officially introduced into the literature of England, but the name 'Oberon' was also established as the standard name of the Fairy King, a name which was to influence all subsequent portrayals of the figure in literary works; in Greene's *Scottish Historie*, Oberon was a conscious artistic creation chosen by the dramatist to offer choric commentary on the central cast of characters, a figure whose metatheatrical presence marks the first named representation of the Fairy King in English drama; and in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Oberon appears within the context of the poet's presentation of an illustrious regnal family tree mirrored in the dual chronicles of British and elven history, perhaps the most representative treatment of the project of constructing luminous (albeit fictive) genealogies undertaken by dynastic houses, specifically the House of Tudor in this case. Accordingly, it is with an examination of these three texts that I conclude my thesis.

FAIRY BELIEF IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND:

It is always difficult to reconstruct the nature of 'belief' in a particular issue insofar as the historical past is concerned, not only because of temporal distance and sociocultural difference but also because of the paucity of available evidence compounded by the interpretative difficulties entailed by an examination of their precise nature. A similar quandary is faced by the scholar of early modern literature who attempts to build a coherent picture out of the welter of (often incompatible) ideas which influenced conceptions of fairylore in England five centuries ago. However, teasing out the different strands of thinking about fairies is crucial in order to understand how sixteenth-century writers engaged with and embodied them in their fictive works. Accordingly, this section will attempt to situate contemporary ideas about fairies within their cultural context in order to make sense of the modes of imagining which characterised representations of the Fairy King in early modern prose (Bourchier), poetry (Spenser), and drama (Greene).

Broadly speaking, discussions about fairies in sixteenth and seventeenth-century England typically revolved around a core of ideas, attitudes, and practices which can be subsumed under the general bracket of 'popular' or 'folk' belief as well as representations in literature, itself classifiable either as works of religious polemic penned by clerical authors or as depictions in works of poetry, prose, and dramatic fiction (which, according to Marjorie Swann, included courtly mythography and Shakespearean miniaturization).[2] As far as the writings of (Protestant) theologians are concerned, the references to fairies frequently appeared in the context of denigrations of witchcraft. Although they constitute a rather unidimensional way of looking at the subject, conceptions of fairy in the works of religious thinkers offer a helpful tool to decipher the ontological status of these beings within the purview of Protestant thinking. By virtue of its absolutist doctrinal nature, Protestant theology privileged the sole and exclusive sovereignty of an omnipotent God, dismissing the belief in all liminal supernatural beings — a category which included both ghosts and fairies — as either apostasy or the overenthusiastic productions of fevered minds.[3] There was a tendency in some clerical circles to regard fairylore as equivalent to witchcraft as both were viewed as concrete testaments of the Devil's handiwork.[4] For Protestant writers in particular, belief in both fairies and witches was an emphatic relic of the evils of Roman Catholicism and an enduring sign of heretical Papistical practice.[5] The strictly dualist mode of thinking which characterised Protestantism implied that barring the resolute and unshakeable binaries of the existence of God and Satan, all intermediary categories — be it Purgatory or the legions of supernatural creatures of dubious ontological and theological valence — were subject either to outright refutation or had to be hammered and moulded into one of the only two categories available.[6] Although the natural impulse in some quarters was to consign fairies to the class of demonic beings, their ambivalent and uncertain nature problematised such easy and reductive generalisations. Sixteenth-century England inherited the full range of conflicting attitudes about fairies which marked both lay and clerical belief in the preceding ages, and to this was added the conceptual non-accommodation of liminal groups of indeterminate ontological status generated by the dualism of Protestant thought. However, even as fairies continued to generate discomfort, with the arrival of the Reformation, the burden of anxiety about the supernatural was largely transferred on to witchcraft.[7] Although fairies could still be viewed with suspicion and fear, the anxieties generated by the figure of the witch were even greater. As witchcraft took centre-stage in both popular and ecclesiastical discomfort about the nature of the supernatural, fairies were relatively free to be dealt with in a variety of ways.

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[2] Peter Marshall, "Protestants and Fairies in Early-Modern England," in *Living with Religious Diversity in Early-Modern Europe*, eds. C. Scott Dixon, Dagmar Freist, and Mark Greengrass (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 139, Marjorie Swann, "The Politics of Fairylore in Early Modern English Literature," *RQ* 53, no. 2 (2000): 451. By "Shakespearean miniaturization," Swann probably refers to the small size of Shakespearean fairies. The difference in bodily proportions between the fairies of tradition (generally considered to be human-sized) and those of Shakespeare had already been noted by Minor White Latham in *The Elizabethan Fairies*.

[3] For a discussion of the binary absolutism of Protestant doctrine, see Alan Sinfield, *Literature in Protestant England, 1560–1660* (New Jersey: Barnes & Noble, 1983), 7–19.

[4] For a survey of the references to fairies which frequently cropped up in witchcraft trials, particularly in Scotland, see Purkiss, *Troublesome Things*, 85–115.

[5] The correlation forced between belief in fairies and witches as tangible remnants of diabolical superstition and the degeneracy of the Catholic Church by Protestant thinkers was a somewhat unfair accusation in view of the fact that fairies were mistrusted equally under Catholicism. However, through a rather creative process of analogical reading, Protestant writers perceived parallels between the fairy

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universe and the world of Catholic orthodoxy, decrying similarities between (among other things) fairy hierarchisation and the organisation of the Catholic Church as well as fairy opulence and the ostentation of Mass. See Marshall, "Protestants and Fairies," 142–144 and Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Penguin, 1971), 729. Regina Buccola notes a further parallel in the theatricality of both fairy behaviour and Catholic ritual which might have convinced Protestant writers to conflate the two, thereby creating a culture of "mutual condemnation." See Buccola, "Introduction," in *Fairies, Fractious Women, and the Old Faith*, 23–24.

[6] A thorough examination of some of these ideas can be found in Peter Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[7] Scholarship on the nature, causes, and implications of the rise and rapid spread of witchcraft in early modern Europe is as vast as it is multifaceted. I do not wish to enter into a discussion of early modern witchcraft here, not only because it is not immediately relevant to my subject at hand, but also because the topic has been extensively researched and written on, with monographs continuing to appear to the present day. For a survey of pre-1970 scholarship on the subject of witchcraft in England, the reader is referred to the comprehensive bibliographical note appended to the chapter entitled "Witchcraft in England: The Crime and its History" in Thomas' *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 517–518. For some authoritative critical works on the subject in recent years, including treatments of the specific topic of the relationship between the Reformation and witchcraft, see Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-century Representations* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), Stuart Clark, ed., *Languages of Witchcraft: Narrative, Ideology and Meaning in Early Modern Culture* (London: Macmillan, 2001), Gary K. Waite, *Heresy, Magic, and Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Hampshire & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), Gary K. Waite, *Eradicating the Devil's Minions: Anabaptists and Witches in Reformation Europe, 1525–1600* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), Peter Elmer, *Witchcraft, Witch-Hunting, and Politics in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), and Charlotte Rose-Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotions in Early Modern England* (Oxford & New York: Routledge, 2017).

In addition to the usual clerical representation of fairies as belonging to a wider complex of evil spirits who were in league with the Devil and often trafficked with his biggest terrestrial ally, the witch, they could also either be dismissed outright as the superstitious remnants of an ignorant and remote past or utilised as a powerful emblem of a rich insular folklore whose implications for political legitimation were particularly ripe for literary treatment.[8] Sixteenth and seventeenth-century thinkers could express scepticism about the validity of existence of certain supernatural beings, ridiculing creatures such as fairies and witches as the false creations of the Catholic Church and therefore to be regarded with wholesale disbelief and condemnation (an idea expressed by both Reginald Scot as well as Thomas Hobbes) or as the vestiges of a past encountered in childhood in the form of fables and other stories crafted by mothers and maids to distract gullible children (a view echoed by John Aubrey).[9] However, besides the fulminations of theologians, religious sceptics, and antiquarians, fairies were also persistently employed in works of literary fiction, appearing both in the pages of printed texts as well as on the dramatic stage.[10] In fact, literary references to fairies peaked in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a phenomenon assisted not only by the rapid expansion of print culture and the proliferation of published texts, but also by the dynamic restructurings of the economic, political, and religious organisation of English society. As England transformed from a primarily agrarian economy reliant upon rural, household-based production to an urban, commercial, and increasingly mercantile economy, fairylore, according to Regina Buccola, became a convenient tool to mystify the workings of such paradigm shifts in social formation.[11] Swann has shown how, regarded as emblematic of an unchanging, pre-capitalist society, fairies were associated in the popular imagination either with a valorisation of the simple pleasures and domestic felicities of agrarian households or utilised to evoke nostalgia and approval for the legitimacy of hereditary aristocracy in the textual productions of elite classes.[12] However, as Mary Ellen Lamb has helpfully pointed out, popular cultural conception and elite literary production were not always or even necessarily distinct groups. Viewing 'popular culture' as a "simulacrum existing in early modern imaginaries created from cultural materials assembled from various lower status groups […] transmitted through written works […] invented or produced by elite and middling sorts as a means of coming to their own self-definition," Lamb notes how such binary divisions were self-reflexive literary choices rather than objectively valid categories.[13] The radical restructuring of sixteenth-century society created, according to Lamb, classes of economically and politically mobile individuals who devised modes of self-distinction to legitimate their privileged status by offsetting perceived differences on to lower status groups in their literary endeavours. In this process of literary 'othering' through the jettisoning of social difference, upwardly mobile groups utilised fairies (together with old wives and hobby-horses) as a convenient creative tool.[14] Representations of fairies in literary works by aristocrats (as opposed to the industrious middling sort), however, were frequently utilised as a means of translating a perceived (and imaginary) fellowship between elite groups and lower status groups in their shared pining for a mythic, unified, and fulsome past of agrarian simplicity as well as to evoke nostalgia for a (now lost) society patterned on feudal structures.[15] Fairy motifs could thus be utilised as part of a text's creative arsenal through the establishment of networks of "cross-class collaborations" predicated upon either cooperative transactions (between elite classes and socioeconomically disadvantaged sections) or oppositional relationships (between the literate middling sort and lower status groups), although the precise triangulations of power depended upon the constituency of the dominant class in question.[16]

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[8] According to Sean Armstrong, the field of signification denoted by the term 'superstition' itself was not an unchanging fixity but was modified over time. Armstrong contends that over the course of the sixteenth century, superstition changed from a synonymous identification with idolatry to the specific crime of demonolatry but was ultimately seen as the antithesis of the new experimental philosophy of the seventeenth century. See Armstrong, "The Devil, Superstition, and the Fragmentation of Magic," *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme* 37, no. 2 (2014): 49–80.

[9] For a brief discussion of Aubrey and Scot, see Mary Ellen Lamb, "Taken by the Fairies: Fairy Practices and the Production of Popular Culture in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," *SQ* 51, no. 3 (2000): 281–283, 286–287, 289–290, and for discussions of both Hobbes and Scot, see Marshall, "Protestants and Fairies," 143–147, 156–157 and Lauren Kassell, "'All was this land full fill'd of faerie,' or Magic and the Past in Early Modern England," *JHI* 67, no. 1 (2006): 117–119. Scot's account in particular has attracted considerable critical attention. For comprehensive discussions, see Leland L. Estes, "Reginald Scot and his *Discoverie of Witchcraft*: Religion and Science in the Opposition to the European Witch Craze," *CH* 52, no. 4 (1983): 444–456, Philip C. Almond, *England's First Demonologist: Reginald Scot & 'The Discoverie of Witchcraft'* (London & New York: I. B. Tauris, 2011), and S. F. Davies, "The Reception of Reginald Scot's Discovery of Witchcraft: Witchcraft, Magic, and Radical Religion," *JHI* 74, no. 3 (2013): 381–401.

[10] Marshall sees this relocation of fairies (together with that other unassimilable category of the supernatural, ghosts) to the English stage at precisely the same time in which persecutions of witches were at their peak as a "brazen form of cultural larceny." See Marshall, "Protestants and Fairies," 150.

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[11] Buccola, "Introduction," 21–22. However, Buccola's view of fairylore as an instrument of creative mystification for sociostructural change is, in my opinion, a bit of an overstatement. Instead of attributing causal significance to fairylore and implying that structural transitions in English society were somehow encapsulated in the mechanisms with which literary fairies operated, it is my opinion that changing literary representations of fairies were the result of widespread social restructuring. I shall have more to say on this shortly.

[12] Swann, "Politics of Fairylore," 450–453.

[13] Mary Ellen Lamb, *The Popular Culture of Shakespeare, Spenser, and Jonson* (London & New York: Routledge, 2006), 2.

[14] Lamb, *Popular Culture*, 26.

[15] Although she primarily talks about the fairy literature that was produced by Stuart aristocrats here, Lamb also adds "godly reformers" and "bourgeois householders" to this category of literary composers, arguing that for all three groups, "fairies served as shared cultural materials from which they constructed a national past in order to justify their individual visions not only of their contemporary England, but of their own social roles within it." For a detailed iteration of these views, see Lamb, *Popular Culture*, 31–32. This utilisation of fairylore for the evocation of an illustrious national past reimagined to bolster and legitimate the credentials of the ruling aristocracy was not an invention of the Stuarts, but had been deployed from the time of accession of the Tudors themselves.

Within the Luhmannian schema of system evolution, modes of conceptualisation and representation of fairies in sixteenth-century England can be seen as constituting the second step in the evolution of the fairies in general. The sixteenth century not only witnessed radical and far-reaching transformations in the domain of religion (the spread of Protestantism in Europe and Henry VIII's break with the Catholic Church which had been officialised by 1534), but was also characterised by a comprehensive restructuring of society (demographic, economic, and occupational change) as well as a veritable revolution in the literary sphere occasioned by the development and propagation of the technology of printing.[17] Deviations brought about by such massive currents of change in the cultural system would, in the Luhmannian formulation, thus furnish the catalyst for initiating evolution. For Luhmann, the introductory step of variation requires that deviations be recognised against a "predetermined semantic" which is determined by the memory of the system.[18] In the case of sixteenth-century England, the complex of ideas and beliefs which had constellated around the conceptual category of the fairies in the Middle Ages can be regarded as such a predetermined semantic, and shifting perspectives on fairylore resulting from the realignment of attitudes encouraged by the dualist doctrines of Protestant theology as well as by the emergence of upwardly-mobile urban professional classes (industrious middling sorts poised between the landed aristocracy and economically-disadvantaged groups) can thus be interpreted as deviations judged against the system's collective memory of traditional fairy belief. While the first evolutionary impulse saw the reconfiguration of pagan deities in the aftermath of the rise and consolidation of Christianity as the dominant religious system, this second phase of transition concluded the process of secularisation of the apparatus of fairylore, a process which had already begun in the Middle Ages with the accommodation of pagan practices into indigenous mythography and insular literary culture, specifically to the fairies as a distinct class of the ambiguous supernatural. Luhmann contends that the objective of evolution is to restabilise the system by externalising complexity and relegating incompatible structures beyond the horizon of a stable intra-systemic boundary. Within this boundary, stability is ensured by the formulation of selection criteria which choose structures (through the processes of dissolution and recombination) of most suitable complexity. System restabilisation is completed when a substitute solution has been found.[19] When applied to the context of fairy beliefs in the sixteenth century, complexities generated by the ontological ambivalence of the fairies were externalised and a stable semantic field for fairylore was created through the simultaneous suppression (via scepticism and condemnation) of its most discomfiting elements (the process of dissolution, evinced by the writings of Scot, Hobbes, and Aubrey, among others) as well as by an assimilation of popular and learned beliefs about fairies (the process of recombination, which found its most potent expression in the literary works of both elite and middling classes). The substitute solution in this case was found in the domain of witchcraft as the fears, anxieties, and dangers formerly attendant upon the category of the fairies were now transferred on to a new figure of absolute alterity — the witch.

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[16] Although Lamb notes differences between the nature and functions of fairy apparatuses deployed in texts produced by elite, aristocratic classes and in those produced by upwardly-mobile middling sorts, I disagree with her observation that for the latter, fairylore was utilised as a vehicle of othering to demarcate their superior status from less-privileged groups. I do not think that the use of fairies by the middling sorts was an *active* and *conscious* attempt on their part to marginalise (and separate themselves from) those groups which occupied a lower rung of the socioeconomic ladder, but rather a lingering remnant of textual practices which had always been available to the privileged few by virtue of their access to literacy and education. In fact, an invisible form of such othering was actually practiced by the aristocratic classes. Elite modes of fairy usage were much more influenced by ideological reasons and the expediencies of preserving the status quo, and any parallelism drawn with the unlettered masses was paradoxically an attempt to assert hegemonic control. I shall have more to say about this in my discussion of Gramsci.

[17] Susan Brigden, "Imperium: Henry VIII and the Reformation in England, 1509–47," in *New Worlds, Lost Worlds: The Rule of the Tudors, 1485–1603* (London: Penguin, 2000), 101–139, C. G. A. Clay, *Economic Expansion and Social Change: England 1500–1700*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), Barry Coward, *Social Change and Continuity: England 1550–1750*, rev. ed. (Oxford & New York: Routledge, 2014), John Hinks, "The Book Trade in Early Modern Britain: Centres, Peripheries and Networks," in *Print Culture and Peripheries in Early Modern Europe: A Contribution to the History of Printing and the Book Trade in Small European and Spanish Cities*, ed. Benito Rial Costas (Boston: Brill, 2013), 101–126.

[18] Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, 282–283.

This section has attempted to offer an overview of the kinds of ideas about fairies that were concurrent in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, as the gamut of opinions surveyed demonstrates, the only unifying factor is variety. In tandem with their ontological ambivalence and hermeneutic heterogeneity, fairies were subject to modes of conceptualisation that were as diverse, shape-shifting, and oscillatory as their varieties of literary treatment. In such a case, reconstructing a monolithic and undifferentiated tradition of fairy in early modern England is not only a fallacious undertaking but also, according to Matthew Woodcock, ultimately both unnecessary and futile. Instead, Woodcock encourages ‘reading’ fairies as definitive textual constructs, moving away from focusing on the essentialist attributes of fairies themselves to an analysis of “the rhetorical or formal role of fairy within [the] process of representation” by taking into account “the ways in which fairies are represented, described, depicted, or staged within texts.”[20] What is of importance here is that by the sixteenth century, there was a more or less established textual tradition that dealt with fairies, a tradition that was characterised by interpenetration and permeability whereby elements were variously adopted, combined, and consequently refracted through a specifically textual lens. Envisaged in this way, fairy becomes “a sign with a negotiated referent, an artificial construction that actively invites interpretation to which varying meanings or significations can be assigned.”[21] Looking at fairies as receptacles of signification functioning within explicitly textual contexts can thus provide a more accurate means of understanding the ways in which authors such as Spenser and Greene conceived of (and gave literary expression to) fairy mythology. One of the uses to which fairies were put in literary works of the sixteenth century was for the political legitimation of the ruling monarchy as parallels were drawn between fairy genealogies and royal lineage, an associative link relying upon the cultural cachet of fairies within the English national imaginary. However, in order to understand the relevance of fairy genealogical tropes for the political and dynastic ambitions of the reigning house of Tudor, it is important to theoretically contextualise the interconnections between political power, supernatural machinery, and the pictorial as well as textual embodiments of such power in the performative as well as literary culture of early modern England. Antonio Gramsci’s theory of ‘hegemony’ and Stephen Greenblatt’s concept of ‘self-fashioning’ can serve as useful tools to deconstruct such abstruse and complicated notions, and it is to a discussion of these ideas that I now turn.

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[19] Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, 294–296.

HEGEMONY, FOLKLORE, AND TUDOR SELF-FASHIONING:

The apparatus of fairy which had by the sixteenth century assumed a markedly textual form became a commonplace in English cultural life not only by the fervent and heated debates of theologians and the smattering of references to fairylore in the literary works of the period (both in published works of a courtly bent as well as those penned by non-aristocratic sorts and intended either for print or for the stage), but also a stock language of the performative imagery of the pageants, displays, and processions which characterised the ascent of Elizabeth I to the English throne. The link for the utilisation of fairy as an instrument of royal panegyric was provided by the literary-historical association of fairies with founding dynasties, a relation which I will explore in greater detail later in the chapter. However, before I proceed to an examination of specific examples of fairy royal genealogies furnished by works of literature, it is important to understand *why* fairy mythology was seen as a convenient trove of associations (both metaphoric as well as literal) by dynastic lines for the purpose of legitimating their foundational credentials and thereby to obtain mass sanction for their political right to rule. The reasons for this cannot be understood without looking at the precise nature of political power exercised by such ruling families and the complex ideological dependence of such power upon readily available cultural symbols for the purpose of its continued operation. In order to illustrate how the house of Tudor could have looked at fairies as a suitable sociocultural emblem for the purpose of bolstering its political credo, I wish to take recourse to Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, in particular his theorisation of the inter-relationship between hegemony and folklore which characterises the political rule of dominant powers.

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[20] Matthew Woodcock, *Fairy in* The Faerie Queene*: Renaissance Elf-Fashioning and Elizabethan Myth-Making* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 9.

[21] Woodcock, *Renaissance Elf-Fashioning*, 28. Woodcock’s reconfiguration of fairy as a sign constructed out of “the dyad of object and subject” bears parallels with my reading (influenced by Barthes) of myth as a semiological system based upon the dynamic interplay of meaning and form in Chapter 1.

According to Gramsci, hegemony is the power exercised by a dominant group through the manufacture of consent for the purpose of maintenance of its supremacy as well as for the preservation of the status quo.[22] Such consent is obtained through the provision of intellectual and moral leadership rather than the exercise of force or coercion by means of the organs of repression available to the dominant group (either the organs of the State or through such instruments as the police and military).[23] Hegemonic control thus implies the form of social control which operates internally through the cultivation of a "common social language […] in which one concept of reality is dominant, informing with its spirit all modes of thought and behaviour" as opposed to external control exerted through the meting out of rewards and punishments.[24] Hegemonic control aims at the internal realignment of personal convictions (via consensual agreement) to the mass validation of prevailing norms and is achieved through the operation of educational, religious, civic, and political organisations which together comprise the fabric of society.[25] Hegemony is thus a form of control which operates primarily at the level of ideology and is based upon relations of consensual agreement.[26] Viewed in this way, the exercise of hegemony is not solely limited to the political or economic spheres but becomes a crucial part of the sociocultural process, drawing upon elements of culture for its enforcement as well as maintenance.

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[22] It is important to note at the outset that Gramsci did not invent the concept of hegemony (which had been a contribution of Marxist theory), nor did he outline his ideas with the coherence and organisation that usually warrants attaching the label of 'theory.' A prolific writer, Gramsci's ideas are scattered across a body of writing produced over several years, much of it composed under the trying circumstances of an extended period of imprisonment under Fascist rule. The problem of profusion is compounded by the additional difficulty of the fact that many of Gramsci's pieces have not yet been translated. For the non-specialist, therefore, reliance upon secondary critical literature is both crucial and indispensable. Much of what Gramsci had to say about hegemony can be grasped through the interpretations and analyses of scholars, and I have accordingly filtered my views through surveys of existing scholarship on the subject. Further, it must be added that in his conceptualisation of hegemony, Gramsci was not talking about early modern England but rather of the political contingencies of the first half of twentieth-century Europe. Thus, when Gramsci talks about terms such as 'state' and 'civil society,' they have to be understood as pertaining to the social, economic, and political systems of 'modern' society. It is through a process of creative reading that I have applied such concepts on to sixteenth-century England while bearing in mind that straightforward transposition is both fallacious and erroneous.

One of the ways in which the dominant class ensures its hegemonic control over the masses and subordinate groups is through the appropriation and calibration of the devices of popular culture, a category which includes, among other things, the diffuse and rich world of folklore. According to Gramsci, folklore relates to a particular "conception of the world" of certain social strata "untouched by modern currents of thought."[27] Such a conception of the world is not only multifarious by virtue of its status both as "a mechanical juxtaposition of various conceptions of the world" as well as "a museum of fragments of all the conceptions of the world and of life that have followed one another throughout history," but also unelaborated and non-systematised since it constitutes the shoring up of all the residues of the different waves of cultural change that have characterised the sociohistorical development of the masses.[28] As a reflection of the conditions of existence of the people, folklore thus forms a distinct species of the popular culture of subordinate groups and is based upon the interpretations of quotidian existence practised by the masses on the level of their own intellectual, moral, and religious level.[29] As a manifestation of a living and ever-changing cultural system, folklore is also characterised by hybridity and dynamism, exemplifying an active process of adaptation and remodelling as opposed to the stultifying and fossilising mechanics of an event frozen in history or sedimented through time.[30] Hegemonic powers attempt to elicit consensual support for their regimes of operation through an ideological contest with subordinate groups played upon the cultural field of folklore. According to Gramsci, dominant groups have their own "conception of life" which they strive to propagate among the masses. This dissemination does not, however, take place on a *tabula rasa*; rather, it is a competitive manoeuvre which often clashes with folklore and must overcome it.[31] One of the ways in which such an ideological conflict is resolved is, paradoxically, through the dominant group's appropriation of folklore.[32] As the folklore of the masses is expropriated and remoulded by the dominant group, the continuance of hegemony is assured through the maintenance of consensual approval.[33]

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[23] For more on this point, see Bruce Grelle, *Antonio Gramsci and the Question of Religion: Ideology, Ethics, and Hegemony* (London & New York: Routledge, 2017), 16–17, Joseph V. Femia, *Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness, and the Revolutionary Process* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 24–26, and Walter L. Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution: A Study of Antonio Gramsci's Political and Cultural Theory* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1980), 170–171.

[24] Femia, *Gramsci's Political Thought*, 24.

[25] Gramsci termed this 'civil society' and distinguished it from 'political society.' Whereas civil society refers to that conglomerate of *private* institutions (such as schools, churches, clubs, journals, and so on) which "contribute in molecular fashion to the formation of social and political consciousness," political society is constituted by that complex of *public* institutions (such as the government, the military, as well as the police and judicial systems) which is synonymous with the State and operates via the exercise of direct (and often coercive) domination. The ruling class extends its control over both forms of society, but whereas this control is realised through the moulding of ideas by intellectuals in the case of civil society (thereby constituting hegemony), in the case of political society this control assumes the more repressive form of discipline, command, and enforcement. For an illustration of these differences, see Thomas R. Bates, "Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony," *JHI* 36, no. 2 (1975): 353 and Femia, *Gramsci's Political Thought*, 26–29.

[26] Raymond Williams acknowledges the ideological basis of hegemony but argues that hegemony goes above and beyond ideology by virtue of its composite nature or its 'wholeness.' See Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 109–110.

[27] Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks: Volume I*, ed. Joseph A. Buttigieg, trans. Joseph A. Buttigieg and Antonio Callari (New York : Columbia University Press, 1992), 186.

At this point it is important to note that Gramsci's observations, while undoubtedly a valuable instrument for understanding the political motivations behind the cultural manipulations practiced by dominant social groups, have not gone unchallenged. Recent critical approaches in studies of early modern culture have sought to retrieve the attitudes and points of view that may have been held by subordinate groups in an attempt to level the playing field. For Andy Wood, modes of belief and ideas held by subordinate social groups must be considered within the wider cultural complex of ‘custom,’ a denotative category that was fundamentally associated with “means of relations of production, with social reproduction and with material culture” and which worked in tandem with local memory in the social construction of knowledge about the past.[34] History, which had particular socio-political cachet for dominant groups, was nonetheless not simply their sole and exclusive preserve but was also known to and used by subordinate groups. In fact, it was collective cultural memory that invested history with meaning, that helped to shape, condense, and simplify the past, thereby reducing it to an essence.[35] Reading culture as a dynamic field of domination and contestation where meanings are ordered only to be broken apart (that is, as an ever-evolving living system, to put it in Luhmannian terms), Wood argues that collective memory is itself produced and reproduced not as a monadic singularity but as clusters, some of which form within “islands of ideological coherence” whereas others “float in unpredictable, historically specific patterns.”[36] The attempt of elite, privileged classes to exert hegemonic control through the assertion that their dominance is either providentially sanctioned or historically deep represents, according to Wood, just *one* claim upon history, just *one* attempt to manipulate collective memory at an ideological level for preserving the status quo. Wood argues for a consideration of what he calls ‘counter-memory,’ a concept which “refers to the possibility that ordinary people might be able to deploy memory in the making of their own cultural worlds — inflected, certainly, by governing ideas, but still produced by themselves, their workmates, kin and neighbours — that is, a *social* memory.”[37] Such a line of reading recognises that although the most common users of social memory are dominant groups (an ease of access guaranteed by structural inequalities of wealth and power), such memory can also be contested, thereby producing alternative readings of history.[38] Thus, although Gramsci's theory of hegemony focuses upon the strategies and tactics utilised by dominant groups in their selective reading of cultural history in order to consolidate hegemonic power, approaches such as those of Wood's offer a corrective by tilting the looking glass to reveal counter-measures and acts of resistance that were practised by subordinate groups in this dynamic contest to mould and lay claims upon social memory. Viewed in this way, hegemony thus becomes "a fluid and unstable site of contestation between the dominant social formations in the ruling power bloc and those marginalised social formations seeking concessions from the dominant, and whom the dominant constantly strives to incorporate."[39]

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[28] Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 186–187.

[29] As a repository of "un-integrated bits and pieces from past popular religions and local cultures which live on in the customs, superstitions, entertainments, myths, and rituals of the common people," folklore, argues Grelle, is distinct from both the "elaborated and systematic culture" of the intellectuals as well as the philosophy, morality, and religious practices of the dominant groups. See Grelle, *Gramsci and the Question of Religion*, 35.

[30] Nadia Urbinati, "From the Periphery of Modernity: Antonio Gramsci's Theory of Subordination and Hegemony," *PT* 26, no. 3 (1998): 379.

[31] Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 187.

[32] The paradox inherent in the dominant group's resolution of the ideological tussle with mass folklore through appropriation and remoulding rather than negation and banishment is similar to the paradox which characterised literary representations of lower status groups by middling sorts traced by Lamb, whereby lower status groups were brought into visibility through depictions of popular culture precisely in order to render them invisible by means of a process of differentiation which reduced them to caricatures. For more on this paradox, see Lamb, *Popular Culture*, 26.

[33] Grelle, however, notes that folklore could also be used by subordinate groups as a sort of *pièce de resistance* to the operations of the intellectuals, philosophers, and dominant groups, a resistance enabled by the very durability and resilience of folkloric motifs in the cultural life of the masses. For further discussions, see Grelle, *Gramsci and the Question of Religion*, 35 and John Fulton, "Religion and Politics in Gramsci: An Introduction," *SA* 48, no. 3 (1987): 206–207.

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[34] Andy Wood, *The Memory of the People: Custom and Popular Senses of the Past in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 13–14. This is reminiscent of the Lotmanian formulation of culture as a semiosphere which functions as the repository of collective memory and therefore, by extension, as an archive of past historical experience (given the quintessentially retrospective positioning of collective memory).

[35] Wood, *Memory of the People*, 17.

[36] Wood, *Memory of the People*, 19.

[37] Wood, *Memory of the People*, 21.

Applying the Gramscian formulations of hegemony and the attempt of hegemonic powers to ensure their control over subordinate groups (through the appropriation of the popular culture of the masses) to sixteenth-century England, a rationale can be found to explain the utilisation of fairy mythology by the Tudor regime in the pageants, displays, and processions which constituted the performative culture of English monarchy, especially during the reign of Elizabeth I. As the dominant political power (one which, despite its Welsh provenance, had not only wrested control of the English throne but had also, most significantly, reoriented the religious culture of the nation), the house of Tudor can be seen as a hegemonic power insofar as it managed to secure popular consensual support for its right to rule. One of the ways in which it generated such consensus was through the careful curation of the imagery and aesthetics of a representational culture of performance and textual depiction which relied heavily upon fairylore. Folklore (in particular fairylore) as an enduring element of custom can be read through the lens of Wood's formulation of social memory. Although Wood sees social memory not as a static or complete body of ideas but rather as a set of interlinked narratives which are constantly being made and remade, he notes that social memory is built upon a solid core (much like Blumenberg's postulation of myth as a system characterised by surface dynamism and core permanence).[40] This core cultural bloc was mined by the Tudor regime for ideas, and given their historical charge as well as their relevance as a crucial component of the collective memorial record, fairy motifs furnished material most amenable and convenient for utilisation. Fairy motifs were frequently used to embellish the performances which accompanied the celebrations organised to commemorate royal accessions as well as the travels of the peripatetic Tudor court, and associations with the world of fairy were also used in literary works to bolster the genealogical credentials of the dynasty as a distinctly textual form of political legitimation. Reading fairy mythology as a particular kind of "conception of the world" allies it with the kind of folklore discussed by Gramsci, and the Tudor regime's utilisation of the vocabulary of fairy as a crucial component of its performative and textual culture can thereby be seen as analogous to the appropriation and refashioning of folklore by dominant groups to preserve hegemonic control.

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[38] Wood, *Memory of the People*, 25–26.

[39] Roberta Pearson, "Custer Loses Again: The Contestation Over Commodified Public Memory," in Dan Ben-Amos and Liliane Weissberg, eds., *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1999), 180. Quoted in Wood, *Memory of the People*, 22.

[40] Wood, *Memory of the People*, 27–28.

The use of fairy as a representational system of both performance and textuality by the Tudor regime can also be related to Stephen Greenblatt's concept of 'self-fashioning,' particularly with regard to the fashioning of political identity.[41] In tandem with the changes in social, cultural, economic, and political organisation that are typically characteristic of the early modern period, Greenblatt notes a parallel trajectory of change in the "intellectual, social, psychological, and aesthetic structures that govern the generation of identities" in the sixteenth century, changes which are both complex as well as dialectical.[42] Linked to an increased self-consciousness about the possibility of moulding [human] identity as a manipulable and artful process, such 'self-fashioning' comes to denote the forming of a self.[43] According to Greenblatt, self-fashioning is a relational process, achieved by the fashioning subject (whom he calls 'authority') against an oppositional force (the

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[41] Although Greenblatt's work has been enormously influential in the field of early modern studies, his approach has not gone unquestioned. Soon after the publication of *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* in 1980, criticisms were directed at Greenblatt's methodology, the tenor of some of his assertions, his myopic focus on individuals as case studies, as well as the fallacies of (unwittingly) implying that power could be abstracted from its specific political applications and for refusing to recognise the role played by literature in the production of ideology. For illustrations of each view, see Richard Strier, "Identity and Power in Tudor England: Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning from More to Shakespeare*," *Boundary, 2: A Journal of Post Modern Literature* (1982): 383–94, Jean Howard, "The Cultural Construction of the Self in the Renaissance," *SQ* 34, no. 3 (1983): 378–381, Barbara Leah Harman, "Refashioning the Renaissance," *Diacritics* 14, no. 1 (1984): 52–65, Alan Sinfield, review of *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England* 2 (1985): 324–328, Jan R. Veestra, "The New Historicism of Stephen Greenblatt: On Poetics of Culture and the Interpretation of Shakespeare," *History and Theory* 34, no. 3 (1995): 174–198. Greenblatt's work continues to generate controversy to the present day, and although I am cognisant of the potential pitfalls of his approach, I nonetheless find his concept of 'self-fashioning' (when divorced from the specific individual case-studies presented in the work) sufficiently broad and encompassing to be valuable for the purposes of my argument.

[42] Stephen Greenblatt, "Introduction," in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 1.

[43] Greenblatt notes that this epistemological and ontological change in the denotative field of 'self-fashioning' is itself related to the increasing use of the verb "fashion" in early modern literature. He also observes that self-fashioning's emphasis on representation makes it a natural correlative for the field of literature in general. See Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 2–3.

'threatening Other' or the 'alien') which is perceived as unfamiliar, strange, or hostile and must consequently be denounced through representational practices which first give form to the alien in order to effect its destruction.[44] The authority and the alien are not, however, hermetically sealed categories; presaged upon either the absence or the parodic inversion of order, the distinctions between the two are characterised by continuous slippage with the implication that one is constructed as a distortion of the other.[45] Further, in Greenblatt's theorisation, self-fashioning is always (though not exclusively) enacted within the domain of language.

Although Greenblatt talks primarily about individual subjects and the self-fashioning of autonomous selves, his concept can be applied equally well to the Tudor regime's self-fashioning of political identity through the use of fairy vocabulary. Read as a foundational process built upon the artful manipulation of identity for the creation of a unique 'self,' Tudor self-fashioning can be regarded as the attempt by the ruling dynasty to artfully manipulate mass opinion through the use of fairylore (among other things) in a complex representational culture of performance and textuality for the purpose of constructing a selfhood built upon the establishment of a distinct political and cultural identity. Tudor performative culture, particularly during the reign of Elizabeth, included a series of pageants, processions, as well as commemorative performances. Although the ostensible function of this representational complex was the celebration of the Queen's accession, such performances also functioned as an emphatic assertion of hegemonic monarchical power through the use of visual spectacle and material display. While some performances were organised exclusively by the Queen's inner circle of courtiers and subjects and privately held in the country houses and mansions which belonged to a select nobility (such as the performances at Kenilworth, Woodstock, Ditchley, and Elvetham which will be considered shortly), others took the form of civic pageantry (such as those at Norwich and the coronation entry of 1559 in London) as well as performances organised in the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. The audiences of such performances could thus range from aristocratic court circles to university men and ordinary townspeople. As the 'authority,' Tudor self-fashioning required the prior invention of a rival Other or 'alien' which had to be subsequently destabilised in order to assert and uphold the legitimacy of the ruling line. Such a strategy is reminiscent of Spenser's allegorical fabrication (and consequent denunciation) of the Catholic Church in *The Faerie Queene* for the purpose of exonerating the credentials of the Tudor line under its newly crowned Protestant queen who is explicitly identified with a fairy empress and whose lineage is traced from an illustrious elven genealogy. However, as Greenblatt argues, the authority and the alien are constructed as laterally inverted (and distorted) images of each other, a line of observation which takes on particular significance in view of the historical contingencies which muddled clear-cut divisions between such categories as fairies, witches, Protestantism, and the Catholic Church. Finally, Tudor self-fashioning via fairy can also be seen as operating within the realm of language, if the field of signification of 'language' is expanded to denote a representational system that is not merely linguistic but also textual, aesthetic, material, and performative.

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[44] Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 9. This 'threatening Other' can include such diverse categories as heretic, savage, witch, adulteress, traitor, or even the Antichrist.

[45] Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 9.

Gramsci's theory of hegemony (in particular, the utilisation of folklore by hegemonic powers for the extension of their sphere of control) and Greenblatt's concept of self-fashioning can be used to understand the cultural mechanisms exploited by the house of Tudor for the fulfilment of its political aims. These two theoretical paradigms not only suggest that Tudor performative culture can be interpreted as an instance of a hegemonic power's exercise of authority (via the creation of a political identity through a process of self-fashioning which elicited consensual approval from mass society), but also reveal that such self-reflexive strategies of validation were crucially predicated upon the use of folkloric motifs such as fairies for their operation and enforcement. However, while theoretical models can furnish the reasons to explain why political regimes in the sixteenth century looked upon fairy as a convenient tool for political legitimation, the deployment of fairy imagery in the performative culture of Tudor royal celebration must also be contextualised by taking into account the historical connections drawn between fairies and dynastic lines. Two fairy figures in particular opened up matrices of associations between fairy and royal genealogy — the French Mélusine and her foundational claims upon the Lusignan dynasty and the British (specifically, Welsh) Arthur and his role within the insular national imaginary — and it is to a discussion of this historical cachet of fairy in English cultural life that I now turn.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS OF FAIRY GENEALOGY AND FAIRY IN THE ELIZABETHAN ENTERTAINMENTS:

The link between claiming fairy ancestry by dynastic families and the exigencies of political legitimation was not a novel development of the early modern period (although it was certainly its apotheosis) but can be traced back to the literary culture of the Middle Ages in both France and Britain. In fourteenth-century France, the fairy Mélusine emerged as the *fondatrice* of the house of Lusignan in the proto-Gothic romance of the same name penned by Jean d'Arras. Commissioned by Jean, the duke of Berry, count of Poitiers, suzerain of Languedoc and Guyenne, as well as tutor to Charles VI of France, the composition of the romance was directly influenced by the skirmishes of the English and French factions in the Hundred Years' War as well as the hotly contested English claims to both Poitou and Lusignan.[46] Jean d'Arras' mythic reconfiguration of the history of the Lusignan line was intended to bolster the legitimacy of French lordship over a city and a region that had recently witnessed the danger of passing into the hands of foreigners by articulating an illustrious indigenous heritage that simultaneously validated French hegemonic claims to Poitou as well as asserted the appropriateness of such rule.[47] The romance enacts, as Stephen G. Nichols points out, a "Francocentric fantasy" of deserved political reclamation whereby after centuries of alienation at the hands of a British hybrid lineage, the regions of Languedoc, Poitou, and Aquitaine are returned to their rightful heirs.[48] The figure of the fairy Mélusine herself constitutes an almost organic connection with the land and, by extension, with the ruling family of the region. Building upon Jacques LeGoff's observation that Mélusine was both the creation as well as the symbolic guarantor of the feudal imagination, Philippe Walter observes that the fairy becomes a 'totemic genius' attached to the land, functioning as supernatural protectress safeguarding the dynastic line from danger and misfortune.[49] Her shamanic authority arises out of a complex ontological matrix whereby her conceptual roots can be traced back to the goddesses of sovereignty who figured prominently in Celtic myth and legend. Within such an hermeneutic framework, the marriage of Raymondin and Mélusine thus represents the conferring of territorial sovereignty (embodied by the fairy-as-goddess) upon patrilineal authority and subsequently to agnatic succession.[50]

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[46] Stephen G. Nichols, "Melusine Between Myth and History: Profile of a Female Demon," in *Melusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction in Late Medieval France*, eds. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 137–138, Philippe Walter, *La Fée Mélusine: le serpent et l'oiseau* (Paris : Éditions Imago, 2008), 12, and Pit Péporté, "Melusine and Luxembourg: A Double Memory," in *Melusine's Footprint: Tracing the Legacy of a Medieval Myth*, eds. Misty Urban, Deva F. Kemmis, and Melissa Ridley Elmes (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2017), 162–179.

[47] Urban, Kemmis, and Elmes refer to this as a strategy "anchored in an agenda of political legitimization and image-enhancement." See "Introduction," *Melusine's Footprint*, 5.

[48] Nichols, "Melusine Between Myth and History," 159. For an account of the Mélusine legend in England, see Jennifer Alberghini, "Matriarchs and Mother Tongues: The Middle English *Romans of Partenay*," in *Melusine's Footprint*, 146–161.

[49] Walter, *La Fée Mélusine*, 13.

For the British Isles, however, the figure which bulks predominantly large in the cultural imagination insofar as questions of genealogy, fairy lineage, and political legitimation of dynastic houses are concerned is the iconic persona of Arthur. The trajectory of evolution of Arthurian material — from the putative origins of the figure in the annals of (Welsh) history to the dizzyingly diverse branches of its development in medieval European oral and literary culture, particularly in France and England — has been exhaustively surveyed in scholarship, and it is not my intention to rehearse that history here.[51] Arthur's presence in insular textual history was guaranteed by Geoffrey of Monmouth's portrayal of the figure in his liberally embellished account of British history *Historia Regum Britanniae* and subsequently given further embodiment in the works of Wace and Laȝamon. Although Geoffrey was not the first author to make use of the figure of Arthur in the historiographic mode, his *Historia* "firmly entrenched the chronological time within which Arthurian temporality could be arranged as an unbroken lineage and out of which the later romance writers would carve out synchronic spaces to flesh out their adventures of the Arthurian heroes."[52] In addition to the historicist reworkings of the Arthurian legend in the prose chronicles, epic and romance treatments of the material led not only to elaborate diversifications of the fiction but also allied the stories with elements of the fantastic and the supernatural.[53] However, what was common to all such modes of development was the necessary trigger provided by the contingencies of contemporary politics. Kathryn Hume has pointed out how the accounts in Geoffrey, Wace, Laȝamon, as well as both the alliterative and stanzaic *Morte Arthur* of the fourteenth century were each affected by the vagaries of English political engagements with France whereby the vacillating fortunes of the English were paralleled in the turbulences of the literary Arthur's expansionist policies. The consequence of this literary-political correspondence, observes Hume, was an increasing interiorisation of romance treatments of the material to the island of Britain as way of bypassing the realities of English losses on the continent (a transitional process whose hallmark was Sir Thomas Malory's complex reformulation of the legend in the *Morte Darthur* in the fifteenth century), a movement which went hand-in-hand with the fictive recasting of the insular kingdom as a fantasy empire and the incorporation of objects and figures imbued with magic, such as the fairy enchantress Morgan le Fay, the Lady of the Lake, Excalibur, and the land of Avalon.[54]

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[50] Walter, *La Fée Mélusine*, 13–14.

[51] In addition to the various titles included under the comprehensive series *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages* published by the University of Wales Press, the reader is referred to Archibald and Putter, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend*, *A Companion to Arthurian Literature*, ed. Helen Fulton (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2009), and N. J. Higham, *King Arthur: Myth-Making and History* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002).

[52] Sif Rikhardsdottir, "Chronology, Anachronism and *Translatio Imperii*," in *Handbook of Arthurian Romance: King Arthur's Court in Medieval European Literature*, eds. Leah Tether and Johnny McFadyen (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2017), 137–138. According to Rikhardsdottir, this historiographic impulse imposed a sequential chronology upon an otherwise diffuse body of material, thereby making the corpus not only amenable to the workings of genealogy but also transforming it into a convenient store of borrowings for the political and dynastic ambitions of the ruling elites of the Middle Ages and for the re-affirmation of national ambitions.

[53] Ad Putter, "Finding Time for Romance: Mediaeval Arthurian Literary History," *MA* 63, no. 1 (1994): 2. However, as Rikhardsdottir points out, the Arthurian legend passed from Celtic folkloric materials located on the fringes of Britain through Geoffrey and others as the conduit on to Brittany and subsequently to Chrétien de Troyes in France before travelling back to English adapters and finally across

In its acquisition of an almost prophetic avatar which enacted the transformation from an obscure, almost forgotten hero bearing only scant mention in the annals of history to a messiah and deliverer allied explicitly with insular imperial ambitions, the figure of Arthur functioned like an 'icon.' David A. Summers has pointed out how the persona of Arthur became the locus around which certain cultural ideas constellated — the notion of a cultural, racial, or national messiah who would reverse the fortunes of a disenfranchised people and restore not only their former glory but also their identity as a cultural and political entity, as well as the belief that such an identity could be maintained if the people of a nation subordinated personal interest to collective national needs and aspirations.[55] For the Welsh specifically, this idea of a champion who would liberate the oppressed and re-assert

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greater Europe in a sort of literary-cultural circumnavigation that testifies to the circuitousness of the legendarium, proving that the strands of development (prose historiography and verse romance) were not insulated but frequently dovetailed with each other. See Rikhardsdottir, "Chronology," 141.

[54] For an astute summary of these complicated developments, see Kathryn Hume, "The Metamorphoses of Empire in the Arthurian Tradition," *Criticism* 59, no. 4 (2017): 619–622. Hume's views are implicitly endorsed by Patricia Claire Ingham who argues that as the opposite of "the realpolitik of statecraft," the fantastic elements of the literary Arthurian tradition "offer a way of understanding the fascination with loss, trauma, fragmentations, and disaffections — the drives and desires that circulate within group identities, yet which rhetorics of union or enduring sovereign genealogies seek to disavow." See Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies: Arthurian Romance and the Making of Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 6. For an analysis of romance attitudes both towards the fairy figure of Morgan le Fay as well as the enchanted isle of Avalon, see Chapters 1 ("Fairies and Humans between Possible Worlds," 9–38) and 2 ("Avalon: Simulacra and Fictional Facts," 39–71) in Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance*.

[55] David A. Summers, *Spenser's Arthur: The British Arthurian Tradition and* The Faerie Queene (Lanham & Oxford: University Press of America, 1997), 26.

indigenous political and cultural might was a particularly attractive one, an association strengthened by the parallels between the historical Arthur's success against the Saxons and the fraught politics of engagement between Wales and the Anglo-Norman administration in the Middle Ages.[56] Although linked initially with the triumph of an explicitly Brittonic (as opposed to Anglo-Saxon) racial identity through the figuration of the trope of return in Welsh vatic poetry, the iconic figure of Arthur was eventually appropriated by the Anglo-Norman regime by a process of cultural annexation (what Summers terms 'cultural piracy'), thereby leading to the anglicization of the figure as an insular national hero.[57] By the late medieval period, Arthur and his court had begun to serve as a particularly potent metaphor for British sovereignty, embodying at once both the contesting political claims of various cultural and racial groups as well as an expansive vision of a unified insular community brought together under messianic leadership.[58] As a sign encapsulating fantasies of indigenous authority and upholding the aspirations of British hegemonic dispensation, Arthur was thus used by English monarchs and dynastic families to reinforce their political credentials through fictional genealogies that traced lines of descent from the legendary British hero.[59] While such strategies were utilised both by the Plantagenets as well as by the Yorkist king Edward IV, nowhere was such an analogous identification more prominent than in the case of the Tudors.[60] Claiming descent from the Welsh, the Tudor dynasty found in Arthur a convenient and powerful emblem to justify both the necessity as well as the appropriateness of their claim to the English throne.[61] The literary-cultural complex of medieval Arthuriana together with its apparatus of fantasy, supernatural, and magic was employed in the service of piecing together an illustrious family tree for the Tudors, a creative cultural process which peaked under the rule of Elizabeth I. In this adaptation of Arthurian material to Tudor genealogy under Elizabeth, the fairy associations of the legend played a significant part, especially in the progresses, pageants, and processions which constituted performative culture during the reign of the queen.

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[56] For comprehensive overviews of the political skirmishes between the Welsh and the Anglo-Normans between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries, see A. D. Carr, *Medieval Wales* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 27–82 and Michael A. Faletra, "Introduction: The Scrap-Heap of History," *Wales and the Medieval Colonial Imagination: The Matters of Britain in the Twelfth Century* (New York: Palgrave, 2014), 3–8.

[57] Summers, *Spenser's Arthur*, 54.

[58] Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies*, 2.

[59] Ingham sees this as a defence mechanism to assuage the anxieties of political legitimation. Building upon Benedict Anderson's theorisation of 'imagined communities,' Ingham postulates that through the commissioning of such fictive genealogies, English monarchs were attempting to justify the possibilities of their future rule through a fictionalised identification with an imagined community of British kings. See Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies*, 25.

[60] For the Plantagenets, see Peter Johanek, "König Arthur und die Plantagenets: Über den Zusammenhang von Historiographie und höfischer Epik in mitteralterlicher Propaganda," *FS* 21 (1987): 346–389 and Martin Aurell, "Henry II and Arthurian Legend," in *Henry II: New Interpretations*, 362–394, and for the Yorkist claim, see Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies*, 52–53.

[61] For a detailed examination of the Tudor utilisation of the Arthurian legend, see Chapter 2 ("The Tudor Re-fashioning of Arthur") of Summers' *Spenser's Arthur*, 85–124 and for a discussion of the circumstances in which such re-appropriation was achieved in the sixteenth century (the pioneering conservatory efforts of the antiquarian John Leland in particular), see James P. Carley, "Arthur and the Antiquaries," in *The Arthur of Medieval Latin Literature: The Development and Dissemination of the*

Given the connections of fairy mythology with insular politics and the exigencies of imperial legitimation (via the figures of Mélusine and Arthur), the vocabulary and imagery of fairy was frequently employed in the complex of performative spectacles which characterised the rule of Elizabeth. Although the charged ideological potential of fairy romance for endorsing hegemonic dispensation had been utilised by different dynastic families both in England and on the continent, with Elizabeth the semiotics of fairy became a crucial and indispensable tool in the process of self-fashioning by which the female monarch constructed an elaborate mythopoeic system to justify her status as sovereign. This myth-making exercise was predicated upon an iconography and performative culture which straddled questions of gender and political identity as Elizabeth sought to control the modes of royal self-representation.[62] The deployment of fairy motifs in the progresses, pageants, and Accession Day Tilts enabled Elizabeth to negotiate issues of personal and political identity by simultaneously fashioning an impressive (albeit fictive) lineage as well as constructing a powerful self-image (through her role as semi-magical, semi-divine intercessor and resolver of crises involving fantastic and legendary creatures) that would function as a triumphant validation of her right to rule. The nature of the progress itself enabled such mythopoesis as it facilitated the mapping of the bodies of both land and monarch, not only foregrounding an organic connection between queen and country but also imbuing both with the corpus of myths, motifs, and imagery with which posterity would remember their empress.[63]

Arthurian Legend in Medieval Latin, ed. Siân Echard (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), 149–178.

[62] Woodcock, *Renaissance Elf-Fashioning*, 39–40.

[63] Observing that texts, land, and history come together in chorography, Jayne Elizabeth Archer and Sarah Knight conclude that Elizabeth's progresses constituted a "particular kind of chorographical project" that allied both monarch and land together and helped to secure the foundations of Elizabethan myth-making. See Archer and Knight, "Elizabetha Triumphans," in *The Progresses, Pageants, and Entertainments of Queen Elizabeth I*, eds. Jayne Elizabeth Archer, Elizabeth Goldring, and Sarah Knight (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 7. For a discussion of the religious and cultural impulses which impelled the institution and elaboration of the cult of the Elizabethan progress, see Roy Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), 114–115.

Four entertainments in particular — the lavish celebrations organised by Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester at Kenilworth in 1575, the pageants organised by Sir Henry Lee at Woodstock in 1575, the reception at Elvetham arranged by Edward Seymour, Earl of Hertford in 1591, and Lee's continuation of the story of the Woodstock entertainment at the pageantry at Ditchley in 1592 — were built upon foundations which utilised the apparatus of fairy in significant ways.[64] At Kenilworth, the figure of the Lady of the Lake together with her connections with Arthurian legend was used as part of the broader chivalric setting which framed the celebrations. Pieced together variously from excerpts contained in the letter sent by Robert Laneham to Humfrey Martin as well as George Gascoigne's *Princely Pleasures*, we learn that the Lady of the Lake appeared to Elizabeth twice — once to welcome the queen in a speech which rehearsed a splendid (though fictitious) lineage of possession for Kenilworth Castle from the days of Arthur, through the political skirmishes of the Saxons, Danes, and Normans, and eventually to the ancestors of Leicester's family and again in a performative interlude where Tryton, sent by Neptune, implored the Queen to release the Lady of the Lake (who had been "surprized" by Sir Bruse sauns pitie as a form of revenge for the Lady's imprisonment of Merlin) in accordance with Merlin's prophecy that the Lady "coulde never be delivered but by the presence of a better maide than herselfe."[65] The welcome speech delivered by the Lady of the Lake is exactly the kind of literary exercise in denoting the fairy configuration of genealogy that had by this time become an established part of ideological praxis seized upon by political families, although here the purpose seems to have been to extol the illustrious pedigree of Leicester in order to advocate his suitability as a potential husband for the Queen.[66] However, as the famous anecdote in Laneham's letter testifies, Elizabeth's pithy rejoinder to the Lady's greetings whereby she reminds the fairy that Kenilworth was *her* gift to Leicester is not only an emphatic move towards reclaiming and reasserting her private authority, but also an indirect presentation of herself (and not Leicester, who is just the beneficiary of her generosity) as the true and rightful descendant of Arthur.[67] In the second entertainment, Merlin's prophecy is not only well within the Arthurian mould, but also sets up Elizabeth as the deliverer of the captive Lady of the Lake. A "better maide" than the Lady could only be the Fairy Queen, and her mere presence was enough to banish the forces of evil and secure the Lady's release.[68] Although a variety of interpretations have been offered by critics to explain the true (political) import of the Kenilworth entertainments, what is undeniable is that many of the devices which formed a part of this complex of celebratory shows were predicated upon an overarching framework of romance and Arthurian chivalry.[69] While Alex Davis has seen the presence of such chivalric themes as evidence of the socio-political value of chivalry as the "currency of social esteem in the Elizabethan court," Lesley Mickel has observed that such chivalry, related directly to the Tudor discourse of royal legitimacy, was simultaneously "part of the cultural *Zeitgeist*, whereby the recuperation of British history and the charting of British geography were enmeshed in the broader project of nation-building" as well as "interrogated and adapted to express alternative views, and to demonstrate a new kind of democratic, communal chivalry" rather than merely reproduced to reinforce royal and national claims.[70] According to Jim Ellis, Kenilworth itself is to be seen as a synecdoche for the mythology of English national identity. Combining elements from Ovidian metamorphosis, Arthurian legend, as well as native folk custom, such a mythology allied imperial mythography with the political ramifications of empire.[71] In such an ideological project, the vocabulary of fairy was utilised not only to construct a genealogy that simultaneously elevated Elizabeth to the status of supernatural imperatrix and validated the rightness of her rule, but also to articulate the entangled (and often inseparable) claims by which the house of Tudor vied for political legitimation as well as expressed its imperial ambitions.

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[64] Although fairies were also used in the Queen's summer progress through Norwich in 1578 in a performance devised by Thomas Churchyard (where the formerly-planned water nymphs were replaced by fairies in the substitute entertainment organised after heavy showers disrupted the usual schedule), they were characterised in a manner harking back to 'popular' folkloric roots rather than the more 'courtly' connection of fairies with royal genealogy and political legitimation. The play-text records (in the words of a water nymph) a characterisation that is thoroughly consistent with the folk fairy of household economy: "The Phayries are another kind of elfes that daunce in darke, / Yet can light candles in the night, and vanish like a sparke; / And make a noyse and rumbling great among the dishes oft, / And wake the sleepie sluggish maydes that lyes in kitchen loft. / And when in field they treade the grasse, from water we repayre, / And hoppe and skippe with them sometime as weather waxeth fayre." Although such a portrayal is in keeping with contemporary ideas about fairies, they do not cohere with the line of argument I have been establishing in this section. In the civic pageantry at Norwich, the fairy participants put on a musical interlude replete with dancing which seem to have been contrived purely for the sake of entertainment and not to hint at the political ramifications of fairy. For the full text of the Norwich entertainment, see Churchyard's "A Discourse of the Queenes Majestie's Entertainment in Suffolk and Norfolk" in John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth*, *Volume II* (London, 1823), 179–213 (the quoted excerpt is from page 210 of the volume). For an analysis of the wider political and religious context which informed the Norwich pageantry, see Patrick Collinson, "Pulling the Strings: Religion and Politics in the Progress of 1578," in Archer et al., *Progresses*, 122–141 and for a discussion of Churchyard's literary endeavours in the composition of the performance, see David M. Bergeron, "The 'I' of the Beholder: Thomas Churchyard and the 1578 Norwich Pageant" in the same volume, 142–159.

It is important to note that the entertainments at Kenilworth, Woodstock, Ditchley, and Elvetham were all private receptions. Although the organisation of such performances would typically involve the participation of the host's household (which would include, in addition to family members, members of the serving classes drawn from lower social ranks), their status as private reception rather than civic pageantry seems to imply that the ones most responsive to the cultural cachet of fairylore and therefore to the socio-political significance of the genealogical pedigree claimed by the Queen were elite, educated cliques. The most important bastion of approval sought by the House of Tudor as a hegemonic power for its political legitimation thus seems to have been the aristocracy itself. 'Mass' approval in sixteenth-century England was undoubtedly more classist than truly democratic.

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[65] There has been much scholarly controversy regarding the precise authorship of Laneham's letter with some critics doubting the existence of an individual named Robert Laneham (or Langham) while others maintain that there is genuine biographical precedent to champion Laneham's claim of authorship. For an elaboration of the former view, see David Scott, "William Patten and the Authorship of 'Robert Laneham's *Letter*' (1575)," *ELR* 7, no. 3 (1977): 297–306 and for an argument in favour of the latter view, see Elizabeth Goldring, "'A mercer ye wot az we be': The Authorship of the Kenilworth *Letter* Reconsidered," *ELR* 38, no. 2 (2008): 245–269. Detailed texts of both the *Letter* and the *Princely Pleasures* are to be found in John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth, Volume I* (London, 1823), 420–484 and 485–523 respectively.

[66] Elizabeth Goldring, "Portraiture, Patronage, and the Progresses: Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, and the Kenilworth Festivities of 1575," in Archer et al., *Progresses*, 163–188.

[67] Laneham records Elizabeth as responding "we had thought indeed the Lake had been oours, and doo you call it yourz noow?" See Nichols, *Progresses*, *Volume I*, 431.

[68] Gascoigne notes that the version of the entertainment involving the Lady's release by the mere presence of the Queen was not what had originally been planned. According to Gascoigne, Elizabeth's intervention was to have been preceded by a fight between the forces defending the Lady as well as Sir Bruse's army, and only subsequently was Elizabeth to have been implored by the Captain of the defending unit to arbitrate in the matter. Such a show would have considerably diminished Elizabeth's authority by dethroning her from the position of being the sole saviour of the Lady. The cancellation of this version (for reasons not directly outlined by Gascoigne) evidently points to Elizabeth seeking to wrest exclusive control of the narrative. Alex Davis also sees this as a deliberate attempt on Elizabeth's part to "[insert] herself into Malorean narrative to take on the heroic role aspired to by her courtiers," thereby enacting a wilful intrusion into the world of Arthurian romance. See Davis, *Chivalry and Romance in the English Renaissance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), 79.

After Kenilworth, Elizabeth was regaled by the celebrations organised by Sir Henry Lee at Woodstock later in the same progress. Fairy mythology makes an appearance here too, albeit in a different mould from that at Kenilworth. Following the story of Hemetes the Hermit (a convoluted plot involving the thwarted passions and star-crossed fates of Gaudina, Contarenus, Loricus, and Hemetes, a role possibly played by Lee himself), the Queen is greeted by the figure of the Fairy Queen in a speech which, singing the praises of the English queen, claims its speaker as an intimate "frende" of Elizabeth, not only privy to the facts of her life and her government but also in some sense her (spiritual and ontological) equal.[72] Later, the Fairy Queen reappears in a dramatic episode that functions as a continuation of the hermit's tale. In this episode, the Fairy Queen (here explicitly named as Eambia) initially intercedes on behalf of Gaudina, arguing in favour of the merits of her love for Contarenus against the wishes of her father Occanon who is opposed to the match. However, upon hearing Occanon's arguments about the unsuitability of Contarenus as a match for the aristocratic Gaudina, the Fairy Queen is converted to his cause and attempts to convince Gaudina of the same, being eventually successful when Contarenus himself relinquishes his claim on Gaudina, sacrificing his "right" to "countries weale."[73] The presence of the Fairy Queen at the Woodstock entertainment serves a dual purpose — in her welcome speech, she establishes the English queen as both her spiritual consort and earthly surrogate through words which hint at their parallel natures, and in her role as the supernatural intercessor in resolving the political turmoil that the kingdom of Cambaya has found itself in following the disappearance of the Duke's daughter, she acts as a spokesperson advocating for the importance of sacrificing personal passions at the altar of duty to one's country.[74] It is useful to note that Achates, the Counsellor to Duke Occanon mentions that his advice was to appeal to the English Queen to convince Gaudina to listen to her father and renounce her pursuit of Contarenus.[75] Since this role is subsequently assumed by the Fairy Queen, this sets up a further equivalence in their status and function. Lee revived some of these elements at the entertainment offered to Elizabeth at Ditchley in 1592 which once again saw the Queen assume the garb of the deliverer of imprisoned (in this case through enchantment) souls. In this entertainment, the Fairy Queen does not make a direct appearance but is introduced indirectly through the report of the knight in charge of the enchanted grove. His story reveals that as punishment for the crime of inconstancy to the Fairy Queen, the enchantress had condemned him to guard the grove whose inhabitants were a group of doomed knights and ladies who had similarly been cursed (for reasons unknown) by the Fairy Queen into adopting an arboriform shape. Elizabeth as the Lady-Errant was the only one who could secure their release through the interpretation of a bunch of allegorical pictures which decorated the pavilion that had been erected to represent the grove.[76] The identification of Elizabeth with the Fairy Queen is, however, complicated in this case by the conflicting registers used to characterise the fairy. Although the knight's story clearly attributes the cause of his incarceration to the "infernall Arte" of the "just revengefull Fayrie Queene," there is also an evident parallel drawn between the two queens when the knight references the Woodstock entertainment of 1575 and claims that on that occasion, the welcome offered to Elizabeth by the Fairy Queen had been a greeting of equals.[77] This bifurcation of temperament — just and honourable on the one hand and malicious and unpredictable on the other — is, however, not only in keeping with the ontological nature of fairies in history but also seems to hint at the potentialities latent in the figure of the English queen herself. Elizabeth as the Fairy Queen could be both the punisher of inconstancy as well as the liberator of perjured souls, just as the mortal queen could simultaneously reward the loyalty and devotion of her subjects and penalise the transgressions of delinquent courtiers. The Ditchley entertainment thus continues the identification of the English queen (and, by extension, the house of Tudor) with fairy royalty while tempering such straightforward parallels with a characterisation of fairy that not only harks back to the duality of fairy ontology but also codifies the binaries inherent in the nature of queenship itself.

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[69] For an influential reading of the Kenilworth entertainments as part of Leicester's wider political aim to urge for stronger English intervention in the Netherlands, see Susan Frye, *Elizabeth I: The Competition for Representation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 56–96 and for a recent argument in favour of the importance of domestic politics in the Kenilworth festivities, see Jim Ellis, "Kenilworth, King Arthur, and the Memory of Empire," *ELR* 43, no. 1 (2013): 3–29.

[70] Davis, *Chivalry and Romance*, 81 and Lesley Mickel, "Royal Self-Assertion and the Revision of Chivalry: *The Entertainment at Kenilworth* (1575), Jonson's *Masque of Owls* (1624), and *The King's Entertainment at Welbeck* (1633)," *MLR* 109, no. 4 (2014): 954–955.

[71] Ellis, "Kenilworth," 28–29.

[72] For the full text of the Woodstock entertainment, see J. W. Cunliffe, "The Queenes Majesties Entertainment at Woodstocke," *PMLA* 26, no. 1 (1911): 92–141. The Fairy Queen's first speech can be found on pages 98–99.

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[73] For this episode, see Cunliffe, "Queenes Majesties Entertainment," 102–127.

[74] Jean Wilson notes that in privileging royal duty and national interest over the prioritisation of private whimsy (here figured through the question of Gaudina's desire to marry Contarenus), Lee was offering a direct opposition to the tenor of the Kenilworth entertainments which attempted to argue for Leicester's suitability as a candidate for marriage. See Wilson, *Entertainments for Elizabeth I* (Rowman & Littlefield: D. S. Brewer, 1980), 122.

[75] "My Councel was, since fates had found the meane / the English Queene to make for her defence, / To whose assured stay she might wel leane / To swage her fathers wrath, so wrought for her offence: / For none could helpe her more or so as she, / if with such sute her grace content might be." See Cunliffe, "Queenes Majesties Entertainment," 108.

At the entertainment at Elvetham in 1591, the Fairy Queen makes a brief appearance on the fourth day of Elizabeth's sojourn at Hertford's estate to welcome the English queen with a garland shaped like an imperial crown.[78] The speech delivered by the Fairy Queen, here explicitly named Aureola, adheres to the decorum expected of a royal greeting, but a number of small details add an interesting dimension to her words.[79] The fairy's greeting is punctuated not only with references to pastoral and pagan myth, but significantly, the Fairy Queen presents herself as dwelling “in places under-ground,” a detail which is reminiscent of the chthonic habitation of Pluto/Dis and his consort Persephone/Proserpina.[80] Perhaps the most important detail for the purposes of my argument is the introduction of the figure of “Auberon, the Fairy King” who is said to have been the one to have given the Fairy Queen the imperial garland with which to welcome Elizabeth.[81] The laudatory verse thus combines both romance setting and pastoral detail, and in casting Auberon as the figure who entrusted the fairy with the gift by means of which Elizabeth was to be welcomed, it establishes a relationship between the two by making the Fairy King invested in the reception of the English queen. Earlier in the entertainment, the anxieties of legitimation via an illustrious genealogy had been simultaneously underscored and assuaged when the figures of the Graces and the Hours had sung a paean to Elizabeth in which she was luxuriantly praised as the “beauteous Quene of second Troy.”[82] Thus, the familiar matrix of royal genealogy and fairy identification was repeated (for perhaps the last time, as far as Elizabeth’s reign is concerned) at Elvetham, although by this time the figure of the Fairy King has also made an appearance.

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[76] The text of the Ditchley entertainment can be found in Wilson, *Entertainments for Elizabeth I*, 126–142. Nichols also prints an account of the entertainment under the category "Masques," but his is a variant text which omits some of the sections included in Wilson while including "The Message of the Damsell of the Queene of Fayries," a speech missing in Wilson. For Nichols' text, see *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth, Volume III* (London, 1823), 198–213.

[77] "Not far from hence, nor verie long agoe, / The fayrie Queene the fairest Queene saluted / That ever lyved (& ever may shee soe); / With sportes and plaies, whose fame is largelie bruted, / The place and persons were so fitlie shuted: / *For who a Prince can better entertaine / Than can a Prince, or els a princes vayne?*" See Wilson, *Entertainments for Elizabeth I*, 130 (emphases mine). The fact that the entertainment presented on the following day continued the story of Loricus (with Lee assuming the role of Loricus in this case) validates the observation that the event referred to by the knight in the first line is to the 1575 entertainment at Woodstock.

[78] For a discussion of the political circumstances which buttressed the presentation of the Elvetham entertainment, see Curt Breight, "Realpolitik and Elizabethan Ceremony: The Earl of Hertford's Entertainment of Elizabeth at Elvetham, 1591," *RQ* 45, no. 1 (1992): 20–48.

[79] The blandishments offered by the Fairy Queen might be more than just mere custom, however. Kevin Sharpe observes that during the last years of her reign, there were attempts to figure the Queen as an 'iconic mask' in order to retreat from the glare of public scrutiny as well as to deny the devastating

Fairy in the Elizabethan entertainments can thus be viewed within the context of the historical associations between fairy mythology, royal genealogy, and political legitimation that had been established in legends connected crucially with the figures of Mélusine and Arthur from the Middle Ages onwards. In the manner of the Gramscian formulation of hegemonic powers, the Tudor regime aimed to secure subject approval for the validity of its claim to the English throne by means of an elaborately constructed genealogy, one which was fundamentally predicated upon the ontology and vocabulary of fairy. One of the ways in which such ideological control was attempted was through the discourse of performativity — via the progresses, processions, and pageants which marked Queen Elizabeth’s courtly peregrinations. Functioning as a kind of specular fiction, the performative culture of the Elizabethan regime enabled the house of Tudor to enact a form of self-fashioning by which

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political consequences of her mortality. See Sharpe, *Reading Authority and Representing Rule in Early Modern England* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 117. By 1591, Elizabeth was nearing the end of her rule, and the Fairy Queen’s flattery might thus be seen as a strategic deployment of Sharpe’s formulation.

[80] The text of the Elvetham entertainment can be found in Wilson, *Entertainments for Elizabeth I*, 99–118. The Fairy Queen’s speech can be found on page 115.

[81] Wilson notes that in addition to the standard romance elements, the plot of the Elvetham entertainment might have been suggested by the first three books of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*. See Wilson, *Entertainments for Elizabeth I*, 97–98. If this supposition is true, it would seem to explain the inclusion of Auberon. I will return to Spenser’s work at the conclusion of this chapter.

[82] Wilson, *Entertainments for Elizabeth I*, 106.

the solidity of its hold upon the throne was explained as a direct consequence of its luminescent fairy lineage and pedigree. Given this context, the conflation of fairy ancestry with genealogy and politics in contemporary literature in such works as *Huon of Burdeux*, Greene's *Scottish Historie*, and Spenser's *Faerie Queene* becomes clear. As the patriarchal progenitor of the fairy line in this elven genealogical table, the figure of Oberon becomes particularly important, and it is to this figure that I now turn.

OBERON IN JOHN BOURCHIER'S *HUON OF BURDEUX*:

Although Auberon features obliquely in the entertainment presented to Queen Elizabeth at Elvetham in 1591, this figure had already appeared in England at least five decades earlier in John Bourchier's prose translation of the medieval French *chanson de geste* of *Huon de Bordeaux*. Etymologically derived from the Latin *gesta* meaning 'feats' or 'exploits,' the *chansons de geste* were poetic works which typically traced the adventures of heroes belonging to illustrious families and enjoyed their heyday, particularly in France, between the end of the eleventh and the beginning of the fourteenth centuries.[83] Steeped in a distinctly feudal ethos and generically poised somewhere between epic and romance, the *chansons de geste* typically extolled the glories of the nobility as well as (both regional and national) dynastic lines through the valorisation of the accomplishments of exemplary heroic figures, and one of their central narrative thrusts included encounters both with a fantastic supernatural as well as with infidel non-Christian figures typically subsumed under the blanket term 'Saracen,' a development probably influenced by and grounded in the historical context of the Crusades.[84] With their emphasis on the centrality of lineage in fashioning the hero's exceptional identity, *chansons de geste* lent themselves quite naturally to the preoccupations with genealogy and ancestry which were a hallmark of the political concerns of many medieval families as well as territorial units. Despite their putative origin and development in France, there is reason to believe that *chansons de geste* were read and known in England, an observation confirmed by the existence of Anglo-Norman versions of many of the characteristic French works.[85] The earliest extant *chanson de geste* centred on the figure of Huon has been dated to the thirteenth century, and textual critics have conjectured that John Bourchier's translation is based on a sixteenth-century prose equivalent of the original *chanson* which had meanwhile been enlarged and augmented through four verse editions which appeared between the thirteenth and the sixteenth centuries.[86] The original *chanson* probably turned upon a fulcrum consisting of personages and events drawn from the chronicles of actual history, but even as early as the thirteenth century the core elements of the narrative had gathered around themselves accretions belonging to the realms of magic and fantasy, embellishments inspired in no small part by the corpus of insular mythology, the literary-cultural complex of the romance (particularly Arthurian romance), as well as the influx of ideas, tropes, and motifs drawn from such literary works of an eastern provenance as the *Arabian Nights' Entertainment*.[87] The central figure of this fantastic, magical world whose powers are pivotal to the unfolding of the plot is the Fairy King Oberon.

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[83] For a succinct summary of the central features of the genre, see David Coward, *A History of French Literature: From* Chanson de geste *to Cinema* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 7–10.

[84] For the influence of the Crusades upon medieval literature in general, see the essays collected in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the Crusades*, ed. Anthony Bale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), in particular Marianne Ailes' contribution to the volume, "The *Chanson de geste*," 25–38.

The first textual appearance of Oberon is not, however, in the original *chanson*, but in a chronicle entry of the thirteenth-century Cistercian monk Albericus Trium Fontium. Talking about the exile and subsequent succouring of Huon, one of the two sons of Duke

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[85] The discussion of French influence on medieval English literature in general is the principal subject of enquiry of William Calin's comprehensive *The French Tradition and the Literature of Medieval England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), to which the reader is referred. For an analysis of the development of the *chanson de geste* in England, including an examination of how the use of the genre was sanctioned by contemporary politics, see Melissa Furrow, "*Chanson de geste* as Romance in England," in *The Exploitations of Medieval Romance*, eds. Laura Ashe, Ivana Djordjević, and Judith Weiss (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010), 57–72. For an account of the contested linguistic provenance of the genre in England, in particular the fraught question of whether Anglo-Norman versions of French works can rightly be considered as *chansons de geste* or whether they should be regarded as 'romances' or 'adaptations,' see Marianne Ailes, "What's in a Name? Anglo-Norman Romances or *Chansons de geste*?" in *Medieval Romance, Medieval Contexts*, eds. Rhiannon Purdie and Michael Cichon (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011), 61–75.

[86] The fullest (albeit dated) textual history of the work continues to be Sidney Lee's introductory remarks on the subject in *The Boke of Duke Huon of Burdeux, Volume I*, EETS Extra Series no. XL (London, 1882), xxiv–lix.

[87] Lee points out how contemporary chronicles variously spoke about heroes from Bordeaux (named either Huon or Séguin, the latter of which was shared with the father) who either challenged Charlemagne's heir Charlot or suffered banishment after killing an earl in Paris. Still other chroniclers extolled the exploits of a duke of Bordeaux named Séguin who heroically defended Saintonge against the Normans during the reign of Charles the Bald. Lee posits that these various traditions became entangled with each other — Saintonge was confused with Saracen and Charlemagne with Charles the Bald together with a transference of the deeds of the father Séguin to his son Huon — and disparate elements were culled which crystallised into a hybrid narrative that was subsequently overlain with the machinery of the supernatural. For an articulation of this complicated historical context, see Lee, *Huon of Burdeux*, xxv–xxix.

Seguin of Bordeaux, Oberon is introduced (in Latinate form) in terms which hint at his superhuman status and the extent of his powers:

> Mortuus est etiam hoc anno Sewinus dux Burdegalensis, cuius fratres fuerunt Alelinus et Ancerus. Huius Sewini filii, Gerardus et Hugo, qui Karolum filium Karoli casu interfecit, Almaricum proditorem in duello vicit, exul de patria ad mandatum regis fugit, Alberonem virum mirabilem et fortunatum reperit, et cetera sive fabulosa sive historica annexa.
>
> Sewinus (Seguin), duke of Bordeaux, whose brothers were Alelinus and Ancerus, is also dead this present year. The sons of this Sewinus, Gerardus (Gerard) and Hugo (Huon), who accidentally killed Karolum (Charlot), the son of Karolus (Charlemagne), triumphed over the traitor Almaricum (Amaury) in a duel, and had to flee from the country as an exile by mandate of the emperor, was acquainted with Alberonem (Oberon), marvellous and blessed man, be it recorded in the annals of history or in the fables.[88]

In Albericus' record, Oberon (from the Latin *Albero*, presented here in the first-person accusative form) is explicitly allied with the trajectory of Huon's life, figured not only as a crucial acquaintance but also as a valuable mentor whose central role in aiding the hero is hinted at. The word 'reperit' (the conjugated form of the verb *reperire*) means to 'discover' or 'get to know' with the additional connotation of 'find/obtain/get,' a semantic field which appears to lend weight to such a reading. Significantly, however, Oberon's nature is qualified by the adjective 'mirabilem' (declined form of *mirabilis*) which, translated as 'marvellous,' would seem to ally him with the ambiguous supernatural in the medieval imagination.[89] Thus, the progenitor of the fairy of the *chanson* already had about him a touch of the liminal and the uncertain and an ontology that was more than merely human.

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[88] The Latin text is taken from *Monumenta Germaniae Historica inde ab anno Christi quingentesimo usque ad annum millesimum et quingentesimum*, ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz (Hanover, 1874), 726. The English translation is my own. A note on the translation: I have supplied the character equivalents in Bourchier's work for the Latin names in parenthesis while retaining the Latin noun declensions. On account of the convoluted syntactical structure of the original, the translation offered is a strictly loose one. The phrase "sive fabulosa sive historica annexa" proved particularly difficult to translate, but I have taken it to mean a declaration on the part of the chronicler that the sources which record this story are by nature both historical as well as fictional.

[89] Corinne Saunders has pointed out how terms such as 'miracle' and 'marvel' could constitute discrete conceptual categories in the Middle Ages while possessing, at the same time, fields of signification which problematised watertight comparisons. Generally, however, 'miracles' seemed to convey a sense of the wondrous brought on by the boundless mercy and splendour of God whereas 'marvels' encompassed a more uncertain semantic field and were classifiable either as natural marvels or as marvels wrought by human or demonic agency. For a detailed discussion, see Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural*, in particular the chapter entitled "The Middle Ages: Prohibitions, Folk Practices and Learned Magic," 59–116.

Appearing as ‘Auberon’ in the French versions, the figure was anglicised as ‘Oberon’ in Bourchier’s translation by which name he formally entered the literary culture of the British Isles and by which name the Fairy King has subsequently almost always been known.[90]

John Bourchier, second Baron Berners (1467–1533) was a soldier and diplomat in the Tudor court during the reign of Henry VIII and an industrious translator of both French and Spanish works.[91] In addition to Froissart’s *Chronicles* and *Arthur of Lytell Brytayne*, Bourchier most notably translated the romance of Huon, based on the French prose edition of 1513 published by Michel le Noir. A first edition of the work probably appeared during Bourchier’s lifetime itself, perhaps as early as 1515; however, its present whereabouts seem to be unknown. Another edition, the only one presently extant, was printed in 1601 and has two copies currently housed at the British Library and the Bodleian Library.[92] The basic plot of *Huon of Burdeux* is straightforward — Huon, son of the late duke Sevin (Seguin) of Bordeaux, sets out to pay homage to the emperor Charlemagne in Paris. On his way, he is ambushed by the emperor’s son Charlot who has been incited against the hero by the jealous and traitorous earl Amaury. In the combat that ensues, Huon’s brother Gerard who was also accompanying him is wounded by Charlot, and Huon, thinking his brother slain, kills Charlot in a fit of rage despite being unaware of the identity of the attacker. When Charlemagne learns of the death of the son from Amaury (who tells a false story to paint

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[90] The philological debate about whether the French Auberon represents a linguistic choice that testifies either to a ‘Celtic’ or to a Germanic/Teutonic tradition is not only hopelessly dated but also potentially irresolvable. One view (forwarded most influentially by the nineteenth-century French philologist H. de la Villemarqué) posited that ‘Auberon’ was a hybrid word constituted out of ‘Aube’ (from the Latin *albus*, meaning white), the Celtic equivalent of the Welsh god Gwyn, and ‘Araun,’ an equivalent Celtic deity. Another view adhered to the belief that ‘Auberon’ derived from the dwarf Alberich/Elberich of Germanic myth, a name itself derived from ‘Alb/Alp/Elb,’ the Teutonic root for ‘elf.’ For a recapitulation of the former view, see Léon Gautier, *Les Épopées Françaises*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1889), 722 and for the latter view, see both Jacob Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*, Volume I (Berlin, 1875), 375 and Lee, *Huon of Burdeux*, xxx-xxxi.

[91] For a succinct biographical summary of Bourchier’s life, see James Carley’s entry on “Bourchier, John, second Baron Berners” in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, published September 2004, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/2990

[92] The textual history of Bourchier’s translation is complicated by several factors. The last edited version of the text was produced by Lee who claimed to have based his edition on the first edition of the work which, at the time of Lee’s consultation, was in the possession of the Earl of Crawford. However, as Joyce Boro has pointed out, at present no one seems be aware of its location. Further, in his introduction to the work, Lee claimed that the first edition of the work was published by Wynkyn de Worde around 1534, whereas Boro remarks that the Short Title Catalogue assigns a date of 1515 to the first edition, noting that it was published by the printer J. Notary. Both Lee and Boro seem to agree that an intervening edition of the work (now lost) appeared in 1570, but Boro contends that a further edition (also lost) had appeared between 1545–61, which would therefore make the 1601 edition of the work the fourth edition and not the third as Lee originally proclaimed. For an enumeration of these views, see Lee, *Huon of Burdeux*, lii–lvii and Boro, “The Textual History of *Huon of Burdeux*: A Reassessment of the Facts,” *Notes and Queries* 48, no. 3 (2001): 233–237.

Huon as the villain), the emperor is predictably enraged. After a duel between Huon and Amaury which is won by the hero, Charlemagne decides to punish Huon by sending him on a seemingly impossible quest to Babylon. Huon is tasked with storming the palace of the Babylonian king Gaudys, killing the admiral, and bringing home as tribute a tuft of hair from his beard together with four of his teeth. Huon accepts the proposal and sets out with a band of knights, and after a circuitous detour through Jerusalem (where he confesses to his sins), he encounters both his kinsman Gerames as well as the Fairy King Oberon. The romance chronicles the numerous adventures that befall the hero as he attempts to fulfil this absurd quest with the constant support of Oberon who succours Huon through every perilous obstacle that crops up during his journey. Bourchier's work does not, however, conclude with the accomplishment of Charlemagne's mission. The narrative is liberally enlarged with the addition of episodes each more fantastic than the other, and while the first 85 chapters adhere to the original *chanson de geste*, the story is considerably amplified through continuations borrowed from a variety of other textual sources.[93] In both the sections derived from the original *chanson* as well as the amplifications, however, Oberon plays a central role.

Oberon is first introduced in the story indirectly through Gerames' report of the figure. When asked by Huon about the shortest way to reach Babylon, Gerames replies that although the shortest way leads through a forest and would take only fifteen days, it is wiser to opt for the longer route (approximately a forty-day journey) as that would make them avoid the danger of "fayrey & straunge thynges," including the threatening monarch of the fairy realm Oberon:

> But I counsell you to take the long way / for yf ye take the shorter way ye most passe throwout a wood a .xvi. leges of lenght; but the way is so full of y^e fayrey & straunge thynges, that suche as passe that way are lost, for in that wood abydyth a kynge of y^e fayrey namyd Oberon / he is of heyght but of .iii. fote, and crokyd shulderyd, but yet he hathe an aungelyke vysage, so that there is no mortall man that seethe hym but that taketh grete pleasure to beholde his fase / and ye shall no soner be enteryd in to that wood, yf ye go that way / he wyll fynde the maner to speke with you / and yf ye speke to hym ye are lost for euer / and ye shall euer fynde hym before you / so that it shalbe in maner impossyble that ye can skape fro hym without spekynge to hym / for his wordes be so pleasant to here that there is no mortall man that can well skape without spekyng to hym / and yf he se that ye wyll not speke a worde to hym, Than he wyll be sore dyspleasyd with you, and or ye can gete out of the wood he wyll cause /

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[93] According to Lee, these include the *Chanson d'Esclaramonde*, the *Chanson de Clarisse et Florent*, the *Chanson d'Ide et Olive*, and the *Roman de Croissant*. See Lee, *Huon of Burdeux*, xxxix.

> reyne and wynde / hayle / and snowe / and wyll make meruelous tempestes / with thonder and lyghtenynges / so that it shall seme to you that all the worlde sholde pereshe, & he shall make to seme before you a grete rynnynge riuer, blacke and depe. But ye may passe it at your ease, and it shall not wete the fete of your horse / for all is but fantesey and enchauntmentes / that the dwarfe shall make / to thentent to haue you with hym / and yf ye can kepe your selfe without spekynge to hym / ye maye than well skape. But, syr, to eschew all perelles, I counsell you take the lenger way, for I thynke ye can not skape fro hym / and than be ye lost for euer.[94]

This preliminary report lays out the terms within which Huon (and, by extension, the reader/audience) is encouraged to view the Fairy King. Oberon is presented as a dwarf whose charms lie not only in his angelic countenance but also in his power of speech with which he has the capacity to ensnare his auditors. Gerames attributes significant importance to the necessity of discoursing with the fairy; indeed, Oberon is said to not only actively seek out people to speak to — individuals who are subsequently enchanted through the spellbinding power of his words — but to also become wrathful when his attempts at communication are thwarted. He has the ability to sway the elemental forces of nature at his command; however, despite the threatening import of such a spectacle, it is said to be mere "fantesey and enchauntementes," a qualification which seems to suggest that the dangers created by the fairy are simply illusion and artifice.[95]

When Oberon is introduced in person, the narrative draws attention to the opulence and splendour of his apparel and dwells on his accessories, in particular on the magical properties of his bow and arrow and his horn — while the arrows have the power to always reach their target without fail, the horn (fashioned by fairy women in the Isle of Chafalone) has the ability to heal sickness, satiate hunger, inspire joy in the hearer's heart through the physical manifestation of song and dance, as well as magically transport the hearer to wherever the person blowing the horn is located. Gerames' report turns out to be true when, offended by Huon's spurning of his request to speak with him, Oberon raises a fierce tempest, causes a perilous river to appear before Huon's train, and conjures a castle out of thin air. However, there is a sense that the cause of Oberon's rage is not so much Huon's refusal to communicate as it is his accusation that the fairy is actually a devil — "I se y^{e} deuyll who hath done vs so myche trouble".[96] Oberon counters Huon's charge by making reference to the "deuyne puisance" of God, an invocation which amazes Huon and makes him change his mind about not speaking with the fairy. At Oberon's subsequent appearance (after a period of fifteen days), the fairy enters into conversation with Huon, revealing not only his knowledge of Huon's past history and his quest to Babylon but also assuring the hero that the achievement of his mission will be an impossibility without the fairy's assistance. This is followed by the Fairy King's recounting of his own life history, a fascinating admixture of various cultural traditions and literary motifs. Oberon reveals that he is the son of Julius Caesar and "the lady of the pryuey Isle" before digressing into the separate biographies of his parents.[97] His mother, he claims, had a son named Neptanabus through another marriage who, in turn, was to become the father of none other than Alexander the Great. Caesar is said to have fallen in love with her when, passing through Chafalone on his way to meet Pompey in battle, the enchantress revealed to him that he would emerge victorious. Oberon is thus the offspring of human-fairy miscegenation, and the fantastic genealogical background he provides marks him off as an exemplary figure enjoying the best of two worlds — as the son of Julius Caesar, he can claim as his father one of the most famous emperors of Roman history, and having the enchantress of the Privy Isle as his mother, he can claim kinship with one of the most powerful magical figures ever to have been known. The recounting of his illustrious parentage (by virtue of which he can claim even Alexander the Great as his step-brother) also seems to imply an anxiety on the part of the Fairy King to justify his credentials both as a powerful magical being as well as a ruler in order to be taken seriously by Huon, thus fitting into the matrix of lineage, genealogy, and legitimation of status that I have traced in the earlier part of this chapter.

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[94] *Huon of Burdeux, Volume I*, 63–64. All subsequent references are to this edition by page number.

[95] Oberon's diminutive size and his capacity to manipulate the weather are features also shared by the eponymous Fairy King in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and it is possible that the playwright derived his inspiration for attributing these qualities to his fairy from Bourchier's work.

[96] *Huon of Burdeux*, 69.

Oberon also unveils that the cause of his diminutive size was a curse from a fairy lady who had taken offence at not being invited to his christening. However, the lady was later repentant of her rash behaviour and made amends for it by blessing Oberon with superhuman beauty. Fairy gifts from other ladies included the power of foreknowledge, teleportation, and wishing anything (including places of shelter and victuals) into existence, standard abilities enjoyed by fairy rulers. Significantly, however, Oberon also reveals that despite his status as a magical being and the seeming permanence of his youth owing to his small size, he is not immortal and will die one day in order to reach his destined end — a place “aperrelyd in paradyce.” After inviting Huon and his train to a fair palace he conjures on the spot and feasting them lavishly, Oberon gives the two crucially important gifts of his cup and his horn to the hero. The cup has the magical property of filling itself to the brim in the hands of all guiltless men but growing empty whenever it is touched by a man who has sinned, thus acting as a good litmus test for judging the worthiness of others. The horn of ivory, says Oberon, is an instrument of “grete vertu” and has the power to summon the Fairy King (together with his army of a hundred thousand men) whenever it is blown upon. However, in keeping with the standard restrictions imposed by fairy figures on their gifts, Oberon too specifies the limiting conditions to which the usage of the horn must be subject — it is to be blown upon strictly in times of dire need and peril and not on idle occasions, with the penalty of earning the Fairy King’s boundless wrath upon disobeying the rules.

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[97] Although the "lady of the pryuey Isle" is generally taken to mean Morgan le Fay, at later points in the narrative Morgan is presented as a separate figure, especially when she arrives with her brother Arthur to claim Oberon's fairy kingdom of Mommure. Whether this is a confusion on the part of Bourchier or an anomaly that was introduced into the story during its later continuations is unclear, and the narrative does not offer any cues to resolving this interpretative conundrum.

Many of Huon’s adventures against adversaries succeed only because of the aid proffered by Oberon and his magical army when summoned by the blowing of the magic horn — this is what happens, for instance, both when Huon faces off against his traitorous uncle Macaire at Tormont as well as during the crucial fight against the Admiral Gaudys at Babylon. However, Oberon’s affirmative response to Huon’s pleas for help is not always an inevitability. The Fairy King can withhold assistance on those occasions in which Huon blatantly disregards the prohibitions imposed by Oberon. When Huon disobeys Oberon’s injunction to never lie and gains admittance to Gaudys’ court by claiming to be a “sarazyn,” the Fairy King is incensed: “I here the false knyght blow his horne, who settyth so lytell by me / for at the fyrst gate that he passyd he made a false lye / by y^{e} lorde that formyd me, yf he blowe tyll y^{e} waynes in his neke brest a sonder, he shall not be socouryd for me / nor for no maner of myschyefe that may fall to hym.”[98] Later, when Huon ignores Oberon’s condition that he should not be bodily coupled with Esclaramonde (Gaudys’ daughter with whom Huon falls in love and who converts to Christianity before departing with the hero) before their marriage, the Fairy King raises a dangerous storm which causes the lovers to be shipwrecked upon an island and consequently leads to Esclaramonde’s separation from Huon when a tribe of pirates whisks her away.[99] In expressly forbidding Huon from indulging in carnal pleasure, Oberon seems to act almost as a custodian of Christian morality; indeed, he is persuaded to send help only when his fairy assistant Gloryant reminds him that even God was moved to pity despite the transgressing of His commandment by Adam and Eve. The unsavoury implications of transgression are literalised most explicitly in the person of Mallabron, a man who had been punished for disobeying Oberon's commandment (although it is not revealed what the commandment was or how Mallabron had broken it) by being condemned to spend thirty years of his life in the guise of an aquatic beast and who is now doomed to do the Fairy King's bidding. The motivations governing the actions of fairies remains inscrutable and failure to adhere to the arbitrary conditions imposed by fairy monarchs continues to have grave, sinister, and potentially life-threatening consequences.

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[98] *Huon of Burdeux*, 117.

[99] It is interesting to note that on both occasions when Oberon refuses to succour Huon, the hero quickly passes from praise of the “noble kynge” to condemnation of the “croked dwarfe,” thereby implying some kind of innate distrust of the Fairy King. This slippage between the divine and the diabolical — Huon can take the name of both the Christian God and the Fairy King in the same invocation as well as decry the devilish hard-heartedness of Oberon when he finds himself in dire straits — is also a testimony to the conflicting attitudes towards fairies that characterised the cultural imagination in both the medieval and early modern periods.

Although the first part of the narrative (the one based upon the original *chanson*) concludes with Oberon's arrival at Bordeaux to make peace between Huon and Charlemagne and his request to Huon to visit him at his kingdom in Mommure in four years' time at which point he will appoint Huon as his successor to Fairyland, the Fairy King continues to appear in the continuations of the story detailed in the second part of the work. A repeated motif in this section of the narrative is the physical description of the fairy's dwelling-places, descriptions which utilise many of the stock features used to characterise Fairyland in medieval romances. One such passage is a description of the Castle of the Adamant at which Huon alights after a series of (mis)adventures:

> […] they had aryued euen at the whyghte howse, that they saw fyrste in the woode / the which was the fayrest and most rycheste howse in y^e^ worlde, within the whiche was so moch golde and rychesse that no man leuinge coude esteme the walue therof / for the pyllers within that howse were of Cassedony / and the walles and towres of whyghte Alablaster. There was neuer dyscryued in [s]crypture nor hystory the beauty of such a castell as this was, for whenne the sonne cast his rayes on it it semyd a far of to be of fyne christal, it was so clere shynynge. In this castell was nother man nor woman: but dede mennes bones lyenge at the gate of this castell […].[100]

Once Huon has fought and slain the formidable guardian of the castle (a monstrous and horrible serpent), he takes a tour of the interiors whose description continues the trope of spectacular ornamentation and dazzling opulence:

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[100] *Huon of Burdeux*, 369–370.

> […] it was so fayre and ryche to beholde that there is no clarke in the worlde can dyscryue the beaute & rychesse therof; the ryche chambers that were on the syde of the hall were al composyd and made of whyght marbyll polysshed / the postes were coueryd with fyne golde / at the ende of the hall there was a chameney, wherof the two pillers that susteynyd the mantell tree were of fyne Iaspar / and the mantell was of a ryche Calsedony / and the Lyntell was made of fyne Emeradis traylyd with a wyng of fyne golde / and the Grapys of fine Saphers. This chemeny was so ryche that none such coude be founde. And all the pyllers in the hall were of a red Calsedony / the pament was of fyne Ambre.[101]

The account of the superabundance of riches, in particular the careful and meticulous inventory of jewels and gemstones which constitute both glittering surface as well as luxurious interior, are all features that have been encountered before. Although most of these motifs were frequently employed in descriptions of the Otherworld in medieval texts, their pattern of arrangement, specifically the detail about the presence of dead men's bones at the entrance to the castle, is most forcefully reminiscent of *Sir Orfeo*'s Fairyland and the Fairy King's palace, including the gallery of bodies present in the courtyard. The gemstones handpicked by the author for inclusion — chalcedony, jasper, emerald — were prominent features of descriptions of Eden and New Jerusalem in such Biblical texts as the Book of Ezechiel and the Book of Revelation.[102] The detail about the everlasting luminescence of the palace caused by the irradiance of the precious stones — also encountered in *Orfeo* as well as in the description of the Pygmy King's palace in Walter Map — is a standard identifying feature which is repeated elsewhere, such as in the description of the castle of the monks upon which Huon and Esclaramonde alight on their way to Mommure:

> […] the castel of a marueylous beautye, […] / the towres were couered with gleterynge golde, shynynge so bryghte as thoughe the sonne had shone theron […]
>
> […] then Huon entered into the castell with them, and came into a great hall well garnysshed with ryche pyllers of wyghte marble vauted aboue, and rychly paynted with golde and asure, and set full of rych precyous stones, y^{e} which cast a great lyght, for by reason of the stonis at mydnyght it was as bryght as at none dayes […]
>
> […] the chaumbre was ryche, for all the nyghte it was as clere as thoughe the chaumbre had ben full of torches, by reason of shynynge of the precious stones […][103]

Almost identical terms are used to characterise Oberon's actual seat at Mommure:

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[101] *Huon of Burdeux*, 383.
[102] See Byrne, *Otherworlds*, 90–91.
[103] *Huon of Burdeux*, 587, 589, 590.

> […] within a lytell season huon sawe before hym apere a great citye, and on the one syde thereof a fayre and a ryche palleys / the walles and towers of the citye & paleys were of whyghte marble polysshed, the whiche stone so bright against the sonne as thoughe it had bene al of christall […][104]

While the Castle of the Adamant is revealed to be Oberon's ancestral palace, having been built by Julius Caesar "by crafte of the fayry" following his Alexandrian expedition against Ptolemy (and abandoned by Oberon in grief and rage following Caesar's assassination in Rome), the castle of the monks is shown to be an elaborate illusionary edifice wherein are imprisoned the angels who joined Lucifer's rebellion against God.[105] However, it is my belief that the repetition of elements is not simply by accident or a mere fortuitous replication of motifs found in medieval literature at large, but a deliberate artistic choice on the part of the author in order to convey the various modes of interpretation that can be applied to fairy domains at large. By using the same features to characterise an abandoned family seat, a purgatorial site of repentance for banished angels, as well as the Fairy King's actual palace, the text dismantles any and all binary distinctions that separate Fairyland from other spaces. By refusing to fit Fairyland into any one category, the text seems to indicate that, like a Foucauldian heterotopia, it can be all at once and yet none in particular at the same time, a relentless oscillation of character that is coherent with the ontological liminality of its fairy overlord himself.

Oberon's last act in the narrative is to cede the throne and kingdom of Fairyland to Huon and his wife Esclaramonde. Although it is not explicitly disclosed why Oberon decides to crown Huon as his successor, the implication seems to be that, aware of his own mortality, the Fairy King can think of no better candidate than the hero of the romance. The episode which revolves around Oberon's wilful abdication of Mommure to Huon takes an amusing turn when it is revealed that the claim to the fairy throne is hotly contested by none other than Arthur himself. In a curious development of events, the British Arthur arrives with his train (including his sister Morgan le Fay as well as Merlin, who is introduced as

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[104] *Huon of Burdeux*, 596. It is also significant that access to Oberon's palace is through a rocky pathway that leads from the foot of a mountain, a detail that is consistent with the rock-side passageways which typically serve as the entrance to Fairyland in multiple medieval accounts.

[105] In accordance with the branch of medieval thinking which regarded fairies as fallen angels consigned to an intermediate, limbo-like state between Heaven and Hell, the text here obfuscates the distinctions between the rebellious angels and "they of the fayrey," demonstrating once again how fairies, even in the sixteenth century, were capable of denoting a field of signification that encapsulated multiple, often mutually conflicting, signs.

Morgan's son with Ogier the Dane, a well-known hero of contemporary romance) and, angered by Oberon's handing over of the kingdom to Huon, refuses to accept the sovereignty of the newly crowned king. The subsequent escalation of hostilities between a recalcitrant Arthur and an adamant Huon is resolved only when Oberon acts as mediator, buying peace by threatening to turn Arthur into a werewolf should he continue to disobey his authority. Arthur is placated through Oberon's gift of the territories of Boulquant and Tartary, and the Briton is finally made to pay homage to the French hero. Is this episode a playful quibble on the (ostensible) superiority of the French to the English? Or is the author attempting to make a wider point about the necessity of subsuming national passions and regional rivalries for the sake of achieving mutually beneficial peace?[106] Whatever may be the true import of the incident, the episode concludes with the death of Oberon who wills the foundation of an abbey on the plains of Fairyland as a final wish before his soul is borne to Heaven by a host of angels. The trajectory of reclamation of the Fairy King to a more spiritually and ontologically comfortable register which had begun with ascribing half-human status to him here comes full circle as he is given a Christian burial and as his soul is transported to Heaven. The alterity of fairy has been domesticated both through a quasi-humanisation as well as appropriation within the familiar (and dominant) religious discourse of Christianity.

Bourchier's *Huon of Burdeux* and its representation of the Fairy King Oberon stands at a crucial watershed moment in the development of this figure in the literature of the British Isles. By bringing together a multitude of traditions both insular and continental, the text achieves a synthesis of motifs to create a hybrid, protean character whose qualities gradually become the quintessential properties attributed to all subsequent fairy monarchs who follow in his wake. Even as the work rehearses many of the standard features which marked medieval fairy narratives — sumptuous fairy palaces which simultaneously echo the architectural language of the Christian Paradise as well as conceal a litany of diabolical horrors, fairy figures who intrude into and shape the lives of the human actors and whose thoughts, motivations, and actions are inscrutable, unpredictable, and arbitrary — it simultaneously attributes a degree of individuality to the central fairy figure of Oberon. From his genesis as the magician-figure of Old French epic, Oberon has mutated into a fully realised character with a distinct and recognisable physical appearance (diminutive size and ethereal beauty), fantastic and luminous ancestry (son of a Roman emperor and a powerful immortal enchantress), and powerful regal identity (omnipotent and omniscient fairy ruler of Mommure, blessed with foresight, military might, as well as powers of conjuration and enchantment).[107] Although he partakes of fairy capriciousness, he is also explicitly and repeatedly allied with the forces of good and righteousness, figured as a divine agent who is seamlessly translated from Fairyland to the Christian afterlife upon his demise. As the unfailing supporter of Huon offering aid, sustenance, and succour in times of need, the Fairy King acts almost as a father-figure to the hero, a symbolic foreshadowing of narrative representation as Oberon will later feature as the fairy father of another hero, Spenser's Faerie Queene herself.[108] The most significant contribution of Bourchier's work lies in not only making the name 'Oberon' the standard nomenclature of almost all subsequent Fairy Kings in Anglophone literature, but also in fashioning an identity that was to influence all future depictions of the Fairy King figure.

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[106] William Calin observes that "one reason for the story's popularity in England was this conflict between a Francophone baron and a French king, between Bordeaux and Paris, with implicit reference to the contemporary, historical resistance of Aquitaine and Bordeaux to French hegemony for three full centuries." See Calin, *The French Tradition*, 128.

OBERON IN ROBERT GREENE'S *THE SCOTTISH HISTORIE OF JAMES THE FOURTH*:

A somewhat different line of development of the figure of Oberon in sixteenth-century England is represented by Robert Greene's characterisation of the Fairy King in his play *The Scottish Historie of James the Fourth*. A dramatisation of an episode drawn from G. B. Giraldi Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*, the play was printed by Thomas Creede in Quarto format in 1598 (although the fact that an entry in the Stationers' Register dates from 1594 seems to imply that there was an earlier edition of the play which has now been lost) and was probably composed by Greene sometime during the summer or autumn of 1590.[109] Although not a part of the cast of main characters, Oberon as the King of the Fairies appears together with Bohan, a misanthropic Scot in the frame narrative of the play. The events of the play unfold as a dramatic illustration of the reasons which have bred disillusionment and ennui in Bohan and revolve around the web of lies, duplicity, and intrigue which assail the court of the Scottish king James IV. James, who is married to Dorothea, the daughter of the King of England, develops a sudden and obsessive passion for Ida, the chaste and beauteous daughter of the Countess of Arran. Although Ida rebuffs the Scottish king's advances, the parasite Ateukin, seeking to win the king's favours, promises to assist James in the fulfilment of his desires. When Ateukin's attempts to convince Ida to relent to the king are rendered unsuccessful (partly on account of Ida's chastity which makes it inconceivable for her to even consider a relationship with a married man and partly by virtue of the steadily blossoming romance between Ida and Eustace, an English lord), he brainwashes James into believing that the only viable course of action is to eliminate the central problem — Dorothea. Ateukin enlists the services of the French cutthroat Jacques in his plan to murder Dorothea, obtaining written confirmation from James that Jacques would be pardoned after the performance of the deed. However, when Ateukin's (and James') nefarious plans come to light through an accidental exchange of documents with the Scottish lord Sir Bartram, Dorothea is persuaded (by her dwarfish attendant Nano, who also happens to be one of Bohan's sons) to flee the kingdom disguised as a man in order to preserve her life. During her flight, she is pursued by Jacques and sorely wounded in a duel. Jacques, believing her to be dead, reports to Ateukin who in turn communicates this news to an ecstatic James. Dorothea, however, survives and is taken into the care of Sir Cuthbert Anderson, another Scottish lord. When the news of Dorothea's death (and James' complicity in it) is known, an enraged King of England declares war on Scotland. James' plans too are thwarted when it is revealed that Ida and Eustace have already married, thereby rendering the elaborate scheming of Ateukin entirely futile. As hostilities escalate between the English and Scottish factions, Dorothea decides to take matters into her own hands in order to broker peace and intercedes on behalf of James, not only requesting her father to give up arms but also forgiving the transgressions of her unfaithful husband like a true Griselda-figure. A repentant James promises to make amends by honouring the sanctity of marriage and issues a declaration for Ateukin's execution, and the play concludes with the restoration of friendly relations between the courts of England and Scotland.

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[107] Talking about magic as a distinct species of the supernatural in the *chansons de geste*, William W. Kibler points out how the realm of magic constituted a distinct conceptual category separate from both the miraculous (associated with the wonder-working powers of God) and the marvellous (literary elements consciously incorporated to whet the audience's appetite for suspense). Within this frame of reference, "magicians […] are men with publicly acknowledged special gifts which allow them to perform deeds which go beyond normally recognized behaviour. In the *chansons de geste*, magicians function on the side of good as well as on the side of evil […]." However, Kibler argues that the *chanson de geste* of *Huon de Bordeaux* marks "an important turning point in the use of the magician figure in the Old French epic" as this figure is not only absorbed into the central narrative but also imbued with traits and qualities borrowed from the genre of romance. For an articulation of these views, see Kibler, "Three Old French Magicians: Maugis, Basin, and Auberon," in *Romance Epic: Essays on a Medieval Literary Genre*, ed. Hans-Erich Keller (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1987), 173–187.

[108] For this reading of Oberon as a "supernatural father surrogate" to Huon together with a (somewhat overdetermined) Freudian spin on the dynamics of their relationship, see Calin, *The French Tradition*, 131–133. Although Calin's observations are made with reference to the character of Auberon in the *chanson de geste* of *Huon de Bordeaux*, his comments are equally applicable to Bourchier's portrayal of Oberon.

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[109] For an overview of the textual history of the play, see Norman Sanders' introduction in Robert Greene, *The Scottish History of James the Fourth*, ed. Norman Sanders, The Revels Plays (London: Methuen, 1970), xxv–xxix and lv–lxi.

Oberon is not one of the central participants in the plot of the play but functions primarily as a choric figure, observing (together with Bohan) the moral bankruptcy, ethical vacuity, and the rapid deterioration of the Scottish court from the framing narrative in a kind of metatheatrical commentary on the ugliness of contemporary politics.[110] He is one of the first characters to be introduced when he appears in the Induction to the play, presenting himself as Bohan's friend who visits the cynical Scot out of love for his well-being.[111] Although the playwright glosses over the physical description of the Fairy King, there is reason to believe that his size is consistent with the standard introduced by Bourchier since Bohan, in keeping with his misanthropic spirit, initially refuses to accept Oberon as a king, denouncing him instead with the observation "Whay, thou lookest not so big as the King of Clubs, nor so sharp as the King of Spades, nor so fain as the King a Daymonds; be the mass, ay take thee to be the King of false Hearts."[112] The ease with which supernatural creatures could be regarded as diabolical, malevolent spirits is once again made apparent when, in response to Oberon's constraining of Bohan's ability to draw his sword, the Scot accuses the Fairy King of being a "witch" or a "deel" (Devil), a testimony to the semiotic slippage of ontology that was a hallmark of the figure's fairy identification. Having learned of Bohan's history (including the reasons why the Scot keeps himself encased in a tomb), Oberon expresses his desire to be entertained with the performance of a jig, a wish which is granted by Bohan's two sons Slipper (the clown) and Nano (the dwarf). Consistent with the tradition of fairy monarchs doling out rewards when impressed by artistic performances, Oberon bestows gifts upon Slipper and Nano:

> Nay, for their sport I will give them this gift: to the dwarf I give a quick wit, pretty of body, and awarrant his preferment to a prince's service, where by his wisdom he shall gain more love than common. And

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[110] For a reading of the play in historically contextualised terms, particularly through the lens of English engagement with Scottish politics during the contemporary reigns of Elizabeth I and James VI, see Ruth Hudson, "Greene's *James IV* and Contemporary Allusions to Scotland," *PMLA* 47, no. 3 (1932): 652–667.

[111] For the Fairy King's description of himself, the audience (and reader) has to wait until the first Chorus at the conclusion of Act I of the play, where Oberon announces: "I tell thee, Bohan, Oberon is king / Of quiet, pleasure, profit, and content, / Of wealth, of honour, and of all the world; / Tied to no place, yet all are tied to one." See Greene, *Scottish History*, 39. All subsequent references to the text are to this edition by page number.

[112] Greene, *Scottish History*, 6.

> to loggerhead your son I give a wandering life, and promise he shall never lack; and avow that if in all distresses he call upon me, to help him.[113]

Although the Fairy King does not directly traffic with the primary characters of the play, it is significant that the characters he does deal with — Slipper and Nano — bring about crucial changes to dramatic episodes through their actions. It is Slipper who is responsible for the revelation of James' murderous plans for Dorothea when he is persuaded by Sir Bartram to disclose the documents that had been entrusted to him by Ateukin, and it is Nano who, blessed by Oberon's gifts of wisdom and a ready wit, convinces Dorothea to assume the garb of a man and flee from Scotland, thereby saving the queen from almost certain demise. Enabled by the fluidity of the play's spatiotemporal construction whereby characters move seamlessly from frame narrative to main plot, Oberon thus indirectly influences the chain of events from the periphery of the action.

For most of the play, Oberon and Bohan appear together in choric interludes at the conclusion of each Act to offer commentary on the events that have just unfolded on stage. In a world disfigured by inordinate lust, boundless ambition, cruel avarice, and sinful corruption, the Fairy King functions as the moral mouthpiece of the play, sitting in judgement on the poisonous schemes of the Scottish king and his parasite and expressing his sorrow and disappointment at the sad state of affairs in Scotland. Oberon can also, however, use his prophetic powers to sound a note of positivity, such as his assurance to Bohan that things may still take a turn for the better at the point when the web of lies and deceit is at its murkiest: "Believe me, bonny Scot, these strange events / Are passing pleasing; may they end as well."[114] In a series of additional choric episodes, Oberon, as the purveyor and chronicler of human history, illustrates by means of fairy shows the fallacy of worldly pomp and covetousness.[115] As an analogue to James' overreaching, Oberon presents a dumb show telling the story of Semiramis and Stabrobates:

> This shows thee, Bohan, what is worldly pomp:
> Semiramis, the proud Assyrian queen,
> When Ninus died, did levy in her wars

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[113] Greene, *Scottish History*, 11.
[114] Greene, *Scottish History*, 94.
[115] As a solution to the somewhat confused numbering of these episodes in the Quarto edition, the editor of the Revels edition Norman Sanders includes Choruses VI, VII, and VIII under the bracket 'Additional Choruses' and presents them at the end of the play. Questions about the probable positioning of these choruses within the play are also discussed in the footnotes.

> Three millions of footmen to the fight,
> Five hundred thousand horse, of armèd chars
> A hundred thousand more; yet in her pride
> Was hurt and conquered by Stabrobates.
> Then what is pomp?[116]

History, the Fairy King seems to say, has borne witness to the fact that overreaching ambition can only result in death, and the purpose of this show is to function both as a cautionary tale for the Scottish king (although he cannot see this) as well as provide a contextual grounding within which the audience's expectations regarding James' fate are to be anchored. Another dumb show conjured by Oberon illustrates the unfortunate consequences of boastfulness using the Persian king Cyrus as an example, and the implicit moral lesson here seems to be applicable to Ateukin:

> Cyrus of Persia,
> Mighty in life, within a marble grave
> Was laid to rot; whom Alexander once
> Beheld entombed, and weeping, did confess
> Nothing in life could 'scape from wretchedness:
> Why then boast men?[117]

In a final spectacle, Oberon recounts the story of Sesostris (the Greek name of the Egyptian king Rameses), demonstrating how the "conqueror of the world" met a tragic end when he was slain by his slaves.[118] The intended parallel in this case is clearly to the growing disaffection of the Scottish lords with James' steady descent into tyranny, and the avowed purpose of the show once again seems to be to function as an admonitory message preparing the audience for the fate that might befall James should the emperor continue on his path of destructiveness. Genealogies of kings are presented in this play not to extol the worthiness of the Scottish king (who is, by all means, a blot on the face of proper kingship) but as a species of social criticism to highlight the themes of political corruption and downfall.

The presentation and treatment of Oberon in Greene's *Scottish Historie* constitutes an interesting intermediate step in the pattern of evolution of the Fairy King in sixteenth-century England. Although not a significant character in his own right, Oberon in the play is endowed with traits that simultaneously represent a continuation of features already introduced by Bourchier (such as his smallness of stature and powers of prophecy and foresight) as well as anticipate future developments in English drama (such as his ability to interfere directly in the lives of multiple human characters and thereby directly influencing plot progression). In fact, Oberon's detached yet involved choric commentary on the vicissitudes of the Scottish court allies him, according to A. R. Braunmuller, with the "complacent assurance" of the figure of the playwright himself.[119] Oberon's metatheatrical participation in observing and commenting upon the events that unfold in Scotland functions as a supernatural intercession of the tertiary world of the fairies into the world of the human actors, thereby eliding the difference between the primary world of the playgoing audience and the secondary world of the play's fictitious construction of the Scottish (and English) courts. The adoxic positioning of the fairy sovereign (his status as *lex animate*, to echo James Wade's formulation) probably influenced Greene's choice of Oberon as the choric analyst in this dark comedy that holds up a magnifying glass to illuminate the insidious politics that often influence monarchical governance as well as the self-seeking avarice of corrupt courtiers which enables such kingly transgressions. Though the Fairy King is yet to emerge as a fully-realised dramatic figure, Greene's play has definitely made a start, an initiatory impulse which will have its apotheosis in Shakespeare's Oberon, another diminutive fairy monarch who commands a legion of fairy attendants (although the jigs will be replaced with charms of blessing and songs celebrating fertility) and directly orchestrates the affairs of the human participants in the magical drama of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

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[116] Greene, *Scottish History*, 129.
[117] Greene, *Scottish History*, 131.
[118] Sanders, however, points out that the circumstances behind Rameses' death as outlined here are an invention of Greene's, since the historical king committed suicide after becoming blind.

OBERON IN EDMUND SPENSER'S *THE FAERIE QUEENE*:

The final literary representation of Oberon in the sixteenth century that I wish to consider is the presence of this figure in Edmund Spenser's ambitious allegorical celebration of the English queen and the British nation, *The Faerie Queene*. In Spenser's work, Oberon appears in connection with the fabulous elven genealogy read by Guyon, the Knight of Temperance in Canto Ten of Book Two. Situated within the broader framework of Spenser's mythopoeic project of panegyric exhortation of Elizabeth allegorised as Gloriana, this canto rehearses the "famous auncestryes" of the English queen through the historiographical records contained in *Briton moniments*, "a chronicle of Briton kings" read by the figure of Arthur and the *Antiquitee of Faery lond*, a compendious volume encapsulating the "rolls of Elfin Emperours" perused by Guyon, the titular hero of the second book.[120] The two figures read their respective histories in Eumnestes' chamber inside the corporal edifice of Alma's castle, and while Arthur focuses on a history that recounts the illustrious reigns of a succession of kings of Britain — from the Trojan Brutus' vanquishing of the giants on the island of Albion to Uther Pendragon's rule, the famous ancestor of Arthur himself — the chronicle read by Guyon fashions an equally luminous (albeit even more patently fictional, although Spenser takes considerable pains to prove in the Proem to Book Two that despite people's doubts about the credibility of "that happy land of Faery," as the poet-historian he has had privileged access to unearthing the fantastic history of Fairyland) genealogy of Gloriana herself, an ancestral heritage that can be traced back to the fairies. The attribution of British and fairy chronicle to Arthur and Guyon respectively is probably a deliberate poetic choice rather than a fortuitous occurrence since, by virtue of his origin from elven stock itself, Guyon offers the perfect ontological complement to fairy history.[121]

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[119] A. R. Braunmuller, "The Serious Comedy of Greene's *James IV*," *ELR* 3, no. 3 (1973): 340.

Spenser's fairy chronicle begins with a description of how fairies were created by Prometheus:

> It told, how first Prometheus did create
> A man, of many parts from beasts deryv'd,
> And then stole fire from heven, to animate
> His worke, for which he was by Jove depryv'd

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[120] Traditional scholarship on the significance of Spenser's fairy chronicle includes Edwin Greenlaw, "Spenser's Fairy Mythology," *SP* 15, no. 2 (1918): 105–122 and Isabel Rathbone, *The Meaning of Spenser's Fairyland* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971). For a thorough recent examination, see the chapter entitled "The Fairy Chronicle" in Woodcock, *Renaissance Elf-Fashioning*, 116–136.

[121] Spenser foregrounds the elven provenance of Guyon in Canto One of Book Two itself: "He was an Elfin borne of noble state / And mickle worship in his native land, / Well could he tourney and in lists debate, / And knighthood tooke of good Sir Huon's hand, / When with king Oberon he came to Faerie land." See Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene, Book Two*, ed. Erik Gray (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006), 7, i.6 [Canto One, Stanza 6]. All subsequent references to the text are to this edition by page, canto, and stanza number. It is interesting to note that Guyon is presented as having obtained his knighthood from Huon of Bordeaux who has, in the British poet's rewriting, assumed the status of a knight himself. This brief record also happens to be the first mention of Oberon in the poem, although the Fairy King is presented here in his role as the mentor and supernatural patron of Huon rather than the form in which he will subsequently appear in Canto Ten. Of course, Spenser's familiarity with the particulars of the Huon legend is unsurprising in view of the immense popularity of Bourchier's text in England in the sixteenth century, a work with which the poet must have been intimately acquainted. For a general overview of the widespread currency of Bourchier's *Huon* in the sixteenth century, particularly during the reign of Henry VIII, see Dennis J. O'Brien, "Lord Berners' *Huon of Burdeux*: The Survival of Medieval Ideals in the Reign of Henry VIII," in *Medievalism in England*, ed. Leslie J. Workman (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1992), 36–44.

Of life him self, and hart-strings of an Aegle ryv'd.

That man so made, he called Elfe, to weet
Quick, the first author of all Elfin kynd:
Who wandring through the world with wearie feet,
Did in the gardins of Adonis fynd
A goodly creature, whom he deemd in mynd
To be no earthly wight, but either Spright,
Or Angell, th'authour of all woman kynd;
Therefore a Fay he her according hight,
Of whom all Faryes spring, and fetch their lignage right.[122]

Spenser's account blurs the ontological and hermeneutic distinctions between elves and fairies by employing a mélange of different traditions — classical, Celtic, as well as Christian. Pagan mythology is utilised to explain the creation of elves as Spenser's creative reimagination fashions 'Elf' as the sentient offspring of Prometheus' theft of fire from Jove/Jupiter. The creature encountered by the Elf — whom Spenser calls 'Fay' — itself partakes of the ontological ambiguity that characterised fairies in the Middle Ages as this progenitor of womankind is said to be positioned between supernatural spirit and heavenly angel. 'Faryes,' Spenser explains, constitute the tribe of beings engendered by the Fay, a clever artistic flourish which obfuscates the differences between denotative sign (Fay, from the Old French **fae*, referring to the figure of an enchantress) and connotative field (Farye from *faierie*, referring to the state of enchantment).[123]

Spenser then provides a summary account of the line of elven succession and of the monumental achievements of each fairy ruler. It is with reference to this genealogical chronicle that Oberon is introduced as the fairy father of none other than Tanaquill/Gloriana herself, the lofty dedicatee and subject of the entire work:

After all these Elficleos did rayne,
The wise Elficleos in great Majestie,
Who mightily that scepter did sustayne,
And with rich spoyles and famous victorie,
Did high advaunce the crowne of Faery:
He left two sonnes, of which faire Elferon

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[122] Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, 179, x.70–71.
[123] For a discussion of the linguistic provenance and semantic significance of these terms, see Chapter 3.

> The eldest brother did untimely dy;
> Whose emptie place the mightie Oberon
> Doubly supplide, in spousall, and dominion.
>
> Great was his power and glorie over all,
> Which him before, that sacred seate did fill,
> That yet remaines his wide memoriall:
> He dying left the fairest Tanaquill,
> Him to succeede therein, by his last will:
> Fairer and nobler liveth none this howre,
> Ne like in grace, ne like in learned skill;
> Therefore they Glorian call that glorious flowre,
> Long mayst thou Glorian live, in glory and great powre.[124]

Presented as the son of "wise Elficleos," one of the greatest elven monarchs by virtue of his contribution to extending the reach of the "crowne of Faery," Oberon is said to have ascended to the throne upon the untimely demise of his elder brother Elferon, thereby implying that he was not originally the intended heir to the fairy kingdom. However, his ascension proves to be both fortunate and momentous, ensuring the continuation of the achievements of his illustrious ancestors both in personal rule and succession. As a judicious and accomplished emperor, he has been a worthy claimant to the throne and as the father of Gloriana, under whom the elven crown was to reach its apotheosis, he has laid the foundations for the everlasting fame of fairy. However, with this account Spenser also cleverly grafts upon his fictive regnal chronicle of fairy an historical allegory of the Tudor political line as the intended identification is between Tanaquill/Gloriana and Elizabeth together with her predecessors. In this analogical progression, Oberon would thus be the fairy equivalent of Henry VIII who succeeds to the throne after the death of his brother Arthur (Elferon) and who appoints his daughter Elizabeth as his successor in his "last will."[125]

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[124] Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, 180–181, x.75–76.

[125] The "last will" is a reference to the amendment made by Henry VIII to his will on 30 December 1546 whereby the king stipulated that Elizabeth was to accede to the throne if her elder sister Mary died childless and if there were no male heirs remaining of any of his lawful wives. It is significant that Spenser presents Tudor genealogy as an unproblematic descent from Henry VIII to Elizabeth, glossing over the troublesome reigns of Edward VI and Mary I (although in a work whose purpose was to court favour with the reigning queen, such excision is quite understandable). According to Matthew Woodcock, such a move was intended to simultaneously provide (via an idealised fairy lineage predicated upon linear progression) an emphatic affirmation of the credibility and appropriateness of Elizabethan rule as well as keep the thorny question of Elizabethan succession open to debate. For a discussion of these points,

Spenser's treatment of Oberon in Canto Ten of Book Two can be considered within the triangular matrix of fairy ontology, royal genealogy, and political legitimation that I have traced in the earlier sections of this chapter. Given the robust associations between fairylore and the genealogical claims of dynastic houses to bolster their political credentials, Spenser's elven chronicle in *The Faerie Queene* is consistent with the hortatory and panegyric mythopoesis that underlies the poet's elaborate allegoresis of the Elizabethan political imaginary in the work as a whole.[126] Patterned as a complement to the Galfridian vision of history laid out in *Briton moniments*, the self-conscious fiction of the *Antiquitee of Faery lond* does not merely furnish the poem's putative subject — Elizabeth — with an ancestry harking back to the retroactive genealogical configurations that informed the figure of Arthur himself in the Middle Ages, but also works to connect the two in a composite fusion of history and myth that constitutes the wellspring of cultural memory.[127] In fashioning the mythical family tree of Elizabeth by taking recourse to the vocabulary of fairy, Spenser attributes a crucial role to Oberon by making him the glorious progenitor of Gloriana; after all, only the King of the Fairies could have birthed the "most mighty Soveraine," the Faerie Queene herself. Aided by the contemporary literary and performative context (Bourchier's *Huon*, Greene's *Scottish Historie*, as well as the entertainment at Elvetham) where Oberon had been established as the prototypical Fairy King, Spenser augmented the associations drawn between the fairy figure and kingship by including him within the chronicle of "Elfin Emperours" that constitutes a fundamental legitimating apparatus for the poem's valorisation of Elizabethan hegemony. As a fairy redaction of British history that symbolically enforces (to quote Chloe Wheatley) a "broadly defined imperial whole," the *Antiquitee of Faery lond* (together with *Briton moniments*) also serves a pedagogical purpose in functioning, via the recounting of the reigns of eminent human and fairy emperors, as an instruction manual to educate Guyon (and Arthur) about the

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see Woodcock, *Renaissance Elf-Fashioning*, 135. The biographical parallel is further reinforced by the poet's observation that Oberon's succession "doubly supplide, in spousall, and dominion" since Henry VIII not only ascended to the throne upon his brother's death but also married Arthur's widow Catherine of Aragon.

[126] The term "Elizabethan political imaginary" is a coinage of Louis Montrose's who uses it to refer to "the collective repertoire of representational forms and figures — mythological, rhetorical, narrative, iconic — in which the beliefs and practices of Tudor political culture were pervasively articulated." See Montrose, "Spenser and the Elizabethan Political Imaginary," *ELH* 69, no. 4 (2002): 907–946.

[127] Woodcock, *Renaissance Elf-Fashioning*, 125. For a detailed discussion of Spenser's utilisation of the Arthurian tradition in the Briton moniments and its ramifications, see Summers, *Spenser's Arthur*, 125–202. For an analysis of the fundamental importance of Tudor ideas about history in influencing Spenser's bipartite (British and fairy) historiography, see Jerry Leath Mills, "Prudence, History, and the Prince in *The Faerie Queene*, Book II," *HLQ* 41, no. 2 (1978): 83–101.

virtues of good governance, an edificatory role which allies the chronicle with the wider theme of Book Two — Spenser's exposition of the doctrine of Temperance.[128]

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The texts considered in this chapter are representative of the most significant literary appearances of the figure of Oberon in sixteenth-century England prior to his inclusion by Shakespeare in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. With Bourchier's *Huon*, an expansive rendering of the eponymous *chanson de geste* which harked back to a quintessentially medieval ethos of chivalry and adventure, the character of the Fairy King-as-Oberon was not only formally introduced into contemporary literature but also established as the standard name with which all future male fairy monarchs were inevitably identified. With Greene's *Scottish Historie*, Oberon was introduced into English drama, appearing as a choric commentator within a metatheatrical frame narrative which represented the obfuscation of boundaries between fairy monarchy and a fictionalised Scottish court, a dovetailing of two worlds which was to (arguably) have its greatest dramatic exemplification in Shakespeare. With Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Oberon was inducted into the ranks of illustrious elven emperors in an invented fairy genealogy which mirrored both the regnal records of British history as well as the family tree of the House of Tudor. Spenser's fairy mythopoesis can be interpreted as building upon the tradition of claiming fairy ancestry by dynastic families for the purpose of political legitimation, an association guaranteed not only by the historical cachet of fairies as founders of royal families (as in the legends of Mélusine in France and Arthur in the British Isles), but also by the fairy iconography of Elizabethan performative culture, a representational complex which can itself be theorised as an instance of 'self-fashioning' practised by the House of Tudor as a Gramscian hegemonic power.

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[128] Chloe Wheatley, "Abridging the *Antiquitee of Faery lond*: New Paths Through Old Matter in *The Faerie Queene*," *RQ* 58, no. 3 (2005): 870. For a reading of the British and fairy chronicles within the thematic context of Book Two's allegory of Temperance, see Ruth Pryor, "Spenser's Temperance and the Chronicles of England," *NM* 81, no. 2 (1980): 161–168.

CONCLUSION

A SPIRIT OF ANOTHER SORT: THE *NACHLEBEN* OF THE FAIRY KING

This thesis has attempted to chronicle the changing face of the Fairy King in literary representation, taking as its starting point the proposition that the putative conceptual roots of the fairies can be found in the pantheons of the pagan gods of classical Greece and Rome. Within the specific context of the Orpheus myth (chosen in view of the later medievalisation of the myth in the fourteenth-century Middle English romance of *Sir Orfeo*), this pagan progenitor of the Fairy King was identified with the figure of Hades/Pluto in Greek religious thought and subsequently with the Roman reformulation of the Lord of the Underworld as Di(ve)s Pater. Belonging to the tribe of the chthonic gods, Pluto figured in the religious conception of the Greeks as both the guarantor of the earth's fertility as well as the custodian of souls after death. The associations between the deity and his dwelling place were elaborated upon as Rome built its own religious ritual and divine pantheon, a development influenced by the persistence of native Italian cultic practices (the cult of the *lares* or the household spirits), the importation of Greek religious ideas, as well as the imperial ambitions of Roman rulers in tandem with the transitions of empire. In the literary treatments of the Orpheus myth by the Augustan poets Virgil and Ovid in Book IV of the *Georgics* and Book X of the *Metamorphoses* respectively, the complex of ideas that had constellated around the ontological association of the pagan god with death, afterlife, burial practices, and lordship of the specifically demarcated domain of the Underworld were given poetic embodiment in the figure of Dis, presented as the arbitrating agent who (together with his consort Proserpina) determined whether the Thracian poet would be reunited with his dead wife Eurydice. In the aftermath of the introduction and consolidation of Christianity in Italy, knowledge of the classical authors and their treatments of pagan mythography was transmitted via a hybrid textual tradition which simultaneously mined these works for scholarly material to be used in the monastic schoolrooms for pedagogical purposes as well as offered commentary on their content through a kind of exegetical hermeneutics which applied a Biblical gloss to pre-Christian myth. Given the structural design of myth (as a semiological system based on the dynamic interplay of form, meaning, and content) as well as its functional significance (to mitigate the absolutism of reality via the creation and transmission of stories that are characterised by core constancy and surface variability, thereby making them infinitely adaptable to multiple cultural contexts), the Orpheus myth could be passed on down the generations, a diachronic literary-cultural peregrination in which the figure of Pluto/Dis was also transported. The most crucial factor affecting this transference was a radical change in religious systems from paganism to Christianity, as the new monotheistic dispensation sought to deal with pagan pantheons of deities either through their wholesale condemnation as diabolical agents and remnants of heathenish superstition, or attempted to accommodate them within existing discourse through diverse and creative interpretative strategies. Boethius' treatment of the figure of Dis in the Orpheus *metrum* in his *Consolation of Philosophy* is a good example of this intermediate branch of transition as his approach melded pagan myth with Platonic philosophy in a nascent post-Christian milieu.

Within the British Isles, pre-Christian indigenous mythography (usually referred to by the umbrella term 'Celtic') featured its own deific pantheon which was characterised by figures often regarded as cognate with the gods of classical Greece and Rome. The observation that there were similarities between native Celtic religious figures and those of the Graeco-Roman pantheon gains greater salience in view of available evidence (both literary and archaeological) which has demonstrated that the Celtic and the Graeco-Roman worlds were in contact with each other. The Celtic peoples encountered the civilisations of pre-Christian Greece and Rome both through trade as well as political conquest, and in this cross-cultural interaction, religious ideas as well as divinities were exchanged and imported into insular myth and iconography. The facilitation of the transfer of elements of religious culture from the Graeco-Roman to the Celtic worlds via economic and political networks can also be theorised as an instance of the 'translation' of ideas. Such cultural translation specifically within the domain of religion (regarded by Jan Assmann as an attempt to counter the effects of cultural pseudo-speciation, that is, the process of cultural differentiation) can lead to the syncretistic assimilation of different religious traditions, practices, rituals, and cultic figures. Given this formulation, the figure of Dis/Pluto in Graeco-Roman tradition can be said to have been *translated* into Celtic mythography where the pagan god of the Underworld fused with his insular counterpart, the lord of the Celtic Otherworld. The introduction, spread, and official adoption of Christianity in the British Isles added a further dimension to such cross-cultural translation as pagan deities were now not only assimilated into each other but also reformulated on the basis of a third ontological register — that furnished by a newly emergent monotheistic Christian dispensation. In the case of Ireland (which occupied a somewhat unique position both on account of its linguistic singularity as well as by virtue of its political independence from Rome), native divinities had a particularly strong association with the Irish landscape and with the spatial contours of the land. United by their dwelling-place of the *síde* (hollow hills or megalithic tumuli which served as sites of veneration for the spirits of the departed and were also regarded as the access point to the Otherworld, an intermittently accessible parallel realm inhabited by supernatural figures of divine or semi-divine status), the pagan deities of Ireland constituted a discrete conceptual category of native religious culture which could only be accommodated within Christianity through secular retrofitting via identification with native systems of knowledge or with the ideology of kingship. The characterisation of the figure of Midir, the fairy ruler of the elfmounds of Brí Léith in the Old Irish saga *Tochmarc Étaíne*, was influenced by this unique organisation of Irish religious belief. By the time Walter Map was writing his *De nugis curialium* in the twelfth century in England, pagan figures had been absorbed within the semantic field of the supernatural. However, as the writings of medieval schoolmen and the Church Fathers testify, this was not a neat accommodation but a rather diffuse adaptation as the field of the supernatural itself expanded to include such elements as miracles, signs, demons, as well as ambiguous liminal beings (variously referred to as *portuni*, *effigies* or phantoms, fauns, and fairies or 'Fates') who were incapable of being included within any of the other dominant registers. The figure of the Pygmy King in the tale of Herla in Map's *De nugis* can be regarded as an example of such a figure. Both Midir and the Pygmy King represent early medieval equivalents of the figure who would subsequently come to be explicitly identified as the King of the Fairies.

Etymologically, the word 'fairy' was derived from the Latin *fatum* (meaning 'thing said') which, through a process of linguistic development, was initially identified with the goddesses of Fate and eventually came to signify the state of enchantment. Cognates of the word included *faege* in Old English, *fey* in Scottish, and *faierie* in Anglo-Norman, all of which shared the notion of 'fatedness' and were accordingly associated (by virtue of the inexorability and inevitability of the power of fate) with death. Theologically, fairies occupied an indeterminate status, variously regarded either as diabolical agents who had joined Satan's rebellion against God and subsequently been disbarred from Heaven, or as neutral angels who by virtue of their unwillingness to pick a side in the Heavenly War had been consigned to a limbo-like existence. This hermeneutic ambivalence was mirrored in their ontological ambiguity as a distinct species of the supernatural which resisted assimilation into any available interpretative registers. As a specific literary device employed frequently within the genre of the medieval romance (a genre which, according to Fredric Jameson, was uniquely suited to embody the concerns and preoccupations of medieval society and was presaged upon the fundamental operational dialectic of good and evil through the use of supernatural machinery and the theatrics of magic), fairies in romance narratives enjoyed an ‘adoxic’ positioning, occupying a ‘state of exception’ which was not only removed from the chains of causality and reason which governed human worlds, but which was also patterned according to its own ineffable and incomprehensible (by human standards, at least) set of rules and functions. The figures of the pagan gods (which could be regarded simultaneously with clerical suspicion as well as be subjected to a kind of begrudging accommodation on account of their persistence in the cultural imagination as an enduring relic of the past) found their closest analogue in the fairies who were themselves of an uncertain, vacillating ontological status. For the pagan Dis/Pluto in particular, an identification was made not only with the ruler of the Otherworld in insular Celtic myth but also with the King of the Fairies as a supernatural agent of romance. Such an identification was accompanied by a concomitant fusing of fields of signification whereby notions of death, afterlife, burial practices and ritual ancestral worship, fate, prophecy, and foresight were synthesised into a protean ontological matrix. The Fairy King of *Sir Orfeo*, a fourteenth-century medievalisation of the Orpheus myth in Middle English, represents the most characteristic example of this multi-pronged trajectory of development. His characterisation is reminiscent both of the chthonic guardian of souls of Graeco-Roman religious belief as well as the otherworldly ruler of native Celtic tradition, and his explicit identification as a fairy allies him with a distinct subset of the literary supernatural. His domain of Fairyland is itself a mélange of traditions, at once classical Underworld, Celtic Otherworld, and a combination of the Hell and Paradise of the Christian imagination. In its inversion of expectations, *Orfeo*’s Fairyland is akin to a Bakhtinian carnivalesque space and by virtue of the co-existence of multiple modes of praxis, it is a Foucauldian heterotopia. Although *Orfeo*’s Fairy King remains perhaps the most representative treatment of this figure in medieval literature, alternative conceptions included the figure of Pluto in both Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Merchant’s Tale* as well as in Robert Henryson’s *Orpheus and Eurydice*. Both texts illustrate the syncretistic attitude that the Middle Ages exhibited towards the Fairy King by harking back to a figure from classical mythology while simultaneously identifying him as a fairy (explicit in Chaucer and only implied in Henryson).

Although sixteenth-century England inherited the standard conflictual attitudes towards fairies that had characterised the literary-cultural imagination of the preceding generations, radical changes both in social structure as well as religious orientation had effected new and interesting changes in the way in which fairies were viewed. Although fairies could still generate significant discomfort within clerical circles, with the emergence of the Protestant Reformation the burden of anxiety about the ambiguous supernatural was largely transferred on to the figure of the witch. Meanwhile, paradigm shifts in socioeconomic organisation as well as the development and consolidation of print culture ensured that newly mobile social classes — the middling sorts — could now be both the producers as well as consumers of literary works. The use of indigenous fairy traditions in the literary productions of middling sorts has been regarded by some critics as an attempt to simultaneously mystify the process of structural realignment of early modern society as well as to offset perceived social differences on to lower status groups in order to legitimate the privileged status of higher status groups. However, the use of fairylore in elite textual culture (insofar as distinctions can be drawn between aristocratic classes, a literate middling sort, and lower status groups) was predicated more upon the historical and cultural cachet of fairy as an instrument of political legitimation. Both in England and on the continent, there had existed a tradition (exemplified particularly by the iconic figures of the French Mélusine and the British/Welsh Arthur) whereby ruling houses and dynastic families had claimed fairy ancestry, thereby constructing a fictitious genealogy whose purpose was to bolster their political credentials as well as justify their imperialist ambitions. Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, in particular the manipulation of cultural material such as folklore (of which fairylore can be regarded as a subset) by hegemonic powers, can be applied to contextualise such genealogy-constructing endeavours of dynastic houses to elicit consensual approval for their right to rule. For the House of Tudor, specifically during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, the ontology of fairy was frequently used in the processes, pageants, and Accession Day Tilts that were organised to celebrate the rule of the empress. As a hegemonic power (in the manner of the Gramscian formulation), this utilisation of fairy motifs and iconography in commemorative performative culture by the Tudor monarchy can be interpreted as an act of 'self-fashioning' (to use Stephen Greenblatt's concept) consciously practised to valorise, via the creation of an illustrious (albeit patently fictitious) family tree, the appropriateness and desirability of Elizabethan sovereignty. The figure of the Fairy King in particular came to function as a convenient literary device to embellish the fictive regnal tables of fairy genealogy. Having been formally introduced into sixteenth-century England as 'Oberon' in John Bourchier's English translation of the medieval French *chanson de geste* of *Huon of Bordeaux* and subsequently selected for dramatic treatment by Robert Greene as the omniscient fairy observer offering metatheatrical commentary on the foibles of the Scottish (and English) courts in *The Scottish Historie of James the Fourth*, Oberon was featured in the chronicle of elven genealogy read by the knight Guyon in Eumnestes' library in Book II of Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* as the fairy father of Tanaquill/Gloriana, at once the self-avowed subject of Spenser's poem as well as the allegorical embodiment of the work's dedicatee Queen Elizabeth herself.

With Bourchier's *Huon*, the name 'Oberon' was established as the standard name by which almost all subsequent male fairy monarchs in Anglophone literature have been known. Before William Shakespeare's inclusion of Oberon as the fairy husband of Titania and the arbitrating figure who triggers both the central problematic as well as the resolution of errors in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (a work which arguably represents the apotheosis of the Fairy King's textual existence), Bourchier's work together with Greene's play and Spenser's poem marked the most significant literary treatments of the figure in sixteenth-century England. The Fairy King-as-Oberon would continue to enjoy a colourful *nachleben* in literary culture, appearing not only as the dazzling regal protagonist in Ben Jonson's masque *Oberon the Faery Prince* (presented at the Jacobean court where the title role was played by King James' son Henry, Prince of Wales), but also as a ridiculous and comic fairy monarch in Michael Drayton's *Nymphidia* and in certain poems in Robert Herrick's *Hesperides*, and later as a mode of disguise adopted by fraudulent and unscrupulous conmen to gull unsuspecting individuals in such plays as Thomas Randolph's *The Fary Knight, or Oberon the Second*, *Amyntas*, and *The Jealous Lovers* and Peter Hausted's *The Rivall Friends*. Although I have concluded this thesis with Spenser, much work remains to be done to analyse how and why the figure of the Fairy King continued to evolve in the seventeenth century and beyond. It is hoped that future scholarship will continue the project of examining the various modulations and trajectories of development of this fascinating figure which, as an enduring element of the European cultural imagination, has continued to appear in multitudinous forms in literary culture. I conclude with the hope that this study has, by initiating the analytical impulse to explore the many facets and transformations that marked the characterisation of the King of the Fairies, made a contribution to scholarship on how literary figures function and the social, political, economic, cultural, and historical circumstances which make such forms of representation possible.

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DECLARATION

I declare that I have referenced all resources and aids that were used and assure that the paper is authored independently on this basis.

28 May 2020 Angana Moitra

Date **Signature**

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