



Fairy

A Parry Pro Type Specimen

Gina Baek

Fairy:

A type of mythical being or legendary creature in European folklore, a form of spirit, often described as metaphysical, supernatural, or preternatural.

The Origin of Fairy

The early modern fairies do not have any single origin, representing a conflation of disparate elements of folk belief, influenced by literature and speculation.

Their origins are less clear in the folklore, being variously dead, or some form of demon, or a species completely independent of humans or angels. The folkloristic or mythological elements combine Celtic, Germanic and Greco-Roman elements. Folklorists have suggested that their actual origin lies in religious beliefs that lost currency with the advent of Christianity. These explanations are not necessarily incompatible, and they may be traceable to multiple sources.

Christian mythology

One Christian belief held that fairies were a class of “demoted” angels. One popular story described how, when the angels revolted, God ordered the gates of heaven shut: those still in heaven remained angels, those in hell became demons, and those caught in between became fairies. Others suggested that the fairies, not being good enough, had been thrown out of heaven, but they were not evil enough for hell. This may explain the tradition that they had to pay a “teind” or tithe to hell: as fallen angels, though not quite devils, they could be seen as subjects of the devil. For a similar concept in Persian mythology, see Peri.

Demoted pagan deities

Another theory is that the fair-

ies were originally worshiped as minor goddesses, such as nymphs or tree spirits, but with the coming of Christianity, they lived on, in a dwindled state of power, in folk belief. In this particular time, fairies were reputed by the church as being ‘evil’ beings. Many beings who are described as deities in older tales are described as “fairies” in more recent writings. Victorian explanations of mythology, which accounted for all gods as metaphors for natural events that had come to be taken literally, explained them as metaphors for the night sky and stars. According to this theory, fairies are personified aspects of nature and deified abstract concepts such as ‘love’ and ‘victory’ in the pantheon of the particular form of animistic nature worship reconstructed as the religion of Ancient Western Europe.

Yet another belief was that the fairies were demons entirely. This belief became much more popular with the growth of Puritanism. The hobgoblin, once a friendly household spirit, became a wicked goblin. Dealing with fairies was in some cases considered a form of witchcraft and punished as such in this era. Disassociating himself from such evils may be why Oberon, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, carefully observed that neither he nor his court feared the church bells.

Spirits of the dead

One popular belief was that they were the dead. This noted that many common points of belief, such as the same legends being told of ghosts

and fairies, the *sídh*e in actuality being burial mounds, it being dangerous to eat food in both Fairyland and Hades, and both the dead and fairies living underground. Diane Purkiss observes an equating of fairies with the untimely dead who left “unfinished lives”. One tale recounted a man caught by the fairies, who found that whenever he looked steadily at one, the fairy was a dead neighbor of his. This was among the most common beliefs expressed by those who believed in fairies, although many of the informants would express the belief with some doubts.

A hidden people

At one time it was a common belief was that fairy folklore evolved from folk memories of a prehistoric race. It was suggested that newcomers drove out the original inhabitants, and the memories of this defeated, hidden people developed into the fairy beliefs we have today. Proponents of this theory claimed to find support in the tradition that of cold iron as a charm against the fairies, which was viewed as a cultural memory of invaders with iron weapons displacing inhabitants had only flint and were therefore easily defeated. Some 19th-century archaeologists thought they had found underground rooms in the Orkney islands resembling the Elfland in *Childe Rowland*. However the idea of a fallen vanquished race in hiding has fallen out of favour with scholars.

In popular folklore, flint arrowheads from the Stone Age were attributed to the fairies as “elf-shot”.

Their green clothing and underground homes were credited to their need to hide and camouflage themselves from hostile humans, and their use of magic a necessary skill for combating those with superior weaponry. In Victorian beliefs of evolution, cannibalism among “ogres” was attributed to memories of more savage races, still practicing it alongside “superior” races that had abandoned it.

Elementals

Another belief is that the fairies were an intelligent species, distinct from humans and angels. In alchemy in particular they were regarded as elementals, such as gnomes and sylphs, as described by Paracelsus. This is uncommon in folklore, but accounts describing the fairies as “spirits of the air” have been found. The belief in their angelic nature was common in Theosophist circles.



The Description of Fairy

Fairies are generally described as human in appearance and having magical powers.

Diminutive fairies of one kind or another have been recorded for centuries, but occur alongside the human-sized beings; these have been depicted as ranging in size from very tiny up to the size of a human child. Even with these small fairies, however, their small size may be magically assumed rather than constant. Some fairies though normally quite small were able to dilate their figures to imitate humans. On Orkney they were described as short in stature, dressed in dark grey, and sometimes seen in armour.

Wings, while common in Victorian and later artwork of fairies, are very rare in the folklore; even very small fairies flew with magic, sometimes flying on ragwort stems or the backs of birds. Nowadays, fairies are often depicted with ordinary insect wings or butterfly wings. In some folklore fairies have green eyes.

Sometimes fairies are described as assuming the guise of an animal.

In Scotland it was peculiar to the Fairy women to assume the shape of deer; while witches became mice, hares, cats, gulls, or black sheep. In the “The Legend of Knockshegowna”, in order to frighten a farmer who pastured his herd on fairy ground, a Fairy Queen took on the appearance of a great horse, with the wings of an eagle, and a tail like a dragon, hissing loud and spitting fire. Then she would change into a little man lame of a leg, with a bull’s head, and a lambent

flame playing round it.

In the 19th-century child ballad “Lady Isabel and the Elf-Knight”, the elf-knight is a Bluebeard figure, and Isabel must trick and kill him to preserve her life. Child ballad “Tam Lin” reveals that the title character, though living among the fairies and having fairy powers, was in fact an “earthly knight” and though his life was pleasant now, he feared that the fairies would pay him as their teind (tithe) to hell.

“Sir Orfeo” tells how Sir Orfeo’s wife was kidnapped by the King of Faerie and only by trickery and excellent harping ability was he able to win her back. “Sir Degare” narrates the tale of a woman overcome by her fairy lover, who in later versions of the story is unmasked as a mortal. “Thomas the Rhymer” shows Thomas escaping with less difficulty, but he spends seven years in Elfland. Oisín is harmed not by his stay in Faerie but by his return; when he dismounts, the three centuries that have passed catch up with him, reducing him to an aged man. King Herla (O.E. “Herlacyning”), originally a guise of Woden but later Christianised as a king in a tale by Walter Map, was said, by Map, to have visited a dwarf’s underground mansion and returned three centuries later; although only some of his men crumbled to dust on dismounting, Herla and his men who did not dismount were trapped on horseback, this being one account of the origin of the Wild Hunt of European folklore.

A common feature of the fairies is the use of magic to disguise appearance. Fairy gold is notoriously unreliable, appearing as gold when paid but

soon thereafter revealing itself to be leaves, gorse blossoms, gingerbread cakes, or a variety of other comparatively worthless things.

These illusions are also implicit in the tales of fairy ointment. Many tales from Northern Europe tell of a mortal woman summoned to attend a fairy birth — sometimes attending a mortal, kidnapped woman’s childbed. Invariably, the woman is given something for the child’s eyes, usually an ointment; through mischance, or sometimes curiosity, she uses it on one or both of her own eyes. At that point, she sees where she is; one midwife realizes that she was not attending a great lady in a fine house but her own runaway maid-servant in a wretched cave. She escapes without making her ability known but sooner or later betrays that she can see the fairies. She is invariably blinded in that eye or in both if she used the ointment on both.

There have been claims by people in the past, like William Blake, to have seen fairy funerals. Allan Cunningham in his *Lives of Eminent British Painters* records that William Blake claimed to have seen a fairy funeral. “‘Did you ever see a fairy’s funeral, madam?’ said Blake to a lady who happened to sit next to him. ‘Never, sir!’ said the lady. ‘I have,’ said Blake, ‘but not before last night.’ And he went on to tell how, in his garden, he had seen ‘a procession of creatures of the size and colour of green and grey grasshoppers, bearing a body laid out on a rose-leaf, which they buried with songs, and then disappeared.’ They are believed to be an omen of death.

The Legends of Fairy

The Classifications of Fairy

- Harebell
- Ragwort
- Wild Thyme
- Cowslips
- The Pansy
- Faerue Rees
- White Thorn
- Rowan
- Lunantishee
- The Elder
- Ash
- Toadstools
- Primroses

The Characteristics of Fairy

Much of the folklore about fairies revolves around protection from their malice, by such means as cold iron or charms of rowan and herbs, or avoiding offense by shunning locations known to be theirs. Some pranks ascribed to them, such as tangling the hair of sleepers into “Elf-locks”, stealing small items or leading a traveler astray, are generally harmless. But far more dangerous behaviors were also attributed to fairies. Any form of sudden death might stem from a fairy kidnapping, with the apparent corpse being a wooden stand-in with the appearance of the kidnapped person. Consumption (tuberculosis) was sometimes blamed on the fairies forcing young men and women to dance at revels every night, causing them to waste away from lack of rest. Rowan trees are considered sacred to the fairies.

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Parry Pro

Type Specimen

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Parry is a typeface design of Artur Schmal. It began in 2002 as Schmal's graduation project at Type & Media at KABK in The Hague. Inspired by the sturdy typefaces of Edmund Fry and Thorowgood, it came out as a fairly traditional, heavy slab serif, complemented by an even heavier condensed variant and a series of sanserif capitals.

Looking at the contemporary designs that address this historical model, Parry is undoubtedly the first to bring a slabserif and grotesque variant under the same proportions, weight and glyph characteristics.

Currently, Parry consists of roman and italic designs in eight weights: Ultra Thin, Thin, Light, Normal, SemiBold, Bold, Black and Extra Black. The Pro character set (PRO) includes small caps, lining, old style and small cap figures (each in tabular and proportional widths); fractions; comprehensive scientific superiors and inferiors, nominators and denominators; case sensitive punctuation sets; mathematical and monetary symbols (in tabular and proportional widths); arrows; standard and discretionary ligatures; and a complete range of accents for all Latin-script-based Western, Central and East European languages.

