

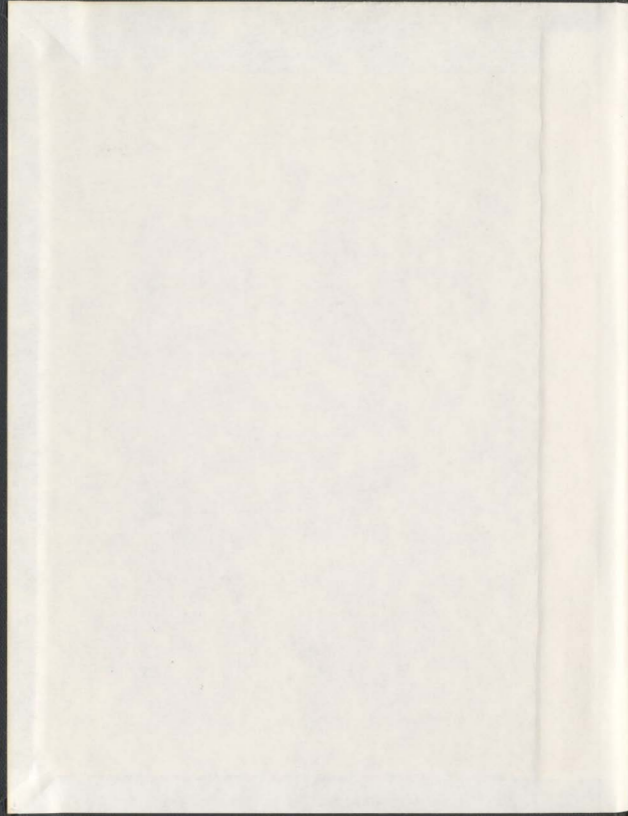
NEWFOUNDLAND FAIRY TRADITIONS:  
A STUDY IN NARRATIVE AND BELIEF

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NEWFOUNDLAND FAIRY TRADITIONS:  
A STUDY IN NARRATIVE AND BELIEF

by

© Barbara Gaye Rieti, B.A., M.A.

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Folklore  
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## ABSTRACT

This is a study of fairy traditions in Newfoundland, based on material from the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive (mostly student collections made within the past twenty-five years) and on field research on the Avalon Peninsula. It examines meanings and uses of concepts of the fairies, both as identified by informants and as suggested through the collation of texts. I argue that on a textual level meaning can be found in explicit and implicit themes: the first refers to overt narrative content (stories of changelings or going astray, for example), the second to cultural concerns which, I suggest, find metaphorical expression in fairy traditions. Analysis of this kind is subordinated, however, to consideration of the individual narrator and situation, for a contextual, ethnographic approach shows that emic interpretation varies widely, and the same content functions in different ways for different informants. I have sought to avoid abstraction and generalization on the nature and functions of fairy traditions (especially in the matter of "belief") which, in ignoring the individuality of tradition bearers, can result in a partial picture at best, and a distorted one at worst.

In accordance with this ethnographic emphasis, I have centered all chapters but the first on my informants and the

issues their narratives raise. The first chapter sets in international historical context the assertion that modern traditions are but faded remains of a moribund belief system, by showing that this view is both a folk and literary convention of long standing which has rhetorical uses; the proposition that "everyone used to believe" is shown to be dubious, for even when contextual information is unavailable, it can be seen from content alone that there have always been sceptics. The next six chapters document what people told me, illustrate the complexities of dealing with belief, and conclude that the fairies, amorphous and polymorphous, have always been eminently adaptable and continue to lend themselves to a multiplicity of uses.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Since this thesis would not exist without the help of my informants, my debt to them on that score alone is enormous. But I also must thank them for introducing me to the magic of Newfoundland and making a stranger feel at home here. To Mr. Dan and Mr. Joe Costello, Mrs. Margaret Ennis, Mr. H. Miles Furlong, Mrs. Annie Hayes, Mrs. Alice Hayes, Mrs. Frances Kavanagh, Mr. Roy and Mrs. Mildred Kelloway, Mrs. Ellen Keough, Mr. Jim and Mrs. Katharine Lynch, Mr. Ed MacDonald, Mrs. Queen Maloney, Mrs. Marie Meaney, Mr. Richard Murrin, Ms. Elizabeth Power, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Ryan, Mr. William George Smith, and Mr. William Clive Tucker, my deepest thanks; thanks also to those I have not named here in order to respect their privacy.

I am also indebted to all the collectors upon whose efforts I have drawn so heavily; I wish especially to thank Anita Best, George Casey, Virginia Dillon, Tom Moore, Eleanor Penney, Cavelle Penney, and Graham Smith for making their research available in MUNFLA. I have also borrowed from the field tapes of Dr. Herbert Halpert and Dr. John Widdowson, which are so rich that they always have a galvanizing effect on this listener.

I owe much to Dr. Martin J. Lovelace, who never thought when he first encouraged my interest in the fairies that he would have to hear about them for the next seven years. In



his tenure as the proverbial long-suffering spouse he helped me with ideas, references, fieldwork and writing, and he even made convincing displays of sustained enthusiasm.

Dr. David Buchan, my thesis supervisor, offered the right kinds of help at the right times, in the form of general interest and references in the early stages, and hard-nosed specific guidance in revision; I shudder to think what the thesis would look like without his Herculean editorial efforts. Dr. Gerald Pocius made useful suggestions for the final version, and a major contribution in the formative stages with his innovative fieldwork seminar. Dr. Larry Small's reading was an important test, coming from his intimate perspective on the various investigations and representations of "Newfoundland culture" by a long train of outsiders.

I cannot imagine writing a thesis without the friendship and commiseration of others in the same boat, and I would especially like to thank Julia Bishop, Elke Dettmer, and Janet McNaughton in this regard. Everyone who has ever worked in MUNFLA knows that it is impossible to get very far there without the help of Philip Hiscock and Mrs. Sharon Cochrane, who hold the keys to many an arcane quest. Sharon's expertise also includes computer mysteries, and I am grateful for her help in ordering my disorderly disks for printing; Karen O'Leary also helped avert a potential eleventh-hour printing crisis. Fellow students John

Cousins, Marie-Annick Désplanques, Kathryn Kimiecik, Lynn MacDonald, and Clara Murphy gave me references from the archive and from their own work; I have had stimulating discussions with them and with many members of the Folklore Department, and I must especially mention that a conversation with Dr. Laurel Doucette led to an organizational plan that felt right.

This project has gone on, fitfully, for so long that some people would probably be surprised to find themselves acknowledged here, but Dr. Alan Dundes and Dr. John Lindow, my former teachers at the University of California at Berkeley, read the original proposal and offered ideas and references. Long-distance, long-term support from California was provided by two weird sisters, Nancy and Janet Rieti, and by William Gross.

A fellowship from the School of Graduate Studies of Memorial University, with Dr. Fred Aldrich as Dean, made three years of my program possible, and a research grant from the Institute of Social and Economic Research at Memorial University helped to cover fieldwork expenses in March of 1985.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Mary Angela Rieti Dilworth.

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In this little volume there will be found stories adapted to persons of every inclination and disposition; some strange, others wonderful, some grave, and others ludicrous and merry. The method is plain and easy, suited to the meanest as well as the highest capacity, tending both to enrich the fancy and improve the mind. In fine, what will greatly enhance the value of this production is, that all the stories in it will be found to be genuine, and never before offered to the public.

From the Preface to The Royal Hibernian Tales: Being a Collection of the Most Entertaining Stories now Extant, printed in Ireland sometime before 1852.

## Preface

There are in the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA) hundreds of legends and memorates about the fairies and descriptions of associated custom and belief, recorded mostly by student collectors over the past twenty-five years. When I came to Memorial in 1982, I was astonished by these accounts; I was familiar with Christiansen's 1973 statement that "in most places the [Fairy] Faith is by now almost entirely extinct," and had not imagined that it was to be found at all in North America.<sup>1</sup> But in MUNFLA I read personal experience narratives of recent vintage, and despite what appeared to be a general consensus among collectors and informants on its decline, it was clear that there was still an extensive body of fairy traditions which had never been examined in depth.

I heard my first fairy narrative in the winter semester, 1983, when an ethnography course took us into "the field" on Bell Island. It came from a twenty-one year old

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<sup>1</sup>"Notes" 95. Although Wayland D. Hand, in "European Fairy Lore in the New World," notes that "a considerable body of European fairy lore has reached American shores," most of his citations, like the bulk of field reports--Halpert, von Blittersdorf, Kelly, Farmer, Leach ("Celtic Tales")--are from first or second generation Irish immigrants, a preponderance which probably led Baughman to observe that "belief in fairies has never at any time taken hold in America" (xii). "Fairy-faith is, we may safely say, now dead everywhere," wrote John Greenleaf Whittier, prematurely, in 1847 (59).

man, Randy Newman, who did not know that Richard MacKinnon, Elke Dettmer and I were folklore students when we struck up a conversation in a restaurant. Richard was asking about older houses when Mr. Newman mentioned that his own was built on the site of a former cemetery. "Plenty of ghosts there," I said jokingly. It was as if a hidden button had been pushed as Mr. Newman, hitherto monosyllabic, launched into a series of supernatural tales, including the time he was picked up by the devil while hitchhiking, and the night he was followed by the fairies. They were the size of children, he said, and had withered faces and wore gray suits and red caps; they marched single file ("military-like") behind him up a hill, but disappeared with a wave when he dropped to his knees and prayed. This was beginner's luck--I have not heard anything so spontaneously offered in so natural a context since, and subsequent attempts to record Mr. Newman proved futile--but it was enough to set me off on the inquiries that led to this thesis.

Aside from the intrinsic fascination of the narratives, I was motivated at first by simple curiosity as to whether fairy legends were still told or not. Was Mr. Newman an isolated case? If nobody believed in or talked about the fairies anymore, why were there so many stories in MUNFLA? As I mentioned, some tell of quite recent events, like this account from a twenty-year old St. John's student:

About six years ago [i.e., 1968] my cousin's mother disappeared into the hills one afternoon and she was never seen again. Many of the old people who believed in fairies said that the fairies took her away. Her red sweater was found and they said that they left this as a sign she was taken by them. We believed that she fell over the cliff and was taken out to sea because the body was never found. (FSC74-101/\*\*)

Could there really be such a complete break in worldview between the "old people" and their immediate families? I felt that even if I could not answer such questions, posing them would teach me something about change and continuity in oral tradition, and about Newfoundland. Moreover, the collation of MUNFLA material that would be the basis for the formulation of questions had never been undertaken and would in itself provide the first large-scale formal presentation of Newfoundland fairy lore. As it turned out, my field research became the first extended investigation of the subject, and my field recordings the first major verbatim collection of texts. This thesis uses both sources to describe and analyze as many aspects as possible of a vast and complex tradition.



## Introduction

The goals of this study are twofold. One is to examine the nature of the fairies themselves--who and what are they supposed to be?--and the forms (such as narrative and custom) in which ideas about them are expressed. The second, more important object is to consider the meanings and uses of these traditions: why do people conceive of, or tell stories about, these entities called (by me if not always by the tradition bearers) fairies? The second question is infinitely harder to address than the first, for there are many answers, perhaps as many as there are people, and I am sure that I have only touched on some of them. My particular interest when I set out was the relationship between narrative and belief, which I hypothesized is a reciprocal one; and so it is, but the more interviews I did, the more apparent it became that the interaction is different in every situation and no more precise generalization could be made. The immense difficulties (not to mention presumption) of documenting "belief" is part of the problem, for at least in regard to fairies, "belief" is seldom unambiguous or unqualified. Over time I found my attention increasingly focused on ethnographic problems, and by the time I had finished writing I realized that if I had to make a choice, I would rather my descriptions of

informants and their material be accurate than the inferences I make from them be "right," for the second derives from the first; and the first is, I feel, more accountable than my own speculations. The more fieldwork I did, the more wary I became about asserting deep meaning or design, for fieldwork showed me how narratives with essentially identical content may be understood and used in quite different ways. This is not to say that general theories cannot be made--I shall offer a few forthwith and many throughout--only that they are bound to be less certain than insights drawn from particular situations. And when the difficulties of assessing any single situation or communicative event are taken into account, the tenuousness of grand interpretations becomes even clearer. Yet it could be argued that the very uniformity of fairy traditions belies contextual and individual variation and demands explanation. Why do the same outlines assert themselves (for it does seem that they have an almost independent life of their own) so insistently? Clearly there is something satisfying in them, but what? This is another basic question with which I began the study.

Answers can be found at two levels, in what I will call explicit and implicit themes. The first refers to overt content and narrative type, such as stories of changelings or going astray. Implicit themes--or perhaps they could be called sub-themes or subtexts--are those which I think can

be discerned underlying Newfoundland fairy lore as a whole, which reflect cultural concerns and help explain its functioning independent of genre and belief. I see two such themes. One is the human relationship with nature. In a harsh environment, under precarious economic and material conditions, one's niche is ever under siege; fairy narratives reflect the struggles and hard-won survival of culture and human creation, and the tenuous imposition of order on the wilderness. Lauri Honko suggests that "the belief in spirits may be described as a map of man's conquest of the environment...[which it must be remembered] is not merely an economic activity; equally important is the cognitive conquest, attempts to organize, divide, classify, designate and thus control one's surroundings" ("Adaptation" 21). It is nothing new to suggest that the fairies represent "nature"; Alan Bruford's statement can be taken as representative of the line of thought:

The mischievous element has a lot to do with the worldwide need for a concept such as the fairies. In general they represent in anthropomorphic form the mysterious and numinous in wild nature, the part of the world which is beyond mankind's understanding--"the raw" of Levi-Strauss, as against "the cooked," what man had mastered and put to his own use. (MacDougall ix)

A more poetic version may be found in Robin Flower's description of his feelings on emerging from a fairy-storytelling session on the Great Basket. On such clear

nights, he says, he often had "a personal fancy" that there was in the stars "a conscious life indifferent or inimical to man":

In such a mood and under such a sky it is easy enough to believe in the reality of the fairies, and it may be that such moods and such skies of night first gave them birth; that from the cold lunar rays and the restless sparkle of the stars imagination bodied forth figures and allegories of its own fears, and gave them a being and a habitation on the earth, and at last a power upon the bodies and the minds of men. They are an image of man's unreconciled distrust of nature, and it was in the cities, which have devised a thousand ways of dissembling natural needs and natural fears, that men began to forget them. Here, too, they will be gone in a few short years, I thought, for they have for a habitation the minds of the old men and women, and the young people no longer believe in them. (140-41)

Writing of Scandinavian nature spirits, Kvideland and Sehmsdorf say, "Perceiving their daily environment in prescientific but eminently practical terms, the people responded to nature in the way they experienced it, namely as animate and possessed of will and thus capable of aiding humans but also of doing them harm" (9). There has been, perhaps understandably, little close analysis on these general kinds of propositions, but I think that attention to a nature/culture dichotomy with reference to specific narratives and motifs does offer some insight into the codes and symbols of fairy narrative.

A second implicit theme revolves around interpersonal relationships, specifically around knowing, not knowing, and being known. The fairies are the ultimate strangers, and serve as metaphor for all that is strange not only in nature but in other people. A concern with recognition can be seen in fairy traditions from dities and ficts--"When Mr. Collins's son acted any way strange, weird, or incomprehensible when he was young, Mr. Collins usually said to him, 'I believe you're in the fairies'" (74-152/13)--to the most serious of personal experience narratives. The incursions of the human world and the fairy world into one another are the dramatic nucleus of the narratives, and mediate constantly the oppositions suggested above.

My object in the organization of this thesis is to set the material from my field research in the context of related information from the same area, or on the same subject, or in other ways pertinent, and to elucidate particular issues or lines of thought arising from this combination of material. The only way I found to preserve the integrity of my field research, that is, to keep the narratives together with the narrators, was to organize chapters around informants or sets of informants rather than along typological lines. This means that major types of narratives or fairy experiences appear in almost every chapter, but from a different perspective in each one. One problem with working with material as rich as fairy

tradition is that almost any text or situation presents numerous points of interest, and the pursuit of any one is often at the expense of others. There is an unavoidable labyrinthine quality to the analysis of some issues; scanning portions of a draft of one chapter, a bewildered reader remarked that it was like being fairy-led, you never knew quite where you were going or why, and indeed, while writing I felt sympathy with those persons who in fascination follow small figures or luscious berries until they suddenly "come to themselves" deep in the woods with no idea how they got there or how to get back. But the underlying principle of each chapter is to let my attempts to impose order on the wilderness of field, archive, scholarly and comparative material be guided by affinities inherent in the material as well as by theoretical considerations.

Centering chapters on informants also seemed the best way to take the reader along the course of my investigation. He or she may scrutinize my field methodology, gaffes and all, as I knock hopefully on kitchen doors, and tell the occupants that I heard they might know something about the fairies. The process of my investigation is also mirrored in the order of chapters: the first is based on the literature and evolved from my musing over the seeming contradiction between the stated decline of fairy traditions and the many MUNFLA accounts (it also serves as a brief

historical introduction and a cursory survey of the literature, except for some modern work whose insights I have preferred to apply to specific questions throughout the study); the second and third chapters are the heaviest in archive data, since I started in the archive; the last four chapters concentrate more on my own field research. I would like the material to unfold, as it did for me, until not only the general patterns but turns of phrase, elliptical references and recurrent images resonate against all the narratives heard before.

By the seventh chapter--if not much sooner--the reader will probably chafe at the "tedious consistency" that Barbara Allen Woods points out allows the folklorist to distinguish genuine from dubious sources (4), but the redundancy is one assurance of accuracy, so that the reader will, for example, readily recognize the artificiality of certain literary representations mentioned in Chapter Six. A large number of texts is also necessary to show the importance of small details and key phrases like "something to it" and "never the same," although there is the possibility that the boredom induced by a huge sample may defeat this very purpose by making it difficult to attend to the finer points of a text. It seemed safer to err on the side of too much rather than too little, however, in the hope of avoiding the abstraction and generalization that characterize much description of fairy tradition. In this

approach, attributes of the fairies are extrapolated from various accounts and built into a kind of "profile": one person hears fairy music, another goes astray, so the investigator writes, "the fairies play music and lead people astray."<sup>2</sup> Besides giving an unfortunate coy tone to much work on fairy lore, this composite approach has serious shortcomings when applied to folk narrative or belief in general, for the voices and views of "the folk" as individuals are lost.

In assembling the relevant data, I tried to keep the voices of my informants foremost, and not drown them in comparative material or my own ideas, and to keep my interpretive suggestions separate enough to be taken or left while informants' contributions stand. At the same time I have described my own role as carefully as possible, since the field worker's approach is bound to have an impact on what informants tell (or don't tell) her, even if she does not know what it is. This is a particularly complicated issue in regard to the fairies, as the following note will make clear. It is followed by a few more preliminary points.

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<sup>2</sup>For recent examples see Part Two of Peter Alderson Smith's W. B. Yeats and the Tribes of Danu: Three Views of Ireland's Fairies (1987) and Chapter Two, "The Philosophy of Irish Fairylore," of Frank Kinahan's Yeats, Folklore, and Occultism (1988).



Some Preliminary Methodological Considerations

Contrary to popular opinion among non-residents and even some livyers, Newfoundland has never been an isolated place with a closed or homogeneous society; on the contrary, there has always been considerable travel both on and to and from the island. Seary, Story and Kirwin write of the Avalon Peninsula, "Though one might, on a priori grounds, have expected the communities of Avalon to be isolated stagnant settlements, in fact there has been quite remarkable and continuous interchange and shift of population throughout their recorded history." Migratory and seasonal work patterns, they point out, "made Newfoundlanders one of the most mobile of people," and "helped to modify, though not to cancel out, that separateness of the people of different areas remarked long ago by Wix" (35-36). In 1836 Wix had written that "the inhabitants of Conception Bay, although a neck of land of only a few miles extent separates them from Trinity Bay, differ from the inhabitants of the latter, as much as if they were of a distant nation; the same may be said of the difference between those who live in Placentia and those who live in Fortune Bay" (Seary et al 36). Melvin Firestone comments on the differences in communities in the Northern Peninsula area he studied in the 1960s: "differences in aggressiveness, sobriety, fear of strangers, interest in dance and song, and so forth"; he found it hard to account

for the variation "when derivation, environment, economy, and cultural heritage are so similar" (Brothers vi-vii).

There are "good" and "bad" areas for fairy lore, according to MUNFLA data. Some areas, like Notre Dame Bay, show little; others, like Upper Island Cove or Bell Island, can be seen from the number and detail of reports to be veritable hotbeds. Although collections usually include religion and ethnicity of area and informant, and there is plenty of data from Protestants and Protestant areas, the difference is often attributed to "Irishness," and I was sometimes advised by informants to seek out "Irish" or Catholic enclaves for my research. It is true enough that in heavily Irish areas like the Southern Shore and Cape Shore fairy traditions are found in profusion, but they are by no means limited to such areas. Upper Island Cove, for example, is mainly English/Protestant, as is neighboring Bishop's Cove where I recorded some of my richest material; Bell Island is mixed. (I chose Conception Bay for most of my fieldwork not only because it is the oldest settled area, but because of its inextricable ethnic mixture.) Since Newfoundland settlers came mostly from southwest England and southeast Ireland (with smaller but significant elements from France, Scotland, Wales, the Channel Islands and Brittany), it seems evident that fairy traditions derive from both strains, but because of the popular notion of

"Irishness" I have devoted some attention to the matter at various points in this study.

The more important questions about antecedent sources concern adaptation. Is it possible, for example, in comparing Newfoundland material to its parent stock, to see selection and shaping according to the features of the "new" environment? What are the distinctive contours here? I have used comparative material mostly to consider such questions of continuity and change, and processes of oral tradition and the interpretation of experience. I have not been systematic or comprehensive in the provision of analogues--all the material in this study could be extensively annotated from the major collections and motif-indexes--but have used it mainly as it illuminates the material at hand. Occasionally the similarities in other cultures or eras that excited early students of fairy lore like Keightley, Wright and Hartland have proved irresistible to me, too, and I have given them some play. There is a certain professional thrill in the sheer antiquity of fairy lore, as when someone, for example, tells "Tam Lin" as it happened in their community. Historical and literary reverberations, however, are not a feature for the tradition bearers, who have a different set of allusions and associations. Since this study is primarily an attempt to understand--or at least to present--fairy traditions from their point of view, I have limited historical material to

as much as will demonstrate the extraordinary continuity which shows fairy tradition to contain powerful expressions of human needs and interests.

Comparison must be tempered, too, by consideration of the limitations of the available data. It must be remembered that the documentation of fairy traditions in Newfoundland has not been systematic or thorough, and is a relatively recent undertaking. Except for the work of MacEdward Leach, who in 1950 recorded some fairy material in his quest for ballads, there was no collection until the mid-1960s, when Herbert Halpert and John Widdowson began their fieldwork on all folklore genres. Some of their students, Virginia Dillon in 1964 and Michael Fagan in 1967, for example, did superior "early" collections, and my reliance on them will be apparent. A list of MUNFLA materials on the fairies (compiled by myself and available in MUNFLA) shows that there has been little abatement of material since then, although some years were "better" than others. The quality and quantity of material from the early years was enhanced by courses taken on a year-long basis, in which students could use the Christmas break to collect in their home communities, and by Halpert's general survey approach which explicitly included fairies as an area for investigation. When classes were shortened to semester-length, they became less conducive to the recording of long narratives or discourse, and students could not always turn

to their home communities to do fieldwork. As more instructors taught more courses with different emphases, fairies would not inevitably be mentioned as a possible topic for collection. The reporting of fairy traditions, then, has been random, depending on there being a student from a community with fairy traditions, who had an interest in those traditions himself, and the mobility to get to informants within the required time. (Students have, of course, collected from each other at university, and are often excellent self-informants.) This element of chance makes it dangerous to conclude that any motif or narrative type is absent from Newfoundland just because it is not found in the archive material. Sometimes a single text is all that bars such a conclusion; the widespread fairy midwife legend (ML5070), for example, appears in MUNFLA in a single version (72-95/33-35:C1278/3-5). Told by an informant who heard it from the midwife herself, it is so complete, and so clearly assimilated to local tradition, that it is impossible to believe that it could be the sole version in Newfoundland. The apparent absence or even "unusualness" of any particular item, then, must be treated with caution. On the other hand, it can be stated with confidence that some things are common or widespread, such as carrying bread for protection; and when there are a great many versions of an item, it can be seen that this or that variation is unusual by comparison. In general, however,

"unusual" (in this thesis) means "unusual in the archive data."

Another reason why a full range of fairy traditions cannot be assumed to be represented in MUNFLA is that some people consider it dangerous, or at least inappropriate, to talk about the fairies. Like all fairy traditions, this is taken with varying degrees of seriousness and is not found everywhere, but it is possible that because of it, much material from "true believers" will never be recorded. There is even a formula to circumvent the prohibition:

Mr. Dwyer's grandmother, who reared him, believed in the fairies and their powers although she had never seen them. She had a good collection of stories concerning them which she and the other neighbors (on Bell Island) would gather together to discuss after tea when it was dark. However, the fairies did not like being discussed and would punish anyone who told stories about them. She would in opening her conversation say, "This is Sunday (or Monday or whatever day it was) and the fairies won't hear us." This statement would prevent the fairies from hearing the ensuing conversation.<sup>3</sup> (FSC67-3/33)

Failure to maintain a respectful attitude could have dire consequences, according to an Upper Island Cove collector:

If one should talk about or mock the fairies, the old people will get really upset. The old people of this town,

---

<sup>3</sup>There are references and examples of the formula in Irish tradition in Ó hEochaidh (374). Clara Murphy, a Folklore graduate student who grew up with fairy tradition, has prefaced some of our conversations about the fairies with this.

most of them, that is, really believe in fairies.... The old people say that if you talk bad about them they will try to get you and punish you. It is said that people have been captured by fairies and brought back crippled up or blind or gone mad. (79-317/13-14)

Some students confessed to unease themselves. One wrote that

Above all, a mortal should never inquire too deeply into about the fairies or their world for those who pry too much into fairy affairs may never live to write about them. If I were a believer in fairies I would not continue to write this paper, but I admit the idea is a bit frightening, because I have heard so many stories all my life about fairies and fairy encounterments. (79-378/5)

Another said:

Now stories of fairies, ghosts or tokens are not easily obtained from these people [her family] because it is mostly a taboo subject, especially tokens--taboo because they are not told for the sake of telling stories or stories to be laughed at. The people who were the main characters in these happenings have a rigid belief in their truths and in their powers; and while listening to them, I found myself, if not exactly fearful, then certainly a bit apprehensive and a mite nervous at laughing at some of the seemingly humorous episodes. I found it interesting that neither my uncle, my mother, or my grandfather wanted to talk to me when there were others present. My aunt even left the house when Nash told her I was coming in to talk to him, or rather, to listen to him. (79-404/3)

Some informants will discuss some fairy traditions but not others, such as those of a tragic aspect. One collector said:

There's one [narrative] I recall about Mina Norman who was captured by the fairies on her way home from [the informant's] house after borrowing some oil for her mother's kerosene lamp. She was gone for six or seven days. She was in a poor condition when she was found. Upon request for this story, [the informant] replied, "We won't talk about that poor little thing. She ended up in the asylum." (74-210/11-12)

For various reasons, students have reported difficulty in getting, as a formal project, stories that they had heard all their lives. One wrote:

My father is from Carbonear which many people claim was the land of the fairies. His grandparents and parents mentioned many stories of the fairies and the devil to him when he was young. Dad believes in them to the extent that they were told to him by his parents as true. During my childhood I heard such stories, therefore, became interested in this type of folklore. My original plan was to visit my older relatives in Carbonear. However, it turned out to be not as successful as I thought. I found that they were reluctant to talk about it, especially Aunt Ann. She apparently know many fairy tales but since my uncle died last fall she refuses to talk about such tales and claimed to have forgotten them, and each time I mentioned stories that my father had told me she would just say, "Is that so," and start on a new topic... I don't know if I used the wrong approach or not but few people were willing to sit down and talk about fairy tales and the devil, especially when I mentioned anything about an assignment in folklore or their names in the archives. (71-75/3-4)



A Cupids collector set herself up to record fairy narratives from her older relatives:

They eye my tape recorder with a certain degree of mistrust and for a while I believe I will be unable to evoke any material from them on this occasion. My grandmother for one does not understand my true purpose in recording their conversation and believes they are being ridiculed by higher education. For some time she refuses to partake in the discussion. She is a woman who dislikes to have her picture taken, and similarly does not want her voice recorded on tape.... Fairy stories seem to figure prominently in this particular family. Stories of strange phenomena are slightly scoffed at...ghosts most likely do not exist. Fairies on the other hand most probably do. (83-39/3,6)

It can be hard to explain the purpose of collection, especially for a thesis, to those unfamiliar with the workings of university. A few times I mentioned to informants that I was writing a book-length study, in order to show how important the project is to me; but I found that they would then refer to my "book," and although it was generally in a positive way, the implication was that I would make money from it. I remembered one student's report that her informant's brother "said I would get no stories there because I was getting them too cheap. He did not like the idea of those 'big university fellas getting their information for nothing'" (76-82/32). So I usually found it simpler to let the project be seen as a paper for a course, although it was a bit embarrassing when they would ask me,

years later, if I had "passed," and I had to tell them I still was not finished.

I encountered evasion early in my inquiries but was not discouraged by it because I did not know that I was being put off. After the experience with Randy Newman on Bell Island, I began to ask everyone I met about the fairies. Two people, one in St. Thomas and one in Shoe Cove, declared that they had never heard anything about them; it was not until later, after I got to know them a little, that they told me of fairy experiences involving members of their own families (described in Chapter Seven). Meanwhile, however, I had begun reading in the archives, and found potentially discouraging information in this vein. One student's informant told him it would be a waste of time to try to collect fairy stories in Salmonier:

He said that the people would be quite suspicious of an inquiring stranger and simply would not cooperate. He also mentioned that I would very likely run into persons who sincerely believed in fairies and who knew the stories that he had related to me but would not admit to either believing in fairies or to knowing any of the stories. (72-161/1)

This informant had moved away from the area, which perhaps allowed him a more detached perspective, for he also told the collector that while in Grand Falls, "it never dawns on him to even think about the fairies or any other supernatural happenings.... However, once he crosses the bridge into Salmonier he says that all that changes and he

becomes extremely religious and just as terrified." It is possible that having moved, he never saw supernatural traditions through increasingly mature eyes, and so never outgrew them; he then projects his belief onto the community as a whole. In any case, intense childhood fear of the fairies is well-documented, and it cannot be supposed that everyone who feels it throws it off entirely; this uneasiness could well be an obstacle to casual talk about them.

One student spoke feelingly of the pervasive influence of supernatural narratives on her childhood imagination: "Our heads were so filled with stories of witches, spirits and tokens, that we lived in constant fear of the dark and of seeing or hearing something that was supernatural." As a folklore student she wondered, "Do the people still tell these old stories?"

I went out to Bonavista to find out, and to collect these old stories.... I approached several people who used to be good storytellers but they insisted that they didn't know any stories. It was frustrating to be told by everyone that I talked to that if poor Alb or poor so and so were alive now, they could tell me stories.... So at this point I had to reassess the situation. I knew the stories I wanted to hear, so I put away the tape recorder and my notebook and just went visiting.... I took my mother along with me. This turned out to be a good idea. Mom is sixty-one, old-fashioned, knows everybody's relatives and enjoys tracing back people and events.

I discovered that these stories are still being told among the older people,

providing the conversation goes in the right direction. I believe one of the difficulties in getting these stories in isolation is that these stories are the basis of the beliefs of the people, they are not sure whether they believe them or not, at least, they are not prepared to argue about their validity. They are told in a conversational manner, where you know your audience and can get agreement. By telling me their stories, in isolation, I feel, the people, not knowing me that well, were not sure whether they were subjecting their beliefs to ridicule or whether I was genuinely interested. (79-708/3-5)

She found that her informants did not understand her desire to hear a story for its own sake; to them, it was crucial to know who the stories were about:

...on several occasions when I was doing fieldwork, I remember a story being held up for several minutes while the storyteller and I became thoroughly frustrated; he because I couldn't remember the person he was talking about, and I because I didn't know the person and couldn't understand why it was so necessary for me to know him. So now, when somebody says do you know John Jones, Kathy's father, I pretend to have some recollection of the person...otherwise, it can take forever to trace a person's genealogy and there's always the danger that you might not get the story if you do not know the person involved. (7)

A Bell Island collector also spoke of the advantages of previous contact:

I found I had to know what my informant had in terms of fairy stories. Both men were very reluctant to talk about the fairies and I was constantly mentioning stories that they had told previously. My pre-interview consisted of talking to the children of the men. In this way I

was able to get the stories I needed and was able to use them in prodding the men to relate the experiences I later collected. (74-43/22)

Pondering these difficulties, I hit upon the plan of contacting some of the student collectors who had written on the fairies, or people who had already served as informants or been mentioned as potential informants. This is how, directly or indirectly, I got most of my informants. They in turn often suggested other people for me to visit, and I do not consider my inquiry complete because I still have a list of potential informants that time has not allowed me to try.

A note on my use of MUNFLA material

The names of individuals figuring in reports are changed unless otherwise stated, but not the names of collectors. Spelling is reproduced exactly as in the archive document, including collectors' attempts to render dialectal speech through nonstandard spelling (painful as this is to me). The use of brackets in a quotation or text is always mine, and parentheses are the collector's.

All quotations from MUNFLA are identified by accession numbers. The first two numbers show the year, or sometimes the following year, in which the item was recorded; exceptions are noted. The last number(s)--after the slash--refer to the page(s). The prefix "FSC" indicates a Folklore

Survey Card rather than a manuscript, and the last number in these is the number of the individual card. (FSC80-322/1 and FSC80-322/2, for example, are two different cards from the same collector.) Asterisks are used instead of a final number when the cards have not yet been assigned individual numbers. A "C" number indicates a tape, and a number after a slash following a C number indicates the page(s) of a MUNFLA transcription of the tape. These archive-produced transcripts are not intended to be polished transcriptions, but a rough guide to the material, so for most quotations I did the transcription myself.

A note on my field material and transcriptions

Transcripts are verbatim, with asterisks in places where I couldn't make out the exact words. (The number of asterisks indicate approximate length of the uncomprehended utterance; they are important because often the informants drop their voice, speak quickly, or trail off at crucial points in a discussion, as when identifying the fairies or expressing doubt.) Ellipses usually indicate that I asked a clarifying or repetitious question, or made an appreciative or encouraging comment; these had to be cut for the sake of space, but I have left in any questions or comments of mine that I felt influenced the direction of the speaker's thoughts. I left out "uhs," "ahems," and so on except when they were marked, that is, when I thought that they showed a

significant pause or hesitation (as before naming the fairies, for example).

My field recordings and notes are in MUNFLA under the numbers 86-124 and 88-055 (they are restricted). I have used the real names of my informants unless otherwise indicated, but changed the names of most individuals figuring in the narratives who were not directly connected to my informants.

#### A note on academic terminology

I use the term "tradition" in the title of this study and extensively throughout because it covers a full range of genres and because it is neutral in terms of attitude and belief. "Belief" in the title is used in the general, not generic, sense: that is, to indicate the full range of opinions, how they are arrived at and expressed, and their usually inextricable relationship to narrative. "Narrative" is another usefully neutral term, but to avoid monotony I also use "tale," "account," and "story"; the latter is closer to folk usage than "legend," which in spite of professional definition suggests distance and doubtfulness more than "story" does. One non-emic term I use with reluctance is "supernatural," which is objectionable in the semantic sense that anything that is in the world cannot be considered "outside" or "above" nature; the term carries an implicit judgement on objective reality that I wish to avoid

because for many people the existence of the fairies is an empirically verified fact. The term can be misleading, too, in its popular sense of "strange" or "uncanny," because there is evidence that people did not always consider the fairies particularly extraordinary. One student's father told her about his grandfather's stepping aside to allow a fairy funeral to pass. "This was told to my father by his grandfather Rossiter as a sort of night-time story," said the student, "It seemed that at the time the people were not alarmed by seeing the fairies and as far as my great-grandfather Rossiter was concerned it was just a natural thing" (71-75/12-13). Whether this is true of the past or not, the informant and collector think of it this way; and there are without a doubt people (including some of my informants) who take a matter-of-fact rather than awestruck view of the fairies.

There is also an ironical aspect in calling the fairies "supernatural" when an association with nature--in the general sense of uncultivated wilderness--is one of their salient characteristics. In his study of Swedish legends, John Lindow calls "the world of the nature-beings" the "other world," while pointing out that it is nevertheless "essentially the one in which the tradition-bearers live"; he calls its non-human inhabitants "otherworldly beings" or "otherworlders" (31-32). I have occasionally borrowed this term for the fairies in all their guises, and also for



kindred phenomena like ghosts, apparitions, and devils. "Supranormal" is an alternative, but in general I have tried to reserve it and "supernatural" as academic shorthand for times when there is no other way to refer to the range of traditions having to do with the spiritual or extramundane world without distracting lexical convolutions.

A note on my own "belief"

It is well-recognized, as David Hufford writes, that "a scholar approaching any interesting subject with human implications must do so with bias," and it is his view that academic inquiries on "supernatural" folk belief start with the premise that the "beliefs" under investigation are "false" and that "the current paradigm asks the scholar to begin with the non-empirical and non-rational nature of supernatural belief as a given" ("The Supernatural" 24-25). This thesis is a study of the opinions of the tradition-bearers, not of my own; but as I have taken it upon myself to "interpret" their narratives, I should probably make my own views as clear as possible.

I am basically of what Gillian Bennett calls the "'more things in heaven and earth, Horatio' school" (27), and although I have never seen anything worse than myself (as the saying goes), I would not rule it out entirely. On the other hand, I am of such an agnostic and materialist tendency in general that a relativistic view comes easily

for some things: the fairies seem as reasonable to me as "God" as "he" is envisioned in formal religion. I am nevertheless irrational about some things, possibly more so than many people; for example, I can never believe--quite aside from the question of morality--that able-bodied people would tempt fate by parking their cars in a spot designated for the disabled. I have no reason to believe, other than his word for it, that Mr. Tucker, the dowser of Chapter Six, can discern unseen essences in houses, but I would not buy one that he said had "bad energy." As to the fairies, I am like Mr. Smith of Chapter Five, who says, "From my point of view, probably they don't exist, but I wouldn't say they don't." I feel there is a certain unwarranted arrogance on the part of those who dismiss them out of hand.

Donald Ward has outlined the hypotheses with which investigators have approached supranormal phenomena:

1. Supranormal experiences as conditioned by atmospheric and other natural conditions.
2. Supranormal experiences as conditioned by physiological disturbances.
3. Supranormal experiences as conditioned by emotional associations.
4. Supranormal experiences as conditioned by dominating personal concerns (*Interessedominanz*).
5. Supranormal experiences as conditioned by the subject's "frame of reference."
6. Supranormal phenomena existing in objective reality. (213-18)

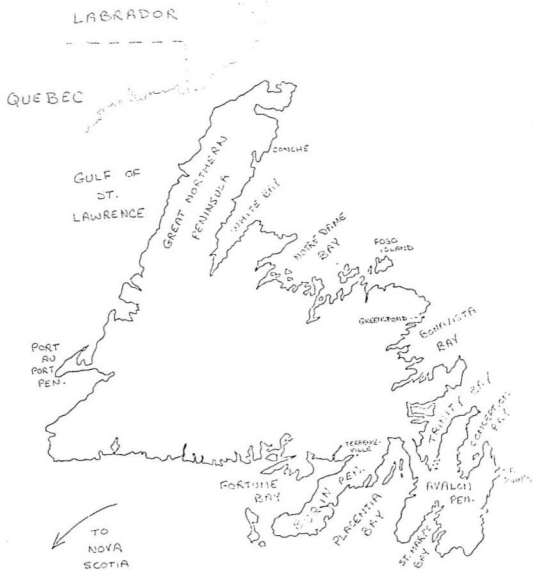
The first five factors can be observed easily enough in some of the accounts in the following chapters, but there are as many to which none of them readily apply. The sixth, I agree with Ward, is irrelevant to most folklore studies, this one included. No one is ever going to prove or disprove the existence of the fairies. When informants ask me whether I "believe in the fairies," I say truthfully that "there must be something to it," and that I certainly believe that people have had strange experiences. This is usually satisfactory, being very close to most informants' own views. In the privacy of my own home, I sometimes entertain various vague theories, such as some kind of physical projection of images, perhaps involving light or magnetic waves or something, by which people would indeed see, say, a crowd of figures dancing; or that perhaps there is another plane of life which occasionally "shows through" the everyday one. But these kinds of conjectures would be out of place in this study. It was not the question of the reality of fairies which drew me to the topic, but a fascination with the narratives that I cannot really explain.

#### A Note on Topography

The landscape is central to Newfoundland fairy narratives and its aspect will soon be apparent, but for the reader unfamiliar with it a brief description may be in

order. Most communities cling to the edge of the coast, often on or near vertiginous cliffs along deep bays and inlets. Aaron Thomas's 1794 description is still good: "Newfoundland being in all parts intersected with Bogs, Barrens, Lakes, Morasses, Hills, Rivulets and Woods we find all places are plaster'd or thickly scatter'd with stones of all shapes and of all sizes" (63). He gives a good picture of the summer weather as well: "It often happens that one hour is hot, the next hour is cold, then a Fogge afterwards clear, then Rain--so that it commonly falls out that you get Four or Five kinds of weather in one day" (123). Winter is equally changeable, especially on the Avalon, where continual freeze-thaw cycles can create hazardous and deceptive conditions, so that apparently solid surfaces are only skins of ice over water or chasms. Temperatures can drop tens of degrees in a few hours, and blinding storms can whip up with little notice. The seasonal work patterns which took people into this world--wood-cutting, berry-picking, traveling--will also become apparent, with the notable exception of fishing. Mac Neill writes that "the sea and seafaring has permeated the fairy beliefs of Teelin and Tory" (19), but in Newfoundland it hardly figures at all in fairy narrative. ("They don't agree with fishing," Ellen Keough told me.) It was on the land that one carried bread in case of meeting the fairies.

The particularities of climate, landscape, and ways of life will emerge both as background and subject of the narratives in the following chapters. Newfoundland fairy traditions, however, retain elements of ancient and widespread Old World traditions, whose patterns must be known in order to recognize what is specific to Newfoundland. One persistent pattern is not so much in content as in rhetoric; in the following chapter I explore the printed record of fairy narrative and belief to show that writers and storytellers have been portraying the fairies as hovering on the edge of extinction for a very long time.



Newfoundland



The Avalon Peninsula

## I

## Always Going and Never Gone

---The opinion of faeries and elves is very old, and yet sticketh very religiously in the myndes of some. --E.K., in the June Glosse of The Shepheardes Calendar of 1579 (M. Latham 31)

The Nolans, a couple in their seventies, told me that the fairies used to be seen on a bluff near their community:

Mrs. N: They'd be all going around of a ring, you know, dancing around in a ring, dressed in red.

Mr. N: But that wasn't our time; that wasn't in our time. That wasn't in our time, but it was in our fathers' time.

They went on to tell how Mrs. Nolan's mother was once "towed away," how their neighbor's baby was changed, and about a woman who used to say she went away with the fairies every October. The Nolans are thus typical of informants who declare fairy traditions dead even as they recount fairy incidents involving themselves, relatives, friends or community members. It may be that they deem certain aspects of fairy tradition more likely to still exist than others--being towed astray versus seeing the fairies dance, for example--but they also assure me that "there's no talk of them now." Their report of the fairies' demise, however, would seem to be (like Mark Twain's), greatly exaggerated. In this chapter I will examine some similar reports from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, which suggest that the



exaggeration has gone on as long as people have been writing and talking about the fairies.

There is no doubt that Newfoundland fairy narratives do not enjoy the currency they did when story-telling was a major pastime; the decline both of narrative contexts (performance or transmission situations) and experiential contexts (situations in which one might have a "fairy" experience, such as cutting wood, picking berries, walking long distances on unlighted roads) alone would assure a weakening of oral tradition. But in the course of my fieldwork and research over the past five years I have come to regard the "complete belief" of the past as an overstatement, and the lack of belief today an underestimation. Even when contextual data is scant, it is possible to see fairy tradition as having always been open to interpretation, dispute, and manipulation. It is also possible to see from the content of the narratives alone that a play between belief and disbelief was inherent in the structure of and functioning of some, and a factor in the transmission of many. This is true of antecedent and cognate sources as well, and in this chapter I want to set these aspects of the Newfoundland material in historical context through an examination of similar characteristics in the written record of the fairies. In doing so, it is possible to touch on some of the major sources and studies of fairy tradition, although the reader should see Briggs's

work for a history of English fairy lore. I am less interested here in what people have said about the fairies than how and why they have said it, that is, in the rhetorical and contextual features of the transmission of fairy legend. The assignment to the past, for example, often carries with it a comment on the present which may be implicit or explicit, conscious or unconscious. And simultaneous with the assertion that "everyone believed" in the old days is evidence that the fairies were always a matter for doubt and speculation, and the exchange of stories the medium of debate.

In The Celtic Twilight Yeats quotes Douglas Hyde's epigraph for Beside the Fire--"They are like a mist on the coming of night that is scattered away by a light breath of wind"--and continues:

I know that this is the common belief of folk-lorists, but I do not feel certain that it is altogether true. Much, no doubt, will perish--perhaps the whole tribe of folk-tales proper; but the faery and ghost kingdom is more stubborn than men dream of. It will perhaps be always going and never gone. (208)

Here Yeats discerns the ever-receding nature of fairy traditions, by which they are portrayed as belonging to an irrevocably vanished past, when they had real meaning lost in the present, in which only scattered "survivals" remain. Hyde's remarks in an introduction to Y. W. Evans Wentz's The

Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries of 1911 are representative of the view:

My own experience is that beliefs in the Sidhe (pronounced Shee) folk, and in other denizens of the invisible world is, in many places, rapidly dying. In reading folk-lore collections like those of Mr. Wentz and others, one is naturally inclined to exaggerate the extent and depth of these traditions. They certainly still exist, and can be found if you go to search for them; but they often exist almost as it were on sufferance, only in spots, and are ceasing to be any longer a power. (26-27)

The postulated decline of fairy tradition involves at least two "tacit assumptions," to borrow Bengt Holbek's useful phrase: that there was once a time when belief in the fairies was stronger and more widespread than at the present, and that this belief amounted to a full-blown "fairy faith" or coherent set of ideas about the nature of fairies to which a large proportion of the folk subscribed. They are related to the tacit romantic assumption Holbek identifies in folktale research, "the notion that they [folktales] were in fuller bloom than in the present, and that they belonged to the folk as a whole" (129). The standard approach to the subject of the fairies is Alan Dundes's "devolutionary premise" writ large, compounded by the fact that it is often shared by the folk themselves. The tendency on the tradition-bearer's part is perhaps analogous to the "escalator" noted by Raymond Williams in

The Country and the City on which the golden age of English rural life moves on "a perpetual recession into history" just ahead of successive generations of English writers, reaching an end within their lifetimes (9-12).

For all the difference in their approach and findings, Evans Wentz and Hyde were operating from the same premises, aided in part (for they were careful listeners) by the testimony of the folk themselves. To date, history has favoured Yeats's view. In a recent introduction to The Fairy Faith, Kathleen Raine writes:

As to the fairy-faith being all but extinct in 1908-11, I heard, fifty years later, more and better first-hand stories of the "other world" on the Isle of Eigg alone than Evans Wentz collected on his too short and perfunctory tour of Scotland. (xvi)

And Diarmuid Mac Manus prefaces his 1959 volume, Irish Earth Folk:

Do not let anyone imagine that I have had to travel far and wide, painstakingly collecting stories here and there as if plucking rare and precious flowers. Not in the least; for the stories have come to me without strenuous searching on my part; indeed I have had to pick and choose from a large number. Many of these tales I have known and lived with for years; others, which are more recent, I have come across without special effort and in the course of my daily life. On no occasion have I gone as far afield as five miles to hear a story. (5-6)

Several scholars have commented on the relegation of the fairies to the past as an integral feature of fairy

tradition. Tracing the semantics of the word "fairy" from 1320 to 1820, Noel Williams calls it "common almost to the extent of being a folk motif itself" (24). Linda May Smith [Ballard] says of her own field research:

It may be that, in looking for fairy lore in the Ulster of the 1970s, a collector is likely to come up only with half-remembered, bastardised scraps, the remnants of a once vital tradition. On the other hand, it may be that there is something misguided in this view of a "once vital tradition"... This is not the first generation to regard itself as moving away from fairy lore.... This view of fairy tradition as a thing of the past is itself a part of folklore. ("Aspects" 402)

In an introduction to Seán Ó hEochaidh's Fairy Legends from Donegal (recorded in Gaelic between 1935 and 1955), Máire Mac Neill points to the aesthetic uses of the convention:

The time-setting of the stories is interesting, and, on the whole, consistent. Almost all set the incidents fad o shin (long ago), while a very few cite a grandfather, a father, or uncle as actor or contemporary. The life portrayed is that of an older time.... It will be noticed that the stories very successfully combine immediacy with a slight distancing, the immediacy by being told of familiar places and of persons with familiar kinds of names, and the slight distancing by these persons being usually of a past generation. We may assume that the stories told by grandparents were told to them by their grandparents, and so on back through the ages, keeping, however, always the freshness of being associated with the near past, the day before yesterday. (24-25)

"English fairy beliefs," observes Katharine Briggs, "from Chaucer's time onwards have been supposed to belong to the last generation and to be lost to the present one"

(Tradition 3). The Wife of Bath's lines are invariably cited (by the scholarly) in this regard:

In th'olde dayes of the Kyng Arthour,  
Of which that Britons speken greet  
honour,  
Al was this land fulfilled of fayerye.  
The elf-queene, with hir joly  
compaignye,  
Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede.  
This was the olde opinion, as I rede;  
I speke of manye hundred yeres ago.  
But now kan no man se none elves mo...  
(84)

Although the disappearance of the fairies is a convention shared by scholars and tradition-bearers alike, the folk view often includes the idea that the fairies once did exist, as in an informant's remark to Herbert Halpert:

...he was led astray by something, back in the days of the fairies. That's like spirits, you know, plenty of spirits down north one time, no more now. In my father's time there was a few. (71-54:C986/15)

Since fairy tradition is always supposed to be on its last legs, the aged are seen as its preeminent conservators. This perception may act as a self-fulfilling prophecy, a sanction for elders whose age may make the telling of fairy stories appropriate for other reasons as well. No longer primarily responsible for the socialization of children to the "real" world, they are free to paint their long-vanished

past (as it seems to the young) in as marvellous an aspect as they wish. Often there is leisure for the first time in long hard lives; a man near Western Bay (in Conception Bay) told me that when he was young, he was too busy trying to make a living to give the fairies any thought, but now that he has more time, he would like to "look into it." Henry Glassie says that because folklorists fail to recognize the importance of age roles, they are always making "unsuccessful predictions of the deaths of arts known only to a few aged people. Generation after generation contains the last basket weaver and the last ballad singer." He quotes one of his informants in support of his view that aging changes one's perspective on the otherworld:

"When you're young," said Tommy Lunny..., "you do laugh at what the old people say, but then the young get older." Young people rip ahead, assuming the world is as it appears. It is the task of the old people to keep argument open. Wise enough to know they do not know, they remain willing to consider evidence of the other world, the possibility that there is more to reality than meets the eye. (63-64)

Briggs suggests that over time people are likely to make fairy stories more personal and definite than the original incident actually was:

Most of the people telling of fairy beliefs and happenings are old, and this is not peculiar to the present age. There is a tendency among the old to confuse what they have heard with what they have experienced. There is an incremental power in reminiscence; and what has been surmised or suggested at

first tends, on the tenth telling, to  
 have hardened into fact. (Tradition  
 150)

Such "facts" contrast sharply--to hearers and to the narrators themselves--with the pedestrian present, which is seen for various reasons as uncongenial to fairy traditions. One Newfoundland informant "said the reason why fairies are not seen so often today is because when these small settlements around Conception Bay became populated, the fairies sort of disappeared" (71-75/21). "They really believed in them then, now they don't," said another, "there doesn't seem to be any around now, do there? Cars got them all killed, I suppose" (72-236/39). Another said that there have been "no fairies on Fogo Island for the past twenty years, they say electricity and cars and things like that frightened them off" (70-33:C760/8). "I don't believe in fairies now, but there were plenty of them in the olden days before the priests and people drove them off," said one Newfoundland woman (72-181/24). The Wife of Bath, too, blamed the growth of religion:

For now the grete charitee and prayeres  
 Of lymytours and othere hooly freres,  
 That serchen every lond and every  
 streem,  
 As thikke as motes in the sonne-beem,  
 Blessynge halles, chambres, kichenes,  
 boures, Citees, burghes, castels, hye  
 toures,  
 Thropes, bernes, shipnes, dayeryes--  
 This maketh that ther ben no fayeryes.



Fortunately, good story material was generated before the exorcism, as in Plate Cove East:

Before electricity there were lots of references to ghosts, etc., or mermaids bawling on the beach, etc. There was one type of creature called the fairy or fairies who supposedly lived under a bridge on the Old Open Hall Road. Lots of people claim that on some nights you could hear the fairies talking very plainly. One night Mr. Andrew Kehoe (my great grandfather) was driving his horse and buggy home but when he came to the bridge the old horse stopped and would not move no matter how hard Mr. Kehoe urged it. The horse would not cross the bridge. Finally he grabbed the horse's mane and the horse landed across in one great leap. According to my great grandfather, "the fairies were talking madly" that night. There was no one else around so he was not sure why the horse was scared. A few years later, a priest came and blessed the bridge, and drove the fairies away. (79-101/17-18)

Chaucer was actually satirizing clerical officiousness--as well as other well-known failings--in the Wife of Bath's lines, for she observes:

For ther as wont to walken was an elf,  
 Ther walketh now the lymytour hymself  
 In undermeles and in morwenynges,  
 And seyth his matyns and his hooly  
 thynges  
 As he gooth in his lymytacioun.  
 Wommen may go now saufly up and down.  
 In every bussh or under every tree  
 Ther is noon oother incubus but he...

Chaucer was not the first to put the fairies in the past. "A short time before our days," Giraldus Cambrensis begins a fairy story heard on his tour of Wales in 1188, "a circumstance worthy of note occurred in these parts, which

Elidorus, a priest, most strenuously affirmed had befallen himself" (390). That Elidorus had to make strong assertions suggests that even in the twelfth century there was room for doubt about his admittance as a child to an underground fairy world. There he visited periodically, until his mother persuaded him to steal a golden ball, and the door closed behind him forever. Giraldus displays all the reservation of a typical present-day informant, for he says that if asked his opinion of the tale, he would place it "among those particulars which are neither to be affirmed, nor too positively denied" (392).

Elidorus's story is about the destruction of innocence, and fairy narrative often contains a contrast between a golden (or gullible) past and a degraded (or cynical) present. In Gervase of Tilbury's early thirteenth century account of the fairy cup-bearer at Gloucester, "talked of among the oldest, as a thing famous and familiar" (Ritson 357), the cup-bearer's services are lost, like Elidorus's access to fairyland, through greed:

This frequent and daily action had for a very long period of old times taken place among the ancient people, till one day a knight of that city, when out hunting, went thither, and having called for a drink and gotten the horn, did not, as was the custom, and as in good manners he should have done, return it to the cup-bearer, but kept it for his own use. (Keightley 284-5)

Walter Map, a contemporary of Giraldus and Gervase, uses the image of a vanished aerial fairy company (the furious host) to comment on the anomie of his own times, launching from a description of that band into a lament on the bustle, commercialism, and corruption of society:

The nocturnal companies and squadrons, too, which were called of Herlithingus, were sufficiently well-known appearances in England down to the time of King Henry II, our present lord. They were troops engaged in endless wandering, in an aimless round, keeping an awestruck silence, and in them many persons were seen alive who were known to have died.... From that day that troop has nowhere been seen; they seem to have handed over their wanderings to us poor fools, those wanderings in which we wear out clothes, waste whole kingdoms, break down our bodies and those of our beasts, and have no time to seek medicine for our sick souls. No advantage comes to us unbought, no profit accrues if the losses be reckoned, we do nothing considered, nothing at leisure; with haste that is vain and wholly unfruitful to us we are borne on in mad course, and since our rulers always confer secretly in hidden places with the approaches locked and guarded, nothing is done by us in council. We rush on at a furious pace; the present we treat with negligence and folly, the future we entrust to chance, and since we are knowingly and with open eyes always wending to our destruction, wandering timid waifs, we are more than any man lost and depressed. (206-7)

It is in fact likely that the "old days" portrayed by Giraldus, Gervase and Map, in which the human and fairy interactions were clearly a matter of legend, were more open-minded, inquiring times than later years when the

fairies were forced into molds of the church's manufacture. Edwin Sidney Hartland, editor of De Nymphis Curialium, notes Map's "constant interpretation as devils of the fairies and other supernatural beings not worshipped in Christianity" (86), and explains the clerical dilemma in The Science of Fairy Tales, an Inquiry into Fairy Mythology:

Mediaeval writers (especially ecclesiastics) were in a difficulty in describing fairies. They looked upon them as having an objective existence; and yet they knew not how to classify them. Fairies were certainly neither departed saints nor holy angels. Beside these two kinds of spirits, the only choice left was between devils and ghosts of the wicked dead, or, at most, of the dead who had no claims to extraordinary goodness. They did not believe in any other creatures which could be identified with these mysterious elves. It is no wonder, therefore, if they were occasionally perplexed, occasionally inconsistent, sometimes denouncing them as devils, at other times dismissing them as ghosts.<sup>1</sup>  
(341)

The variable character of the fairies remains in Newfoundland tradition today, as does a strong association with the dead. Two Colliers women were telling fairy stories:

Informant B: Timmy, George, and ye're Jim was out there and they had to bring

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Wright, inspired in by the Grimms' Deutsche Mythologie to trace the "national fairy mythology of England" in 1846, considered Anglo-Saxon saints' legends the best source of Anglo Saxon fairy lore (263), because "if we take one of the legends of the English or Irish saints wherein devils are introduced, and change the devils to elves, we shall have a local popular legend" (80).

George home, he got weak and everything. There were two crowds there (fairies) and one used to say, "Come on, take 'em, take 'em," and the other used to say, "Go fast, go home, go home fast." Oh, they were out there as thick as anything. I can hear Timmy now. They never went out there after, they were frightened to death.

Informant A: They were around though. Now where did they all disappear to?

Informant B: Well, they say there's so many cars, and so much stuff on the roads, and so many prayers said for the dead people that they all disappeared....

Informant A: But where are they gone to?

Informant B: Well, they say there were no masses for the dead and they weren't prayed for and so they used to come back.... I guess they're out there yet in the gardens and marshes, but the young ones don't resort too much to the marshes now. (74-150/10,18)

Clerical and learned interference with folk tradition played a major role in linking the fairies with witchcraft in Europe, and the records of witchcraft trials are the great exception to the habit of relegation to the past, for in them the fairies are accorded the status of quite real and accessible entities.<sup>2</sup> These are among the most important sources on fairy tradition, but must be treated

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<sup>2</sup>M. Latham gives extracts and references in his fourth chapter, "The Changeling and the Witch." Some Scottish trials are summarized with particular reference to the fairies by Macculloch on "The Mingling of Fairy and Witch Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Scotland." Examples can also be found in Wright's Narratives of Sorcery and Magic and Seymour's Irish Witchcraft and Demonology.

with caution not only because much "information" in them was extracted under torture, but because in their determination to demonstrate human collusion with non-Christian otherworlders, the persecutors portrayed what was no doubt an artificially vivid peasant worldview. They had more success in this in Scotland than in England, where a humorous strain seems to have better survived (perhaps because it was more pronounced to begin with). One of Reginald Scot's ploys to discredit witchcraft in The Discoverie of Witchcraft of 1584 was to repeatedly compare it to outmoded notions of fairies and other bogey figures with which "in our childhood our mothers maids have so terrified us" (86):

And know you this by the waie, that heretofore Robin goodfellow and Hob goblin were as terrible, and also as credible to the people, as hags and witches be now, and in time to come, a witch will be as much derided and contemned, and as plainie perceived, as the illusion and knaverie of Robin goodfellow. And in truth, they that mainteine walking spirits, with their transformations &c. have no reason to denie Robin goodfellow, upon whom there hath gone as manie and as credible tales, as upon witches; saving that it hath not pleased the translators of the Bible to call spirits by the name of Robin goodfellow. (74)

He points out that most women accused of witchcraft were old and stiff and "therefore unapt to flie up in the aire or to danse with the fairies" (124); and of their alleged crime of "seducing the people," he says, "God knoweth they have small

store of Rhetoricke or art to seduce; except to tell a tale of Robin good-fellow be to deceive or seduce" (40). According to the 1590 tract, Tarleton's Newes Out of Purgatory, of which Robin Goodfellow is named publisher, Robin and "the spirits" were "famoused in every old wive's chronicle" (Delattre 65). Another chapbook roughly contemporary with Scot, Robin Goodfellow; his mad pranks, and merry Jestes, full of honest mirth and is a fit medicine for melancholy,<sup>3</sup> is a frame story in which a traveler in Kent hears the main narrative from the hostess of an inn, who commences thus:

Once upon a time, a great while agoe,  
when men did eat more and drinke lesse,  
--then men were more honest, that knew  
no knavery then some now are [sic], that  
confesse the knowledge and deny the  
practise,--about that time (when so ere  
it was) there was wont to walke many  
harmless spirits called fayries, dancing  
in brave order in fayry rings on greene  
hills with sweet musicke (sometimes  
invisible) in divers shapes.... (Ritson  
176)

Here again is the fairy pastoral, contrasting the "once upon a time" of the fairies, when people were more upright, with the materialist present. The fairies are also used to establish a long-ago setting for one of the Royal Hibernian Tales, a pre-1825 Irish chapbook: "...in those days Ireland was particularly infested with a kind of small being called

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<sup>3</sup>Ritson reprints it from "a black-letter tract of the utmost rarity, published at London in 1628" (173-207), and Keightley says almost surely pre-1588 (287).

fairies, who inhabited those hills and mounts so common in the north of Ireland" (195). Even a Glasgow chapbook (undated) takes a jocular tone: "Fairies are terrible troublesome, they gang dancing round fouks lums, and rin through the houses they haunt, and play odd tricks, and lift new-born bairns from their mothers" ("Extracts" 198). The English chapbook Round about our Coal Fire (fourth edition 1734) has "A Chapter on the Fairies," the author of which states:

My grandmother has often told me of fairies dancing upon our green.... All this I have heard, and my grandmother, who was a very tall woman, said she had seen several of them which I believe because she said so.... But, though my grandmother told me so, it is not unlawful to enquire into a secret of this nature, and so I spoke to several good women about it. (Rimbault 482)

Such tongue-in-cheek treatment does not mean, of course, that fairies were never taken seriously; it arises not only from the subject but from the chapbook genre, in which we can see a similar humorous treatment of witches. Round about our Coal Fire contains jolly chapters on frightening figures, ghosts and witches, the latter topic including "how to make them." For all the bloody mayhem engendered by witchcraft beliefs--or perhaps because of it, as with tabloids of today--witches were chapbook material; even as James the First's witchcraft law of 1603 was



bringing about gruesome executions, "The Famous History of the Lancashire Witches" circulated:

Containing the manner of their becoming such; their enchantments, spells, revels, merry pranks, raising of storms and tempests, riding on winds, &c. The entertainments and frolics which have happened among them; with the loves and humours of Roger and Dorothy. Also, a Treatise of witches in general, conducive to mirth and recreation. The like never before published. (Harland and Wilkinson 248-58)

Possibly the folk had a healthier skepticism and sense of humor than the "learned" classes, who were not immune to the narrative attractions of supernatural stories but felt compelled to justify their interest in terms other than "mirth and recreation." The more scholarly witchcraft and demonology treatises often convey--at least to the modern ear--a curiously mixed tone of pleasurable gossip and religious fulmination. Amongst the morass of classical and biblical allusions, local legends and memorates are adduced in proof of the compilers' views, and it is impossible not to discern in the retailing of these a certain narrative relish. Joseph Glanvil, for example, in his Sadducismus Triumphatus: Or, A full and plain Evidence, concerning Witches and Apparitions, dismisses Scot's Discoverie:

I profess, I met not with the least Suggestion in all that Farrago, but what had been ridiculous for me to have gone about to answer; for the Author does little but tell odd Tales and silly Legends, which he confutes and laughs at, and pretends this to be a

Confutation of the Beings of Witches and Apparitions... (37)

But he is ambivalent about "odd tales and silly legends," as well as the act of storytelling, sneering at Scot but elsewhere deploring the popular tendency to despise valuable narrative as "meer Winter Tales and old Wives Fables." His section on "The Proof of Apparitions, Spirits, and Witches from a Choice Collection of Modern Relations" begins on a defensive and slightly wistful note as to his own narrative ability (or perhaps it is false modesty):

I know it is a Matter of very little Credit to be a Relator of Stories, and I, of all Men living, have the least Reason to be fond of the Employment; for I never had any Faculty in telling of a Story, and have always had a particular Indisposition and Backwardness to the writing of any such: But of all Relations of Fact, there are none like to give a Man such Trouble and Disreputation, as those that related to Witchcraft and Apparitions, which so great a Party of Men (in this Age especially) do so rally and laugh at, and without more ado, are resolved to explore and despise, as meer Winter Tales and old Wives Fables; such they will call and account them, be their Truth and Evidence what it will... (213)

It is possible to see in these collections a dialectical process akin to oral dynamics, whereby stories and experiences are exchanged in a debate over their authenticity and meaning, with one legend or set sparking

another.<sup>4</sup> Richard Bovet, for example, prefaces an account of the fairy fair near Taunton in the "Collection of Relations" in his Pandemonium of 1684:

Reading once the Eighteenth of Mr. Glanvils Relations, p.203, concerning an Irishman that had like to have been carried away by Spirits, and of the Banquet they had spread before them in the Fields, &c. it called to mind a passage I had often heard of Fairies, or Spirits, so called by the Country People, which shewed themselves in great Companies at divers times; at sometimes they would seem to dance, at other times to keep a great Fair or Market: I made it my business to inquire amongst the Neighbours what Credit might be given to that which was reported of them; and by many of the Neighbouring Inhabitants I had this Account confirmed. (124)

John Aubrey, contemporary with Glanvil and Bovet (all three of particular interest to Newfoundland for their use of West Country sources), solicited supernatural material among his acquaintances, with good results such as an account of a Devon man beset by spectres. "The occasion of my Friends sending me this Narrative," writes Aubrey, "was my entreating him sometime since to enquire into a thing of this nature, that happen'd in Barnstaple, where he lives."

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<sup>4</sup>Charles Lea extracts and summarizes many witchcraft treatises, observing that "The writers borrow of each other; in the later ones we meet the marvels recounted by their predecessors enriched with new ones drawn from all sources, ancient and modern, the mass growing like a snowball. All the imaginative stories told by classical writers and poets are repeated as absolute facts and every collector gathers from the superstitious gossip of his neighbors and from the wonders told by witches in their confessions something new to add to the labors of his predecessors" (3:472).

He had especially asked his friend to be scrupulous about authentication, but the friend met with typical legend variation:

And to gratifie Mr. Glanvil who is Collecting Histories for his Sadducism Triumphatus, I desir'd to have it well attested, it being full of very memorable things; but it seems he could meet only a general consent as to the truth of the thing; the Reports varying in the Circumstances. (Three Works 93-94)

Although intensely interested in supernatural tradition, Aubrey considered it to be rapidly waning in the face of new technology and media:

Before Printing, Old-wives Tales were ingeniose, and since Printing came in fashion, till a little before the Civill-warres, the ordinary sort of People were not taught to reade. Now-a-dayes Bookes are common, and most of the poor people understand letters; and the many good Bookes, and variety of Turnes of Affaires, have putt all the old Fables out of doors: and the divine art of Printing and Gunpowder have frightened away Robin-goodfellow and the Fayries. (Brief Lives xxv)

Yet he found no dearth of material. One friend, from whom he requested "instances and examples of Transportation by an invisible Power" in 1694, sent him two examples from Scotland (Three Works 94). Another example of aerial transport (we shall have some Newfoundland examples in Chapters Three and Seven) may be found in the anonymous "A Discourse of Devils and Spirits" which was attached to the 1665 edition of Discoverie of Witchcraft:

And more particularly the Faeries--do principally inhabit the Mountains, and Caverns of the Earth, whose nature is to make strange Apparitions on the Earth in Meddows, or on Mountains being like Men and Women, Souldiers, Kings, and Ladyes Children, and Horse-men clothed in green.... And many such have been taken away by the sayd Spirits, for a fortnight, or month together, being carried with them in Chariots through the Air, over Hills, and Dales, Rocks and Precipices, till at last they have been found lying in some Meddow or Mountain bereaved of their senses, and commonly one of their Members to boot. (Briggs Anatomy 26-27)

As this passage shows, the "Discourse" was completely antithetical to Scot's own views, and its appendage to his Discoverie suggests that as in oral tradition, the attitude of a person telling a legend may be less important, in terms of transmission, than the act of its being told, which sets in motion a chain of further examples the likes of which the original narrator (Scot, for example) may have meant to discredit. A related parallel to oral transmission is that, in literary or clerical circles, the expression of disbelief generated proofs to the contrary from "believers." Ludwig Lavater's Of ghostes and spirites walking by nyght, and of Strange noyses, crackes, and sundry forewarnynges, which commonly happen before the death of menne, great slaughters, and alterations of kynngdomes, translated into English in 1572, inspired Noel Taillepied's 1588 refutation, Psychologie ou traité de l'apparition des Esprits, Asçavoir, des âmes separées, fantomes, prodiges et accidens

merveilleux qui précèdent quelquefois la mort des grands personnages ou signifient changements de la chose publique

(translated into English in the twentieth century).

Lavater, a Swiss Protestant pastor, was a cynic in supernatural affairs compared to Taillepie, a French Capuchin monk, although neither denied the reality of witchcraft or spirits and both speak dismissively of the fairies. Lavater devoted a chapter to "What the cause is that in these our days so few spirits are seen or heard" (183), and of the fairies he snorted, "Simple foolish men, hearing these things, imagine, I know not howe, that there be certain elves or fairies of the earth, and tell many strange and marvellous tales of them, which they have heard of their grandmothers and mothers" (49). Taillepie recognized that ordinary people as well as scholars argued--not agreed--about the spirit world:

The subject of this Treatise is the Apparition of Ghosts and Disembodied Spirits, and my end has been to resolve the many questions which are daily debated not only among learned men and great Scholars, but also by rustic and simple Folk in the common walk of life, concerning Unembodied Souls, Demons, Lemuses, Fawns, Satyrs, Larvas, Penates, Nymphs, Sprites, Fairies, Goblins, and all sorts of Phantoms which not unseldom appear to men, by day as well as by night, on the high seas as well as on dry land, in the open country and in houses, making horrid cracks and a vast hurly-burly, often suddenly manifesting themselves in the shape of beasts or birds, and even maltreating and batooing those whom they encounter.  
(xvi)

His opening "Argument" is duly pious, but concludes by assuring his audience of a good read: "All of which is debated and agreeably set forth in this Treatise" (xix). For all his belief in "marvellous and most unexpected supernatural occurrences" (xix), Taillepiéd makes the familiar equation of age, rusticity and gender in regard to the fairies: "In the country old people believe that there are pixies, and they have all sorts of strange stories about these elves, which they have heard from their grannams or at their mothers' knees" (36).

Among men of the cloth, Robert Kirk, a Church of Scotland minister and author of The Secret Common-wealth & A Short Treatise of Charms and Spels of 1691, stands alone. Far from axe-grinding, his approach is scientific and sympathetic, and in parts The Secret Commonwealth (that is, the fairy world) reads like an ethnographic document on a foreign people. For example:

They are distributed in Tribes and Orders; and have children, Nurses, mariages, deaths and burials, in appearance even as wee, (unless they so do for a mock-show, or to prognosticate som such things to be among us.) (51-52)... Their apparell and speech is like that of the people and country under which they live: so are they seen to wear plaids and variegated garments in the high-lands of Scotland and Suanochs heretofore in Ireland. (55)

Important and fascinating as it is, The Secret Commonwealth must be read with as much reservation as the work of Kirk's

less open-minded brethren as to its representation of general folk tradition. The mirror-imagery in the passage above is typical of fairy tradition, but airy abstractions like the following are not:

They live much longer than wee, yet die  
at last, or least, vanish from that  
State: For 'tis one of their Tenets,  
That nothing perisheth, but (as the Sun  
and Year) everie thing goes in a Circle,  
Lesser or Greater, and is renewed and  
refreshed in it's revolutiones, as 'tis  
another, That Every Body in the  
Creation, moves, (which is a sort of  
Life:) and that nothing moves but what  
has another Animall moving on it, and so  
on, to the utmost corpuscle that's  
capable to be a receptacle of Lyfe.  
(56)

Passages like this suggest that to an extent the "commonwealth" is a construction of Kirk's own, either extrapolated from narrative or envisioned by self-made "seers." In an introduction to the work, Sanderson notes that "Kirk assiduously collected over a number of years information about fairies, second sight, and similar traditions from his parishioners in Balquhider and Aberfoyle" (8); and Kirk himself indicates his use of different sources in reference to the "diversity of judgments" which "may occasione severall inconsonancies in this Rehearsall" (58). But Kirk also states that his subject is the fairies "as they are described by those who have the Second Sight" (49); the emphasis is mine because this is an important qualification. While the Second Sight



is "a native habit in some, descended from their ancestors," for others it is "acquired as an artificial improvement of their natural sight" (66), and Kirk's "informer" got his "secret way of correspondence beyond other mortals" through an elaborate ritual involving "odd solemnities" and hair tadders (63-64). The deliberate cultivation of visionary powers, and the arcane knowledge gained thereby, is quite a different thing from everyday folk tradition, however much the latter might influence the former. Kirk's informant may be compared to the "peasant seer" and "Irish mystic" from whom Evans Wentz took "testimony" over two hundred years later, whose discourse strikes a note entirely different from the bulk of "evidence" recorded from ordinary people. The first seer, his neighbors agreed, was eccentric, holding long conversations with the fairies; his testimony is nevertheless full of unmistakable folk material, such as the fairies' ability to appear in different forms and their abduction of people (44-47). The second (the "mystic") talked of "inner worlds" and "radiant archetypes" largely foreign to folk tradition (59-66).<sup>5</sup> Data from such self-appointed visionaries, then, must be treated cautiously in

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<sup>5</sup>Kathleen Raine, in the introduction to The Fairy Faith, identifies this seer as one AE (xv), whose visions are also recorded by Yeats in The Celtic Twilight. Yeats describes him as a distinctly ethereal young shopclerk, who wrote poetry, drew and painted the fairies, talked of his previous lives, and sought out "half-mad and visionary peasants" (40-42). Yeats's own interview with the fairy queen (Celtic Twilight 77-80) is another example of such self-induced visionary experience.

drawing inferences about folk tradition and in positing folk belief "systems" when real tradition is in fact often unsystematic and tentative. Kirk's "commonwealth" and Evans Wentz's "fairy faith" may be as much academic constructs as the elaborate cosmologies of the medieval demonologists.

In Newfoundland, as we shall see, when people are asked about the fairies they are far more likely to offer a story than to expound upon their nature; indeed, their perplexity or unconcern when pressed upon the latter shows that it is not the customary mode of thinking about them. I cannot help thinking that it might have been like this in Kirk's time as well, at least when reading the narratives. Kirk gives one story, for example, that seems more typical of visionary experience in fairy tradition than his "seers'" visions. "In the nixt Countrey to that of my former residence about the year 1676," Kirk commences with the customary small remove in place and time, "when there was som scarcity of grain, a marvellous illapse and visione strongly struck the imaginione of two Women in one night, living at a good distance from one other, about a Treasure hid in a hill called Sith bhruaich, or Fairie-hill." The women met each other at the hill, where they dug up a vessel full of "ancient coyn" which "verie manie of undoubted credit saw." There was apparently no further explanation offered, or perhaps there was diversity of opinion, for Kirk gives us an open-ended conclusion: "whither it was a good or

bad Angell, one of the Subterranean people, or the restless soul of him who hid it, that discovered it, and to what end it was done, I leave to the examination of others" (61-62).

To point out that Kirk's and Evans Wentz's "seers" were eccentric or highly individualistic is not to say that their "testimony" is unimportant; this chapter is intended, after all, to question the concept that fairy tradition was ever the common property of a mass of undifferentiated "folk," and I merely wish to stress that the "seers'" visions cannot be taken as indicative of some former uniform worldview. Certainly there have been people who were supposed to have been more conversant with the fairies than most, but this was more often an attributed than self-proclaimed association, and it was one people were burnt for; it seems unlikely therefore that they would bruit abroad such a connection even in a cooler period.<sup>6</sup> Another distinction between the seer's contact and the more usual kind is that the knowledge gained through the latter tends to be of a pragmatic rather than a philosophical sort. In Devon in 1566, John Wellshe was compelled to defend himself in court, where he denied using occult knowledge for anything but good, saying that

He knoweth when any man is wicked partl  
by the feres, and there be 3 kindes of  
ferishes, white, grene and blacke, with

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<sup>6</sup>Walter Scott points out that many of the accused in Scotland pleaded traffic with the fairies as a lesser charge to diabolical witchcraft (Letters 138-39).

whom when disposed he speaketh upon  
 hills where over is grete hepes of  
 either, viz: in Dorsetshire, and at noon  
 or midnyghte. Whereof the black ferryes  
 is the worst.... By the ferrys he knew  
 howe persons are bewitched." (Coxhead  
Legends 123)

In 1696 there appeared An Account of One Ann Jeffries, Now Living in the County of Cornwall, who was fed for six months by a small sort of Airy People call'd Fairies. And of the strange and wonderful Cures she performed with Salves and Medicines she received from them, for which she never took one Penny of her Patients.<sup>8</sup> It was written by one Moses Pitt, to whom Ann had been a nurse in 1645; at that time she was nineteen years old and stricken by an illness which she explained thus:

I was one day knitting of Stockings in the Arbour in the Garden, and there came over the garden-hedge of a sudden six small People, all in green clothes, which put me into such a Fright and Consternation that was the cause of this my great Sickness; and they continued their Appearance to me, never less than 2 at a time, nor never more than 8: they always appear in even Numbers, 2,4,6,8. When I said often in my Sickness, They were just gone out of the Window, it was really so; altho you thought me light-headed. (15)

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<sup>7</sup>In his quotation of this passage, M. Latham gives "great heapes of earth" (169), not "great hepes of either"; (the latter makes it sound as if there were great heapes of the variously-colored fairies.) Coxhead says that he copied straight from the manuscript history at the church of Salcombe Regis and purposely maintained the "quaint English" of the record.

<sup>8</sup>Like most well-known fairy texts, it is frequently but incompletely quoted; the whole may be found in Westcott.

After her illness she cured (by stroking) the mistress's leg, which had been broken in a fall Ann said was caused by the fairies. "The Cure of my Mother's Leg, and the Stories she told of these Fairies, made such a Noise over all the County of Cornwall," wrote Pitt, "That People of all Distempers, Sickesses, Sores, and Ague, came not only so far off as the Lands-end, but also from London, and were cured by her." Ann's powers also attracted the attention of the magistrates and ministers, who "endeavoured to perswade her they were evil Spirits that resorted to her, and that it was the Delusion of the Devil"; they put her in Bodmin Jail, unfed, for three months, after which one judge kept her prisoner at his house "without victuals" for three more months. She was eventually released and left the area. When Mr. Pitt wrote the story down he had to do it from memory because Ann, then seventy, refused to talk about it, saying "that she would not have her Name spread about the Country in Books or Ballads of such things," and besides, she did not want to get in trouble again (9).

But things were changing by that time. In 1705 John Beaumont (after reading Aubrey's account of the Second Sight) described in remarkable detail his "two great Visitations" from spirits in An Historical, Physiological and Theological Treatise of Spirits, Apparitions, Witchcraft and Other Magical Practices (to give a final example of the

grand titles of that period). Among the first group were two that "constantly attended" him, looking like women about three feet tall, wearing "black, loose Network Gowns." Beaumont stresses that "When they came it was altogether a surprize to me"; at first he did not see them for they stayed at the windows, where they called, "sung, play'd on Musick, rung bells, sometimes crowed like Cocks, &c." He thought they were good, and the group that came years later were good and bad, "as among Men." In this second lot "there came hundreds, and I saw some of them dance in a Ring in the Garden, and Sing, holding Hands round, not facing each other, but their Backs turned to the inner part of the Circle."<sup>9</sup> Apparently Beaumont discussed these spirits with others who accepted them as real, for he says:

I did not ask them many curious Questions, as I find many Men think I should, and, as they say, they would have done; but I always kept me on my guard, and still requir'd them to be gone, and would not enter into such Familiarity with them. Indeed I ask'd them once what Creatures they were, and they told me, they were an Order of Creatures superior to Mankind, and could Influence our Thoughts, and that their Habitation was in the Air... (Briggs Anatomy 243-45)

It seems a long way from mysterious beings like these to the flowery sprites of Victorian children's books. Minor White Latham holds Shakespeare responsible for the change:

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<sup>9</sup>The dance of witches at a sabbat. Remy's Demonolatriy (50) has examples.

Although the Elizabethan fairies continued to exist as realities--both in the belief of the folk and in the literary records of the time--until the end of the 17th century and later, the beginning of their decline as terrible and credible entities took place in the 16th century. This was due, for the most part, not to the curtailment of the power and influence of the Catholic Church in England, as many an Elizabethan scholar was wont to contend, but, indirectly, to the vogue of the fairies in literature and in drama, and directly, to the influence of the race of fairies created by William Shakespeare in A Midsummer Night's Dream. (176)

He notes the irony of this, for Shakespeare used the fairies more realistically in other plays; but it was the Dream fairies that caught the literary imagination. Even early folklore studies are filled with paeans to the play; Alfred Nutt called it "the crown and glory of English delineation of the fairy world," observing that

Scarcely any one of Shakespeare's plays has had a literary influence so immediate, so widespread, and so enduring. As pictured by Shakespeare, the fairy realm became, almost at once, a convention in which numberless poets sought inspiration and material. I need only mention Drayton, Ben Jonson, Herrick, Randolph, and Milton himself. (31)

The products of this period have exercised English fairy lore students ever since in winnowing folk tradition from poetic invention. Herrick, for example, penned the most ridiculous "fairy" conceits--nutshell coaches and the like--along with relatively straightforward "Charmes":

Bring the holy crust of Bread,  
Lay it underneath the head;  
'Tis a certain Charm to keep  
Hags away, while Children sleep.

Another:

If ye feare to be affrighted  
When ye are (by chance) benighted:  
In your pocket for a trust,  
Carry nothing but a Crust:  
For that holy piece of Bread,  
Charms the danger, and the dread.  
(426)

Like Glanvil and Bovet, Herrick is of especial interest in relation to Newfoundland because of his West Country background; these verses give proof of an English antecedent for one of the most widespread of Newfoundland fairy traditions, the carrying of bread. Clobery, another Devon poet, provides an earlier example in a 1659 reference to "Old countrey folk, who pixie-leading fear, bear bread about them to prevent that harm" (M. Latham 248).

By the time Richard Corbett (1582-1635) produced "A Proper New Ballad Intitled The Faeryes Farewell," the use of the fairies to satirize political and religious changes was an established literary convention. In "The Shepherd's Dream" of 1612, for example, the fairies (with Robin Goodfellow as spokesfairy) lament the disappearance of the old days in the face of Protestantism, coaches, tobacco ("an Indian Weede/That feum'd away more wealth than would a many thousands feed"), lawyers' fees and farmers' rents (Ritson 362-69). Corbett's contribution to the genre, however,



acknowledged an informant whom he portrays as the last lone bearer of fairy lore:

Now they have left our Quarters  
 A register they have,  
 Who looketh to theyre Charters,  
 A Man both Wise and Grave;  
 An hundrad of theyre merry Francks  
 By one that I could name  
 Are kept in Store, conn twenty Thanks  
 To William for the same.

...  
 To William Chourne of Stafford Shire  
 Give Laud & Prayses due,  
 Who every Meale can mend your Cheare  
 With Tales both old and true.  
 To William all give Audience,  
 And pray yee for his Noddle,  
 For all the Faries Evidence  
 Were lost, if that were Addle. (52)

The poem also has it that the fairies were "of the old profession," that is, Catholic, a routine seventeenth century equation. Aubrey blamed Protestantism and political change (in addition to printing and gunpowder) for the decline of supernatural narrative of all sorts:

When I was a child (and so before the Civill Warres), the fashion was for old women and mayds to tell fabulous stories nighttimes, of Sprights and walking of Ghosts, &c. This was derived down from mother to daughter, from the Monkish Ballance which upheld Holy Church, for the Divines say, Deny Spirits. you are an atheist. When the warres came, and with them Liberty of Conscience and Liberty of Inquisition, the phantoms vanished. Now children feare no such things, having heard not of them; and are not checked with such feares. (Brief Lives xxi)

The reference to frightening stories as a disciplinary measure for children shows one of their most venerable

rhetorical functions. Taillepie even flays "a traditional practice" of dressing up as some supernatural creature in order to frighten children into obedience; he points out that the "Wise Man" in the Book of Proverbs says, "Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and deliver his soul from hell. He does not suggest that anyone should put on a hideous mask and say to a child: Blunderbore or the ogre will eat you all up, or put you in his big sack" (31). The masquerade, he says, was done at certain times of the year by "monitors and masters," but women and servants are most commonly accused of invoking bogey figures and retailing scary stories. Ritson quotes one L'Abbé Bourdelon on "the Fairies, of which grandmothers and nurses tell so many tales to children...who steal shepherds and children, to carry them up to their caves, &c." (31),<sup>10</sup> and Sheringham from De Anglorum gentis Origine of 1670:

Among us, truly, this superstition and foolish credulity among the vulgar is not yet left off; for I know not what fables old women suggest to boys and girls about elves (with us by another word called fairies), by which their tender minds they so imbue, that they never depose these old-wifish ravings, but deliver them to others, and vulgarly affirm that groups of elves sometimes dance in bed-chambers, sometimes (that they may benefit the maids) scour and cleanse the pavement, and sometimes are wont to grind with a hand-mill. (45)

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<sup>10</sup>The British Museum Catalogue and the Catalogue of the Bibliotheque Nationale (from which I tried unsuccessfully to date the reference) lists L'Abbé Bourdelot.

Tom Peete Cross quotes from John Lawson's History of Carolina, printed as early as 1709:

Hobgoblins and Bugbears as that we suck in with our milk, and the foolery of our Nurses and Servants suggest to us; who, by their idle Tales of Fairies and Witches, Make impressions on our tender Years, that at Maturity we carry Pigmies' Souls in Giant Bodies and ever after are thereby so much deprived of reason, and Unmann'd, as never to be Masters of half the Bravery Nature designed for us. (Witchcraft 222-23)

Bourne comments on the effects of scary stories in his Antiquitates Vulgares of 1725, and points to the circular nature of oral tradition by which the stories instill the fear which creates frightening experiences, the tales of which are in turn fed back into the supernatural repertoire:

Nothing is commoner in Country Places, than for a whole Family in a Winter's Evening, to sit round the Fire, and tell Stories of Apparitions and Ghosts. And no Question of it, but this adds to the natural Fearfulness of Men, and makes them many Times imagine they see Things, which really are nothing but their own Fancy. From this, and seldom any other Cause, it is, that Herds and Shepherds have all of them seen frequent Apparitions, are generally so well stock'd with Stories of their own Knowledge. Some of them have seen Fairies, some Spirits in the Shapes of Cows and Dogs and Horses; and some have even seen the Devil himself, with a cloven Foot. (76-77)

The reference to shepherds as especially active bearers is interesting for the implication that those who spend a lot of time alone out of doors are likely to be "well stock'd

with Stories of their own Knowledge," as is the case in Newfoundland fairy tradition. Even as Bourne thus notes the prominence of fairy stories in the oral repertoire, he claims they are "vanished"; the assertion is made, however, in the obligatory classical and religious references at the end of a passage where they have the air of an afterthought:

Another Part of this Conversation generally turns upon Fairies. These, they tell you, have frequently been heard and seen, nay that there are some still living who were stolen away by them, and confined seven Years. According to the Description they give of them, who pretend to have seen them, they are in the Shape of Men, exceeding little: They are always clad in Green, and frequent the Woods and Fields; when they make Cakes (which is a Work they have been often heard at) they are very noisy; and when they have done, they are full of Mirth and Pastime. But generally they dance in Moon-Light, when Mortals are asleep, and not capable of seeing them, as may be observed on the following Morn; their dancing Places being very distinguishable. For as they dance Hand in Hand, and so make a Circle in their Dance, so next Day there will be seen Rings and Circles on the Grass. Now in all this there is really nothing, but an old fabulous Story, which has been handed down even to our Days from the Times of Heathenism, of a certain Sort of Beings called Lamiae, which were esteem'd so mischievous and cruel, as to take away young Children and flay them. These, together with the Fauns, the Gods of the Woods, seem to have form'd the Notion of Fairies.

This Opinion, in the benighted Ages of Popery, when Hobgoblins and Sprights were in every City and Town and Village, by every Water and in every Wood, was very common. But when that Cloud was dispell'd, and the Day sprung up, those Spirits which wander'd in the Night of

Ignorance and Error, did really vanish  
at the Dawn of Truth and the Light of  
Knowledge. (82)

We may pause at this point to summarize the preceding discussion, which has jumped about in time and space, before moving to a final demonstration of the ever-receding, always debatable nature of the fairies. We have looked at samples from different types of sources--medieval chronicle, witchcraft trial records, treatises on witchcraft and the otherworld written from various perspectives, English post-Shakespearean fairy poetry, chapbooks, inquiries by antiquarians and scholars--and seen that the premises outlined at the outset of this discussion (that there was once some monolithic, cohesive fairy "faith" credited by large numbers of people, remaining but in remnants in the author's time) cannot be supported. The various lenses through which the information is filtered have too much potential for distortion to be trusted on that score.

Let us return now to our starting point, Wales, almost six hundred years after Giraldus Cambrensis gave us the story of Elidorus. It is 1773, and Thomas Pennant, another tourist, is climbing a mountain on which "we were told, in fairy days, those diminutive gentry kept their revels" (2:326). Yet Pennant could have picked up a full record of current belief in the Relation of Apparitions of Spirits in the County of Monmouth and the Principality of Wales, etc.

of 1767<sup>11</sup> by Edmund Jones, pastor for a congregation of Protestant Dissenters and a firm believer in the fairies. Jones considered the fairies to be disembodied spirits of Pagans, and decried the popular view that they were happy:

But some persons may desire to know why these fairies have appeared in Wales more than in some other countries? to which I answer, that I can give no other reason but this, that having lost the light of the true religion in the eighth and ninth centuries of Christianity, and received Popery in its stead, it became dark night upon them; and then these spirits of darkness became more bold and intruding; and the people, as I said before, in their great ignorance seeing them like a company of children in dry clean places, dancing and having music among them, thought them to be some happy beings... (Sikes 135)

The painstaking corroborating details and general vehemence of his arguments suggest that Jones realized that there would be sceptics in his audience; he presents "eye-witness" accounts of things "seen by credible witnesses" (Croker 245), and his informants are "of strict veracity" and "above telling an untruth" (Croker 246; 241). "If any think I am too credulous in these relations, and speak of things of which I myself have had no experience," says Jones, "I must let them know they are mistaken"; he saw the fairies

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<sup>11</sup>Sikes, who extracts the work throughout British Goblins (mostly in summarized form), says it was published at Newport in 1813, but Parry-Jones cites two previous editions printed at Trevecca in 1767 and 1780 (9). Croker includes some of the accounts complete in Fairy Legends (3:243-251).

himself, as a "company of many people" in an old sheep-fold (Sikes 109-10).

Over a hundred years later, the Reverend Francis Kilvert recorded in his diary (for 14 October 1870) the reminiscences of an aged Welsh parishioner who lived with her grandparents as a child. Their friends would often visit:

These old people would sit around the fire talking of the long winter evenings, and Hannah then a child of 8 or 10 would sit on a little stool by her grandfather's chair in the chimney corner listening while they told their old world stories and tales of fairies ("the fairies") in whom they fully believed. (1:247)

But Kilvert also records recent experiences, for he writes that "Old Pugh says the fairies used to dance near the top of the mountain and he knows people who have seen them," and that another man told him:

We don't see them now because we have more faith in the Lord Jesus and don't think of them. But I believe the fairies travel yet. My sister's son, who works at the collieries in Monmouthshire, once told me he saw the fairies dancing to beautiful music, sweet music, in a Monmouthshire field. Then they all came over to a stile close by him. They were very yellow in the face, between yellow and red, and dressed almost all in red. He did not like to see them. He fully believes he saw them and so do I. He said they were about the size of that girl [an eleven year old child]. (1:281)

At about the same time--1881--Wirt Sikes produced British Goblins, in which he makes what might be the earliest scholarly formulation of the perpetual recession of the fairies. He quotes a writer in the Archaeologia Cambrensis of 1858: "The traveler may now pass from one end of the Principality to the other, without his being shocked or amused, as the case may be, by any of the fairy legends or popular tales which used to pass current from father to son" (old husbands' tales?), and points out that another writer in the same periodical eighteen years later found fairy and ghost stories "fully believed in." He quotes Chaucer and Dryden ("I speak of ancient times, for now the swain/returning late may pass the wood in vain/and never hope to see the nightly train"), and says, "The truth, probably, is that if you will but sink down to the level of common life, of ignorant life, especially in rural neighborhoods, there you will find the same old beliefs prevailing, in about the same degree to which they have ever prevailed, within the past five hundred years." He recognizes the specificity of the assignment to the past to fairy lore, and identified the related tendency to assign belief to other places:

The practice of every generation in thus relegating fairy belief to a date just previous to its own does not apply, however, to superstitious beliefs in general...I confine the argument, for the present, strictly to the domain of faerie. In this domain, the prevalent belief in Wales may be said to rest with



the ignorant, to be strongest in rural and mining districts, to be childlike and poetic, and to relate to anywhere except the spot where the speaker dwells--as to the next parish, to the next county, to the distant mountains, or to the shadow-land of Gwerddonau Llion, the green meadows of the sea. (2-5)

Six years later, Elias Owen echoes Sikes's view:

Number 419 of the Spectator, published July 1st, 1712, states that formerly "every large common had a circle of Fairies belonging to it." Here again the past is spoken of, but in Wales it would seem that up to quite modern days some one, or other, was said to have seen the Fairies at their dance, or had heard of some one who had witnessed their gambols. (89)

A similar exercise may be undertaken for Scotland where, in 1769, Pennant discovered that "the notion of second-sight still prevails in a few places: as does the belief in fairies; and children are watched till the christening is over, lest they should be stole, or changed" (51). Touring in 1703, Martin Martin learned that

A spirit, by the country people called Brownie, was frequently seen in all the most considerable families in the isles and north of Scotland, in the shape of a tall man; but within these twenty or thirty years past he is seen but rarely. There were spirits also that appeared in the shape of women, horses, swine, cats, and some like fiery balls, which would follow men in the fields; but there has been but few instances of these for forty years past. (681)

"Martin, we may conclude, had a mind above these particulars," writes R. C. Maclagan of this passage, "for

the skilled inquirer finds them by no means so rare in the belief of the people in 1896" (204-5).<sup>12</sup> There were not many skilled inquirers, however, for W. A. Craigie notes in 1898 that "while the folk tales have received a good deal of attention since Campbell's day, very little has been done to preserve the many stories of ghosts, witches, fairies, &c., exactly as they exist in popular tradition" ("Highland Folklore" 378-79). "Men do believe in fairies, though they will not readily confess the fact," Campbell had written in the introduction to the Popular Tales recorded 1859-60 (xciv), but his view of the future of fairy tradition is ambiguous:

Farther east stories are still rarer, and seem to be told rather by women than by men. The long romances of the west give place to stories about ghosts and fairies, apparitions and dreams--stories which would be told in a few words, if at all, in the islands. Fairy belief is becoming a fairy tale. In another generation it will grow into a romance, as it has in the hands of poets elsewhere, and then the whole will either be forgotten or carried from

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<sup>12</sup>One marvels that anyone told Martin anything, for he was continually railing against the "superstition" he encountered and did not forbear to inflict his views on his hosts. When he told some "ancient midwives" that their custom of daily circling unchurched women and unbaptised children with fire was illegal, "this disobliged them mightily"; but "others, who were of a more agreeable temper," explained that it was to keep evil spirits and fairies from changing the child (612-13). Some ignored him, as when the pilots of a boat in which he took passage rowed it sun-ways, even though he "forbid them to do it" (613). In some instances, his disbelief elicited narrative to prove him wrong (602, 715).

people who must work to "gentles" who can afford to be idle and read books. Railways, roads, newspapers, and tourists, are slowly but surely doing their accustomed work. They are driving out romance; but they are not driving out the popular creed as to supernaturals. That creed will survive when the last remnant of romance has been banished, for superstition seems to belong to no one period in the history of civilization, but to all. It is as rife in towns as it is amongst the hills, and is not confined to the ignorant. (xxiii-xxiv)

Alasdair Alpin MacGregor claimed in the 1930s that "belief in faeries is by no means on the wane in the Highlands and Islands," (Peat-Fire 28), and that "even in the most sophisticated village in the Isles you will come in contact with people who are in constant touch with the fairies" (Haunted 71). In 1959, Calum Maclean said:

As to the fairies, belief in their actual existence has not entirely gone. Tunes and songs of fairy origin are still played and sung in different parts of the country, while in very many areas fairy knolls are pointed out and have been entered on Ordnance Survey maps. The belief that certain individuals and families received the gift of music or poetry or some other accomplishment from them is still common. Among people in rural areas there seems to be a good deal of reluctance to dismiss the belief entirely, and informants will not commit themselves either way. What is commonly reported is that fairies were last seen over fifty years ago or so.... Within the last ten years, however, fairies were actually seen by a couple of young school-children in the west... ("Beliefs" 194-95)

Sanderson was delighted to be able to report some cases of fairy belief in 1964 ("Prospect"), and more recent examples may be found in the pages of Tocher (see "Tocher" in the bibliography) and in a collection of Travellers' tales from Duncan Williamson.

A decade before Campbell undertook his collection, English fairy lore had been pronounced dead by Thomas Keightley in The Fairy Mythology:

Such is the sum of what we have been able to collect respecting the popular fairy-lore of England, the largest and most complete collection that, to our knowledge, has ever been made. We might venture to add that little more is ever likely to be collected, for the sounds of the cotton-mill, the steam-engine, and, more than all, the whistle of the railway train, more powerful than any exorcists, have banished, or soon will banish, the fairy tribes from all their accustomed haunts, and their name and their exploits will in future be found in works like the present rather than in village tradition. (313-14)

The first edition of The Fairy Mythology appeared in 1828, three years after the first volume of his friend Crofton Croker's Irish Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland, a pioneering collection with an immediate popular success.<sup>13</sup> Croker's publishers sent him back for more

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<sup>13</sup>Keightley and Croker disputed rights to some of the texts; Dorson gives the particulars in British Folklorists 44-57. Croker's Researches in the South of Ireland, illustrative of the scenery, architectural remains, and the manners and superstitions of the peasantry, published in 1824, received less notice; it has a chapter on the fairies.

material, and there was a second edition in 1826; it was reprinted in various forms and extracted in popular collections many times over (most recently by Henry Glassie in Irish Folktales). The Grimms translated it into German, and wrote an essay on "Irische Elfenmärchen," which Croker translated into English and included in a third volume. Croker treated fairy lore as living tradition, even though some of his texts show the characteristic harking to the past. "It was in the good old days when the little people, most impudently called fairies, were more frequently seen than they are in these unbelieving times," commences one (1:85); another begins with a reference to a deserted building which had been used "long after the days of the fairies" (1:2); a changeling legend opens, "There lived not long since..." (1:47), and another is set "not many years ago" (76). Some tales center on belief versus disbelief, as Croker's titles indicate: "Seeing is believing," for example, or "Fairies or no fairies." The latter provides a good sample of Croker's style, and contains some good contextual features: an aged believer, whose repertoire is doubted by many but openly challenged by young disbelievers who call it "old woman's gabble"; his defense of its authenticity by reference to a grandmother, whom they impugn as senile:

John believed devoutly in fairies; and  
an angry man was he if you doubted them.  
He had more fairy stories than would  
make, if properly printed in a rivulet

of print running down a meadow of margin, two thick quartos for Mr. John Murray, of Albemarle-street [Croker's publisher]; all of which he used to tell on all occasions that he could find listeners. Many believed his stories--many more did not believe them--but nobody, in process of time, used to contradict the old gentleman, for it was a pity to vex him. But he had a couple of young neighbours who were just come down from Trinity College...and they were too full of logic to let the old man have his way undisputed. Every story he told they laughed at, and said that it was impossible--that it was merely old woman's gabble, and other such things. When he would insist that all his stories were derived from the most credible sources--nay, that some of them had been told him by his own grandmother, a very respectable old lady, but slightly affected in her faculties, as things that came under her own knowledge--they cut the matter short by declaring that she was in her dotage, and at the best of times had a strong propensity to pulling a long bow. (137-38)

Croker did cast his material in a tongue-in-cheek literary style, but on the whole the content is reliable, and his sketches of narrators or situations, such as the one above, are more than many later collectors or folklorists gave.

Croker was at the head of a new wave of interest in folklore which committed to print not only fairy lore but prophecies of its extinction, so that later students can see a succession of such predictions. Newman and Wilson, surveying "folklore survivals" in the Lake counties and Essex in 1952, note:

Briggs, writing of Westmorland fairies in 1822, claimed that, though once

plentiful, they were then extinct. Pearson in 1841 told the Kendal Natural History Society that "they are all gone, utterly vanished." Sullivan in 1857 remarked that they "are now spoken of as belonging to the past." Gibson in 1887 wrote of them in the past tense. Yet as late as 1901 an article entitled "Some Surviving Fairies" was published in the Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Archaeological and Antiquarian Society (the article, it is true, referred to fairies in Cumberland); and in 1899 Daniel Scott reported: Fairies have given place to more material creations, but the faith in the "little folk" has not died out, and even yet occasionally the dairymaid may be seen furtively to put a pinch of salt in the fire at churning time, "so that t'fairies mayn't stop t'butter frae coming." (91-92)

By the turn of the century, fairies fit precisely into the canon of "survivals" evolved by the emerging discipline of folklore, obscuring the possibility that they have always been "survivals." The assumptions of the new "science" influenced what was collected and how it was understood. The Reverend J. C. Atkinson, for example, an exceptionally open-minded inquirer working in his own community (as indicated by the title of his Forty Years in a Moorland Parish, first published in 1891), felt let down by the absence of an identifiable narrative type in an informant's account of a girl who found a "fairy-bairn," which she kept until it dwindled away. "Here again I was a little disappointed," he says, "I had expected to get hold of a genuine unsophisticated changeling story, localised and

home-bred. But the termination was just as I have recorded" (54). He records the view of the fairies as historical personages from one informant, of whom he says: "Neither the fairies of Fairy Cross Plains nor the Glaisdale Hob were unrealities to her mind. They might not be now; but they had been, as certainly as her own remote fore-elders, and much more certainly than Oliver Cromwell or Julius Caesar" (58).

By the late nineteenth century folklore collection was an aristocratic pursuit in Ireland as well, where it was fuelled more by romantic, nationalist, and artistic impulses than "scientific" ones; Yeats, Lady Gregory, Lady Wilde and her physician husband William made sympathetic inquiries into fairy lore. They were part of the Celtic "revival," and one wonders how much of what they heard bore the influence of the popular books set in Croker's train.<sup>14</sup> One of the best collections from this period was not part of the nationalist school, but was done by an American, Jeremiah Curtin, who in his Tales of the Fairies and of the Ghost World of 1895 quotes an informant: "When I was a boy nine men in ten believed in fairies, and said so; now only one man in ten will say he believes in them. If one of the nine believes, he will not tell you; he will keep his mind to himself" (2).

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<sup>14</sup>For a discussion of the revivalists' handling of fairy lore see Kinahan (41-84).



For all these efforts, in 1928 Séamus Ó Duilearga identified fairy traditions as a neglected area in need of collection and analysis ("Editorial" 417). Professional interest was concentrated on Gaelic language material, and much fairy material remains untranslated, except in summary, in Béaloidéas. Eileen O'Faolin translated a few texts in 1965, asking at the same time, "How much do the Irish still believe in this Faery or otherworld?"

Or, as Yeats said at the end of the last century, to what extent has what he called "the Spirit of the Age" broken in? In the countryside, especially in the remote Irish-speaking regions, I believe that what I call the Fairy Faith is still intact, in spite of great pretended skepticism. An old woman of my acquaintance, not long dead, used to say: "Yerra, I don't believe in fairies! But," with a quick look over her shoulder she would add, "they're there all right!".... "They're all gone these few years back," says another shaky believer. "The motors going up into the mountains have them banished out of it entirely." (xi)

In 1981, Patrick Logan undertook a study of the fairies, and in The Old Gods he observes:

Now people are saying that the next century will see the end of the belief in fairies, but they have been saying that for at least two centuries, and they may be still saying it in the year 2100 (20-21)... But before the fairies are written off and liquidated--to use the present jargon words--we should remember that they have been disappearing for the past fifteen hundred years. (133)

The tendency to write off the fairies prematurely has an apparent opposite in the tendency to ascribe them current status in a time or place other than one's own, but both spring from the set of assumptions outlined at the outset of the chapter: nobody believes now, everybody believed then (or there). Thus C. I. Paton's complaint of 1939, "nowadays many a superstition, song or custom mentioned by Waldron, Train or other old writer, has long been a thing of the past--though frequently quoted by modern writers as 'now done in the Isle of Man'" (v). Of the fairies, he does allow:

It is true that on stormy nights the hearth would be left vacant to let them obtain warmth and shelter (I have been told so by one who remembered it being done on such occasions in her own home), and food would be set out for them; but all the same the feelings with which they were regarded were well expressed by an old lady from whom a brother of mine was attempting to draw some of the old tales forty years ago. "Aw! those dirts of feyries," said the old dame, "they are all done away wis nowadays."  
(46)

Yet looking back from 1975, Margaret Killip thinks that Manx fairy stories were thriving in Paton's time:

It is likely enough that tales of this kind [about fairies] could still be heard if in this disbelieving age people dared to tell them. They cannot all be forgotten. Thirty or so years ago they were being told quite as a matter of course, especially in a gathering of country people by those who did not so much consciously believe them, as having heard them all their days from parents and grandparents, found acceptance of

them a natural habit of mind.... There are some people still to be found to whom the fairy world has some kind of reality, though their numbers are diminishing almost daily. (27-29)

Their numbers are diminishing in Newfoundland, too. I have not compiled this chapter to suggest that fairy tradition has not faded in Newfoundland or elsewhere, only that the decline is usually far less precipitous than it is often made out to be. The view of a rapid diminution in the face of various social changes is valid, but is modified by knowing that it is also, in part, a convention of long standing.

Newfoundland has experienced extraordinarily rapid change over the past fifty years: World War II, confederation with Canada in 1949, the resettlement program of the 1960s,<sup>15</sup> electricity, cars, economic diversification, and general modernization have radically altered life and mitigated conditions which fostered a lively fairy tradition. I sometimes sense a sort of bemusement on the part of older people at the transformation; it has made their earlier days remote, and some feel that it is impossible to convey the feeling of them to young people or to outsiders. For young people, the rapid change probably aggravates the ordinary tendency to see the youth of one's

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<sup>15</sup>The controversial government program which encouraged --or forced--people to move from small settlements to designated "growth centers" where they were supposed to have better access to jobs and services.

parents and grandparents as lost in a hopelessly dim past. Students will write of the "old days" and "old ways" even as they record their own parents' experience or practice. The preceding examination of the rhetoric surrounding the fairies and the past--and for that matter, the present--has shown that sweeping statements about what people believed then and what they believe--or don't believe--now, must be taken with a small grain of salt.

specific, others deriving from an overlap with other supernatural figures which is also shown in narratives with a stable structure but variable agent or actor. The relationship of these beings to human beings ranges from mutual accomodation and even friendliness to antagonism; they are sometimes shown as amenable to human manipulation and thus controllable, other times as unpredictable and therefore feared.

The fairies show themselves in all their shape-shifting capriciousness in "Ten Tales of the Fairies," recorded from Angela Mason by Michael Fagan in 1967 (67-4). Appearing as bees the size of chickens, glass alleys (marbles), ordinary people and in assorted other guises, they wreak havoc on some people, are ignored or defeated by others, and give a handsome reward to one. This collection was one of the first things I read in MUNFLA, and one of the first "field" trips I made, in July 1984, was an hour's casual drive to Riverhead, St. Mary's Bay, out of curiosity to see where such extraordinary material had come from.

Riverhead is not in fact at the head of a river but at the mouth, and as one student describes it, "is basically a cluster of houses dotted along either side of the U-shaped valley" with "salt water" between (80-296/6). Most of the houses are strung out along the main road, and it was in a small shop among them that I inquired about Michael Fagan.

The proprietor informed me that he was dead,<sup>1</sup> but on hearing my interest, suggested that I see Maria Meaney. Fagan had mentioned her, saying that his chief informant, Angela Mason, and Mrs. Meaney "consider themselves, or I should say are considered specialists in the area of the supernatural, especially fairy legends" (49). Angela Mason was in her eighties when he recorded her and is dead now, but Mrs. Meaney is in her nineties, and although somewhat deaf, in good health. At her house, I explained my errand to her daughter-in-law, who went back inside; then a tiny ancient woman appeared in the doorway and demanded, "Do you think I'm a fairy?"

I was invited into the kitchen where without preamble Mrs. Meaney began to tell stories. I did not tape record them that day, but asked to come back another day. Before the second visit I found in MUNFLA a paper by her granddaughter, Colleen Meaney, who said that Mrs. Meaney is "well-known throughout the community for her stories and songs" (79-374/3). On the second visit Mrs. Meaney was not well, but insisted upon doing the interview anyway; and although she had declined to be taped for her granddaughter's interview, she spoke into the recorder in a clear and authoritative manner that made it apparent that she was--or had been--accustomed to public performance. A

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<sup>1</sup>He died on 27 March 1983 at the age of thirty-nine.

formality of style will be noted even in personal experience narratives like the first story she told on both occasions:

One evening my girlfriend and I went on the north side of the village to visit another girlfriend. And when our visit was finished we left to come home. And in walking over along the road, a crossroad at the head of the harbour, when we came to the foot of a hill in the road, our way was blocked by a forest of trees, where there was never a tree known to be before. So we were frightened, my girlfriend and I, and we turned and we ran back to the house we had visited. And the old lady said to us, "Don't worry about it," she said, "alright." So she gave us pieces of bread, and she sprinkled holy water over us. She said, "Make the sign of the cross over yourselves and go on. And when you reaches over to where the trees are, throw some pieces of bread. Put a piece of bread in your left hand and throw it with your right hand all around everywhere, and you'll be alright." So while we were throwing the bread, the trees banished and we went on home. And we were frightened when we went home. My mother said to me, she said, "Don't go on the north side anymore," she said, "That's fairies. The fairies lives over there in the hollow of that road." And she said, "Ye were in their way, so they had to block your passage until they got through themselves."

This story is included in summarized form in the granddaughter's paper, in which neither she nor Mrs. Meaney mention the fairies. But the first time Mrs. Meaney told it to me, she concluded, "Now, what was that but the fairies?" This raises the immediate question as to whether the granddaughter knew the fairies were involved (and whether this is important), as well as more far-reaching questions

about methodology and the interpretation of archive data. There is no doubt that some of my informants, kind and obliging people, used the term where it would normally be left unsaid. Such explicitness for my benefit probably yields a text different in this respect from one that would be given to a native audience with a shared background, or in a normal narrative context. On the other hand, it does make clear the nature of an incident that might be missed by auditors unfamiliar with fairy traditions. Who or what the "fairies" are (or were) is seldom a matter of explicit statement, but of inference either from personal experience or from narrative. An informant may make generalizations for the benefit of the researcher, but the real information is in the stories he or she tells, from which one is left to draw conclusions in the same way the informant has. Although individuals may be quite specific about the nature of the fairies, on a general level "fairies" is a very broad and elastic concept. Given this expansiveness, together with the avoidance and euphemistic aspects of fairy traditions, it is not always immediately apparent when someone is talking about "the fairies." Familiarity with patterns, language, and motifs, rather than explicit identification, is usually what makes it clear. Illusory trees, for example, are almost invariably a fairy manifestation, as in this account from the Southern Shore:

[The informant's father] had been  
walking along on the well beaten path



and had even seen the lights of Fermeuse when he sensed he was walking on unfamiliar ground. All around him were high trees, the height of which he had never seen before. Then he began to curse and swear and in the madness at having lost his way took off his cap and flung it to the ground. Immediately he was on the correct path again. He picked up his cap and continued on his way. Aunt Eileen was certain he had encountered the fairies who had tried to lead him astray. Something strange had certainly happened to him because he was still cursing and swearing when he entered the house that evening--and he was never known to curse inside his own home. (72-773/9)

A Bell Island student wrote:

I asked Uncle Steve [in his 80s] if he knew any fairy stories and he looked at me and said no. Aunt Lizzie, who was behind him, nodded her head to say that he did, and so I told Uncle Steve about a story that I had heard previously. When he saw that maybe I believed he told me that one time he had gone into the gardens and as he was crossing a path that he usually crossed he saw trees that were never there before. The trees were about fifty or sixty feet high. He went down the road a ways and then went back again. He did this three times and the third time he went back, everything was back to normal. He told me that the "Little Johns" must have been there.<sup>2</sup> (FSC71-22/29)

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<sup>2</sup>This is the only instance of this term I have encountered, although there is an Upper Island Cove reference to "jackies" (see Chapter Five). The Daily News for 16 July 1894 carried an article headed, "Very Uncanny: A Crazy Man's Actions Yesterday," describing a disturbance created by a man "roaring and crying at the top of his voice. It was one of those unfortunate men named Littlejohn." It is a common enough surname in St. John's and on Bell Island, however, and my late neighbor, Estelle Morris (long of St. John's), knew of no stigma attached to it.

An informant from Carbonear in Conception Bay gives an even more dramatic example of D2031.0.2.\*: Fairies cause illusions:

I was coming home one night and I cut through a garden. When I jumped over the fence I couldn't move--the field was all great big buildings. You could look into the windows. At this time one of my neighbors was out in his garden. He yelled out to me but I couldn't hear him, he seemed to be a long distance away. I then heard him yell, "What are you lighting matches for?" I yelled back, "I'm not," and he said, "You are, there are several lights beside you." Fairies can get you confused so you won't know where you're going. You'll hear someone say, "Come this way, come that way," and then they'll throw stuff ahead of you, e.g. trees, buildings, etc., unknown or unfamiliar scenery to fool you up. Since you know the area, you think you're after going the wrong way when you see strange buildings, so you change directions until they throw something else in front of you until you're lost. I seen one little guy dressed in red running through the woods and I chased him but he threw a long board fence ahead of me. (FSC74-8/\*\*)

Mrs. Meaney had a second experience with illusory trees, in which her mother also made the fairy identification (as in the first account):

Another evening, it was Sunday evening, and there was a young man in the house, he was a cousin of ours, a friend used to come in Sunday afternoon, you know, and evening. And Mother had a cow, you know, and a lovely bell around her neck so you could hear her, know where she was. And she said to us, "Go in there," she says, "in a little ways in the road, and drive home the cow and we'll milk her." So we went. We went--we could hear her down by the river. So we went

a little narrow pathway, we walked on a pathway down to the river, and we saw the cow and we sighted her now. We meant to walk down with her, see? So a few minutes after we sighted her the place was blocked with trees, we couldn't get to the cow. And there was no trees there any before that. But we couldn't reach her with trees \*\*\*. We were frightened. We didn't know what to do. So Henry said, "Better turn back." So we come back up the road and come home to Mother's. And Mother said, "[grumble], ye spent your time sitting around, girl, ye didn't go hunt for the cow at all." We said, "Yes, we hunted for her, we couldn't get to her." I commenced to cry, I was frightened, you know. And a few minutes after, Mother looked out through the window and said, "Here's the cow coming down the side of the river now, coming home." So the only thing she could arrive at, see, they wanted a little drop of milk for their supper. [pause] The fairies.

Here, "fairies" is so obviously an afterthought that it does not distort the text, and it does not occur in the rest of the narratives I recorded. The avoidance of naming has an ambiguous function in that it leaves interpretation open even as it implies fairy influence. Wayne Lee observed the dynamic in his investigation of the fairy traditions of four people who moved from Riverhead to Stephenville (on the West coast) in the 1950s:

...the "fairies" are never mentioned by name in the stories. Indeed, no name is given to the supernatural beings at all. The tales are simply recounted and the listener is left to fill in what is left unsaid. This obviously requires experience in the tradition as the same tales told to a more cosmopolitan audience today would make little sense. (82-206/7)

The sophisticated audience would suspect from the very beginning what was involved in "a strange experience of Ronald O'Keefe" of Placentia, related in a recent essay by his grandson,<sup>3</sup> for Mr. O'Keefe and his brother set out hunting on October 1, 1925--October 1 being a particular fairy day. When he left the camp alone, his dog's whining provides a second clue that something strange was afoot (dogs and horses being sensitive to supernatural presence). He shot two black ducks, and when he went into the tuck (underbrush) to get them, he could hear "someone talking all around," although he could not understand it even as it drew closer. Starting back to the camp,

jeez, I was surrounded by rocks, cliffs, everything. Well, I traveled all night 'til it got dark and I got beat out and I fired thirteen shots. Ralph never heard them; Ralph fired ten or twelve and I never heard them.

He sat down to wait for morning, and "when dawn broke, I was sot in the foot path. Had no more trees, no more nothing." He walked a mile to the camp then.

Now that is true as God is in Heaven, my son. Them people was there, I thought they was French but they had to be little elfs, that's what they used to be called. Then I never got hungry or never got tired or never got sleepy. There's something in the world other than me and you.

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<sup>3</sup>Uncatalogued paper submitted to Martin Lovelace for Folklore 2300, Fall 1989.

The common motif that the fairies have a language of their own paints them as a kind of distinct society, to borrow a phrase from the current debate on the status of Quebec (an analogy inspired by the reference to French). They are enough like the tradition bearers to have speech, albeit a foreign one. Mr. O'Keefe's statement that "there's something in the world other than you and me" is typical of the oblique way in which some people affirm the existence of the fairies or other supernatural forces, "something" being the key word, "other" the premise.

The account above is the only good evidence I have seen that the fairies were called "elves" (or elfs), but it is not uncommon to come across seemingly singular appellations, like "little johns" above, or "darbies" below. It was only at the end of my second interview with Mrs. Meaney that the subject of naming arose, after a story about a lost baby:

And they couldn't find it. And they were a long time, searched everywhere for the baby. And after, oh, I don't know how many days, the parish priest took over. And he went with the searchers, you see. And they went over to the sort of the edge of the forest or something, and the baby was sat out on one of the big limb of a tree, sat up like a \*\*\*. Not a single thing wrong with the baby.

BR: So the fairies didn't always hurt people? The fairies weren't bad?

MM: No. They were always called good people. That was the right name, not fairies, but good people.

"Good people" is the most common alternative name for the fairies, apparently considered more respectful. A Terrenceville informant "recalls that her grandmother [born in 1858] wouldn't even refer to the fairies as fairies because she was afraid she might anger them. She always referred to them as 'good people'" (73-103/38). Pius Power of Southeast Bight in Placentia Bay told Anita Best (in 1976) about a man who was passing a schoolhouse in which strange rushing sounds "like a big crowd stood up" were sometimes heard. Looking in, he saw

a little light on every desk, and little fellas sat down to the desk, little children sat down to the desks in school. I suppose that's what they was--all good people, we always called them, we weren't allowed to call them fairies, good people was all we was allowed to call them. (88-14:C7671/my transcription)

It should be noted at once, however, that "good people" is not always synonymous with the fairies. A student (from an unnamed community that is almost surely Riverhead)<sup>4</sup> reported:

My mother remembers hearing lots of stories where the dead returned to do Purgatory. She said she remembered one incident of this herself. She told me that one evening when she was a young girl her mother and her were returning from picking berries when all of a sudden two women dressed in black crossed the road in front of them

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<sup>4</sup>I base this surmise on the student's surname and on the congruence of the paper's content (on death customs) with other material from the area.

carrying buckets of water. Mom said that their faces could not be seen--it was almost like they had none. Mom did not recognize the women and asked her mother who they were. Her mother told her to ask no questions, to make the sign of the cross and to walk on as fast as she could towards home without looking back. On reaching home Mom again questioned her mother about the identity of these women. Her mother replied that they were two women who had belonged to the community, but died some time ago. She said that God must have permitted them to do their purgatory on earth--this was why they were carrying buckets of water. Her mother referred to such people as "the good people...." Many people in my community also believe strongly in fairies. However, they do not really associate them with dead people. To them fairies represent supernatural elements of evil. There are stories of people who were apprehended by fairies in the not too distant past. (73-169/26-28)

Another student wrote that in Branch, St. Mary's Bay,

[The informant's grandmother] said that a long time ago, about forty or fifty years, it was believed that a herd of horses that roamed around the place every night was a group of good departed who were allowed back to their home for a period in the guise of horses. Some people believed that these were phantom horses but others believed that they were the horses of the farmers of the places. The ghosts took possession of these horses during the night. People referred to these horses as "the good people." (FSC71-26/53)

The term "good people" and related ideas of Purgatory on earth are clearly derived from Irish tradition.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>In Scotland they were sometimes called "guid neighbours" and "the gweed folk."

Ó hEochaidh summarizes an Irish text:

Narrator begins by saying that the "old people" believed that many of the dead returned to earth, some as they were when they were alive, others in the shapes of lambs, very often black lambs, and that those souls who returned were so numerous that every dock-leaf had a soul sheltering behind it. Furthermore, the lonely hills were so full of the "Good People"--the Fairies--that ordinary people paid no attention to them! ("Seanchas Na Caorach" 205).

Riverhead is part of an area identified by John Mannion as settled primarily by Irish rural immigrants from the southeast counties of Wexford, Waterford and Tipperary, brought by English Westcountrymen who called at Waterford on their way to the fishery; he also notes that migration to the area was "but a small part of the wave of southern Irish immigration that reached the shores of the Avalon during the first two decades of the nineteenth century" (Irish Settlement 19).<sup>6</sup> Direct parallels for much Newfoundland

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<sup>6</sup>Colin Lee writes that "it is believed that all the Lees in Riverhead descended from three brothers who settled there from England over two hundred years ago" (82-205/informant data sheet), and Mrs. Meaney (a Lee before her marriage) told Colleen Meaney that the first settler, Henry Lee, a fisherman, arrived in Riverhead between 1735 and 1740, although she did not say from where (79-374/12). Mannion's case study of an Irish merchant family in Placentia shows the inextricable early ethnic mixture of the Placentia Bay fishery, in which Henry Lee, whether English or Irish, was probably involved. After the French ceded "Plaisance" to English interest in 1713, a fishery based in North Devon was established; later Poole in Dorset replaced Devon and "the importance of Waterford and its hinterland as a source of labour and provisions increased ("Transatlantic" 374-76). A Placentia tradition treats the accompanying fairy lore literally: "Old people still say that fairies and even Leprechauns exist. My mother told me how it was



fairy lore can be found in Irish tradition, such as the fallen angel legend, widespread in both. A few examples show how the character of the fairies can range from diabolical to angelic--or include both--within this explanatory framework:

[The informant from Marysvale says] the fairies or good people are "people 'as thick as that' who'd tear the earth up if they thought they wouldn't get relieved on the last day. If these people weren't forgiven they wouldn't leave a thing standing." But she says now there are too many prayers and masses said to have that happening. (72-95/38)

[The informant] believed the faries [sic] were fallen angels thrown out of heaven and they disappeared when the priest blessed the woods near Flatrock. [She] especially feared the little people on All Souls' Night when they were found in greatest numbers and were up to their most tricks. (72-181/4)

Fairies are bad angels who were cast out of heaven along with the devil. However, they were not quite as bad as the really bad angels and were therefore sent to earth. Only their assurance from the Almighty that they will be the last to enter heaven on Judgement Day prevents them from wreaking havoc on earth. As it is, they only perform minor pranks; however, they are known to have led people astray to be never seen again, and are also known to capture the souls of human beings. (72-73/9, Fermeuse)

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believed that Leprechauns came on the ships with the Irish" (71-88/21); "The area known as the Head is supposed to be the home of the fairies. Many of the people, Mr. Davies said, believe the fairies came to the area when the Irish came in their ships" (72-60/27-28).

[A woman who grew up in St. Mary's Bay in the nineteen thirties and forties] told me "fairies" for them were "outcast angels" who had turned evil and came to take others to join them in their evil ways. Her mother had told her that they would always try to take small children or teenagers, because they were at a more impressionable age and not strong enough to fight off the evil powers. (81-319/6-7)

At the time of the fall of the angels there was a group of angels that sided with neither Lucifer nor St. Michael; they remained neutral and since they didn't want to go to heaven or to hell they were sent to earth as spirits. (73-103/7-8, Argentia)

The fairies were supposed to have been the fallen angels. They weren't ringleaders among the fallen angels, but merely followers. They weren't bad enough to go to hell or good enough to go to heaven so they were put on earth as 'little people.' [We should fear them because] only for they are expecting salvation on the Last Day they could destroy the world. (73-103/18, Terrenceville)

The fairies are fallen angels who were not good enough to be saved, nor bad enough to be lost.... The angels who fell to the sea were mermaids and those who fell to the earth were fairies. (79-340/12-13)

"All you have to do is look into your Bible and you'll see all that," one informant assured John Widdowson, "they rebelled against God and God threw and cast them out of heaven" (64-13:C55/my transcription). Another referred both to Genesis and a popular radio show in explaining who the "good people" are, when she said they were "driven out of

the Garden of Eden. They were real people once upon a time. And they were unsettled, you see. I would say something like we heard on the open line the other morning, something about discontented spirits" (74-209/n.p.).<sup>7</sup> Fagan asked Austin Breen who the fairies were:

He replied, "Oh, they're the fallen angels. They rose up against God and He drove 'em out of Heaven." I asked him why there weren't any fairies today. He said, "I don't know, boy, I suppose they're all gone. Maybe they're after doing penance and got back into Heaven." (FSC67-4/58)

For all its explicitness--or perhaps because of it--the idea of the fallen angels must be treated cautiously in terms of its weight in "explaining" the fairies. First, it is by no means known to everyone; but more important, my impression when I encounter it in MUNFLA or in my own

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<sup>7</sup>M. Latham writes that "the identification of the fairies as fallen angels had been one of the earliest origins assigned to them," citing an Old English text in The Early South-English Legendary of the 13th century; he also quotes the 16th century The Famous Historie of Chinon of England, by Christopher Middleton on "Such creatures as we call Fairies, whome some imagine to be those spirites that fell downe upon the earth, and since that time inhabit the severall corners thereof" (42). A twelfth century tale given by Walter Map has a devil trying to convince a potential victim that he is harmless, explaining that the fallen angels were of varying degrees of culpability; he himself did not abet Lucifer, but was "foolishly and unthinkingly carried away in the train of his accomplices." On earth, he said, this group was "skilled in comical tricks and delusions, we do, I confess, cast glamour, contrive hallucinations, cause apparitions so as to veil reality and produce a false and absurd appearance" (175-76).

fieldwork is that it is a discrete formulation, a reporting of what "they say" the "fairies are supposed to be" which is added after stories have been told, or between them, and is not an integral part of them. Therefore I think that it is a mistake to conclude, as Peter Narváez does, that this legend of the fairies' origin "predominates" over a connection with the dead (20). Ó'Súilleabháin notes that "it is very difficult to draw a clear line of demarcation between the kingdom of the dead and the fairy world in Irish popular belief. Stories of persons who reappear after death are inextricably confused with tales of the fairies" (Handbook 450). In Newfoundland, too, fairy lore, death customs, concepts of the soul and spirits, and revenant stories are fused in a complex of ideas and motifs which have an underlying consonance rather than an explicit relationship. Some variations on the "fallen angels" shade into the association with the dead:

The fairies were souls hanging between heaven and earth. They don't have a place to go. It wasn't decided, or they didn't know, if they would be going to heaven or hell. (71-121/7, Harbour Main)

...the people of the community always felt that fairies were cast away souls from heaven. (FSC74-117/\*\*)

[The informant] believed that fairies were little children who had died but were too good to go to hell and too bad to go to heaven; his mother told him this. (72-181/13)

My sense of bald formulation, however, may be due to the nature of most archive data, which is limited by its artificial neatness and excision from ordinary discourse; my directed interviews suffer from the same problem to a lesser degree. The following conversation between informants from Colinet, St. Mary's Bay (transcribed by the collector), illustrates the difficulty, if not impossibility, of getting one definition of "fairies" from animated natural context. It also shows how participants in the same discussion may have quite different ideas, and while one person might be specific about the distinctions between supernatural figures, another will be unconcerned with niceties of nomenclature:

Mrs. S: There used to be fairies on the go, you know, one time. Little people they calls them.

Paddy: Yes, one time, the darbies, they used to call them. Darbies, mummers. They dress up, you know, go around and blacken you and everything. Torches on sticks.

Interviewer: This was during Christmas, was it?

Paddy: Yeah, and they were in a house one night--no, it wasn't, they were out around in the cold, you know, watching for them. They didn't want to be caught, see, and 'twas no sign. It was so cold so they said they'd go in to a--our uncle was telling me that. And he said, he said, "We'll go to some house now for a game of cards and keep watch." So they went into a house and there was a girl there and I don't know if she was a serving girl or one of the girls around the house, but they got her

watching. They told her to go out a scattered time and have a look. If she saw any sign of the mummers coming, come and tell them and they'd all get out and run. She got out. So by and by she hears them coming, they come down the back of the meadow. She hears the fences busting and cracking, and she ran to sing out to tell them that they were coming. And they were gaining on her so fast that she see she couldn't do it and when she got to the door they were nearly on top of her and she sung out, "Darbies." And as quick as that, they said, you could hear the big ruption. They trampled her in the door, flattened her out, and she was black as tar. And the whole house, our uncle said, full up, great big long white feathers was full from the floor right up to the ceiling, he said. And a cold breeze going through the house, frightening everyone to death, and about two seconds everyone was gone. And when they went out she was--and her face and eyes and that flattened right out. And she was all black in the face.

Chris: She was dead, was she?

Paddy: Yeah...

Interviewer: Were they ghosts or were they real people? Were they ghosts?

Paddy: Oh, yeah, they were ghosts. They had darbies. They were dead, they were people now who used to be in the darbies years ago. And they were dead, see. Big, long white ???, he said. The great big long white feathers about that length, he said. And they'd be in the house busting and cracking, the walls cracking and everything. And he said about two seconds and all, everything was gone and when they went out she was dead on the doorstep.

Mrs. S: I heard that too and I forgot about it. They used to be fairies.

Paddy: Yes, that's what they called them.

Mrs. S: And they calls them good people, you know. They were bad angels cast out of heaven. And our aunt said that one time someone she knew--

Paddy: The priest said that they're so plentiful that they'll destroy this world only for they want to get forgiveness.

Mrs. S: They're expecting to get forgiveness on the last day.

Paddy: Forgiveness on the last day, only for that they'd destroy everyone.

Interviewer: Oh, so they're actually good. They're in Purgatory, I suppose.

Mrs. S: But our aunt used to tell us all about them.

Paddy: And they say there's some good more than bad. There's some that'd harm you.

Chris: But them that killed the girl weren't good.

Mrs. S: No, they couldn't have been good, no.

Paddy: They didn't want her...  
[reiterates]

Mrs. S: I wouldn't call them fairies. I'd call them real bad spirits, you know.

Chris: But these fairies are supposed to be angels, are they? That are looking to get forgiveness?

Mrs. S: Yeah, they're bad angels cast out of heaven but they're expecting to get forgiveness on the last day so they try not to affect anybody. [She finally gets to tell her story.] (81-207/89-95)

The equation of mummers and fairies here is unusual, but logical if we consider the fairies to be in essence strangers. In "Mummers and Strangers in Northern Newfoundland," Firestone enumerates the ways in which disguised mummers, or janneys, become temporary strangers; the most important is that they behave in an uninhibited and unpredictable fashion until their identity is revealed (72). They were feared, probably because the history of mumming does include incidents of violence (in Chapter Four I discuss the possibility that "the fairies" were sometimes used to cover violent or antisocial behaviour). The term "darbies" forms a conceptual bridge between mummers and fairies, for "darby" can denote a mummer, "a sly or cunning fellow," or "a Halloween spook" (Story et al Dictionary 134). In any case, Paddy clearly regards the register of frightening figures--mummers, fairies, ghosts, the dead--in the same light, while Mrs. S. is more discriminating about who is who.

The long white feathers are a striking detail; is it too tenuous a connection to associate them with the wings of the fallen angels, in keeping with standard religious iconography? Paddy does seem possessed of a rather apocalyptic imagination, for he has another story of a woman who persuades a man to accompany her one midnight to watch



for the "hell horses."<sup>8</sup> She is killed, but the man lived to tell Paddy's uncle about it:

And by and by, he said, just before the horses come to the top of the hill it was just like a great big breeze of wind. A big howl of wind. Everything a-roaring and a-tearing. And then the horses started running. About fifty of them. And big long streaks of blue fire flying from their shoes, and firing out of their eyes, and she stuck into him and started screaming... It was a real horse to look at, he said, and the fire flying out of their shoes and out of their eyes and the smell of brimstone, he said, was enough to knock you down when they passed along. And I said, "Was they horses?" And he said, no, they weren't horses. They were the shape of horses but they were people who was in hell. And he said what you call them is hell horses... (34-36)

These horses seem to be cognate with the equine good people or souls in Purgatory described above by a Branch collector, who made an observation on narrative practice which contrasts with Paddy's wild inclusiveness:

I had heard many ghost stories from older people but I was unfamiliar with fairy stories. They are never told as ghost stories are--I never heard any fairy stories until I started collecting information for this paper. (71-26/45)

Wayne Lee, however, found just the opposite:

The borderline between fairies and ghosts or other spirits is not well defined, as exemplified by the story of "Liz's Light," a phenomenon with similar

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<sup>8</sup>They are reminiscent of the furious host, or of the related Devonian "hell-", "wish-", or "yeth-" hounds described by Hardinge, Hughes, King, and Tongue ("Fairy Hounds").

characteristics to "Jackie the Lantern" [which is "generally ascribed to the fairies"] but with a very different explanation. "Liz's Light" supposedly presaged an easterly wind and was the spirit of "Liz" who was lost in an easterly storm at the mouth of the harbour.... One can cross the border from fairy tales completely and examine the story of the ghost ship that comes into Point le Haye harbour every Christmas Eve carrying the spirits of those who drowned in a storm as they were coming home for Christmas. When questioned about this tale people will respond that it has nothing to do with fairies although they are prone to jump from a "fairy" story to a "ghost" story without making any overt distinction. (11)

This narrative fluidity and the elasticity of the concept of "fairies" would be important tools for the innovative narrator, and Fagan and Lee both noted elements of invention and competition in the telling of fairy stories in Riverhead. Lee's informants told him that

not everyone told them. At any gathering which constituted a public performance (as opposed to private culture) one person was generally acknowledged to be the teller of fairy tales and the telling of the tale was usually preceded by a period of prompting or "coaxing." Those rare instances when several tale tellers were present in the same context were to be relished as they invariably tried to outdo one another--much to the delight of the assembled audience. (13)

Fagan found people reluctant to talk of sea and fishing lore:

In the area of the supernatural, however, if someone knows, or can invent a ghost or fairy story, or otherwise

motivate an audience, he will get a host of such tales, one a little better than the other. This is by far the most popular topic of folktales, and some people rather specialize in the bearing of this body of tradition, for example, Angela Mason. (45)

Mason, he said, "takes a great pride in her knowledge of the old traditions" (6), and gave him "Ten Tales of the Fairies," which he wrote out from recall after his visit. In these tales, the fairies manifest themselves so variously--a "flock of horses," a "pack of bees," and so on--that recognizing "them" is usually the crux of the narrative, with sad fates meeting those who fail to do so. Those who realize with whom they are dealing and act accordingly generally escape harm. For example:

Granny Mason used to tell me this one: There was no priest here then; the only priest was in Ferryland. He used to come over a couple o' times a year or whenever they had to send after him for something. He used to travel across the barrens--that's twenty miles or more I spose. There was a shack halfway across where he used to stay sometimes all night. He used to have a lot o' stuff to carry. Bill Biggs used to travel with him most o' the time. This night they were in the shack anyway--the priest was asleep. The shack started to fill with cats. They went all around the shack. They'd look at each other and nod. After a spell they left. When the priest woke up Bill Biggs told him about it. "Why didn't you wake me?" the priest asked him. Bill was a great man--that's why the priest always looked to him when he had to travel the country. "Did you drive them out o' the shack or anything like that?" the priest asked him. "O, no," says Bill. "Tis a good

thing you didn't, 'cause you know who they were," says the priest.<sup>9</sup> (18-20)

Several of Mason's texts are rare in Newfoundland, such as ML5050, "The Fairies' Prospect of Salvation":<sup>10</sup>

Down in St. Mary's one time to Mass there was this little foolish fellow. The priest was up on the altar and up he gets and asked the priest would the fallen angels ever be forgiven. The priest said, "Damnation itself choose those words." Right away there was an awful screachin' outside the church. See, they were after gettin' the little boy to ask the question for them, and they were outside waitin' for an answer. The priest must o' said that without thinkin' when the little boy interrupted him or something. Now there was a strange priest in to St. Mary's one Sunday, and he was sayin' Mass, and this little boy asked the same question again. "God's mercy is worth waiting for," the priest said. There was no screachin' that day. (8-9)

I know of only two other versions; one is from Carbonear with "good and bad devils":

On Sunday afternoons people would go for walks, visiting their friends and maybe stay for supper. If they did they went home about ten P.M. One Sunday night Pat Cook, one of the local guys around home, on his way home tripped and fell. When he did he said, "God save us!" A man appeared and said, "When is he going to save us?" Pat was really scared and

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<sup>9</sup>Wayne Lee gives another version, adding that "the gist of the story seems to be that the apparitions were malevolent fairies" (8-9).

<sup>10</sup>For Irish versions see Ó Muirgheasa; Croker (1:37-46); Gregory (Poets 109-10, Vision 240-41); Kennedy (Legendary Fictions 87-96); Bryan Jones ("Stories" 339-40). Killip gives a Manx version (31-32).

didn't know what to say. This man said he would be in the same place at the same time the next evening and Pat had better come with the answer. Pat went home and told his folks about what happened. It didn't take long for the word to get around and since no one had an answer they told Pat to go and see the Bishop. He did, and the Bishop told him to go back and take some holy water with him and sprinkle it around into a circle and stand in the circle. If it was a good devil it would come inside the circle, but if it was a bad devil it would stay outside the circle. The Bishop also told Pat to say, "When God is pleased." So he went back again, made a circle with holy water, got in and waited. When the man appeared he asked the same question, "When is He going to save us?" Pat answered, "When God is pleased." The man went off in a ball of fire. (71-75/7-8)

In a third version (from Western Bay in Conception Bay), the disappointed stranger plummets into the sea in a ball of fire, his mode of exit the only clue to his identity (76-137/110-12). The stable function/variable agent principle operating here shows the eminent practicality of Halpert's suggestion that legend types be grouped according to structure rather than actor. In the same discussion Halpert proposes testing the hypothesis that "each geographical and cultural area tends to ascribe supernatural legends to its dominant supernatural figure" ("Definition" 50). In the Carbonear area there is a tendency to equate the fairies with devils, as shown in a text from neighboring Victoria:

This is a story my Uncle Dave claims to be true. The story is about an old man. One night this old man was walking down the road when he came across a group of

children who looked terrified. When he asked them what was wrong they said that there were some little men down the road and they were afraid to walk any further. The old man said there was nothing to be afraid of and he proceeded to walk down the road. The next morning they found the old man dead and his hair had turned a silver white. It was said that the children were little devils in disguise who had tricked the old man into getting killed. (FSC75-144/\*\*)

However, the devil cannot be considered "dominant" over the fairies in this area, nor are the two strictly interchangeable. The student who recorded the version of ML5050 above, for example, also wrote:

I have heard many descriptions of how the fairies look and most of them are the same. My father said that they are little people who live mostly in the marsh who wear red stocking caps on their heads. My aunt Lizzie Ann McCarthy said that they have a language of their own, a sort of gibberish. She said nobody said harsh words about them but always called them the little people or the good people. Most stories that I have heard about the fairies around Carbonear are about good fairies but the fairies around Colliers that I heard about are bad ones. (71-75/11)

The idea that the fairies "live mostly in the marsh" or woods places them literally just outside the human or cultured space of the community; they are neighbors, as the Scottish term "guid neighbours" would have it (the bad reputation of the Colliers crowd is probably just a Carbonear stereotype). The images of the fairies as souls or spirits in some intermediate state blend with ideas of

Purgatory and other indeterminate "other worlds" also portrayed in narrative as very close to the everyday world. The legend of "Liz's Point" illustrates the occasional permeability of the boundaries between these regions. According to Mason:

This girl Liz, Fagan I believe her last name was, I'm not sure about that. She's none o' yere crowd, anyway. The fairies took her. She was gone about three months, I spose. They were havin' a time in one of the houses down in St. Mary's this night. Her brother was there. You know how the houses used to be built in them days, with the big piece built on the back down stairs. This is where they were havin' the shindy. The brother looked out through the door and here she was. There were two doors in this place, one in each end. The brother went out through the other door and came up behind her and grabbed her. All of a sudden there was I spose thirty or forty fairies all around her and grabbin' at her, tryin' to pull her away. He was tryin' to get her inside; she'd be safe then. He got so mad that he cursed on them. With the same she slipped out of his arms and away she went. This was the last chance she got to get back, but he cursed them and that was the end o' that. They used to see her after that, sittin' on a rock over on Liz's Point. That's how it got the name. (10-12)

The back section of the house was probably a linhay, a place where rough work was done and not a fully domesticated space; hence, perhaps, the appearance there of Liz and the fairies. In a version from Austin Breen, who put the event seventy or eighty years ago, Liz appears in the kitchen door but comes no further into the human domain:

Liz Fagan, who lived down at the Graven Bank (shown on maps as Graven Beach), was missing for two or three months. The fairies had her. One day she appeared in the kitchen door. "O now I have you," her mother said. "No you haven't, Mother," she said, "not now or ever." If she didn't speak she'd get her. She chased her out the landwash as far as Liz's Point, that's where she lost her. People used to see her there, sitting on a rock, late in the evening. (FSC67-4/61)

A third version from St. Mary's retains the key utterance, although not as a fatefully broken prohibition:

There was a girl up there to Liz's Point [in Riverhead]. They said the people, the good people, took her, you know, they used to live there at that time. But they took her, what they used to call the fairies, took her. And be God, she got a chance one day or one evening or something, to her mother or father; she said, "I'll be passing along this evening," she said, "and if you don't catch me," she said, "at that time, you'll never get me back." Did you ever hear that? And be God, she was passing along and she said to her mother, she said, "Now or never." [second informant: She was running?] She was running. So her mother never caught her, so they never seen her after. So that's why they call it Liz's Point. (73-107:C1814/my transcription)

Tales of captivity and escape reveal the fundamentally dangerous and antagonistic nature of the human/fairy relationship. They often include a test or contest, as in Liz's family's efforts to retain her (foiled by their ill-advised outbursts in the first two versions), or in a Riverhead story of a servant girl who was "surrounded by



small little men" while hunting a cow one evening. One of them tells her that if she can answer the following question she will be let go: "What is a woman's secret?" She answers, "something she don't know," and is released, but dies shortly afterwards (Q68-32/3-4).<sup>11</sup> In Angela Mason's "Brass Castle," the hero is tempted with much-needed household goods, but his wit and self-possession afford a near escape from a hall of fairy hostages:

This Dalton fellow up to the Beach, and a fine, real big man he was. This strange fellow came up to him one day and told him about the Brass Castle down on the Harbour Point. Now he heard tell of it before this you know. He told him they had one chance to get up out o' the ground and escape, and that was if someone livin' would go down and take something from them. He told him they had everything, and he could take whatever he wanted. But if he decided he wouldn't take anything, he promised him nothing would happen to him. He went with this fellow anyway. They went down this long stairs and he showed him all through the castle. In one place there was big long tables all set out with all kinds o' food, there where all the food used to be stored up, and clothes, and fishin' gear, and in one place all those real lovely ladies were sittin' around with their sewin' baskets. These weren't very good times, and he needed a lot o' this stuff, but he didn't touch a thing. When he got back to the foot o' the stairs and they

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<sup>11</sup>An example of what in ballad scholarship Wimberley calls "riddlecraft," whereby Otherworlders set riddles "in an effort to get mortals under their power" (301), and Buchan calls "witcombat" ("Witcombat Ballads"). I do not quite understand the riddle, unless it means that a woman can only keep secret something that she does not know, that is, she cannot keep a secret.

saw he wasn't going to take anything, they all turned on him. But this fellow that made the bargain with him gave him a ram-rod to keep them off. They twisted the ram-rod right around and around his arm, but he got away. Some o' the Daltons up to the Beach still have the ramrod, all bent up like it was. I saw it one time I was up there a nice bit ago. You know how big and strong the Daltons are, and sensible too. This was their mistake, picking a man like that. If they had o' picked a foolish fellow he'd do what they wanted. (23-26)

This is D1960.2, represented in MUNFLA and in North America only by this version and one from Mrs. Meaney.<sup>12</sup> Colleen Meaney wrote, "My grandmother told me that she knew another interesting story called 'The Twisted Ramrod.' She claims that it is true but I find it rather hard to believe. Anyway here it is as she told it to me":

It was a crisp winter's day as a certain man began his daily walk to the home of a friend. The man had not gone far when he was brought to a stop by a stranger. The man who had appeared so suddenly, as if from nowhere, was about twenty years old and most fashionably dressed. The stranger spoke in a deep husky voice commanding the man to be on the Point the following day at a specific hour. There he would find a cluster of trees which he was to push open. On the next morning the man did as he had been asked and walked toward the appointed place. When he arrived he found a few young fir trees which he slowly separated. To his surprise there was the young stranger standing at the top of a staircase. The stranger silently opened a gigantic wooden door

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<sup>12</sup>According to Baughman, who lists only one version from Wales, in his own manuscripts (122).

and led the startled man deep down into an underground chamber. The first room which they entered was illuminated with brightly coloured lights. This room had the appearance of a dining hall. It was decorated from side to side with long tables. Upon the delicate lace tablecloths stood elaborate candlesticks and silverware.

While the two men were walking along a narrow corridor the stranger noticed that his companion was carrying a ramrod. But of this the stranger said nothing. On and on the two men walked, along the dimly lit passage, until they reached a gigantic living room. Deep, soft carpets covered the floor and beautiful furniture of every form was to be found there. Again the stranger never mentioned the ramrod and here, as in the first room, the terrified man laid his hand upon nothing, but silently followed the stranger into another passageway.

The third room which the men entered was a little different from the others. For here, shiny counters lined the walls and behind these counters stood many silent young men, each displaying different merchandise. Everything from thimbles to rich silks were arranged before the men. The poor man was terrified by this time and refused to take anything but turned quickly and left.

Through the door he ran, down the passage to the living room, past that to the dining hall and up the stairs. When the man found himself again in the open air he paused to catch his breath. He felt a sharp pain in his arm. He was bewildered to find that the ramrod which he had been carrying was wound tightly around his arm and could be removed only by filing it off. It was later discovered that the men in the underground cave were enchanted. If the man had taken as much as a thimble, these men would have been freed. The ramrod had been wound around his arm as punishment for not freeing the enchanted people. (16-19)

Hardwick (164-69), Rhys (2:458-84), Hartland (Science 170-73, 207-21), Briggs (Dictionary 370-73), Croker (3:266-72) and Bryan Jones ("Cavan" 321-23) give versions of what Thompson calls "Kuffhauser. King asleep in mountain," in which a culture hero (Arthur, Bruce, etc.) and his men are found sleeping by someone who is usually led to their castle or cave (often visible only at certain times, often full of finery or treasure) by a stranger. Inside, he semi-awakens the sleepers when he partially unsheathes a sword, rings a bell, blows a horn, etc. (Sometimes he is warned against this, sometimes urged to do so.) They ask if it's time, but frightened, he pushes the sword back and flees, sometimes attacked or pursued by the angry warriors. The unsheathing of the sword (or the affirmative answer, etc.), translated in "Brass Castle" and "Twisted Ramrod" as his "taking something," would have freed the men.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Interesting parallels can also be seen in "The Giant's Stairs," given by Croker (2:315-326), in which a blacksmith rescues a boy from rows of hundreds of identical children imprisoned in an underground cave. When the giant asks to shake hands, the smith holds out a plough-iron, and when the giant twists it the children laugh, enabling the right child to make himself known to the smith. The child has not changed in seven years, but grows up to be noted for skill in working brass and iron. Croker notes the similarity to "sleeping warriors," but this text lacks the stranger who takes the man to the castle, the idea that it is only open periodically, and the taboo on touching or taking anything. The twisting of a rod proffered instead of a hand is found in some versions of ML5010, "The Visit to the Old Troll. The Handshake," and in the Irish tale type 726, "The Dream Visit" (Ó Súilleabháin and Christiansen). It also appears in a Danish version of "sleeping warriors" (Hartland 213).

It is worth noting, in connection with the blacksmith,

In synopsis the similarity may appear dubious, but besides the basic structure, numerous details show "Brass Castle" and "Twisted Ramrod" as unmistakably belonging to this type. The stranger, for example, often carries a rod with magical properties; the soldiers or captives are often in rows. Ó hÓgáin's study of D1960.2 in Ireland is especially useful for comparison, although only some of the fifty-one texts are in English. These show the legend undergoing synthesis with fairy tradition even when the culture hero element is relevant; and the latter is omitted in some. Specific analogous details include designation of the men as "enchanted," and in one the guide is a "well dressed stranger" (287). The attack on the hero does not occur in any of these versions, nor does the elaborate description of the castle's wealth; but both are found elsewhere (Rhys 262 and Trevelyan Glimpses 461, for

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that Riverhead once had a forge, and one student noted that the blacksmith was very strong and no horse went away unshod (80-296/28-9); this hints at a semi-legendary figure whose presence might have given especial appeal to any story featuring a blacksmith. It is also worth noting, in connection with the unexplained "brass" motif, that in a version given by Rhys, a man comes across "the mouth of a cave with abundance [sic] of vessels of brass (pres) of every shape and description within it" (471-2), and that in a Scottish version, the enchanted place is called "Bruce's Castle," a name found in one Irish text as well.

"Brass Castle" and "Twisted Ramrod" might be related as well to what Cross lists as a motif in the Motif-Index to Early Irish Literature, "H1385.0.1\*: Unspelling quest: journey to disenchant (free) captives."

example). The hero's hasty retreat figures in most versions, and often his fear or his boldness is stressed, as in the Riverhead texts.

The protagonist is scorned for his failure of nerve in most cases--"If you had to pull out that sword Ireland was free, but you were too big a coward" (289)--but in others he did the right thing: "If you had to touch that sword or pick it up, that army would go out and kill every man, woman, and child that they met till they'd come to the place where they'd have to stop" (286). In "Brass Castle," it was a good thing the men weren't freed, but in "Twisted Ramrod" the man is "punished" for not releasing them. The different outcome, then, can be seen as coming from both the narrative type itself and from the narrator's individuality. Mason's hero is a strong and sensible fellow who displays the awareness and appropriate conduct towards the fairies which features in almost all of her tales. And in one instance, she describes her own bold conduct in a supernatural encounter:

When Annie's mother died...I went over and took Annie and reared [reared] her. A little spell after she died I used to hear this noise every night, 'twas her poor mother, you know. I used to hear the stairs squeaking, and like someone walked into the room. When I heard her coming in the room one night, I got up and took Annie out of the crib. I held her out in my arms and said, "Here she is now, if you want her, take her. If you don't, then don't come back here any more, 'cause if you do I'm going to take her back to the dirt and poverty I found

her in over there on the other side."  
 And I promise you she never came back either.  
 (FSC67-4/68)

In contrast to this confident knowledgeability, Mrs. Meaney's hero is--like her other protagonists and herself in her own encounters--"frightened." He flees because he is terrified, not because he is pursued.

This background is not necessary for understanding "Brass Castle" and "Twisted Ramrod" from an emic point of view, for it is intelligible in its own terms, that is, in relation to fairy tradition. The prohibition on taking anything from the fairies, for example, and their anger when refused are widespread motifs. Two reports from White Bay are illustrative; the first is from Coachman's Cove:

I don't know too many fairy stories but I do know one lady who said she was taken away by the fairies once and they wanted her to drink out of a certain cup, and when she wouldn't drink they threw the cup at her. It struck her in the hip. An apse (boil) broke out and they said that everything came out of that side--moths, hare's teeth--so they said that the fairies did it to her when they threw something at her. (71-44/64)

A Conche collector said that her mother said:

When I was a little girl our mothers used to always warn us not to talk to fairies, or take anything from them. One day we were playing in the woods when six of them came up to us. They had things in their hands and they used to hold them out to us. But we wouldn't touch it. Then they got angry and threw them at us. One little boy got struck in the hip with something. After this we ran home. His hip got very sore. It "rose and broke," and a piece of comb

came out of his hip. He was crippled all his life. (72-104/22)

Material lures offered by the fairies were usually modest, such as the lovely kettle "shining like gold" that Pius Power said enticed one woman--"That's how they went astray, people did get astray, some foolish thing like that they went for, got off the path" (88-14:C7671). Sumptuous fairy habitations or wealth, such as the fishing gear or sewing baskets in "Brass Castle" or the carpets, furniture, and shiny counters of "The Twisted Ramrod" are rather more rare, but the fairies are sometimes shown as having revels in which a human might engage. A Bell Island man claimed to have had a grand time in the woods with "a whole pile of little people" who had "food and beer, and danced and played the accordion" (81-55/4-6; also 72-97:C1286/16-17); another man said he was forced to play the accordion for them while they danced in the woods behind Mt. Scio Road in St. John's (FSC74-1/13). Mrs. Meaney has a story about an elegant fairy tea party in a kitchen at night; the "king and queen" were even there the first time she told it. This is her second version of what I shall call "Night Kitchen":

This young man, he used to banish from home, you know, and they wouldn't know where he was gone. He'd be gone for a couple of days and nights, and they wouldn't know where he'd be gone, see? So, his brother and his parents used to hear some goings-on down in the kitchen at night, see? Table, light, table and dishes, and everything on the go. So he determined, the older brother determined to watch. So one night he heard a



noise; he got out of his bed and he came down. And he only had an underpants on. And when he came down, his brother, who was with the company, his brother was so offended because he should appear among all those grand ladies they had in their crowd in his underpants, that he, he threw a cup belonged to his mother's china set which they were using; he threw it at him, and broke a piece out of the cup. And the piece that came out of the cup struck the brother in the leg. And the brother went away to bed, well, he went almost distracted with the pain. And the leg got bad, got sore and got bad, and he nearly lost his leg. And they wouldn't believe him, nobody believed him. So they went, he went over to the cupboard and took down the dishes. And there was one of his mother's cups broken with a piece out of the side of it. The piece was there, they could fit it into it. [They could fit the piece that came out of the brother's leg into the cup.] You don't believe that, do you?

Curtin gives an Irish version in which

...a careless, untidy girl, who rises in the night and commits offensive acts in the kitchen, is punished in a signal manner. There is present a whole party of fairies, men and women, though unseen by the girl. One of the women, who is making tea, takes a saucer and hurls it at her as she is returning to bed. The saucer is broken; one half flies over the bed to the wall beyond, the other is buried in the girl's hip. She screams and wakes the whole house. No one can help her. She is in bed for three years after that in great suffering. No relief for her till her mother, who had just earned the gratitude of the fairies by acts of service, prays to have her daughter cured. The fairy woman tells how the daughter offended and how she was punished, says that if the mother will go to the wall she will find one half the saucer there; if she applies that to the affected part

of the daughter's body it will cure her. The mother does as directed. One half of the saucer comes out of the hip to join the other, and the girl is cured straightway. (179)

The "act of service" was probably as a midwife, for that motif is often found in Irish versions. Kenneth Jackson recorded a Gaelic version from Peig Sayers in which a midwife to the fairies asked for a cure for her daughter's foot, which "had become poisoned one night with a chip of saucer when she got up for a drink"; he adds that "Peig explained afterwards that the fairies are apt to come invisibly into houses at night, and if you disturb them, as the girl did, they throw an elf-shot at you" (91). Patrick Kennedy had a Wexford version in which a midwife to the fairies asks for a cure for her daughter's sore leg; the queen tells her that the daughter offended the fairies by coming into the kitchen one night when the fairies were having tea by the fire. When she unknowingly spilled tea on her, the queen hurled the teapot at her, and the spout went into her leg. The queen gives the midwife ointment for it, and when she puts it on the skin bursts and a tiny spout emerges (105-09).

Mrs. Meaney's chief divergence from these Irish analogs is the truant brother's presence among the fairies, with whom he is literally quite at home. People most commonly seen among the fairies are the dead or missing, and although there are a fair number of accounts of persons who have

regular or occasional friendly contact with the fairies, these contacts are generally depicted as taking place in the woods or bogs, far removed from the prosaic warmth of the domestic sphere. "Night Kitchen" confounds the usual boundaries and expectations when the man's "unknown" whereabouts are discovered at the very center of the home. There he treats himself as a stranger, using the fine china normally reserved for guests or holidays, until his nosy brother spoils it all by an unceremonious appearance in his drawers. This intrusion is rewarded in kind by the shaft of a teacup, which in keeping with the reversals and twists of fairy metaphor has changed from a tool of gracious hospitality and reception to one of aggressive injury.

Although the fairies often create disturbances in houses, this is usually because the house is built on one of their paths or their ground, as described in Chapter Three. There are only a few records of their regularly frequenting normal households. One of these contrasts the behaviour of two women, one of whom took precautions to keep them out while the other prepared the kitchen for their use. The informant, from Red Island, talked about a "bibe,"<sup>14</sup> or

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<sup>14</sup>"Bibe" is the English spelling of "badhbh," the Irish term for banshee used in Waterford, south Kilkenny and south Tippereary (Lysaght 34-36). Both bibe and banshee in Newfoundland are usually death portents, but may refer to fairy-like phenomena as well. In neither usage do the terms have the specifically female denotation found in Ireland, nor are the banshees solitary figures as in Irish tradition. "Watch out, the banshees will get you," older children would tell smaller ones in Harbour Grace, said a student, adding,

spirit, that immobilized a man by a graveyard one night, and continued:

Same thing with the fairies, they believed in the fairies like anything. This old woman said that just between sunset and dark you'd hear the fairies chattering. She'd light a big fire to make a big smoke. This was old Mrs. Lizzie Norman, now, and she believed it with all her life. She'd light the big fire, put a cross on all the windows. She said the smoke would banish them, because in the old days they used to use smoke as some kind of incense and she believed there was a blessedness in the smoke that would banish them. She often told me, "the fairies were here last night, girl, don't go out after dark," or, "be sure and go home before dark, don't be here when the dark comes." I'd be foolish enough to believe her and kill myself getting home before the sun went down behind the hill. I'd watch that sun like anything, so I could judge how long I had left before taking off for home. [Another] old woman, an old Mrs. Mulrooney, used to live alone, and every night before she went to bed she'd make in a big fire, put all the chairs around the stove, leave the door unlocked, put bread, water, whatever she had on the table, and go to bed. This way, if the fairies came in, they could sit on the chair and warm themselves, get a bite to eat, and wouldn't bother her. She said if you're good to the fairies they won't bother you. (79-435/38-39)

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"banshees meaning fairies" (FSC76-143/\*\*). Mrs. Meaney tells about two men who are summoned to their sister's deathbed by the bibe, persistent voices saying "we are coming," and "hurry, hurry, hurry" (79-374/15-16). A Riverhead collector said that "strange noises like a dog or rooster when no one is present are an omen called a 'bibe' by the old people" (73-169/4), and a Cape Broyle collector described it as "a cry that people often heard years ago" which would lead you away in pursuit of it (FSC76-82/\*\*).

An account from another Placentia Bay island also mentions the appeasement motive:

Up to the time they left Merasheen about eight years ago, [the informant's] wife would put a saucer of milk outdoors for the fairies before going to bed every night without fail. The fairies supposedly fed on this, thus their friendship was ensured. (FSC69-8/43)

A third collector, comparing the fairy traditions of her childhood in Trinity Bay and on the Southern Shore with those outlined by Arensberg, said, "it would seem that they are taken more seriously in Ireland than here," because she never saw food and water left out for the fairies--only water or milk (67-12/31).<sup>15</sup>

Food might be set out for the "dead" if it was suspected that they were not actually dead but had been taken by the fairies. One informant knew a Bell Island woman who "had a son who died, but everyone knew he had become a fairy because every night she left bread and tea for him and the next morning it was gone" (72-181/12). Food, furniture, or other amenities were sometimes provided for the "normal" dead as well, at certain times. A Bell Island collector reported that a cup of water and bread used to be left out for the dead on All Souls' night, because, her mother told her, "They used to say that it was good to

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<sup>15</sup>"Indeede your grandams maides were wont to set a boll of milke before him [Incubus] and his cousin Robin good-fellow, for grinding of malt or mustard, and sweeping the house at midnight" (Reginald Scot 48).

have something on the table for the dead person if he returned to the house that night" (FSC 73-99/27). A student from King's Cove in Bonavista Bay reported that on All Souls' Night candles used to be placed in the windows "to guide the wandering souls that may pass by," and that in neighboring Keels "people would leave their doors unlocked and they would put knitted articles, such as socks and mittens, on the kitchen table for the souls to pick up if they happen to pass that way" (FSC73-98/27).

Another crucial period was the time just after death. One of Fagan's informants told him:

Aunt Lizzie Power...on Colinet Island...The evening she died they laid the table for her when she'd come back that night. Walter Norris was there; he was frightened to death. It was gone in the morning, and I can promise you Walter was gone too. Walter used to tell that some often. (FSC67-4/72)

Walter's reaction suggests a worldview in transition: laying the table must have struck him as a shocking or bizarre thing to do, but it frightened him as well and later became story-worthy. Yet the custom was not unknown in Riverhead, for another informant told Fagan:

Margaret Bursey, that's when she was well, used to put a glass of water on the table for her husband every night. Every morning the water was gone and the glass turned upside down on the table. (FSC67-4/74)

A Branch collector said that the practice of putting chairs out "for the departed in your family" during November, the

"month of the holy souls," had mostly died out, but reported:

A friend of mine spent a night with her great-aunt and great-uncle just a few weeks ago. She said that when they were going to bed her aunt put out two chairs in front of the stove. When my friend asked her why she did this, she said that they were for her da and her ma-- both dead over forty years. He also took a wooden crucifix down from the wall and laid it on the parlour table, 'cause his da used to do it. (FSC71-26/38)

This collector's brother taugt in a community near Branch, where a man fell off a cliff while hunting and was killed. Before this man left the house that day, he had been sitting on a chair and on rising knocked it over without picking it up. After his death, his mother refused to right the chair. Eventually she was persuaded to pick it up, but:

Still she regarded it as her son's chair and would allow no other person to sit on it. When my brother taugt in Point Lance, the chair was standing in a small alcove where the stove was situated. If anyone made as if to sit on this chair-- usually a stranger like my brother, for the people of the community knew and understood--she would ask them to sit somewhere else. I haven't visited this community in years, nor has my brother. This old woman is still alive but I don't know if she still expects her son to return and use his chair during the night as she did then. (FSC71-26/36)

Here is custom being transformed into personal belief, and in the process the chair takes its meaning from the particular circumstances--its having been overturned before

the death--as well as from general, but fading, tradition. A different Branch collector reported that chairs were overturned the night after a burial, "so that if the spirit returned it couldn't sit on them; this would cause the spirit to leave and return no more" (FSC80-315/\*\*). Most people devoutly wished not to see any spirits, and the provision of food or furniture at All Souls' should probably be viewed not as a welcoming but as an attempt to placate and confine by setting aside a specific time. It would be a mistake to extrapolate ideas about "folk belief" from accounts of exceptional individuals or instances. Another example of definite oddity on the part of the practitioner comes from Placentia, where a man drowned when returning drunk from the christening of twins to whom he was godfather. His mother, "a psychic," puts a curse on the twins (eventually fulfilled) that they too will drown. "In the meantime, every night when the clock struck twelve she would fill up the kitchen stove, send everyone to bed and set a chair for Jim, who would come in soaking wet and get warm by the fire which she had lit" (72-60/29). One suspects eccentricity in Margaret Bursey as well, because although it is noted in the account above that she put water out for her dead husband "when she was well," she later displayed unusual behavior:

Mrs. Margaret Bursey, the fairies came and took her. They brought her back when she was dead. I often heard old Maurice talking about things she used to



do. Old Margaret was a real fairy alright. She was sick in bed for a long time. She was paralyzed and everything. One day her brother was up in Riverhead. When he went back Margaret was on her mattress out in the yard dead. She looked right different--just like her real self. (FSC67-4/64)

It is impossible to know from this brief account whether it was truly believed that there was a fairy in Margaret's place, or whether this was half-serious metaphor, but like some of the other accounts above, it shows the reluctance to accept certain deaths or disability as natural or final. The otherworld of fairy tradition provides an alternative, from which one might even return. The denial of death triumphs in a story Pius Power told Anita Best (in 1976)--clearly related to "Liz's Point"--about a woman who supposedly died and was buried but who appeared in the kitchen several midnights afterwards getting water, bread and molasses. On the third night she explained to her husband, who had kept vigil, that she had been taken by the good people; she had been out taking in clothes, and "that's all she remembered about it." She had to eat, she said, but the next night would be her last, after that she would be "gone, and gone forever" unless he would wait at the gate which she would be the "last to go through," and grab her. "You can't touch me now," she said, "because there's hundreds [hundreds of fairies around her]." The husband got her, although she "tore him up." Later the priest came and

restored her to health, and when they dug up the grave they found a broom inside the coffin (88-14:C7671/my transcription).<sup>16</sup>

Such abductions can be understood in view of the almost tangible reality accorded to a person's soul or spirit, especially on its separation from the body at death. The interests of good and evil hovered about the deathbed awaiting the event. Fagan wrote:

It is very important that a dying person have a blessed candle in his hand when death finally overcomes him. The blessed candle will protect the dying person from the devil, who will make a final bid for his soul during the last moments of existence. (FSC67-4/4)

The banshee sometimes heralded the event; according to one student (who described the "bangree"), "as soon as the blessed candle was lit or the rosary started, a bunch of

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<sup>16</sup>This is a widespread narrative type, for which E. B. Lyle gives many references in "The Ballad Tam Lin and Traditional Tales of Recovery from the Fairy Troop." (The shape shifting of "Tam Lin," through which Janet has to hold on to the captive before he can be freed in his true shape, appears in this narrative and in "Liz's Point" as a physical struggle with the fairies themselves.) Map gives a legend of a man who plucks his "dead" wife from "a great company of women" (187-89). Pádraig Ó Tuathail gives several Wicklow versions; in one, the lost girl makes the characteristic final cry: "Gone, gone, for evermore!" (84-86). One of two versions in Kennedy's Legendary Fictions includes the "dead" wife's instructions to leave food out for her every night. More recent Irish versions may be found in Glassie (Ballymenone) 543-51; references 779), and Ó heOchaid (46-49; references 376).

weird-looking spirits appeared outside the window and started screeching, moaning and groaning while the old man or old woman was dying. This as far as the old people were concerned years ago was expected to happen and no fear accompanied these spirits" (77-168/n.p.). In Branch, some people sitting up with a sick woman heard "the banchee [sic] cry":

They heard voices, too, saying, "Oh my, what'll we do? Oh my, what'll we do?" This was "the good people" (or ghosts of the good dead) coming for Mrs. Moon. (FSC71-26/35)

In Mobile, on the Southern Shore, a child who was lost overnight on a reputed fairy marsh died a week later:

While the child was dying cries and lights could be heard and seen all around the house. People said that these noises were the fairies waiting for him to die, so that they could take him back to the marsh with them. (FSC73-157/3)

Upon death, the soul required release from the room. Fagan gives an account which shows that while this idea was taken very seriously by some, it was not necessarily common knowledge or prevailing practice:

When a person dies, the spirit immediately departs. According to my informant, it is very important that the spirit be given an immediate means of escape from the sick-room. He (my informant) promised an elderly lady who lived with him that "as soon as the life went out of her" he would open the window to let her soul out. However, she became suddenly worse, and died while he was out fishing. The other members of the family didn't know

anything about "letting out the soul," and it remained in the room for many months. Several months after her death, my informant acquired a serious infection in his knee. There was no apparent cause for the infection, but he later learned that his family had not opened the window to let the soul out. He then understood perfectly. He had broken his promise with the old lady, and she "had given him the nip."<sup>17</sup>  
(FSC67-4/3)

A St. Mary's student described the release of the soul as well as the routine admittance to the house of a dead woman's spirit:

I asked my mother-in-law to tell me this story which I thought was just a joke but she assured me it was no joke and that it actually happens. The mother of her first cousin, Hannah Kelly, died in early spring about ten years ago (1962 or 63). These people are Roman Catholic and extremely religious. They believe that a person's spirit comes back from the dead. They also believe that you should let a person's spirit (soul) out of the house as soon as they die. When Hannah's mother died they immediately rushed to open the doors and windows of the house to allow the spirit an exit. In accordance with family tradition, when her mother was buried she would, and still does to this day, open the door every night at ten o'clock to allow her mother's spirit in to say prayers

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<sup>17</sup>McPherson notes the expression in Scotland: An apparition might give 'the dead man's nip.' This was the name given to those marks or spots on the skin, for which no common cause could be assigned. They were believed to be due to the spirits of the departed whose memory had been maligned. Thus when a dead person was spoken lightly of it was usual to say 'he (or she) will hae a nip o' yer skin afore mornin' (131).

before retiring for the evening.  
(FSC73-95/10)

The safety and repose of the soul was not exclusively a Catholic concern. A collector from (Protestant) Bishop's Cove said although it is now done as a "sign of respect," the blinds used to be drawn after a death to keep out "evil spirits" (FSC70-25/39). In nearby Bryant's Cove, a Protestant informant said that the person who washed and dressed a dead body had to sit with it "to guard against evil spirits entering the body thus preventing the ghost or soul ever reaching heaven" (75-5/n.p.). Precautions were necessary even at the gravesite. The late Michael Hayes of St. Thomas told Martin Lovelace that after a coffin was lowered into the grave, the ropes were cut so that the fairies or "bad people" could not get at the body.<sup>18</sup> A Branch collector says the ropes were cut so that "the spirit could rest," claiming that the practice originated in Ireland as a protection against theft of the corpse for medical experimentation (FSC71-26/33). The rest of the dead was desired not only for the sake of the deceased but for the living, and given the great mobility of souls and spirits, measures to speed the dead on the way or keep them in the grave were crucial. With all the things that might

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<sup>18</sup>17 February 1985. I was in the next room with Mrs. Hayes, who wouldn't tell me about the fairies until I knew her several years (see Chapter 7); by contrast, Mr. Hayes had never set eyes on Martin until this occasion.

keep a person from resting--not seeing a priest, guilty consciences, unfinished business, Purgatorial sentences on earth, and so on--it is not surprising that there is a vast anonymous body of souls about, with whom one might come into accidental contact:

Mrs. Viola Simms of Clarke's Beach recalls an incident when a child became "flicked." A Mrs. Anderson, also of Clarke's Beach, had a son who had been playing outside one evening around dusk. When the boy came in, he complained of a pain in his shoulder that later moved down to his foot. His parents took him to the doctor but nothing could be found wrong. Finally his father said the boy was "flicked" by the dead. (The old people often called it "flicked by the good people." This meant that one had been in contact with the dead.) Mrs. Anderson decided to poultice the foot, and a couple of days later it broke and they removed two old weatherbeaten bones. These bones in no way belonged to the boy's own body. Mrs. Anderson still has them preserved in alcohol. (FSC76-113/\*\*)

Sometimes the dead retain a jealous interest in earthly affairs:

They cut down this old apple tree on Uncle Joe Coveyduck's place [in Mackinson's].... He was cutting down the apple tree and suddenly this pain came in his thumb and after that he had a really bad thumb. She [a healer] used to use her own remedies on it, bread and flour and molasses and bread poultice and that, so I guess it got infected or something. It was really really a bad hand. So she got this other old lady to use some remedies on it...and she opened the sore. And took out rabbits' bones and pieces of rags and felt and you name it, it came out of the hand. He got a blast, yes, really a blast. Because

they didn't want the tree cut down--the old people didn't. And they were dead now, oh yes, they were dead for years. [Interviewer: And that's what they believed?] He got a blast because he cut down the apple tree. He almost lost his hand. Yes, they maintain up 'til today, they think that's what happened.<sup>19</sup> (74-209/n.p.)

The connection between the dead and the fairies is very close in the widespread motif of the "blast," although the fairy attribution is most common. Fagan gives two examples from Riverhead:

[Aide Lee] very narrowly escaped capture by the fairies while picking berries alone near his home. He became lost for a while, but soon found his way home. His becoming lost was caused by the fairies trying to lure him away. He did not escape them entirely, however. They sent an infection into his leg, and the swelling rose to almost the size of your head. When after more than a year the swelling broke, berries, particles of moss, straw, pieces of shrubbery etc. were taken from the sore. (FSC67-4/62)

Austin Breen did not name the fairies, but said only that Aide Lee "got away from them":

Aide Lee went up to turn down the cows one evening on the hill, just behind his house. He got astray for awhile, and you know there was nothing right about that. On the way home his legs felt kind of funny. He got away from them, but the poor man was crippled for the rest of his life. (FSC67-4/60)

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<sup>19</sup>The rarity of apple trees in Newfoundland might explain the "old people's" seemingly excessive concern. When I was wandering about Mackinson's with a camera one day, a man insisted that I photograph his apple trees, saying, "This will prove that you CAN grow apples in Newfoundland!"

A third version of Ade Lee's story comes from Wayne Lee's Stephenville informants:

Ade Lee as a boy of twelve or thirteen years was playing with several of his friends on a marsh in Riverhead called the Carney Marsh when they all heard many voices in the woods adjacent to them speaking what appeared to be a different language. Thinking that the voices were from other members of the community and not really caring if they weren't, Ade and his friends "gave sauce"--yelled insults and taunts in the direction of the voices. The reply was a rush of objects flying from the general direction of the voices: branches, roots, rocks and other debris. Frightened, the boys ran away but Ade fell and was momentarily left behind. When his friends went back to get him he was lying on the ground unable to get up. When the boys finally got Ade home, a large bag or sack had formed on his hip which broke later that night releasing fish bones, grass, birds' feathers and skeletons, and various odd-shaped things. The effect of this was that Ade was permanently crippled and spent the rest of his life on crutches.<sup>20</sup> (82-207/6)

It is significant that the most detailed version comes from the Stephenville informants, who had lived away from Riverhead for at least thirty years. They also had a changeling story beside which those of Mrs. Meaney and Mason pale. When I asked Mrs. Meaney about changelings, she said:

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<sup>20</sup>This is Lee's summary; the tape (C7188) is nearly unintelligible, but I can make out one informant using the standard phrase "everything came out of it--old fishbones and grass and hay, pieces of stumps...", and a second informant adding, "everything that they threw out of the woods."



They used to take the babies, long ago you know, that babies would banish, banish out of the crib, or out of the bed or somewhere. And the mother would hear the baby screech, screech, and screech, and when she come in to check on the baby's crib, 'twas a real old ugly old effigy was in the crib, an ugly old baby, and her lovely baby was gone. So all she could do was mind the baby. She minded that baby for a long time. And after awhile, the baby got sick, the ugly old baby got sick or something and died. And when it died, they laid it out for burial, and it was the most beautiful baby that ever was looked on. You see, her own baby was brought back to her and they took the old effigy away. See? The baby died, the baby died and they brought it back to the mother. But it was beautiful. And the one in the cot changed as quick as that! [pause] I don't know if that ever happened or not, but it was told to me...

Mason gave a classic version, but it is not set in Riverhead (although "the Goulds" may be an area near it), and unlike most of her stories, the people in it are not named:

My mother, you know, she was from the Goulds. The people who lived next door --that's in the Goulds--had a baby boy, and he was swapped. He was only just a little baby but he was starting to look just like an old man. The woman's brother used to live there with them too. He kept telling her the baby was swapped, and wanted to redder the shovel and throw him out, but she wouldn't hear of it. One day she was in town and there was nobody home only this brother and the baby. This was his chance. He reddened the shovel in the fireplace and brought it to the side of the crib. Just as he did the baby flew right up out of the crib and out through the door, and he chasing it with the shovel.

When he came back the real baby was back in the crib. (20-21)

Fagan said that Mason referred to an article in the newspaper for 9 March 1967, about a child suffering from progeria, or premature aging, as an example of a changeling, and she also explained that

If someone became suddenly ill, or suddenly began acting in a peculiar manner, it was often suspected that they had been taken by the fairies. (Nobody knows why the fairies might want to capture a human being.) The person was supposed to be stolen away, and a fairy, in the semblance of the individual, left in his place. To find out if such a transfer had actually occurred, a shovel was heated until it became red, and then brought near the body of the victim. If he were a fairy, he would show violent reaction or hastily retreat. The fairies, knowing then that their plot had been discovered, would soon return the person. (FSC67-4/59)

The Stephenville informants give a graphic account of the procedure in action:

Alice Ryan was born a "nice child" but at two or three weeks of age got "cross and ugly" and showed behavior inconsistent with a child of that age, for example, responding to adults. Mrs. Cook was an old woman who lived in Mussel Pond [now O'Donnell's], a community some distance removed from Riverhead, and the acknowledged authority on supernatural events. Three people from the community of Riverhead set out on the considerable journey cross-country to eventually arrive at Mrs. Cook's house with the baby and find three cups of tea waiting for them. Mrs. Cook, when presented with the child, said, "Give me that!", threw the child in the bedroom, put a shovel in the stove to heat and invited her three

visitors to sit down to tea. When tea was finished and the shovel was red hot, Mrs. Cook went into the bedroom from which emerged loud cries and shrieking and a noise "such as the side was coming out of the house." Then, after a short period of quiet, Mrs. Cook emerged with a "cute" baby to announce that all was well. (6-7)

Alice Ryan figures in a recitation of Mrs. Meaney's (81-457:C8927) and so seems to have survived the treatment. The following account has a less fortunate ending. The informant told the collector that he heard it from his parents in the 1930s, who said it happened around 1900; he nevertheless stressed that no real names be used:

A St. Mary's Bay woman, Mrs. Morris from Mt. Carmel, had a thirteen-year-old son who had never walked. She had heard about a Mr. Kelly from Holyrood who was the seventh son of a seventh son. Now it is believed by the people of the communities of St. Mary's Bay that the seventh son of a seventh son is supposed to have special powers. Mr. Kelly was supposed to have special powers to cure. People claimed that Mr. Kelly was a fairy. When he was a young man he had disappeared into the wood for three months. Now, at this time, he was an old, humpbacked man. However, Mrs. Morris sent for him. When Mr. Kelly arrived at Mrs. Morris's, he held up his hand and said, "Jump up, you little bugger, and walk." The boy, Mike, did so, and was immediately cured. Now, a Mrs. Haynes from Mitchell's Brook many years before this, had a tragic experience (believed to be around the 1880s). She had gone to the clothesline to hang out her clothes, and upon returning found her baby missing and another one in its place. She knew it was not her child for it looked deformed and its facial features were like those of an old man.

Now twenty-seven or twenty-eight years later she heard of Mr. Kelly coming to Mt. Carmel so she sent for him. (This was after the time that Mr. Kelly had cured Mrs. Morris's son.) Mrs. Haynes wanted to get him to return her own son, or man he would be by now. When Mr. Kelly entered the home of Mrs. Haynes, the boy, Teddy, crouched on the woodbox snarling at him. Mr. Kelly said, "Shut up, you king of the fairies." Mrs. Haynes couldn't believe this, she said, "My goodness, Mr. Kelly, don't tell me he is a fairy?" Then she begged him to get her own son back. Mr. Kelly could not do this, for he said if he did return her son, his own army of fairies would come and kill him. However, there was one way she could get him back but for Mrs. Haynes's own sake she would have to get someone else to do this for her. He said if you reddened a shovel in fire and stand him (Teddy) on the shovel and throw him over the left shoulder, she would get her own son back. Mrs. Haynes didn't have the heart to put Teddy through this ordeal for she had grown attached to him. Mrs. Haynes questioned how she was to know Teddy was a fairy for she somehow doubted Mr. Kelly's word for it. Mr. Kelly told her to dig Teddy up thirteen months after he was buried and there would be a broom in his coffin. No one ever did dig the body up but it wasn't very long after this incident that Teddy died.<sup>21</sup> (74-114/51-54)

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<sup>21</sup>The broom or other item was the "dummy" substituted for the stolen person. Archibald Campbell gives a changeling narrative in which a withered leaf is found in the coffin (71-72); Napier one with a wooden figure (41); A. A. MacGregor, an oak log (Peat Fire 93-94); and a green billet of wood is found in The Fairies of Tomnahurich. Yeats tells of a girl taken by fairies: "a villager was said to have long struggled to hold her from them, but at last they prevailed, and he found nothing in his hands but a broom-stick" (Celtic Twilight 36). William Wilde gives the story of a woman who was "taken" when a gust of wind carrying dust and straws blew over her house; she was

Both "Alice Ryan" and "Teddy Haynes" come from informants removed in time and space from the event--in the first case thirty-odd years out of the community, in the second from an informant not even born when the events occurred--yet the narration of both includes vivid detail and dialogue. Time and distance, which might be expected to obscure such features, seem to have aided rather than impaired these reconstructions or performances. This may be in part because of the freedom afforded the narrators to talk about sensitive subjects, like changelings. There is also the tendency to impute questionable beliefs and actions to people in other places and other times; the spatial equivalent to the temporal proposition that "everyone used to believe in fairies" is that "everyone in X believes (or believed) in fairies." It seems paradoxical that generalization should lead to concreteness in narrative, and that the removal of the constraints of immediate reality should allow for the construction of a more "realistic" narrative, but the principle of increasing elaboration over time and space may be particularly applicable to supernatural materia'. Hartland, for instance, commented on Pitre's study of Nicolas Pipe the merman, which traced the

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buried, but the grave was dug up three weeks later "in the full conviction of finding only a birch broom, a log of wood, or the skeletal remains of some deformed monster in it" (127).

legend from Map in the twelfth century through thirty-three versions to the mid-nineteenth: "It may be said in general terms that the farther they were away from the alleged time of 'the Fish,' the more they knew about him, and the greater the wonders they told of him" (Map 205). Gustav Jahoda cites a "census of hallucinations" undertaken by the Society for Psychical Research in which "it was observed that the most dramatic cases tended to be those alleged to have happened a long time ago" (43). The implication for fairy lore is obvious.

Distance likely lent enchantment to Mrs. Cook's and Mr. Kelly's powers as well, by a similar process identified elsewhere. In Sweden, according to Klein, Nicolovius found that people preferred to consult a klok gumma (clever woman) who did not live in their own village, because the one at home "lived too close to be regarded as truly klok." Klein also translates Tillhagen on the kloka, that "their reputation was the least in the place where they lived" and "belief grew...with distance" (329). In her field research on witchcraft in France, Jeanne Favret-Saada found that "a serious crisis will never be taken to the local unwitcher. People prefer to choose their therapist beyond some boundary (in a neighbouring diocese or département), in any case outside the network of acquaintanceship" (20). Of a famous unwitcher, she said, "As always, he was not taken very seriously in the village where he lived; but it was known

that every night he was consulted by the bewitched, who sometimes came from far away, and that he would go off with them and lift the spells hanging over their farms" (57). Possibly no one in Mussel Pond would bring their child to Mrs. Cook, and no one in Holyrood would call in Mr. Kelly. (In Riverhead, Mrs. Meaney herself was "well known for her many old cures," according to her granddaughter, and even in 1979 people still went to her "for advice and cures" (13,22).)

The dynamics of distance and distancing make it difficult to evaluate how changeling traditions functioned, for they (the dynamics) might arise from the sensitivity or seriousness of the subject, or from the greater narrative scope offered by distance; or from both simultaneously. Mrs. Meaney's account of how "long ago...babies would banish" concludes with a disclaimer of personal knowledge: "I don't know if that ever happened or not, but it was told to me." (The narrative nevertheless had a polished feel-- "and the one in the cot changed as quick as that!"--and Mrs. Meaney's characteristic literary tone surfaces in the word "effigy.") It is perhaps ironic to include the following discussion of changelings in a chapter ostensibly based on an informant who is so vague on the subject, but this negative data is interesting in itself. Since Mrs. Meaney and Angela Mason were supposed to be fairy "specialists," one might conclude from what they told collectors that

changeling traditions were weak or moribund in Riverhead. Yet there is ample evidence, notably from the Stephenville informants' story of "Alice Ryan," that this is not the case. Were Mrs. Meaney and Mason reticent in what they would tell outsiders (Fagan, though an insider, was writing for outsiders) because changeling stories involve disease or tragedy? Might they have felt that such stories would be discreditable to individuals involved, the community, or themselves? Or perhaps they rejected the idea themselves and, while acknowledging its existence, did not wish to give it undue attention. In any case, their apparent reserve shows how unlikely it would be that any account of the actual application of a "reddened shovel" would ever find its way into MUNFLA. My own guess is that these stories occupy the more fantastic end of a spectrum which might be envisioned as having serious, completely believed traditions at one end and fictional entertainment tales at the other; but I will never know, for people would likely not admit to finding gruesome recitals involving innocent children diverting.

While we will probably never know if anyone actually tried hot shovels in Newfoundland,<sup>22</sup> the burning of supposed

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<sup>22</sup>One informant, Mr. Smith, did tell me that his grandmother wanted to put a child "out" for the fairies to retrieve, but the parents refused. An informant at Burin gave Halpert an account (65-16:C151/19-21), unfortunately very difficult to understand, about a girl who was burnt because she had been "led astray"; but as near as can be made out, the implication seems to have been that she was



changelings figured in several Irish court cases in the late 1800s (Croker 2: vii-ix; Byrne 56-68; J. Cooke 300). But Yeats discussed a Tipperary case with an old woman who told him that the man who did it was "very superstitious," since "everybody knew that you must only threaten, for whatever injury you did to the changeling the faeries would do to the living person they had carried away" (Gregory Visions 360). In Newfoundland narrative, the threat is usually successful, as in Mason's story, or in one of a mother on the Southern

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morally "astray," either pregnant or possibly living out of wedlock. The tape had been turned off before this account, but the preceding topic had been devil legends; there was no discussion of fairies. The informant saw the spot she was supposed to have been burned on Entry Island in the Magdalen Islands; the shape of her body was in the ground, and grass never grew there after. (Thanks to Philip Hiscock for trying to figure this one out with me.)

The practice, or at least the idea of rough treatment to restore health is very old (David Buchan suggests that it prefigures modern medical treatments that employ shock). The penitential (handbook of penances) of Theodore, Archbishop of Canturbury (668-690) decrees that "if any woman puts her daughter upon a roof or into an oven for the cure of a fever, she shall do penance for seven years" (McNeill and Gamer 198); Bartholomew Iscanus, Bishop of Exeter (1161-84) prescribes forty days for "he who places his child upon a roof or in an oven in order to restore his health, or who for this purpose uses charms or characters or things fashioned for sorcery or any trick, and not godly prayers or the liberal art of medicine" (350). Etienne de Bourbon (b.1195) a Paris inquisitor, gives in his "Preacher's Manual" a detailed picture of ritual proceedings undertaken against supposed changelings at the shrine of St. Guinefort (a greyhound), in which the mothers called upon the "hobgoblins" to take back the sickly child "who as they said, belonged to the fiends" and return their own healthy one (Coulton 93-94). (Jean-Claude Schmitt has recently made a study of the legend of St. Guinefort, with an interesting discussion of changelings.)

Shore who left a six-month old baby in a crib while she went to the well:

...and when she came back from the water there were an old man in the crib the size of the baby. And she didn't know what to do and she got the priest up. The priest came up and blessed the house and everything and still the thing was there in the crib. And he went and reddened the shovel in the stove and went over for to pick the thing up out of the crib and it disappeared and the baby came back in the crib; her own baby came back. So they were saying that if you ever got into a situation like that to redden the shovel and the thing will disappear, and you know, bring back the child. And they said that was really true, my father told me about that.  
(81-550/19)

A Terrenceville collector said:

If a woman returned to her home after leaving her baby alone and unprotected (no breadcrumbs left in crib) and she found that the fairies had succeeded in possessing her child, then she would stand where the baby could hear her and remark that the baby was behaving so badly (baby would be cranky and crying) that the only thing left to do was "hotten the coal shovel and put the baby on it." Then the fairy that was in the baby would leave because it was afraid of the pain and the baby would no longer be possessed. Mrs. Lannon did not know of anyone who had used the cure; she had just heard her mother and grandmother talk about it. (73-103/22-23)

The idea of "possession" or "the baby that was in the fairy" is slightly different from the actual substitution which is implicit in another Terrenceville text; the idea that the changed infant is "cross" is the same:

The other day when we were talking my uncle mentioned the fairies. The fairies would steal babies but sometimes instead of stealing babies they would switch them, that is, take the baby and put a fairy baby in its place. A sure sign that this had been done was a very cross baby. The way to get the right baby back would be to bring a shovel in the house and put it into the fire until it got red hot. You were then to take it out and say that you were going to lay it on the baby. The baby would supposedly stop crying immediately, showing that the right baby was back. The fairies took it back because they did not want the fairy baby burnt....many of the old people used to believe in fairies, very much so. (FSC69-19/41)

Although in international tradition kindness to the changeling is sometimes recommended (on the premise that the fairies will treat the stolen baby the same way), I found only one instance of this in MUNFLA:

In a small settlement in Trinity Bay where fairies are well-known because it is a wooded area, the thing there to do was never leave a baby alone because the fairies were known to steal babies. One woman in the community, after putting her baby asleep figured he was okay for a couple of hours, so she went to the store which was a short distance away. She wasn't gone long but when she returned she found her baby sat up in the crib with a corncob pipe in his mouth, and he had all the features of a little old man. Of course she was very upset and called a priest. When the priest arrived he told her to wear a shawl and pet her baby. After she had to warm a blanket, put her baby on it, and put the baby out the door while she was turned backwards. She did this and when she turned around she found that the baby had changed back again. (72-117/12-13)

In April 1989 I mentioned the singularity of this recommendation to a Folklore class, and a Bell Island student subsequently discovered that as an infant her grandmother had been exchanged for an "old-faced, big-headed, monstrous-looking baby." Seeking advice, the mother found that

According to the old people, when something like this happened, you were to treat the creature as if it were your own baby. Great-grandmother did what she had heard. She fed the creature, rocked it, sang to it, but never kissed it. Within a week or so, the fairies brought grandmother back home and took the ugly creature away. Great-grandmother then took her child to see the priest and to have her blessed. The priest said that no one should ever leave a young baby near an open window alone. (89-215/n.p.)

A related feature common to European tradition but not well represented in MUNFLA is the test that makes the fairy reveal its true identity before drastic measures are taken. This is some ridiculous activity which causes the fairy to make some exclamation--usually a rhyme or formula--about its great age: "I am old, old, ever so old, but I never saw a soldier brewing beer in an egg shell before!"<sup>23</sup> Although Alice Ryan's precocious behavior in an account given earlier

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<sup>23</sup>Leather 47. Robert Wildhaber has devoted a recent monograph to "der Altervers des Wechselbalgs."

("responding to adults") suggests age,<sup>24</sup> as does the pipe changed children sometimes puff,<sup>25</sup> I know of only one Newfoundland example of the classic type, and that is set in Nova Scotia. The informant said:

I heard Pop talking about when he was up in Sydney. He was boarding in this house when he was working there and she had a small child and the fairies took her. She couldn't figure out what was wrong with the child. She gave him something to eat this day and she went out, and he was in swearing the big oaths, he said, "I never tasted anything as hot as this since the Battle of Waterloo." So she got the priest to come and he banished them. (74-150/7)

Indications of "changing," other than physical symptoms, are usually more subtle than this. One child's fascination with nature was considered unnatural. His mother left him near the woods after dark, and when she returned

...the child was somewhat different. The child appeared like an old man and from that day on never played with toys, as normal children do, but found great pleasure with leaves, insects, trees, or

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<sup>24</sup>"If suspected children were heard speaking above the understanding of children, it was considered a proof that they were changelings. This was a widespread belief in Wales" (Davies 133). (They should then be thrown into the river or threatened with a red hot shovel.)

<sup>25</sup>One lost boy's hair turned gray, and he was found "smoking a pipe, just as the fairies did" (76-269/n.p.); another boy taken by the fairies was found with his nose stuffed full of straw; he "grew whiskers and a beard and smoked a pipe like an old man," stopped growing, and died a year later (86-67/7).

butterflies--all things that had to do with nature. (72-60/28)

Perhaps toys represent culture:

The child appeared to be an old woman. No longer did she play with her toys, and she refused to associate with anyone and hardly ever talked to her family. (FSC73-40/15)

"That the Fairies would steale away young children and putt others in their places: verily believed by old woemen in those dayes: and by some yet living," said Aubrey (Works 203). It is verily believed yet, according to a fifteen-year old male informant in St. John's, who told a collector that "there are still many fairy and ghost stories that are commonly believed in the Mt. Scio Road area," and that this happened to his aunt and uncle about six years before:

They had a little baby, about four to five months old, and it was a very active, happy child. After a while, the parents began to notice one day that their baby was not very active and wasn't as happy as it had been. The child's father (my informant's uncle) then realized that the child that they had in the cradle was not their own. The fairies had changed their human baby for a full-grown adult fairy that looked like the human baby, but did not act exactly the same way. What we had called in class a "changeling." To get his own baby back the father had to threaten the fairies. He built a large fire and put the fairy baby on a shovel and held it over the fire. He spoke out and told the fairies that if they did not give him his baby back, then my informant's uncle would throw the fairy-baby into the fire to perish. When he said that, suddenly the fairy-baby disappeared from the shovel and the parents heard a baby crying in the

cradle. When they went inside they  
found their own baby crying in the  
cradle. (FSC74-1/12)

Since a reddened shovel would not really be of much use in the case of an abnormal child, the popularity of this motif must be explained on other grounds. Perhaps as "applied" to "normal" children--cranky, crying, wakeful, tiresome--it could express normal, but personally and socially unacceptable, parental feelings of anger and rejection. As a sublimating device, it would be a model of structural economy: the "real" child (beautiful, happy, and lovable) is safely removed, and abuse heaped upon the ugly, recalcitrant substitute. Very often--as in Mason's version --the mother virtuously resists the diagnosis and remedy, which is done by someone else. Spleen thus vented, the real child is returned, its desirability affirmed by the retrieval efforts and by the fairies' theft of it in the first place.<sup>26</sup>

There is no doubt that a wide range of physical or mental disabilities was blamed on the fairies, but "changeling" stories about truly abnormal children (or adults) usually suggest that the victim was "changed," that

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<sup>26</sup>This theory struck me with great force when my own child was about four months old. During the endless months of breast-feeding, in which he ate voraciously and was never satisfied, it also occurred to me that those (European) narratives in which women are held captive as nurses in fairyland--cut off from their former world and slaves to the little "fairy"--are actually quite realistic.

is, altered, rather than actually exchanged:

The baby had been a nice little girl but something happened to her. She had a little neck and a great big head...couldn't talk or couldn't walk or do anything. She had long fingers and an old person's face. Well, you know, right long arms and long fingers just like little claws. I heard Father Flanagan telling that they used to see lights around her and she used to grab them in her hands and the lights would come out through her fingers... They said the fairies took her, the old people used to say that's what happened to her. (67-23/37)

A Bell Island woman set her step-child on the grass while she gathered some dry wood; when she came back, he seemed different, and soon became ill:

Instead of looking like a small child he looked like an old man. He had long fingernails and long toenails. His hair turned white like an old man's. He took sick and died. When he died he came back to his natural self like the small child he was. She didn't know what happened. He was alright when she laid him down on the grass. When she came back he was changed. So the people said the fairies took him. (72-95/22-23)

Susan Schoon Eberly has recently correlated descriptions of changelings with various birth defects and congenital and other infantile illnesses, as Piachewski did in a 1938 monograph on "der wechselbalg"; and Lindow says that "J. S. Moller has convincingly demonstrated that the most common causes of such stories were idiocy, mongolism, hydrocephalus, cretinism, rickets, and atrepsy" ("Rices" 42). It is a folkloristic commonplace that changeling



traditions "explain" such conditions for the folk, and here commentary generally stops. As an interpretation of changeling traditions, this is manifestly inadequate; it misses entirely a possible metaphorical element, and suggests an unwarranted degree of simplistic acceptance on the part of the general population. Medical terms are, after all, only labels which don't necessarily "explain" any more than "changelings" do; they do not show why, for example, one child and not another is afflicted. And although some changeling stories do "explain" ailments as the consequence of some broken taboo, in most cases the fairies' depredations are as capricious and unwarranted as the freakish gene which has replaced them. In recognizing this randomness they are a mirror, rather than a denial, of reality. They are also an accurate picture of the sad situation that occurs when, through mental or physical disease, a person is no longer "himself." Even the medical profession can be slow to accept a biological basis for behavior: at present, for example, childhood autism (which usually manifests itself around age two) is treated as a psychiatric problem despite increasing evidence that it originates in a physiological malfunction, probably of the immune system (Ross). It seems rather brutal to deny that a person is not who he was because he has become ill, but it

does happen with personality-disordering afflictions such as brain damage, schizophrenia, or Alzheimer's disease; the "former" person is in effect utterly gone, an unknown person is in his place.<sup>27</sup> As long as this "stranger" remains, the lost person cannot be officially mourned; perhaps this is why in fairy tradition, on the death of the body, the person is often said to have "come back to themselves"--so that he can be properly bid farewell and buried at last.

Referring to the hot shovel test and other alleged ways to get rid of a changeling, Sikes expresses the usual opinion that "the creed of ignorance everywhere as regards changelings is a very cruel one" (57). Clara Murphy recalls that in her home community in Conception Bay, it was "normal" for anyone different in appearance or mental capacity (including a woman of her acquaintance said to have been taken by the fairies) to be shunned by children and adults (111). But there is also evidence that, at least in some places, fairy traditions could sometimes be kind rather than cruel. For one thing, as a report from Bell Island suggests, they could gain a modicum of respect for the child:

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<sup>27</sup>In a study of mental illness in the outports, Paul S. Dinham gives "unknown" as an idiomatic reference, now little-used, to mental illness (53).

It was widely thought that mongoloids were children which the fairies had left in a home in place of the people's own child. Because all mongoloids look much alike, it was said they were the feeble work of the fairies and usually they were treated with respect. If retardation was not noticed for several years it was customary to say that the fairies had changed the child. (73-171/12)

Accounts involving abnormal children often show that they were patiently cared for. This is another version of "Teddy Haynes":

There was a family of Haynes living in Mitchell's Brook. Mrs. Haynes was hanging out clothes on her line, while leaving her baby in the cot. When she came in she was terrified to see that a monkey had replaced her baby. Apparently she kept it but immediately she sent after a man in Holyrood to come in because she was after hearing that this man had been taken by the fairies and he knew how to cure such things. After a few days he returned [sic] to her home and he saw the monkey. But he said there was nothing he could do as it was too late. He said that she should have reddened the shovel, put the baby on it and thrown it over her shoulder, and she would get her baby back. However, she raised the monkey who grew up to be very mischievous. He died when he was about twenty-five years old. (FSC74-102/\*\*)

A priest who grew up in Bar Haven, Placentia Bay, gave a description of one family's "changeling" which shows the different kinds of medical options and treatments available—

folk, patent, and supernatural:

On the lower end of Merasheen Island living alone are a family called Travis, there is the father and mother, three sons and a daughter.... They're rich as anything because they pay no doctor or no dues to the priest. They have all their own medicines. You go in the kitchen and you see all their cures, essence of ginger and liver pills and olive oil and all that.... Her son "dim Pat" is never there when we come around but you see him hiding behind the door or running off up to the woods. Once I told her I had to meet him, I said I was taking the census for the bishop so she brought him in. He's about thirty-two and he's ordinary but he always wears a skirt made out of canvas like you'd make sails with or you'd wear splitting fish. No pants underneath but the big boots and a shirt and this skirt. He's right odd but quite intelligent to speak to and he can fish and make little boats that his brothers sell for him. People say he's a changeling and the fairies took the real one away, they're always saying that about the odd ones. They dress the young ones up in dresses to fool the fairies. I wore one until I was six or seven till I had enough sense to get into pants. Mrs. Travis said that she bought medicine for her feet and he drank it and he's been odd ever since.<sup>28</sup> (FSC66-1/15)

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<sup>28</sup>One collector said that boys in Mall Bay (near Riverhead) used to wear plaid skirts until they were five or six, but offers no explanation (FSC80-296/\*\*). This is one of those customs the true explanation of which is quite hard to judge; probably, like most fairy lore, it varies as to belief. There was a hot debate on the usage in Ireland in Notes and Queries around the turn of the century: G. H. White cited The Hospital for 1905 that Connemara nurses often met adolescent boys in petticoats, which the mothers insisted were to prevent the fairies from taking them, "but the common-sense nurses often attribute the custom to motives of economy." In reply, R. A. S. MacAlister wrote that Aran Islands boys wore skirts because they were easy to make, and when he told a native of the "fairy" explanation,

The main party benefiting from the idea of changelings was probably the parents, who were thereby absolved from responsibility for the child's condition. They may take the blame for having been careless about precautions, but this censure is mild in comparison to other possible explanations for abnormality. For example, while maternal impressions or "marking" are usually said to proceed from "natural" causes, such as a fright or an unsatisfied craving during pregnancy,<sup>29</sup> irregularities are sometimes taken as supernatural retribution for parental misdeeds. "'Mocking is catching' is a common expression with special significance for pregnant women," said one collector, giving the example of a pregnant woman who made fun of a retarded boy punished by giving birth to a son who was "retarded in the same

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the man was astonished: "Well, there isn't a man, woman, or child on the island that believes the likes of that," he said, "but there was a man here with a notebook a while ago, and the people sent him away with it filled." Estyn Evans says it was done "to mislead the fairies," noting that boys were "preferred and cherished"; he also suggests the fact of their biological inferiority (being more susceptible to illness and death than girls) as reasons for the fairies' desire for them ("Beliefs" 42). Sam Hanna Bell also gives the preference for boys as the reason for petticoats (75). Parry-Jones claimed that in Wales "only male infants were stolen; there does not seem to be on record a case in which a baby girl was taken" (51). (I have heard no statements to the effect that the fairies prefer boys in Newfoundland, and there seem to be an equal number of each sex "taken.")

<sup>29</sup>The unmet desire for strawberries, for example, might result in a strawberry-shaped mark; or a mother frightened by a mouse might have a child with a mouse-shaped mark on it. My late neighbor, Estelle Morris, always maintained that she was afraid of cats because her mother had been frightened by a cat when carrying her.

manner." Because of the idea of reflected sin, this collector said, people were "ashamed of deformity" and in the early 1900s abnormal children were hidden away when company arrived (75-295/n.p.). Ilka Dickman, a European refugee physician working on the South Coast in 1940, describes the birth of an anencephalic child there. The midwife said they ought to name it quickly, and Dickman ran to get the teacher to baptize it:

In the meantime, in the house of the newborn, there is the mother, crying in her bed; the father, sitting next to the dying baby, deeply shaken; the grandfather, utterly upset; all of them worrying themselves to death not because of the misfortune itself, but rather on account of the unknown sin they must have committed, to which the deformed child is ascribed. (27)

There is ambiguity in the possible reasons for abnormality in that some are blameworthy, others not. One student reported that a woman frightened by a bird had a baby that was "half-bird" (84-203/19); another said that a woman frightened by a cow might have baby with a cow's head, or that such a malformation might be blamed on having had intercourse with a cow (68-2/2). On Bell Island, one woman seems to be the hapless victim of prenatal fright, while another offered some provocation to the fairies:

This pregnant woman was staying alone at home and she kept getting a knocking at her door every night for about a week. At first she was afraid to open the door but one night when she did, she saw a fairy (dwarf-like man) with a smile on his face. A month later when her baby

was born it had the same smile on its face. Another woman was nine months pregnant and was living alone in her house. When she opened the door she saw a fairy who was just standing there. She called to him but he wouldn't answer. The same thing happened on the second night and the third night. But on the third night when he wouldn't answer she got mad and threw a rock at him. She missed but he went away anyway. The same night she went into labor and her baby was born dead. (72-117/9-10)

Two informants from the Cupids/Brigus area said that a woman had a "fairy child" because the fairies took her while berry-picking; it is not clear whether the woman was already "expecting" when she was taken away for one night and the fairies thus "marked" the child, or whether she was supposed to have gotten pregnant during the night she was gone (and if the latter, whether the fairies were actually supposed to have been the progenitors). The informants saw the child, which had "claws instead of hands" and "clubbed feet"; they didn't know whether it was a girl or boy. They seemed to think the mother was rather unapologetic about it, for she would "bring it around," and had it christened because "as far as she was concerned 'twas a child, you know." When the interviewer asked if the mother could remember being taken, they said "Oh, yes, she could tell you all about it." The child never talked, only chirped, whistled, and rattled

paper, and died at about twenty-five (67-34:C427/23).<sup>30</sup>

Even when the etiological function of changeling stories is prominent there are secondary messages, such as the affirmation of traditional wisdom in the following, for which the collector withheld the names and place "because of the seriousness of the situation": a woman took her new baby to show a neighbor, who wanted to put bread in the baby's "bosom" when they left the house. The mother refused;

The next morning she reproached her neighbor for having such silly beliefs. However, in the next couple of months, she noticed a drastic change in her charming baby. The child once bright and cheerful turned into a decrepit creature not noticing anyone or anything. The consensus of opinion was that she had offended the fairies by not having an offering of bread, and the offended fairies stole her baby's personality and intelligence and replaced it with one of their own kind, probably one who was not wanted in their group because of its personality.  
(79-378/11)

Sometimes a change is explained as the result of a foiled theft:

This is a story of a woman in Admirals Cove, Fermeuse, in 1940. This woman's husband was in the stage late in the evening salting codfish. She was getting his supper ready and had no water in the house. She left the baby in the cradle, and left the door open,

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<sup>30</sup> "Woe to the damsels who come near the Courils!" writes Wilhelm Grimm of the Brittany fairies, "Nine months afterwards something new takes place in the house; the birth of a young sorcerer, who is not indeed a dwarf, but to whom the malicious spirits give the features of a young villager; so great is their power and subtilty" (Croker 3:150).



since the well was not far away. On her way back, coming up the path toward the house she could hear what seemed to be a lot of whispering. She said she felt very strange because nobody lived close by. When she came into the yard, she felt as if a lot of things were hitting her in the legs as they passed by. She rushed into the house and the baby was in the cradle and seemed unchanged. This baby never sat up, walked, talked, or did anything normally afterwards. She remained like a vegetable for the fourteen years she lived. She died in 1954. Her mother always maintained that something evil had happened that night. She said, "I never put the bread in the cradle, and the fairies were probably trying to take her, when I returned and interrupted them." (81-319/13-14)

Another woman who left her baby alone for a few minutes returned to find him crying and all scratched up. From that day on his body stopped growing but his head kept getting bigger. When he was two his head was the size of a full-grown man's. He died when he was about two and a half. The mother of the baby swore that the fairies had tried to take him while she was gone. She must have frightened them away when she returned. Because the fairies didn't get the baby she figured they disfigured him so as to punish her. (72-117/12-13)

The didactic import of changeling stories is obvious and sometimes made explicit (at least by the collector):

A North Shore woman who wasn't a good mother or wife and was always off at night came home one morning to find her baby gone from its crib. In its place was a baby with a big head that spent its time "bawling" no matter what she did for it. She knew it was a fairy child so she called the priest and somehow he got her own baby back. After that she never left the house again. (72-181/11)

Sometimes, however, there was no choice but to leave a child unattended. Firestone observed that when women worked at the stage during the fishing season in Flower's Cove, if there were no siblings to watch infants, they were left by themselves tucked into cots (73); one of my informants (Mrs. Nolan of Chapter Four) describes a child "changed" in just such circumstances. While changeling stories may reflect anxiety about these situations, both anxiety and didactic value is countered by security measures which were taken quite seriously:

There were supposed to be a lot of ferries around the Georgetown area. People had ways of keeping them away from their children because it was children that they liked to bother the most. My grandmother, Mrs. William Loveless, would not even go out to the clothesline without putting a Bible under the head of a child who might be left behind in the house.... (There is an English tradition in Georgetown, mostly from Devonshire, England.)  
(FSC70-10/105)

Changeling stories find continuity in modern popular culture, in the tabloid fascination with preternatural infants (space babies, infants born singing Elvis songs or speaking a foreign language) and with striking birth defects and strange diseases; another tabloid staple is the hospital mix-up of babies. Anxiety over harm to children finds expression in legends like "the attempted abduction" and "the mutilated boy" (Brunvand 78-92). These analogues suggest that, for whatever reasons, such stories hold a

powerful appeal for the human imagination. This is proven by the persistence and stability of the classic form, as in a final example from Riverhead:

The most exciting story I've heard of fairies was alleged to have happened about fifteen years ago. It involved a baby swapping. There was this lady in the community who decided to visit her neighbor's house for a minute of two. Before leaving she placed her infant baby (about two months old) in the inside part of a bed which was placed tightly against the wall. The child was sleeping when she left. However, on her return a short while afterwards she found the baby beneath the bed. When she picked it up she found that the baby's appearance was completely different and she was convinced that the baby was not hers. The child lived to be about twelve or thirteen, she was physically deformed and never learned to speak many words. (73-169/30)

Changeling and blast narratives can be very dark matters indeed. But they have a comic counterpoint in pranks and stories of pranks. These are perhaps most common in relation to ghosts, but they are especially effective with the fairies because it is a fairy characteristic to play tricks, thus making the stories pranks-within-pranks. Often the young people play these tricks on their elders, who are supposed to be the "true believers"; perhaps this is a kind of revenge on the part of the tricksters for having been threatened throughout childhood with the fairies. The play between belief and disbelief is central to their functioning:

Jack Bursey was up here one day on the horse and long car. While he was in, some of the young fellows unhitched the horse, pushed the shafts of the long car in between the longers, and hitched up the horse on the other side of the fence. Jack thought for sure it was the fairies. (FSC67-4/66)

Often the "trickees" never realize a prank has been played, and in one Riverhead story they propose a trick themselves which extends the conceit of their gullibility:

It seemed that two old ladies had teapots that were identical only one happened to be a bit larger than the other. Of course them times people were very superstitious. And they went in anyhow to one old lady's house--Aunt Peggy--and they watched their chance and they got the cover of Aunt Peggy's teapot. And they went down to the other old lady's house and this was Aunt Maggy. So they watched the chance and they took the cover off her teapot and they left the cover of Aunt Peggy's teapot, and then they had to get back to Aunt Peggy's and put in the cover of Aunt Maggy's teapot. Well, next morning anyhow, the two old ladies got up and went to get their cup of tea and Aunt Maggy went to have her cup of tea and then she said, "Gosh, what's happened to the cover of my teapot? I had it on the teapot last night, it was perfect, now it fell down in the teapot." She took the cover of the teapot and went up with her sad story to Aunt Peggy, that the little people were after getting in and making the cover of her teapot smaller. And Aunt Peggy said, "That is a funny thing, Maggy my dear, because," she said, "they came here last night, too," she said, "and what do you think they did," she said, "only they made the cover of my teapot larger. When I went to put the cover on my teapot I couldn't get it on it. I'll tell you what we'll do now," she said, "I'll give you the cover that I have," she said, "and you

give me the small one, sure," she said,  
 "We'll be just as well off, and the  
 little people will never know."  
 (79-362/29-30)<sup>31</sup>

The playful manipulation of fairy traditions in tricks and deceptions is an old genre, and pranks show that "of course them times people was very superstitious" is as much a convention as fact. An Irish account from 1814 tells about a woman who puts an egg and oat-cake by the fire in the neighbors' house while they are out,

inverting at the same time all the little furniture of the place. Soon after, conversing with the old woman of the family, she endeavoured in an indirect way to find out what impression the incident had made on her; but the woman, though communicative in other matters, kept this a profound secret, from which it was inferred that she was afraid to mention it lest her little friends might not pay her another kind visit. ("Irish Folk-Lore" 140)

It can as easily be inferred that the old woman had her own joke by refusing satisfaction to the prankster. A Scottish account from 1904 tells about a "superstitious" old man--he once saw fairies riding cats on Halloween--who thought himself the victim of "evil spirits" when two pranksters put a hook down his chimney and yanked his hat off his head (Wilson 99-101). A much older example comes from a Latin

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<sup>31</sup>The tape (C4734) is virtually incomprehensible, so I have used the MS text, with one correction--from the tape--in the last line. Ellipses in MS text are eliminated here.

treatise compiled in France in the early fourteenth century, in which thieves break into a house disguised as women, singing, "Take one, give back a hundred," as they take the most valuable items. The peasant refuses to allow his wife to stop them, saying that they were the "good beings" who would increase their belongings a hundredfold (Cohn 214).

People sometimes used deception to get themselves out of trouble. One of The Royal Hibernian Tales tells of a thief who, caught burgling a house at night, impersonates a spirit to escape the awakened inhabitant: "In those days people were more easily imposed on, than in this age, so that the gentleman, believing him to be a spirit, ventured up and unlocked the door, and he passed out quickly" (167). In a narrative of the 1734 edition of the chapbook Round About Our Coal Fire, a woman insists she got a ring from the fairies despite her husband's claim it belonged to another man. Adds the author:

The fairies were very necessary in families, as much as bread, salt, pepper, or any other such commodity, I believe; because they used to walk in my father's house, and if I can judge right of the matter, they were brought into all the families by the servants; for in old times folks used to go to bed at nine o'clock, and when the master and mistress were laid on their pillows, the men and maids, if they had a game at romps, and blundered upstairs, or jumbled a chair, the next morning everyone would swear it was the fairies, and that they heard them stamping up and down stairs all night, crying, "Waters locked, waters locked," when there was

no water in any pail in the kitchen.  
(Rimbault 481-82)

The fairies might be used to cover a good turn as well: Wayne Lee says that "old people appear to have been aided in many cases as stories are told of gardens being weeded and wood split at night" (82-206/8). This brownie-like household help is uncommon in Newfoundland and points to the jocular strain of Riverhead traditions.<sup>32</sup> A more typical example of fairy assistance in Newfoundland may be found in two reports of a "foolish" brother and sister who lived alone on a small island near Ferryland on the Southern Shore (FSC71-34/66 and Q68-245). They had built a wall of huge boulders "which could not possibly be lifted by two people," and when asked how they did it would say only "They'se help us," or "They always helps us." "No one was ever able to figure out who 'they'se' were," said the first collector, and according to the second, "They could be fairies or spirits." "They" could also be the deliberate invention of

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<sup>32</sup>It also has the ring of English rather than Irish tradition, small nocturnal chores being favoured in the former. Lee mentions that "a tale is also told of fairies helping an aged farmer bring in hay 'one straw at a time' and then when some disagreement arose bringing it all back out again," a motif found in a Hampshire narrative in which a farmer sees "elves" removing wheat from his barn "a straw at a time" through the keyhole (Keightley 305-06). The "blaming" of chores on the fairies may be one of those small jocular traditions which easily go unreported; I have found few examples besides Lee's in MUNFLA, but in April 1989 Elizabeth Power, a student from Frenchman's Cove, told me that in her community, if someone wished to refuse credit for some favour quietly done, he might suggest that the fairies did it.

the strange couple, since the fairies might be invoked-- explicitly or otherwise--by one who simply does not wish to offer any other explanation for some untoward event. Mrs. Meaney tells about a girl who went missing several days:

A young girl, she lived with her--her father died when she was young, see, and this couple took and raised her \*\*\*. And one evening, Sunday evening, her mistress had a few friends in to tea, see? And when they were finished tea, she said to the girl, "Now take the tablecloth out and shake it out." So she took the tablecloth and went out, shook it out around the door. And just outside of the door was a little place raspberries used to grow. And she stopped to pick a few, you know, pick them and eat them, pick them and eat them. And gosh, she never came back. She never came back, and she never came back for two or three days. And when she came back--they searched everywhere for her--and when she came back, Missus said to her, [haughty tone] "Where were you to? Do you know how long you were gone? You were gone three days and a night." She couldn't believe it, you know. She was frightened. But they brought her back. She was none the worse for it, see? Now when anything like that happens, you're not supposed to take anything they'll offer you. When they takes you away. Don't take, don't eat, above all, don't eat anything belong to them.

BR: Why not?

MM: They'll have you then. You'll join them, you'll join them then, see?<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>For references to the taboo on eating see Hartland: "We touch here upon a very ancient and widespread superstition, which we may pause to illustrate from different parts of the world" (41).



It is often impossible to know from legend or memorate whether intentional deception might have been involved, but there are some reports of purposeful invention. Fagan's parents told him:

About thirty years ago, four or five families lived in the "Nord-East Pon'." Although the extreme end of the road is not a half mile from Riverhead, the people began moving their homes up to the main road in Riverhead. One old man, however, was very determined not to leave the Pon', but his wife played on his fear of ghosts, and particularly of fairies, that, as residents put it, "she frightened poor ole Paddy out of the Pon'." For example, if he were in the yard sawing up firewood she might ask him, "Who were all them saucy little young ones that were here throwing your wood around?" He didn't see anybody, and she concluded they must have been fairies. Another day she might ask him who was the strange man that came down the road with him. He would assure her that he was alone, but with a sad or frightened voice she would say, "Oh, that must have been poor old John Mason, the Lord have mercy on him." [The dead are referred to as "poor."] When the old man was almost frightened out of his wits by fairies and ghosts (of his wife's making), he finally built a new house on the main road. (FSC67-4/84)

I have been treating Riverhead as a whole in this chapter, but as this passage suggests, it can be misleading to see even a small community as a single or homogeneous entity. In a study of his home community, George Casey says that although "the younger generation of Conche do not recognize distinctive neighbourhood groups but see the community as a whole" (58), in the past different

neighbourhoods were noted for different narrative specialties (52). Casey himself had never heard fairy stories:

However, Dr. Halpert insisted that since Conche was an Irish ethnic area there was every reason to expect fairy lore, so I even attempted to collect this narrative genre. To my amazement not only were fairy legends known in Conche but even my mother knew several of these stories. Neither my older brother nor I ever heard her tell any.... I might equally well have failed to learn about the one or two other genres except by accident. It is very possible for any one individual in the community not to be aware of all the story categories of Conche. The community had four to ten neighbourhood groups depending on the specific time. When a person moved outside his own neighbourhood group he probably visited only one or two representative houses of the remaining groups. (225-26)

An informant at Port Saunders directed Halpert and Widdowson to the "other side of the island to find out about the fairies, cause they talk about fairies over there just the same as we do ghostes over here" (66-24:C272/my transcription).

Riverhead had at least two sections, and its physical division by water may have contrived to make them at times mysterious to one another. Mike Lee recalled the advent of electricity in 1965: "That night we spent a great deal of our time looking across at the other side for this was really the first time at night that you could distinguish the houses on that side of the water" (29). After his

interview with Mason, Fagan's mother asked him, "Didn't she tell you any stories about over in the Lane? Sure that was the real home of the fairies!" (46). The Lane is where Mrs. Meaney lived before her marriage, and her mother's admonition may be recalled: "Don't go over on the north side any more--that's fairies!" Mason's reference to the "dirt and poverty on the other side" may also be recalled in this regard. There is probably an element of blason populaire in this, coupled with the use of fairies as bogey figures to keep children from wandering too far. Mrs. Meaney had twelve children, and they lived "by the salt water, down by the Pond" (79-374/3). It would be interesting to know if she used the fairies to keep her children close to the house, but I was never able to make myself understood well enough to ask Mrs. Meaney many questions.

Our conversational difficulties had the single advantage that she pursued her own line of thought mostly uninfluenced by leading questions. On the first visit, for example, she would conclude a fairy story with something like, "Well, that's all I can tell you. Still, a lot of queer things happen." She would then go on to tell about some of these "queer things," so although it was not clear whether she was separating them from "fairies" proper or had just thought of something new, the natural narrative flow was apparent. "Something," for example, "a little woman," was often seen along the road; Mrs. Meaney passed her one

day as she was returning from a neighbor's house with scraps for her hens. Another time a man greeted this woman, thinking her someone from the community whom Mrs. Meaney later informed him was nowhere near the road at that time. This story prompted "young" Mrs. Meaney (her daughter-in-law) to tell about strange headlights behind her car one night, which mysteriously disappeared. She said others have seen the same thing along the same part of the road near the Bay Roc Lounge, so "you do wonder." (On another occasion, the late Mr. John Meaney (Mrs. Meaney's son) told about an experience with a mysteriously stalled car, and about a token of his father's death.)

When I asked Mrs. Meaney about the "Twisted Ramrod," she said she didn't know anything like that; she also said that there is no such place as Liz's Point, only an Ellis's Point to which no legend is attached. Yet Seary gives Lizzy Point as the local name for Ellis's Point. I don't know if there was a problem of her memory or my inability to get across what I meant, or perhaps she was simply disinclined to give a long narrative. Certainly Mrs. Meaney's "songbooks" attest to a remarkable memory, at least until quite recently. These are scrapbooks in which she has written the texts of songs, which she told me represent only a fraction of those she used to sing; she could start at three in the afternoon and not be finished in the morning. She allowed me to borrow these to copy for MUNFLA, and later

I discovered that another student, Julie Hauri, had in 1978 planned to make Mrs. Meaney the subject of a master's thesis and had copied some scrapbooks as well. In that set (78-279) there were seventeen songs, and in those that I copied (85-198), sixty-three more; most are broadside ballads and sentimental songs with many stanzas. The scrapbooks also contain recitations, and clippings from newspapers and magazines which are mostly locally composed poems or songs or pieces on local history and people. If the pages of songs show a concern with the preservation of tradition-- Mrs. Meaney thinks today's songs are "no good"--the clippings suggest an alertness to new sources and materials. Many of them are of a humorous nature, such as limericks, and these contrast interestingly with the tragic character of the broadside ballads and sentimental songs which comprise the majority of the songs. Some are on traditional themes, such as a beer advertisement featuring "An old island story: Kinchler beats the devil" (P4597). There are also notes of Mrs. Meaney's own, such as a list of deaths for 1973, including that of Austin Breen at the age of eighty-five (P4669). In another she wrote, "On Monday night Feb. 17th two stars appeared together in the western sky, they were called Venus and Jupiter, they were traveling side by side" (78-279/P4614). The scrapbooks show the high degree of literacy Mrs. Meaney attained for one with little formal education, and the fondness and retentive memory for

the formal and poetic language that characterizes her fairy narratives.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>The singularity and elaborateness of the Riverhead texts could well owe something to a printed source. It is easy to imagine the influence of even one book on a community's repertoire. Dickman describes the hunger for printed material among her patients, among whom magazines were called "books" and "digested voraciously," and old catalogues were prized by young and old as picture books (32). A Colliers student said:

One custom that was very important to my grandmother was one that she devised herself and made a tradition. Every Sunday afternoon was a very special occasion. People, usually the same people every week, would come to visit. With them they would bring a book. These people usually could not read. They came to have my grandmother read for them. She was a very good and expressive reader. This special storytime was somewhat similar to our present day soap opera. When she would reach the climax or an especially exciting part of the story she would stop and continue the story the next week. This custom went on for years and years. She also read at wakes. She was sort of the official parish reader. (81-455/23)

(The collector also notes that this woman, who died in 1970, was a strong believer in fairies and evil spirits.)

In Ireland a great deal of fairy material made its way into popular print, which could have crossed the Atlantic along with oral lore. Yeats mentions chapbooks: "They are to be found brown with turf smoke on cottage shelves, and are, or were, sold on every hand by the pedlars, but cannot be found in any library of this city of the Sassenach. The Royal Fairy Tales, The Hibernian Tales, and The Legends of the Fairies are the fairy literature of the people" (Fairy Tales 7). "Lageniensis" (John O'Hanlon) said in 1896 that the "Tales of the Queen's County Peasantry," a column by John Keegan (d. 1849) in The Leinster Express was read with avidity at ceillis (77-78). Croker's Fairy Legends, as already noted, was reprinted repeatedly; it was available in abridged form as a volume in "Murray's Family Library," for example, and was extracted and rewritten in popular collections as well: "The Giant's Stairs" appears as "The Giant's Page" in Monica Cosens's Tales and Legends of

As Mrs. Meaney and I looked through a scrapbook together one day, a picture of a spinning wheel prompted me to ask her if she ever heard you should take the band off at night; yes, she said, otherwise the fairies would be at it all night and tangle the wool so you'd never get it undone. I think if I could have made myself clearer I could have gotten more material from Mrs. Meaney by questions and prompting, but the really frustrating aspect of the communication problem was that I was never able to gauge Mrs. Meaney's attitude toward the fairies and her stories; all I can say with confidence is that she did not take them very seriously. Fagan noted Mrs. Mason's offhandedness regarding dates for her "tales of the fairies": "I haven't been able to date them very well," he wrote, "to her the date was rather insignificant, and any attempts to get this

Ireland (London: George and Harrap, 1925). The St. John's Public Ledger for 4 December 1838 has a reference to sneezing and its connection with the fairies "found in Crofton Croker's well known and amusing story." (Thanks to Clara Murphy for this reference.)

In the U. S., Patrick Kennedy's collections were issued as P. J. Kennedy's Irish Fireside Stories, Tales and Legends (N.Y.: P. J. Kennedy, "Excelsior Catholic Publishing House," 1900). A catalogue inserted at the end of this volume lists among the "Catholic Standard Publications" a 570-page offering, "Fairy Folk Stories" (no author given), "Legends and Fairy Tales of Ireland" ("over four hundred pages," no author given), ten volumes by William Carleton, including "Turf Fire Stories and Fairy Tales of Ireland," and assorted unspecified "Fireside Stories." As the bulk of the offerings were pious and educational tomes, it is possible that this publishing house was used by Catholic institutions in Newfoundland and that some of its "lighter" fare might have made its way here as well.

information was dismissed with, 'Oh, that was a nice bit ago'" (7).

For fairy, ghost, and other supernatural stories the insistence on the truth is often part of the genre itself. It may be genuine, but it is also an aesthetic device for heightening the effectiveness of the narrative; "scaring people to death" is one measure of successful ghost stories. To ask a creative narrator--as opposed to one who considers herself to be only reporting the "facts"--for such stories in an ethnographic context is to put her in a bind. To let fly with the customary persuasive devices, which would be recognized or at least suspected as such by a native audience, is to risk being recorded inaccurately for public scrutiny or posterity as "a firm believer in fairies." But to recount the narrative without conviction is a kind of parody or bowdlerization, rather like a novelist outlining a story instead of writing it. A similar literary analogy was made in The Glasgow Evening News of 26 Sept. 1896 on the researches of Ada Goodrich Freer on "second sight":

Supposing Miss Freer is the proper sort of investigator, however, and able to inspire the natives of Harris, say, with the utmost confidence, she must not too readily imagine that their stories of ghosts, fairies, supernatural cantrips, are absolutely believed by the people who narrate them. Nine times out of ten, the narrator has but the novelist's belief in his own creation or at most the convenient illusion of a spectator at a play. (Campbell and Hall 87)



Gerald Thomas comments on a familiar literary analogy in relation to Newfoundland folktales:

Now it has long been customary to characterize the attitudes of storytellers and audience to Marchen by "that willing suspension of disbelief." In other words, no one really believes in the existence of such creatures [magical animals], but one pretends to for the duration of a folktale narration. Yet discussion with storytellers about their tales suggests that this attitude is not necessarily shared by all. I know informants who refuse to believe that Man has walked on the Moon, seeing in the televised reports no more than a science-fiction movie in the fashion of Star Trek. To an urbanized and educated product of the twentieth century, this refusal to accept the wonders of technological invention may seem both mildly amusing and slightly ridiculous. Yet to look at this attitude with a patronizing air of superiority is to ignore some very profound differences between the life-style of the urbanite and the rural dweller. One should not be misled either by statements to the effect that legends or folktales happened "in the past" or "in the old days" or even "dans les temps que les bêtes parlent." This is often a safety device enabling the speaker to disassociate himself from a belief which might prove embarrassing in front of a stranger. But observing informants in a natural context, I have often noticed the unconscious practice of a belief which had earlier been belittled, when formally discussing the belief itself. Even the "safety device" may be no more than a recent reaction to cynical sophisticates; many informants have stressed how life used to be different "in the old days," and if animals no longer speak to humans, that is not to say that they never did. (73)

I had an informant who did not believe a man walked on the

moon. He would not admit me to his house until I had showed him identification proving I was a student; he thought I might be a spy, because "you never can tell with all the Europeans around." (This was before the conviction of a Soviet spy in St. John's.) He would not say anything about the fairies until he was sure that I recognized that he considered them completely unreal, and then he told three short humorous "yarns." He enjoyed telling the stories once he started; he simply did not want to be taken as a "believer" in the fairies. Perhaps it is not so much that one suspends belief as that one accepts the tradition in its own terms for the sake of engagement with the narrative. One student concluded a collection of fairy narratives:

When telling these stories Mr. Brendon didn't really commit himself as to whether he believed them or not. He just told them to me as they were told to him. In bygone days, he said, when people had fewer radios and no television, people would entertain each other by telling stories. He seemed to indicate that whether you believed them or not was unimportant, simply the fact of their existence and your knowing them seemed to create a bond between you and the rest of the people who were interested in hearing them. Now, as there are less people on Bell Island, the number at parties is lessened, not so many stories are heard because this is where you usually hear the stories. (72-95/17)

Colin Lee mentioned the "bond among all the communities in St. Mary's Bay" (80-205/12), and Mike Lee said that each community around Riverhead had its "own distinctive

characteristics" (80-296/3); Riverhead, according to Colleen Meaney, was "famous for its get-togethers, scoffs, and spreccs" (79-374/4). The venues for the performance of traditional genres remained vital in Riverhead longer than in many areas partly because of the relatively late arrival of television (Mike Lee describes the breakdown of visiting patterns after its introduction). Nor was Riverhead torn apart by resettlement as many small communities were. The rich body of material from Riverhead, then, comes from a fortunate set of circumstances: a stable, performance-oriented community with specialist, long-lived narrators, and good students to record them.

Wayne Lee claims that fairy stories ended in Riverhead in the 1960s, with the coming of electricity (2-4). Fagan, writing in the 1960s, said, "The idea of being 'taken by the fairies' was very prevalent in the areas surrounding St. Mary's up to about thirty years ago. It is interesting to note that there are no ghost stories of recent origin either. The reason given by the older people--there are so many priests and nuns, and so much prayers being said" (FSC67-4/67). But "Night Kitchen" was prompted by a question from Mrs. Meaney's grandson, who asked if she had ever heard of a cup and saucer in a cupboard which was broken by thunder and lightning when there was no thunder and lightning. ("You haven't got it all," Mrs. Meaney said, and commenced.) This grandson, whom I took to be about

twelve, told me the following story as I was getting into my car: he and a friend were in the graveyard, painting Grandma Lee's (Mrs. Meaney's mother's) stone when his friend told him about Jack O'Lantern, who would get you if you cursed on him. "Do it, then," dared the grandson; "Fuck the Jack O'Lantern," said the friend. A bell rang above the graveyard and they went to look for it. When they came back, the paint and brush were gone, and written on the tombstone was "Jack."

Only time and continued fieldwork will tell the fate of the fairies in Riverhead, and whether Mrs. Meaney is the last of the fairy specialists. In the interest of future research, I should note that on a third visit to Mrs. Meaney, to check that she had gotten a copy of the tape I had mailed, I found that the tape had been much in circulation among the neighbors and family; so people have heard the stories on the tape, whether directly from Mrs. Meaney or the tape.

Using Riverhead as a point of departure, we have seen that fairy traditions comprise many genres and uses, although it is not always easy to say what they are for any given text. Nor is it always a simple matter to identify a "fairy" narrative as such, for the expansiveness of the concept coupled with the avoidance aspect and the fusion with other supernatural beings can make definition difficult; but too precise an abstraction would probably be

misleading anyway. Naming (or not naming) is not just a matter of label or top-dressing, but an integral element of performance and interpretation. "Good people," "little people," "little johns," "darbies and mummers," "elfs," have been used by informants in this chapter (as well as "bibes," "banshees" and "devils" acting in the same capacity), but references to "those people," "those other people" are more subtle and perhaps even more telling ways of talking about "them."

We have seen that fairy traditions are intricately related to other supernatural or spiritual traditions, especially those surrounding death and the afterlife, and that knowledge of the latter is necessary for an understanding of the former. Both are concerned with an otherworld or otherworlds, dimensions beyond the visible mundane world which contain "others" whose essential nature is viewed from five possible positions: they are bad; they are good; some are bad and some are good; they are sometimes bad and sometimes good; or they are neither bad nor good. The idea that they are good or at least harmless would not seem to carry as much weight as the others, for we see that most customs have to do with avoiding or placating them, and that most narratives have to do with their destructive capabilities. Many stories predicated on this potentially dangerous co-existence are nevertheless found entertaining, and the joking use of fairy traditions undercuts any picture

of undue solemnity toward them. Moreover, in reading accounts of individuals enacting customary behaviour (as opposed to abstract description of custom), we can see that the inferences to be drawn from such behaviour are limited, for it is individually adapted and it is always in evolution.

Postscript to Chapter Two:

John Meaney died in January 1989, and from an obituary for one of her daughters in May 1989, I learned that Mrs. Meaney had moved to the Hoyles Home in St. John's. I have visited her a few times there, but communication is almost impossible, not only because of hearing problems but because of the constant blare of the television set positioned between the heads of the beds on Mrs. Meaney's end of the room. She didn't have her songbooks, and when I brought a copy from the Archive didn't seem to realize that she herself had written them down (probably because it was typed and bound). She read with intense pleasure, however, stopping occasionally to declaim a verse with the clarity of a sudden strong radio signal breaking through the static of a stormy night.

Marie Meaney





## III

**Bread, Wind, Old Paths: The Texture and Planes of Everyday  
Life in Fairy Narrative**

While continuing to explore conceptions of the fairy "otherworld" and "otherworlders" in this chapter, I want to focus on how narratives about them are stories of ordinary life as well, and as much about the narrators and protagonists as about the "fairies." Fairy narratives give an often beautifully detailed picture of folklife, of people going about their daily round until it is interrupted by the intrusion of the marvelous. The retailing of this intrusion has the effect of lighting up the events surrounding it like the flash of a camera; and like the sudden exposure, it fixes the moment in time, and presents us with tableaux of people picking berries, digging gardens, or walking home after a dance. The projection of such homely activities on the fairies, so that they, too, are said to eat, play music or conduct funerals, is one of the most intriguing aspects of fairy traditions in that some human characteristics are mirrored in the fairy world while others are denied them. The analysis of the relationship of the human and fairy world begun in Chapter Two continues with an examination of methods of protection--that is, keeping the otherworld at bay--and of some ways in which the infringement of the otherworld on this one is graphically represented in the association of particular times and places with the fairies.

Among the many byproducts of this discussion--or perhaps byways is the more fitting term--is a digression on the national derivation of certain traditions and their adaptation (or lack thereof) to the new environment. A more general, recurring question of evolution is how Newfoundland fairy traditions of the present--and as reflected in records of the last twenty-five years--are different from those of the past, not only in content and ubiquity but in immediacy in everyday life (an unanswerable question, ultimately, given the lack of historical record, but one worth contemplating). Listening to fairy stories of long ago events is a little like looking at old photographs--some faded, torn, steeped in a sepia of time through which one peers at shadowy shapes on a blurry background, others sharp as yesterday. Small details emerge: when Mr. Dan Costello of Avondale told me about seeing the fairies as a boy, he spent as long describing the new overalls he had been wearing as in describing the fairies. Color streaks the images--in Avondale the fairies have been seen in red scarves, white dresses, multicolored gowns--but the overall tone of long-ago events is difficult to envision, and it is hard to guess the extent to which images and ideas of these otherworlders colored life in the past. A photographic analogy does not work in all respects, for a photo is a contemporary, unchanging document, whereas there are no contemporary records of fairy traditions of the past, and

there is probably no such thing as an objective portrayal of the past from the present perspective, particularly for such vague and subjective matters as intensity of belief or experience. It is hard, for example, to evaluate the opening claim of this report from Conception Harbour, the community neighboring Avondale on the north:

When my mother was growing up the "fairies" were an accepted part of life. People referred to them as the "good people" and a surprising number of people really believed in them. If the cover was found off a well in the morning, it would be said, "Oh, the good people are around." When the wind blew, it was the fairies. Often those "squalls of wind" could mean perhaps bad luck since it meant fairies and my mother remembers being advised, "If you throw a rock with the wind it will drive the fairies away." It was a sure cure and many people, especially if alone, would carry this out for their protection. By the action it would be assured that the fairies would never harm you. The only knowledge I have of fairies is whatever I hear from my parents, as it is recalled to me as "something of the past." (FSC73-64/18)

Here again is the picture of fairy traditions having gone from commonplace reality to obsolescence in one generation that struck me at the beginning of my investigation. As this and many other MUNFLA accounts show Avondale and Conception Harbour to be rich fairy areas, I undertook inquiries there in March 1985, and since I found two excellent informants in Mr. Dan and Mr. Joe Costello, Avondale will be the base for this chapter.

Avondale--Salmon Cove until 1906 (Seary 64)--lies just beyond the opposite end of the Salmonier Line from Riverhead, about sixty kilometres from St. John's. Its location on the busy Conception Bay Road and its proximity to the TransCanada Highway (since the mid 1960s) have made it today a larger (900 people) and more suburban community than Riverhead, with many commuters to St. John's. It has in common with Riverhead a good student collection of fairy legends (71-42); Tom Moore wrote in 1971, "I could find no adult who did not know about the fairies," who were "were generally thought of as devilish people with some magic power...[who] were never known to use this power for any good purpose" (14). He identified most of his informants, including his parents, as of "mixed Irish and English extraction." Moore now lives and teaches in Avondale, and when I spoke to him there in March 1985, he recalled that people had been delighted to talk about the fairies for his paper. He suggested that I visit Jack and Bride Parsley, which I did in June 1985. Mrs. Parsley died unexpectedly in June 1987; Mr. Parsley unexpectedly thrives, in his nineties, as of March 1989.

When I explained my errand to the Parsleys, they told me that just before I had arrived there had been a "fairy squall," a sudden wind that took things up in the air. Mrs. Parsley and Julian Lewis, a middle-aged fourth grade teacher visiting their house, nevertheless agreed that "those

things" aren't talked about anymore, although Mrs. Parsley was adamant that they certainly happened at one time. She herself had once met up with an unnatural dog that used to ply the road. Mr. Parsley was too deaf to participate in the conversation, but occasionally contributed something such as that the dog made a great rushing sound; one minute you'd think it was behind you and the next thing you'd hear it way in front of you. "Fairies," he said, would be something like hearing a train coming, jumping out of the way, and then there was no train. One of Moore's informants had used the term in a similar sense, describing invisible or "fairy horses," which raced down Lee's Pond and past him one evening while he was hauling wood. (A man near Western Bay made a distinction between "fairy" as a noun and adjective when he told me that there are "two kinds of fairy": one like his father once saw when he cut open a stump and little people ran out; the second, like seeing a ship on the ocean that wasn't really there.) Mr. Parsley also told about a man fishing on the Labrador who said that he had been "home" overnight, and told the names of people who had died there; when they returned in the fall, those people had in fact died--"He was a real fairy man." The Parsleys used this expression several times, mostly, I think, in reference to people who knew about fairy matters, although it might also have implied that there was something strange about them. Kevin Parsley, their son, came in part

way through the visit, and hearing the discussion of one man, said that he had been "in the fairies so long" that he was "a fairy himself." He asked if they'd told me about the fairy squall, so it seems the actual term was in use before my arrival. An account from Conception Harbour illustrates the danger associated with these winds:

My mother claims that long before her time people in her family had cause to believe in the fairies. A child was once taken by the fairies and lost for three days. Her father, after searching for three days, found her in a state of confusion. She had been overtaken by a strong wind one day while picking berries and led away by strange voices. Because she would not eat or drink what they gave her, she was not an asset and was left alone. It is alleged that the child was left--and indeed lived the rest of her life--with a speech defect that she had not had when she had been taken. My source claims that had she eaten what they gave her they would have kept her, but they didn't want people in their group who couldn't obey their commands. (FSC73-153/28)

I said to Mrs. Parsley that I had heard it was dangerous to get caught in a fairy squall and she agreed emphatically that it was.

At this point the kitchen had filled with children, the phone was ringing, and everyone was talking about something different, so it was hard to catch details of any one thing, but Kevin Parsley was telling about some friends of his hearing voices in trees, and how he himself was followed once at about three in the morning by "that fucking woman,"

whose high heels he could hear tapping along behind him. Ms. Lewis was reading aloud a copy of Tom Moore's paper I'd brought, and although she took an amused-but-tolerant attitude toward the project she told about a woman on Redlands Hill who disappeared when she went out to bring in the clothes one frosty night at about ten o'clock. She was gone for weeks, but the parish priest told the people that if they watched on a certain night they would see a white horse with a sleigh, and she would be on the sleigh; they were to pull her off.<sup>1</sup> They got her back with the socks still in her hands. Mrs. Parsley confirmed this, and said that Lee's Pond was the place for fairies, and that May and October were fairy months. She had never heard that you should not talk about the fairies, or that the fairies would take or change babies. She talked about how frightened people used to be of the dead, and how the night after a burial, a cup and saucer and food would be left out for the dead person. She did not tell about any personal experiences (other than the strange dog), but one of Moore's informants had told him about Mr. Jack Parsley's experience with fairies around 1940.<sup>2</sup> He had moved his house onto a

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<sup>1</sup>People recovered from the fairies are often, like Tam Lin (Child 39), pulled off white horses, or occasionally gray ones (O Tuathail 166).

<sup>2</sup>This might have been a different Mr. Parsley, as it is not uncommon for several individuals to have the same name even in a small community (hence the ubiquity of nicknames).

piece of land where there were many "old wood paths," tracks for the sleds to go into the woods in the winter:

It seems that he had put his house on a fairies' path. One night when Jack was at a dance his mother heard a young child walking back and forth along the front of the house crying. The child stayed there crying all night and when Jack got home she told him. Later Jack heard the crying himself while in the stable. He eventually moved his house again and had no more trouble from the fairies. (23-24)

Narratives about fairy paths and winds are especially good for the depiction of everyday life, for in them the fairies' presence is usually invisible, and the listener's (or reader's) imagination is not automatically focused on startling, dramatic appearances of the fairies; instead it sees the woman kept awake by the crying, perhaps nervously pacing the floor as she waits for her son, his later bringing the animals into the stables and hearing it, and so on. In "path" stories we get images of life indoors, in "wind" stories of life outdoors, but the bigger difference is that in "path" stories we learn of events unfolding over time, whereas wind stories are usually of single acute episodes.

The Parsleys suggested that I see Dan Costello, who turned out to be a quiet, courteous man in his seventies (he was born in 1910). After I had interviewed him, he took me to see his brother Joe Costello, and I hope that they would excuse the familiarity if for the sake of clarity I refer to



them hereafter as Mr. Dan and Mr. Joe; I will also call an informant of Moore's, James Costello, Mr. James. Mr. Dan told me about his father having to move the first house he built:

But he had to shift out of it, he had to haul the house, he was took sick over there...the parish priest told him to move out of it.

BR: Did he ever see or hear anything in the house?

DC: Oh, yes, used to hear them walking around outside. Passing the road.

BR: Was the house on a path?

DC: Could be. And, this fellow lived there, now my brother went there after and built a shack, after he got married, they was only young people, my father gave them a piece of land, see? Same spot. And the little one, (no bigger than that?) she fell in the same place and broke her nose, had to go in the hospital. Right on the level ground. That seemed to say that she was knocked down by it.<sup>3</sup>

The fairy path is one of the major human intersections with the fairy world, and it is a dangerous one. The central image of path narratives is the house, the physical base of most people's lives, in which daily activities begin and end. Path stories suggest that if something is wrong there, nothing will be right. There is often an emphasis on the

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<sup>3</sup>Haddon says that an Irish child who fell down accidentally would be given salt because the fall might have been caused by the fairies trying to run away with the child (358).

inhabitants' bad luck, and this often involves the children. In a paper on "The Fairy Path in Butlerville," Conception Bay (77-162), a student wrote, "I have heard stories all my life of the effects of people crossing the fairy paths, and I interviewed an acquaintance of mine...who lives not far from the fairy path." The informant told how out of eleven children born to a couple living in a house built on this path, only one survived; the others died soon after birth, and after death had old, sunken faces.

Mrs. Butler and everyone else in the community blamed the fairies and thought that in some way or other she had displeased them. Mrs. Butler told the story of how sometimes in the night she would hear the table being set. When she would go downstairs all the dishes would be placed on the table ready for a meal. This was thought to be the presence of the fairies in the house. Mr. and Mrs. Butler finally realized or believed that their house was inhabited by the fairies and that their lives would always be affected while they remained in the house on the fairy path. While the Butlers were considering moving, Mrs. Butler died. Mr. Butler then moved out and built a house at the other end of the community. He remarried shortly after his first wife's death and he and his second wife had six children all of which were normal healthy children. Mr. Butler always refused to talk about his first family.

The couple's realization that their house was "inhabited by fairies" seems rather belated in view of the fate of all those poor children and in view of the strong community consensus the collector portrays in the following section.

Yet no one seems to have enlightened Mrs. Butler when she told them about the nocturnal table-settings, and Mr. Butler was able to sell the house to another couple. The second couple had two children that were never able to walk or talk, but when they moved the house into the next garden, they had a third, normal child.

They still live in the same house and believe that they have safely escaped the fairies. Behind the house is a large cliff and on the other side of this mountain is believed to be the home of the fairies. On certain days goats can be seen running--or could be seen, in those days--down from the mountain as if being chased by the fairies. This occurrence was usually followed by a heavy wind or rainstorm. This was attributed to the fairies who were upset. Several other families moved across the road so they would not be affected by the evil of the fairies. Sometimes during the summer rocks would fall down the side of the mountain for no reason whatsoever. This, according to Bill, was the fairies driving people away from their home. Today in Butlerville the foundations of the houses can be seen. The remaining houses near the area have been boarded up and have not been lived in since. Many of the people in the community are familiar with the story and believe in the power of the fairies and do nothing to get them upset.

There may be several genres mixed in this account, which makes it sound almost as if the whole community based its fairy belief on the Butlers' experience. The explanation of the abandoned houses sounds like etiological legend, and there is the ring of dite or fict in the goats being

"chased" by the fairies,<sup>4</sup> and the storms being blamed on their being "upset." Similar meteorological and etiological connections are made in this account:

There is a path in Torbay cut through the woods which is still there today and which was caused by the fairies. They were so angry at one man that they caused a lightning bolt to strike the house, go down the chimney, out the other side and through his garden, cutting a path right through the woods.  
(72-181/8)

One might reasonably, if inanely, ask why the fairies don't just go around the house: if they have the power to affect the weather, can't they make a little detour? One explanation might be that in "path" stories the fairies are envisioned as a kind of mindless inexorable force completely indifferent to anything "in their way." The answer, however, is probably not to be looked for in the nature of the fairies but in human nature. Clearly many misfortunes could be blamed on "paths," just as they could on "changelings," and we have seen a connection between the two in reference to unhealthy children. The Butlers' children likely had a hereditary disease, but the tendency to attribute illness, particularly of infants and young children, to an external agency has been shown in the discussion of changelings. Crediting the change of scene

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<sup>4</sup>Mr. Tucker (of Chapter Six) says that people in St. Phillips used to say that if a cow ran in a pasture, it was being "ridden by witches."

rather than a change of genes for the normal children of Mr. Butler's second marriage locates liability in impersonal fate rather than individual circumstances, although it is interesting that we don't know Mr. Butler's own opinion, since he "always refused to talk about his first family." There may also be a metaphorical element in "path" traditions, as I suggested with regard to changelings: although people everywhere are prone to attribute undesirable results of their own actions to bad luck, bad "luck" in the proper sense is indeed the result of being in the wrong place at the wrong time, and getting caught in a current of misfortune.

The fairies' undeviating passage does make sense in terms of tradition itself in that it is closely related to, if not identical with, the travelling of their former routes by the dead:

[In Brigus South], a house built on a "crossed path" will be haunted. A "crossed path" is a path that was once well-travelled, but is no longer used. My grandmother's first home was built on a crossed path. At night you could hear doors opening and people walking. It became so unnerving that my grandfather finally tore down the house and built a new one further in off the road. These things were never heard in the new house. (FSC70-13/139)

These travellers are not ghosts or revenants in the usual sense; they have not "returned" from the dead, nor have they any particular reason to harass the living. Rather they are

there all along, going about their own business, so to speak, unless injudiciously or inadvertently interfered with.

Many years ago [in Victoria] Aunt Elva had a house built on what was known as the Spirits' path. Every night when everyone had gone to bed, they would hear something on the roof which sounded like cans [chains?] rattling. She then decided to tear down the house and build it somewhere else. When they did this they never heard the sounds again.  
(FSC76-7/\*\*)

The travellers on the path are not always explicitly identified. A couple in Avondale lived peacefully in a bungalow until one night they heard a great racket; the man went downstairs to find the front door, normally only opened for wakes ("no need, except when father died that time"), swinging open. The next night it was "as if some crew were travelling through the house," so they got the priest:

The pastor told him to check old paths to the bog behind his house. He found an old path and sure enough when neighbors had put up their new picket fence it crossed the path and the fence joined on to his, which went to the corner of the house, thus blocking off the passageway of the path to the house. Immediately Bill took down the obstruction. This solved the mystery of the racket and the swinging doors. (79-410/10-13)

A Whitbourne collector wrote:

There used to be this old house called Mrs. Cuff's house, it was Aunt Lizzie Cuff used to live there. I often wondered why nobody lived there, so I asked my grandmother. She said the house was built right across a path. It

was a bad thing to do. Build your house across a path, she said, and in the night the dampers on the stove would rattle, doors would slam, and everything. She had a nervous breakdown, poor woman. She had to come to St. John's to live. Nobody's lived there since. (78-404/21)

While the house on a path is similar in many ways to the more common "haunted house" of ghostly tradition, one difference is that the latter is often depicted as old and resounding with some tragedy of the past, while the former is usually brand new, and the noise only the humdrum traffic of a previous time; it is a superimposed image, a kind of double exposure in which the shadows of earlier activities move behind the transparency of the present, their sounds echoing through the newly defined space. The two house types have in common the potential for exorcism:

A newly married couple built a house in the community of Tors Cove [Southern Shore]. Every night at bedtime they would hear an ungodly racket downstairs which stopped when they checked it. They had a priest come in and the house was exorcised. The priest told them that their house was built over an old pass, and it was thought that the noise came from the spirits of the dead who used the pass. They never returned after the priest's visit. (FSC70-11/80)

An informant in Riverhead, Harbour Grace, told about a friend of her mother's who would hear rumblings as if a horse and box-cart were coming through her newly-built house; she learned then that it was built on an old road. She kept the matter to herself, putting it down to fatigue

from trying to get the house ready for the winter, until her son heard the sounds too. Then she said:

I often heard a saying to build a house on a path the people in it would never be at rest. They'd hear the people that once traveled over the road at one time. So now I'm beginning to believe it. I think, son, that there's people wants to come this road that are dead and gone and our house is an obstruction; we're in the way. I'm going to the priest tomorrow.

The priest blessed the house inside ("the four corners") and out with holy water, and said "You're going to be alright from now on, you'll have no more trouble in your house" They said, "We believe you, Father," and heard no more sounds. The informant wasn't sure the sounds were dangerous: "It mightn't be harmful but it wouldn't be nice for a nervous person to listen to" (76-138/1-20).

"Path" narratives implicitly recommend an awareness of and respect for the past. Often it is older people who advise against building on a certain site:

It was a belief in Cape Broyle [Southern Shore] about fifty years ago that it was bad luck to build a house on an old path. It was believed that the souls of the dead people used to use these paths and that the faries also used them. If a house was built on a path the people in it would never be happy. The man who told me this said he knew of an incident where the foundations of the house had to be removed because they were on an old path. He said, "The Walshes were building a house up there near where they live now. One day old Mrs. Walsh went up to have a look at it. She said that there used to be an old path running along right where the foundation



was. She made them take up the foundations and start building somewhere else."<sup>5</sup> (FSC68-16/61)

"Path" traditions may have at times expressed tensions surrounding land use or allocation. Property rights, for example, seem to have been at the heart of an incident in Trepassey:

[Mr. Sutpin] built a bungalow on a piece of land he secured. On this land there had been an old footpath greatly used at an earlier time. When the house was finished, the back door was situated directly opposite the front door, one at each end of the footpath. Tradition has it that every night, approximately at midnight, Mr. Sutpin would hear a rap on the back door. He would open it, and although he couldn't see anyone, he was aware that a long line of people would walk from the back door, across the floor (built directly over the footpath) and then through the front door which he would have to open for them. This went on for about three years; everyone in the settlement knew of Mr. Sutpin's visitors and they said it was because he had stolen the property. He was told that he would find no peace until he moved his house. This is what he did

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<sup>5</sup>I know of no reports in MUNFLA of ways to insure against inadvertently building on a path. In Ireland, tentative boundaries for the proposed structure might be marked out with sticks or stones, and if these were left undisturbed, the site was taken as acceptable (Duncan; Duffy; Ó Danachair; Mac Gréine "Longford Miscellany" 267 and "Mud Wall House"). There are many Irish narratives about houses built on passes: Mac Gréine gives several about people having to move houses, and notes that the "passes" were usually between fairy forts; Edward O'Toole gives an example in which a little man warns a builder that his prospective site is on a "pass"; Helen Roe says that tenants forced to take such a house in Laoighis always left doors or windows open for "those who wish to use the pass" (26). I have not noticed in Irish tradition the same idea applied to old (human) roads or paths.

eventually, and in his new house  
he heard no more ghostly visitors.  
(71-41/75-77)

In another account, the occupant's general disregard for received standards was rectified by his experience with unwelcome visitors:

After Henry Smith built his house in 1910 he became bothered with ghosts. It was a fact he had built it across a fairy path, which no sensible person would think of doing. Therefore, no one was surprised to hear of his unexpected guests, heard but not seen. These were the days before street lights, even before electricity was available in Spaniards Bay, when everyone heard or saw ghosts, who chose dark, windy, and often rainy nights to go abroad. It was on such nights that Henry's ghosts were bothersome. The Anglican priest who had recently arrived from England banished them. After that the Smiths attended church regularly and tried to live the good life. ("Across a path" meant that the house obstructed passage along the path. The "path" was in fact a "fairy" path, i.e., a path supposedly used by fairies during the night.) (FSC71-45/48)

A narrative in which a sceptic becomes a believer through personal experience of the supernatural might be termed a "conversion" story, and path stories are especially suited to this purpose for they often show the sceptic wilfully flying in the face of traditional wisdom, building despite elders' warnings or his own knowledge of "old sayings." A St. Mary's Bay informant related two experiences in reverse chronological order, explaining how his unhesitating acceptance of the premise of the later incident sprang from

a conversion ten years before. According to the collector:

Mr. Delmont Gregson related an incident which he encountered when he and Mr. Jack Everly, from Haricot, went to Mount Carmel, about four miles away, to visit the priest, Father Slattery. This incident happened about 1940. While Mr. Everly was in the priest's house, Mr. Gregson sat in the truck and waited. Suddenly he heard a galloping sound coming down the lane and seeming to stop behind his truck. He got out, and between his truck and a rock wall he could see what looked like a pony, but it was constantly changing in size until it was finally the size of a cat. It could clearly be seen because Father Slattery turned on the light over the door as Mr. Everly was leaving. However, even as Mr. Everly was coming down the lane he heard or saw nothing unusual. Finally the unusual animal reared up the road with a thundering noise heard only by Mr. Gregson. When Mr. Gregson related this incident to Father Slattery, he did not seem disturbed or to think it was unusual. He told Mr. Gregson that he had parked his truck in the wrong place. It was crossing a path and was apparently in the way of something. He gave no further explanation. However, Mr. Gregson said that this was enough explanation for him for he believed in never putting up a fence across an old path. The reason will be obvious in the next article.

Mr. Gregson and his brothers did not believe in what he called "the superstition that an old path cannot be fenced." However, the incident which he and his brothers experienced around 1930 soon changed his mind. Since they did not believe in that "superstition," when Mr. Gregson and his brothers were putting up a fence on their premises they placed one right across an old path no longer in use. That night they were kept awake by hammering noises which seemed to come from the place where the fence crossed the path, although they

could see nothing. However, the next morning they came to the conclusion that there must be some truth in what the old people used to say about fencing old paths. So that very morning, even before they went to haul their nets, they took down that part of the fence that crossed the path. They never heard the noises after. Mr. Gregson said that whenever the old people of the community (Haricot) put up a fence they always left an opening or put a gate across the place where the path was. In this way the path wouldn't be fenced, and anything was free to pass through. The people who held this belief, said Mr. Gregson, always believed they were blocking the way of "something" if they fenced an old path. (74-114/44-48)

Even when proper precautions were taken, one could "get in someone's way" or be in the wrong place quite unwittingly, and even ordinary intersections could be hazardous at certain times. Aly O' Brien said that "crossroads were considered dangerous places in the dark because fairies and ghosts frequented these places at nighttime," and that according to his grandfather, it was also advisable to place the thumb between the index and middle fingers to form a cross for protection at places where paths crossed on the farm (74-118/4). The O'Brien farm is in St. John's (once on the outskirts, it now overlooks the Avalon mall), and before leaving the subject of fairy paths, it is worth noting that they are not confined to wood paths and rural routes:

My grandmother told me that a small roadway leading from the Battery Road to Walsh's Square in St. John's East was, in her childhood (1896-1910), frequented

by ghosts. She told me that the ghosts in this area seemed to have had something against her family and some members of other families as well.... On many occasions her brother Bernard, and other people as well, while passing the lane late at night, would be showered with stones at a time when no other people were in the lane. She said people in the area thought this maybe was someone or a group of people just having fun but they became convinced it was ghosts when her sister Sadie received a BLAST when she passed the area late one night. She said her sister received what felt like a hand smack her on the left side of her face while passing this lane. She said the following day her sister's face was swollen and very sore. A few days later (she couldn't remember how many) the infection broke and pieces of old cloth, rusty nails, needles, and bits of rock and clay were all taken from her face. This was the Blast and it was believed to have been caused by her walking across the path of ghosts. She said her sister had a scar on the side of her face from that time until the day she died in 1970. (FSC74-99/\*\*)

Nor is the idea completely outmoded; one account shows it influencing behaviour in 1970. The informants told the collector that when they bought a house,

the man who sold it did so on the condition that they put gates in the fence they were planning to build around it. The reason for building the gates was that the fence would cross a path believed to be used by the fairies. As a result the Days built two gates where there wouldn't normally be any. Mr. Day didn't take the gates very seriously, but Mrs. Day was determined that they were going to be built into the fence. Mrs. Day knows of one family who built the house right on top of a path which came from the woods and over their plot of land. They had a lot of hard luck

thereafter. They had retarded children and lazy children. Mrs. Day did not want to mention the name of this family as they were still living in Port de Grave. Mrs. Day, my informant, took these stories very seriously. (70-26/56-57)

Following these paths has led us a long way, perhaps, from "everyday life," but a generous sample of texts demonstrates an unequivocal identification of the fairies with the dead, and specifically with the ordinary, pedestrian dead (surely an excusable pun in this context). This runs counter to Katharine Briggs's finding that "even those [fairies] who are most closely connected with the dead are generally supposed to be those who died under some special circumstances" (Anatomy 117). (She is comparing fairies and ghosts with reference to the theory that fairy beliefs derive from "ancient ancestor worship.") An equation with the "normal" dead does much to "explain" the fairies: how they might be good or bad; why they are so often in groups (as opposed to the solitary purposeful ghost); why their actions, and even emotions, so often shadow ordinary human activity. Certainly it explains the sorry results of unwholesome contact with them.

The identification is borne out by the extension of the rights of the way of the fairies and dead on All Souls' Day. A Conception Harbour student said:

On this particular day and night it was believed that the souls were loose and people would never walk in the middle of the road to prevent them (souls) from

passing. It was commonly heard on All Souls Day, "Don't walk in the middle of the road--the souls will be out."  
(FSC73-64/19)

Another collector wrote:

On All Souls' Night (Oct. 31), people on Fogo Island say that one should remain on the right side of the road when walking. This is done to insure oneself against meeting the spirits of the dead. It declined about twenty years ago.  
(FSC70-34/50)

The prohibition on throwing out water after dark (or after midnight) was sometimes limited to this day as well:<sup>6</sup>

A neighbor of mine told me that water should never be thrown out on All Souls Night, Nov. 2. When I asked her why, she told me a story that happened to her mother. Around 1920-25, her mother had to throw water outside in order to get rid of it. One All Souls Night she threw the water outside as usual and the water came back in her face. She thought this very strange because it wasn't a windy night and she could see no reason for it. Later she told one of her friends what had happened and they told her it was wrong for her to throw out the water because it was All Souls Day. They said on this night the souls were passing along on their way to heaven and nothing could cross their paths. After hearing this story Mrs. Williams would never let any water be thrown out on this night. (FSC74-116/\*\*)

The fairies were especially active this night. A student reports (from an area identified only as "Placentia Bay"):

Years ago people used to say if you went out after dark on All Souls' Night, you would be likely to see a crowd carrying

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<sup>6</sup>And sometimes to Good Friday.

a coffin up the road. If one of the crowd happened to see you watching them you would have to go along with them whether you wanted to or not. They say these were the fairies out on All Souls' Night burying their dead. (74-212/30)

Fairy and phantom funerals are quite common and might be encountered at any time, although there is the suggestion of punishment for a breached temporal taboo in an account from St. Phillips of a young man who went into the woods one Sunday "either to go hunting or cutting wood, both tasks not accepted to be done on the Lord's Day":

After entering the woods he wasn't heard or seen for another three weeks. When he did walk out of the woods he had become simpleminded and just rambled on about nothing understandable; it was said that the fairies caused this to happen... This story is what happened to the man after piecing fragments of his disconnected ramblings together: After going a short distance in the woods, the young man faintly heard the "sweetest music he had ever heard in his life." As the music seemed to be coming closer the man hid behind a bush. What the man then saw was a lot of little people singing as they carried a tiny wooden box directly ahead of him: it was a fairy funeral. The "little people" saw the man and he began to follow them. They treated him very nice and he really liked to be with them. That's all that could be found out about the man who was taken by the so-called "little people." (Q68-403)

The size of the fairies much interested early students of fairy lore, and one theory advanced to account for their small appearance is that it derives from ancient conceptions of the soul as a small being inside the body, which emerges



at death or sometimes during sleep.<sup>7</sup> The small fairy funeral processions (although of course there are human-size ones as well), in their direct connection with the departure of the soul, that is, death, support this venerable concept and theory. In any case, their mirror-imagery of human life is made explicit in a text about a man who was returning from the funeral of a friend when he saw "a bunch miniature people" carrying a "miniature coffin":

He stopped, stepped aside, and let them pass by, out of shock, bewilderment, and what you could almost determine an inner sense of respect. When he explained what he had seen to the people upon his return to Seldom-Come-By, some old person told him that "depending on the time and the place, there is usually a fairy funeral for every human one that occurs."<sup>8</sup> (77-160/n.p.)

Felix Oinas writes that "it is customary for people to project their own mode of life onto the spirits supposed to live in their immediate neighborhood. This holds true for

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<sup>7</sup>Lewis Spence summarizes the theory of the "manikin soul" in relation to fairy lore in British Fairy Origins (68-70).

<sup>8</sup>Fairy and phantom funerals are quite common in English and Irish tradition. Briggs gives references and texts in her Dictionary, including William Blake's vision of "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" (145-47). Redmond gives a Wexford example from 1894: "In the boggy corner of the lands of R., about fifty years ago, three men were cocking hay after sunset, and he who was upon the cock saw what seemed a funeral procession coming through the fields. It passed through the hedge close by the men, who all saw it, and went on out of sight" (363). See also Bowker (83-96); Hunt (218-9); and Wiltshire (17-18, 31).

Russians and other East Slavic peoples as well, whose supernatural world mirrors their own society" (1). This cannot be said of Newfoundland fairies on the whole (there are, for example, no fairy weddings), but Mr. James gave Moore some examples of this kind of projection. One has an intriguing historic element:

[He] told me that as he heard it, over one hundred years ago, the fairies lived around the settlement. They lived on what they could, often depending on the people of the community for food, and were often to be seen around the houses. Mr. Costello told me that they behaved very badly towards men with their evil powers and finally Father Rowe of Harbour Main (an adjoining community) "banished them to the woods" because of their evil. (15)

This image of the fairies lurking at the edges of the community getting food from the inhabitants calls to mind the theory that fairy traditions are derived from folk memories of conquered aboriginal peoples such as Picts or Britons, scattered bands of whom survived outside the supplanted area making occasional furtive forays for food or equipment.<sup>9</sup> (According to this theory, the small size of the fairies comes from the displaced peoples' appropriation of old barrows or caves as quarters: people seeing the small openings would conclude that the inhabitants must be small.)

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<sup>9</sup>David MacRitchie (inspired by J. F. Campbell) was the chief proponent of this school, with his Testimony of Tradition. Lewis Spence summarizes the arguments in British Fairy Origins (56-59).

Could the presence of the native population have helped fuel fairy traditions among the early European settlers in Newfoundland? In Freshwater, Placentia Bay, a boy playing with the fairies had to be forcibly removed from them by his father; the informant, who did believe in fairies, thought "it might have been the remains of an Indian band who were in hiding" (80-328/36). "In the eighteen and early nineteen hundreds, people believed that the fairies lived in Stoney River, Brook River, Bar River, and St. Shott's, and that they would come to Trepassey in the night" (FSC75-48/87).

As among humans, the fairies' nocturnal assemblies might be boisterous or genteel:

In 1888 or 1889 Mr. Costello's father saw the fairies in his own house which was then on the main road through Avondale. One Sunday evening he returned to his own house and heard many young people's voices inside as he stepped into the porch. He didn't think any of his family were home but then figured they may have invited some people in. He opened the kitchen door a little and peeked in. "A young girl was sweeping the floor." They were all happily making fun and did not see him. "A beautiful music could be heard from the kitchen." He said they were all normal size. He made a noise before coming in so as not to interrupt their conversation. When he opened the door again, they were all gone. Also around 1884 some man in Avondale was in bed when his wife woke him saying, "They're breaking up everything downstairs." He heard terrible noises coming up from below. Tables and chairs were crashing around and dishes were breaking. As he rushed down the stairs, "a whistle blew from over on O'Kelly's hill." They had all disappeared when he reached the

kitchen. Mr. Costello explained that "they had been called back to the woods by the whistle." (24)

Sometimes their partying became habitual and a nuisance. A man in Bay Bulls told me that when his parents lived in Freshwater Bay just outside St. John's, they would hear the stove rattling and the fire crackling in the kitchen after they had gone to bed. They could even see light flickering through the crack at the top of the door, but if they went to the kitchen to check, the stove would be cold. This house burned down in the fire of 1892, and although it was supposed to have been built on a fairy path, they never heard anything in the new house they built on the same site.<sup>10</sup> Mr. Joe told me:

Sure, out here, going out to Harbour Main, 'tis a pond, Black Duck Pond. 'Twas a man living there, Penny was his name. And his family was growed up and gone, and himself and his wife was living there, just like us [his late wife and himself]. And every night they used to come. Make a big racket in the kitchen, downstairs in the kitchen. 'Twas no electric lights or nothing then. And he used to get up and light the lamp and come down and start cursing on them [laughs], he thought he'd drive them that way.

BR: Did it work?

JC: That never done him any good. Do you know what he had to do? He had to go to the priest. It was a priest in Harbour Main, Father Rowe was his name, he had to come and say mass in the house. The last place they heard them

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<sup>10</sup>Field notes, Tuce Franton, 28 September 1984.

was across the pond, on the other side to the mountain, they'd hear them over there in the night, they'd be picking and shoveling in the clift. That's where they went when the priest banished them.

The Parsleys told me that a Father O'Donnell banished a devil from Matt Penney's house, although they didn't say what the devil did there. The fairies' preeminence in raising kitchen rackets, however, is venerable. Heywood's Hierarchy of Angells of 1635 includes the passage:

In John Milesius any man may reade  
Of divels in Samartia honored,  
Call'd Kottri, or Kibaldi; such as wee  
Pugs and Hob-Goblins call. Their  
dwellings bee  
In corners of old houses least  
frequented,  
Or beneath stacks of wood: and these  
convented,  
Make fearfull noise in buttries and in  
dairies;  
Robin Good-fellowes some, some call them  
fairies.  
In solitarie roomes these uprores keepe,  
And beat at dores to wake men from their  
sleepe;  
Seeming to force locks, be they ne'er so  
strong,  
And keeping Christmasse gambols all  
night long.  
Pots, glasses, trenchers, dishes,  
pannes, and kettles,  
They will make dance about the shelves  
and settles,  
As if about the kitchen tost and cast,  
Yet in the morning nothing found  
misplac't. (Ritson 14)

Thomas Churchyard wrote in 1578:

The Phayries are another kinde of elves  
that daunce in darke,  
Yet can light candles in the night, and  
vanish like a spark;  
And make a noyse and rumbling great

among the dishes oft,  
 And wake the sleepee sluggish maydes  
 that lyes in the kitchen loft.  
 (M. Latham 51)

And earlier still, Gervase of Tilbury describes the "Follets" of England "who inhabit the houses of the simple rustics, and can be driven away neither by holy water nor exorcisms; and because they are not seen, they afflict those who are entering with stones, billets, and domestic furniture; whose words, for certain, are heard in the human manner, and their forms do not appear" (Ritson 16-17).

The fairies (in Newfoundland) are seldom depicted as having dwelling structures of their own, although in the midwife-to-the fairies story mentioned in the introduction as being rare here, the midwife is taken by "a lovely gentleman" to a house that is "spotless...everything was spic and span in it," where she delivers a baby boy (72-95:C1280/my transcription). More common is an association with topographical features such as hills or caves. A student from Englee (described as a "mixed" ethnic settlement) gives an odd account according to which children were regular seasonal "guests" of the fairies:

Green people = fairies. As children we were always warned not to go in the woods because the fairies would carry us away. There was supposed to be a girl in our family who had been carried away for the whole winter with these people, her father found her the next spring one evening when he went trouting. Her name was Dulcie. The interesting thing about this is that every family had a boy or girl who had been carried away by these

green people but were always returned. The green people were supposed to do you no harm. You would become small like them and in the spring you would return to your normal size. There is a hill home called Manuel's Hill where these people were supposed to have lived. Nobody dared to go near that hill by themselves for they would, without question, become a part of these small people. (FSC70-12/100)

Whether these green people were actually envisioned as living inside the hill is impossible to say; the vagueness of the account in this respect probably reflects the vagueness of the tradition itself. Moore wrote, "I could never get a story on houses in which the fairies lived, but some people recollect it was underground" (26). Mr. Dan made an allusion to the fairies' "residence" and the "nice stuff" in it:

BR: Did you ever hear that the fairies would take care of someone who was lost?

DC: Ah, yes, I often heard tell of it, that years ago, there was somebody lost, and they went to the--their residence and everything. It was luck happened they didn't eat the food they had. Of the bread. If they had to eat it they'd be finished.

BR: If they had eaten the fairies' food?

DC: Yeah, they'd never come back to \*\*\* no more. But they refused to eat. They had all kinds of nice stuff. They wouldn't eat it. You'd never think of that, would you?

I don't know whether this last question was about the seeming unlikelihood of the whole idea; I took it as a kind

of musing on its remoteness. It may be that stories in which fairies and humans enter one another's dwellings represent an older strain of tradition which has fallen into disrepair, like so many old houses themselves; perhaps the fairies' present association with the bogs, barrens and woods reflects their recession from everyday reality, a banishment from center to periphery. If fairies and humans were at one time considered to have been more interactive-- although I am inclined to think that in 1889 Mr. James's father talked about what his father saw--then the nature/culture dichotomy I see in fairy tradition might be a relatively recent development. There would be logic in this, for as we become less at the mercy of nature on a day-to-day level, it becomes more distant, receding as the primary consideration in our undertakings (we can go where we want almost any day of the year, for example). The "stranger" theme would work in both time settings, almost literally in the earlier era (the people in the kitchen) and more metaphorically later, as nature grows less familiar.

Roads, gardens and barns, as intermediate areas between the house and the wild, often form the stage for fairy encounters. In Mr. Dan's house, there is a horseshoe over the inside back door, and another on the barn door; I was interested to see that the latter did not bear one of the small painted marks which are found in some area, particularly around Avondale, and which are sometimes



explained as a charm against supernatural interference with the animals:

Often on barn doors in Newfoundland there is painted a white circle. The purpose of this circle is to keep away "the evil eye." Of course "the evil eye" refers to the devil. (FSC68-19/75)

Driving around the bay we often used to see barns with a white circle, about four to six inches in diameter, or a white heart painted in the center of each barn door. A farmer told us that these would bring good luck. I've also heard the explanation that these symbols would keep the fairies away, but from some other source, I can't remember who it was. (FSC64-4/52)

If you go out around Conception Bay, Trinity Bay, Bonavista Bay, you will see many old barns painted bright colors. On most of these barns you will see symbols or designs such as hearts, diamonds, crescent moons, circles, etc. painted in contrasting colors. These designs are painted there to ward off evil spirits which may come and spirit off livestock. (FSC70-22/190)

To protect animals from the fairies or evil spirits, they often painted a heart on the door of the barn. This was supposed to frighten away the fairies who might harm the animals. (FSC74-212/\*\*, Placentia)

Another superstition which was very common to Northern Bay was the painting or drawing of a symbol over the door. The drawing was either a star or a shape of a half-moon. This symbol was to ward off all evil, devils, etc. from entering a house. (77-168/n.p.)

A white spot on the doors of a barn is said to be good luck. The white spot will keep any evil spirits away. The spirits were feared in that they were said to be the cause of a cow not being

able to produce milk. (FSC75-13/\*\*,  
Nipper's Harbour)

Although they appear convincing thus marshalled, these explanations are actually sparse in comparison to the ubiquity of the marks, and I have not heard them myself. One man I asked suggested that the marks were for the light to fall on at night to make the door visible, and Mr. Dan (whose neighbor's modern storage shed bears a heart on its door), said they were for decoration, to "set it off." I was struck once again by the variation in fairy traditions, when Mr. Dan also said that he never heard of the fairies riding the horses at night or tangling their manes or tails, a widely reported form of mischief.<sup>11</sup> (He did say they would "hang the horses up in the road," that is, not let them pass.) A student's grandmother in Carbonear used to find her two horses sweaty and with their manes plaited in the mornings:

One night my grandmother decided to stay  
awake in the barn to see what would  
happen. Around eleven o'clock the

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<sup>11</sup>It was once common in the West Country. A Dorset informant told Begg of a carter telling him, as a boy finding the horses sweaty, "Oh, the fairies have been out again," explaining that the little people had ridden them and knotted their manes ("Witchcraft" 71). Herrick gives "a charm for stables":

Hang up Hooks, and Sheers to scare  
Hence the Hag, that rides the Mare,  
Till they be all over wet,  
With the mire, and the sweat:  
This observ'd, the Manes shall be  
Of your horses, all knot-free. (375)

fairies appeared, plaited the horses' manes, jumped on their backs, and with a cry that could raise the dead, rode through the side of the stable and flew across the yard out of sight. The stable was left intact and grandmother could scarcely believe her eyes. At twelve o'clock the horses returned, but no one was riding them. They made their entrance as they had left, through the side of the stable.... My grandmother blessed the horses, hung a horseshoe outside the barn door, and drew a white circle with a spot of white paint in the middle. Since then there was never any trouble with the animals. (66-16/24-5)

In an interesting discussion on fairy legends' role in defining spatial and temporal boundaries, Peter Narváez uses the concept of "liminal space" for the areas "between known space (purity) and unknown space (danger) where one might experience the benign or malignant" (17), focusing particularly on berry-picking grounds. One could consider barns and stables in this light as well: as semi-domesticated spaces frequented only part of the time, they would be the "liminal" area closest to home, and as such an arena for supernatural traditions which would naturally center on the animals, such their kneeling or speaking at Christmas. Sometimes people go there--often against all advice and with disastrous results--to test some of these ideas. Rhoda Maude Piercey's memoirs of life in Winterton, Trinity Bay, provide an example:

There was an old belief that animals fell to their knees on Old Christmas Eve. One man was said to go to see if there was any truth to it. As he went to the barn door he heard one horse say

to the other, "We have a hard day's work tomorrow, the master is heavy and the road to the graveyard is long and steep." The man died that night.<sup>12</sup>  
(88-032/27)

Some people, like the Carbonear woman described above, try to catch the fairies at their mischief. Wayne Lee, who interviewed a west coast informant as well as the Riverhead natives, wrote:

A common problem in rural Stephenville (before the coming of the [U. S. army] base) was for the horses to be tired and sweaty in the morning after being ridden by the fairies at night. One could tell that the riders were fairies because of the braids that the "little people" had to put in the horses' manes so they would not fall off. Older residents on the west coast tell of devising elaborate traps for catching the fairies which were unfortunately not successful as we have no adequate description to this day. This rather common idea corresponds to a tale told by Riverhead residents regarding a man who nailed up his barn doors to prevent fairies from riding the horses and returned the next morning to find the barn covered in manure in retaliation. (82-206/12)

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<sup>12</sup>Martin Lovelace examines this tradition in "Animals Kneeling at Christmas: A Belief Topic and Its Calendar Context in Newfoundland," a paper delivered at the California Folklore Society in 1986 and forthcoming in Studies in Newfoundland Folklore, ed. Gerald Thomas. A recent instance of the idea influencing behaviour was given to me by Kathy White of CBC radio, after she interviewed me about the fairies in spring 1988. She keeps a horse near Kilbride just outside St. John's, in a stable belonging to the family who once owned most of the land that is now housing tracts. When she told Mr. Lockwood that she was going to bring a stocking for her horse on Christmas Eve, he became upset and insisted she could not go into the barn that night; when she persisted, the whole family joined in dissuading her.

It seems that attempts to "catch" the fairies are not dangerous, but trying to see the animals kneel is; perhaps this is because the barn on old Christmas day (or Christmas day), like the road on All Souls, is given over to the sacred (and the otherworlders) and this temporary ascendancy must be respected; whereas in their molestation of the animals, the fairies are the trespassers. Lee's Stephenville informant was interviewed by other students (in a joint effort) who quote him:

Once upon a time I had a horse when I was living alone at Gallants, about thirty miles from Stephenville. I used to hear a lot of stories about the fairies so I wanted to see if they were for real. Late one evening in the summer in the month of July I went over to my barn and plaited my horse's mane. I then went to my cabin and in the morning I went to the barn and found the horse's mane unplaited. This proved the stories I heard that the fairies came down in the night and unplaited the mane. I did this several times and the same thing happened. (73-107/44-5)

The "plaiting" motif seems to be particularly prominent on the west coast. Gary Butler says that in the French-Newfoundland community of Black Duck Brook on the Port-au-Port peninsula, "lutins" are a particular kind of fairy that tangles horses manes.<sup>13</sup> Ronald LaBelle asked an informant

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<sup>13</sup>An observation made to Martin Lovelace after his (Butler's) thesis examination. Guillaume d'Auvergne, a bishop of Paris who died in 1249, describes spirits in the likeness of girls and women in shining robes, who frequented woods and stables, where they plaited horses' manes. "Foolish old women," and even some men, he says, would leave out food and drink in their houses for these "ladies of the

in la Grand'Terre on the Port au Port about this:

...when I asked her about the "lutins" who used to go into stables and tie the horses' manes into knots, she said she knew about them, except they were called "les fairies" or "le petit monde" where she lived. At first, she only told us that she had heard they went into people's houses and barns. Then her son Laurence, who has a strong belief in fairies, told us that he had seen horses with their manes braided by the fairies. He told us about the way fairies only came on certain years to certain places. Seeing we were interested in what he said about fairies, Mme. Chason then told us of the time Francis Louvet came over to see her husband Joe Carter. He told him that his horse had a braided mane some mornings when he went into the stable. She agreed with her son that fairies were very small creatures. (76-79/11)

The idea of cyclical appearances ("certain years in certain places") is probably derived from French tradition, for I have found only one other example in Newfoundland.<sup>14</sup>

night" (Cohn 214). John Cousins reports in his M.A. thesis (in preparation at MUN) that braiding the horses' manes is "the last bailiwick of the fairies" on Prince Edward Island.

<sup>14</sup>That is from Mr. Smith of Chapter Five, who says that strange things like fairies and UFOs go in twenty-five year cycles.

Paul-Yves Sébillot writes of "les fées":  
 Mon père, dans ses Traditions and Superstitions de la Haute-Bretagne, leur a consacré plus de cinquante pages, il s'est livré à une enquête sur elles à une époque (1880) où nombre de sexagénaires...avaient vu les fées. Une femme de 88 ans les avait même vues dans son enfance. L'opinion générale était qu'elles avaient disparu au commencement du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. (7)

The idea is the basis of the story that some peasants, seeing an automobile for the first time around the turn of

However, we have seen that association of the fairies with certain times of the year is widespread: May 1, all of May, Halloween and All Souls' Day, are fairy times;<sup>15</sup> all foggy days and Fridays are likely fairy days. The usual places to beware are bogs, barrens and woods, and in addition to these, some communities have particular fairy haunts; sometimes these spots are even named for them: "There is a road in Carbonear called the 'Fairy Run'...because people said they saw fairies running on it" (FSC76-112/\*\*); Dunville, Placentia Bay, had a "Fairy Hill where people were supposed to have been taken by the fairies" (80-328/24);

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the century, took it for the return of the fairies (Sébillot 8; Schloesser).

Rhÿs says that an old Welsh man "believed that they will come again to be seen by men and women. For he thought that they had their periods, a belief which I have come across elsewhere, and more especially in Carnarvonshire" (1:277). "An' now if ye mention fairies to the wee ones they think yer full of whigmaleeries--or mebbe worse," an Armagh informant told Paterson in the 1930s, "God, ay, the times are changed. But it's speyed [foretold] the fairies will come again. But it was an oul' harl of bones without gumption or sense who said it, an' mebbe they'll niver" (90). A Donegal man told Evans Wentz that they "were terribly plentiful a hundred years ago, and they'll come back again" (73).

<sup>15</sup>"Fairies move their camps" in May, according to a Colliers informant (81-455/24). Estyn Evans suggests that the idea that the fairies change their dwellings at May day and Halloween comes from the memory of "booleying," the seasonal shifting of summer pastures ("Beliefs" 48). Kirk says that the fairies "remove to other Lodgings at the beginning of each quarter of the year, so traversing till doomsday, being impatient of staying in on place, and finding som ease by sojourning and changeing habitations, Their Chamaeleon-like bodies swim in the air, neer the Earth with bagg and bagadge" (51).

outside Harbour Main harbour is a small inlet called "Red Cap's Hole" (71-121/13); in Brigus, "Miner's Path is also called Fairies' Marsh" (FSC71-103/13); Victoria has a "Fairy Rock," a huge boulder with a crack from which the fairies emerge at night to dance (FSC75-144/\*\* and FSC76-25/\*\*); Colliers also has a "Fairy Rock" where Clara Murphy says two people saw them dancing in May (110); they danced on "the fairy grounds" in Power's Green in Oderin, Placentia Bay (FSC76-367/\*\*); "People believed that there was a Fairies Field on the Lower Coast (Trepassey) because some mornings when they went to this field the wood was platted" (FSC75-179/\*\*); Upper Island Cove has a small by-road called the "Fairy Path," where "some people had claimed they saw the fairies" (80-314/36); people in St. Joseph's, St. Mary's Bay, avoided the "Fairy Ridge" after dark (75-250/32); and a man in Portugal Cove South told me that people often got lost in the "Fairy Brake."

In addition to such "mapped" areas are unmarked pitfalls into which one can blunder as into a trap. An informant from Lumsden in Bonavista Bay told a collector how his father once went to look for berries; he was gone for hours, and his friends found him in a valley "walking around and around in circles in a trance." They shouted and shook him until he snapped out of it:

As soon as he did, he told his friends that he had been in fairyland, and he couldn't get out no matter how hard he tried. He said the fairies had been



holding him captive. As soon as he came out of this trance he recognized where he was and walked out with his friends. (FSC74-121/24)

In Lewin's Cove, another collector's father told how his father once lagged behind as the two of them were returning from the woods. Turning back and calling, he found him "walking around and around":

He called out again, and this time his father saw him and came. His father said it was like he was in a ring and couldn't get out. He would walk around and end up in the same place he started. He said then he often heard people talking about fairy rings but it was the first time he got caught in one. When my father called out to him he was able to walk out of the ring. (FSC74-11/\*\*)

"Fairyland" can be a place or a state of mind, or perhaps both. A three-year-old boy was lost in the woods several days, and died two weeks after he was found; his mother "believed the fairies had taken his mind to fairyland" (75-53/14-15). A ten-year-old boy in Comfort Cove, Notre Dame Bay, "was taken on the fairyland, it was called then, but now is called the pond path" (FSC74-129/\*\*).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>In Wiltshire, said Aubrey:  
Some were led away by Fairies, as was a Hind [farm overseer] riding upon Hakpen with corne, led a dance to the Devises. So was a shepherd of Mr. Brown of Winterburn basset: but never any afterwards enjoy themselves. He sayd the ground opened, and he was brought into strange places under ground where they used musicall Instruments, violls, and Lutes, such (he sayd) as Mr. Thomas did play on. Elias Ashmole Esq, sayes, there was in his time a Piper in

Many strange things happened in the place from which Mr. Dan's father had to "shift" his house, although it was only four years after I interviewed Mr. Dan that I learned from his daughter-in-law that they call it "the fairy patch." It was there that Mr. Dan saw the fairies himself. His sister had just made a new pair of overalls for him, and he had gone to await the return of the rest of the family from berry-picking:

When she had them fitted and put on me, she pulled them down, buttoned them up, she said, "Now you're a sport from the west." And I ran over to the road several times, and they wasn't coming. The back road, over through the field. The last time I went over it was getting late, and the clouds was closing in, getting duckish, and I stood up on the fence, and I sang that: that I'm "a sport from the west." And looked down in the other place across the road, and I saw six big men with gray suits on. They had a stool and all, 'twas sitting on, 'twas three used to stand up. And they had a big book, oh, way bigger than that [gestures to my notebook], and they used to haul that up and one would read and sing, and then would sit down and the others would get up and do the same thing. And I looked at them a while, but I had sense enough to know that it wasn't right. I started to get the cold shivers. And I hopped from the fence, and started to come out through the field. I didn't go over again, though, right? And I come in and told Nelly, my sister, and she said, "Stay over out of

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Lichfield that was entertayned by the Fairies, and had often-times seen them, who said, he knew which houses of the Towne were Fayryground. (Three Works 204)

it, don't go over any more," she said.  
"The fairies would have you."

BR: Uh-huh. Huh. And they were big people?

DC: Oh, big men. Yeah. And now, I can remember that as well as the day I saw it. Can show you the place it was at, and everything.

Another time, someone (I think his brother's wife) was cutting hay there:

She had the hay spread out, tossed down on the field. She came over here to get a lunch. And she was just leaving when she went out to the door. And what do you think she saw? The hay was passing over here. All in a cloud. Right up, away up, like as far as that--the helicopter goes.... And I went down over--did you ever hear tell of Lee's Pond? Where the Lee's Pond mountain is at. And the hay went along just as high as if it were a plane, went aback of the hills, and that's the last sight she saw of it. When she went over the meadow was cleaned. 'Twas just a bit of straws left around here and there...fairy squall, they used to call them here.

Mr. Dan told these stories with animation, jumping up and going through the motions of holding a book for the first one; and definitely using the first person--"I went down over"--in the second narrative, before switching back to the third person. On the day we recorded this, I had had coffee with Mr. Dan's daughter-in-law Florence, who lives next door, while I was waiting for him to return from the cemetery where he and some others had gone to clean up. Ms. Costello said that she had never heard of the fairies while growing up in Holyrood, that Mr. Dan's stories were the

first she had heard; she emphasized his and "the old peoples'" complete belief in them.

Almost four years later, in April 1989, I visited Mr. Dan to take some photographs, and when we were done he took me to see Ms. Costello, who offered me coffee once again while Mr. Dan returned to his chores. Ms. Costello said that not long ago her husband was working in "the fairy patch" when a swirling wind came along, taking rocks and dirt high in the air. He was amazed, and came home and told everyone about it; he had always heard of the "fairy squall," but had never seen one. Ms. Costello also said that last summer Mr. Dan's sister, the one who had made his overalls in the story and who is now in her nineties and living in New Jersey, visited; I should have heard the fairy stories then, she said. One, according to Ms. Costello's sixteen-year old son, was about one of their sisters being carried off by a whirlwind until they pulled her down with a rake. I was delighted to hear this, for until then I had never been sure whether the idea of being "taken" by a wind actually meant that a person might be physically carried away by it. Mr. Joe said that a fairy wind "used to take all the dust and all the grass and everything with it; if you was in their way, you'd go too." But this could mean simply that the person would not be right afterward, as could this account from Conception Harbour:

My mother claims that one day during a  
berry-picking expedition in which my

father and her took all the family berry-picking, one of the members of my family narrowly escaped being taken by the fairies. The child wandered off beneath the hill to pick alone. Suddenly a great gust of wind shook the trees that surrounded the child and she cried out in fright. My father, racing down the hill, flung his bucket of berries into the path of the wind and shouted, "Take this, in the name of God, and leave us alone!" The trees stopped swaying and my father took the children and quickly returned home, where they all knelt in prayer to thank God. Needless to say, the family never returned to that spot. Mother says, "We must have been picking on some old path that the fairies used." (FSC73-153/27)

Here the linkage of the wind and a path highlights their commonality as a horizontal flow over the earth. Their strongest similarity is perhaps historical, for the Newfoundland fairy wind has not retained the ancient connection with the dead in the furious host or sluagh, the band of restless souls riding the night skies (with, perhaps, an exception in the "hellhorses" of Chapter Two).

There are certain complementary contrasts between the fairy wind and fairy path. The wind is a sudden phenomenon, often recognized by its occurring on an otherwise calm day, while the relentless presence of the path is its essential feature. "Wind" and "path" encounters might be described as acute versus chronic contacts, with corresponding narrative structures and protective practices. "Path" narratives usually describe a number of incidents, culminating over time in house-moving or an exorcism ritual. In "wind"

narratives, the critical incident is a single episode (although there may be an aftermath in illness or derangement). Being abrupt and unforeseeable, suspect winds demand instant action, and so there are verbal formulas and magical acts for ready response:

Grandmother used to always tell us, they used to take the big pooks of hay. You'd see the big pooks of hay rise up in the sky and land right down in another fella's garden. Well, whatever you had in your hand, you'd throw it to them and say, "Bring back my hay," and they'd bring it right back to you. (74-150/11, Colliers)

Aly O'Brien said that "fairy whirlwinds" at harvest time could carry cocks of oats a hundred yards into the air; on sighting a small whirlwind, one would throw a wisp of straw after it "to placate the fairies" (74-118/5). This practice is well attested in Irish tradition, as are flying haystacks; one J. D. D. gives a Wexford narrative in which the "good people" transport a bundle of hay across a river to Waterford. For an English parallel we are again indebted to Aubrey, who records in The Natural History of Wiltshire:

Anno 1660, I being then at dinner with Mr. Stokes at Titherton, news was brought in to us that a whirlwinde had carried some of the hay-cocks over high elmes by the house: which bringes to my mind a story that is credibly related of one Mr. J. Parsons, a kinsman of ours, who, being a little child, was sett on a hay-cock, and a whirlewind took him up with half the hay-cock and carried him over high elmes, and layd him down safe, without any hurt, in the next ground.  
(16)

Aubrey would have enjoyed the story recorded just last summer (1989) from eighty-year-old Jack McGrath:

Geez, I saw a woman going in a pook of hay, Bridge Hearn in Colliers. Uh, meself and Ann, me sister Ann, went in for a load of dry boughs--wanted them to make a flake to dry caplin on--and coming down the hill, we're coming right around the garden, it was handy out to the road then, and--the end of Whelan's road--and there was a lot of pooks of hay made up in the meadow. And she was over raking up hay. And all of a sudden this squall of wind come and rolled all the pooks together, took them all in one, \*\*. So I come home to tell Mother, I said, "Bridge Hearn's gone in a pile of hay." "Ah, nonsense." Sure that night, sure enough, Aunt Mary come down, and sure enough she was looking for Bridge Hearn everywhere. Couldn't find her. Well, geez, they got the priest in and everything, and the next day they found her in to the side of Three Island Pond knitting stockings. So where'd she get the needles, where'd she get the wool to knit a stocking? And she was seven years in bed, then, never spoke after that. And so what was that? Geez, it had to be fairies. What was it? If a squall of wind was hard enough to take you, it wouldn't give you a set of knitting needles and a ball of yarn. \*\*\*\*\*. No, my son, as sure as you are there, there's fairies. Because I saw Bridge Hearn twirling up in the hay and gone. Geez, she was gone three or four days before they found her, and she was in to the side of Three Island Pond, sat down knitting a stocking. She said there was a crowd of horses got around her. Chasing her. And she said there was a woman there with her hands up getting them away from her. [long pause] Oh yes, there was fairies, I want to tell you that.... Where'd she get the needles, and where's she get the wool? She had a hay prong in her hand when I saw her. I'm sure the hay prong never turned into a set of knitting

needles and a ball of yarn. Yes, as sure as Christ made you, there's fairies.<sup>17</sup>

The transformation of homely objects is one way in which fairy narratives achieve transcendence of everyday life even as they remain grounded in it. A haystack becomes an aircraft, knitting needles are freighted with ominous significance. Mr. McGrath's insistence on the unnatural knitting needles is also one of those subtle cues, or clues, that seem strange until recognized as a recurrent motif in fairy narrative (well, they are still strange--that is their point--but they are not as idiosyncratic as they sound on first hearing). There is a motif, mentioned in Chapter Five, of the fairies "skivering berries up on knitting needles"; also discussed in that chapter is the association of needles with the blast, but a few examples here might be useful. In Lawn, Placentia Bay, an informant's father was troutng at dusk when "a shower or something went over him" and he went home with a pain in his side. Upon poulticing,

a darn needle with wistard [darning needle with worsted] came out of it. And they said that's what the good people--fairies threw it at him. Because the fairies didn't want him there that hour in the evening, you know, that's what happened. But that's really true, they says that it's true about them fairies. (76-350/20)

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<sup>17</sup>Unaccessioned tape submitted to Marie-Annick Desplanques for Folklore 2000, Summer 1989. My transcription.



Like the teacup in "Night Kitchen," an innocent implement of everyday life becomes a noxious dart. A more common blast missile is straw. The emphatic Mr. McGrath provides an example:

But there's one thing I believe in, that's fairies. They WAS fairies. My mother was going picking marshberries one time. She got up on \*\* to go pick marshberries, and she was sat down eating her breakfast...and when I come in through the door--"My God, she said, "\*\*\* pain in the leg." "Oh yeah, you got a pain in your leg it's not from picking marshberries." "No, she says, "I am not." And before noontime she was in bed. And she was in bed seven or eight days. And all of a sudden the leg got sore, right on the side of the leg. And Dr. Jones from Avondale come over to her. And he took a straw of grass right out of her leg, \*\*\* straw of grass, and geez, where'd the straw of grass come from in the leg? I'm sure it never grew in there.... It was inside the sore, when the sore broke, that come out on the plaster, a straw of grass. And geez, it was that length. And it was all coiled up. So where did it come from in the sore? You know there's a lot of things happened, people just didn't stop to realize what it was, what was happening. Some thought it was simple, and more thought it was nothing. But there's a lot of things happen in this world and it wasn't just real, I'll tell you that.

Needles and haystacks, and things common as grass are the stuff of metaphor and fairy lore ("thick as grass," people sometimes say of the fairies).<sup>18</sup> Making hay, once an

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<sup>18</sup>An expression common in Ireland as well: see Evans Wentz for an example (32, 40).

important outdoor job, is, like berry-picking or hunting, a natural focus for fairy narrative; the fairies' connection with wind make it even more inevitable. A St. Mary's Bay woman noted the fading element of personification when she told the collector "that while she would be out during the summer months making hay a 'gang of fairies' would come and take the stack of hay and spread it all over the meadow," but now "people in around home do not refer to it as such but they call it a whirlwind" (FSC74-102/\*\*). Predictably, the fairies might equally do the opposite; an Argentinia collector said:

The man next door to me home told me of an experience his uncle had [c. 1921]. He was tossing his hay one evening down in Argentinia. He heard some funny noises and when he looked around he saw about fifty little men dancing around a pile of hay. They were about six inches tall, dressed in red suits with a black belt around it. The language was a foreign one. He ran to get his wife to show her the fairies and when they came back the fairies were gone, but his hay was dry and stacked in piles. Jim Smith, my informant, says the story is true. (FSC74-123/\*\*)

Even tinier fairies lug potatoes, ant-like, in a Bonavista narrative. The collector says:

There is an old man at home who told about fairies that appeared on the windows and streets when his mother was young. His mother told him about one of her relatives who came upon some fairies one night as he was walking along with a bag of potatoes. They appeared on his back on the bag of potatoes and he soon noticed that the bag was getting lighter. When they saw him looking at

them, the fairies dropped the bag and ran. He said it took a couple dozen fairies to carry one potato. They were only about three inches long and looked just like a man. When this happened to him the man was about fifty years old so naturally everyone believed him. In fact this old man who told the story said that both he and his wife believe that there are fairies. (FSC74-98/\*\*)

In Chapter Two I mentioned that petty domestic aid seems particularly English, citing as an example a Hampshire tale of fairies removing hay from a barn straw by straw through the keyhole; when one says to another in a small voice, "I weat, you weat?" the farmer who has been watching leaps out of hiding, shouting, "the devil sweat ye. Let me get among ye," whereupon they fly away in fright (Keightley 305-6). The swarming fairies of the Bonavista narrative, carting off potatoes until spotted, are reminiscent of this tale, as are the little men dancing in the hay in Argentinia, making "funny noises" and speaking in a "foreign" language. The fairies' speech is the central feature of the English narrative type, recorded mostly from the West Country, in which a farmer spies on fairies (or pixies) threshing, messing up, or thieving his corn, and hears them saying variously to one another: "I twit, you twit" (Crossing 59); "See how I sweat! See how I sweat!" (Charlotte Latham 28-9); "How I do tweat!" (Avon Lea); "I twate" (Briggs Folk Tales 1:186); "Tweat you? I tweat?" (Northcote 214); "I tweat. You tweat. Tweat I too" (Northcote 214). "I tweat!

You tweek?" (Hazlitt 1:147); "How I do tweek." Farmer: "So thee do tweek, do'ee? Well then, I do tweek and double tweek, looky zee" (Tongue Somerset 118; Whistler 49). Sometimes the farmer drives the fairies away with a gift of clothing, and in one version of this, they exclaim, "New toat, new waist-toat, new breeches; you proud, I proud; I shan't work any more!" (Crossing 66). The reduplicative lispings typify the childlike quality often seen in the fairies, and the farmer reacts much as an exasperated parent might.

From this motif, we can see that in a text from Old Perlican, Trinity Bay, the fairies' words clearly indicate their national origin:

There was one man, Uncle Tommy Beckett, he used to have to tie up a bit of hard bread in his shirttail to keep the fairies away from him. I heard Mother say that when he was across the bay the fairies would be thick as the grass, pitched on the trees, but if he had the hard bread, he was okay. The fairies used to have a favorite saying, too, for they always said, "I twit, you twit, I see twitweg" to one another and to other people. Apparently all fairies were thought to be sly, harmful little creatures to be reckoned with, and if you were set upon without the hard bread it was very dangerous. (72-25/16)

The "I-you" construction also appears in a text from Trinity or Bonavista Bay (the collector is unclear as to the location):

Similar to the jackie-de-lantern is the fairies. These are little people...who are dressed in red and also tow people

"away." They are said to offer a cup, saying, "I drink, you drink," whereupon, if you do, you too will become a fairy.<sup>19</sup> (77-238/2)

Direct West Country provenance is evident in a text from Newman's Cove, Bonavista Bay, where, the collector writes, "the little people who inhabited the woods surrounding the coves were termed co-pixies and had the appearance of young boys." It is not clear whether he is quoting an informant or writing from his own memory, but he says:

I remember one night late in August a woman named Lizzie went astray in the woods. It was a bad night of south wind and rain. It blew a hurricane and is known to this day as Lizzie's Gale. Several men had also got trapped in the storm. Lizzie and the others all had the same story of how they had followed these so-called miniature children. Lizzie suffered both physically and mentally from her experience for when found her clothes were in shreds and she was suffering from the cold.... George Baker had a similar thing happen to him when he spent all day berry-picking with his head down. When he lifted his head everything had turned around. The hills and ponds were in reverse. He thought he was too good a man to get lost so he started to walk out, as he thought. He met John Baker who told him he was going in instead of

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<sup>19</sup>Giraldus Cambrensis gives the story of Elidorus, who as a boy was able to visit fairyland for a period of time, and reported that the fairies would say "Ydor Ydorum" to mean "bring water" and "halgein ydorum" to mean "bring salt" (391-92). According to Giraldus and other commentators, this was supposed to resemble Greek; I find the double construction (with the "I-you" sound) and its association with drink most interesting as a possible example of a remarkably persistent "nonsense" motif.

out so he sat down for awhile, closed his eyes and rested and when he opened them again everything was in its proper place. That same evening Uncle Arthur Abbott got lost. George Baker felt that maybe it had happened in the same place he had experienced the strange things. They found Uncle Arthur around the same place, wandering around, and he said that two young boys had been ahead leading him and beckoning him on and saying, "Come on, this is the way, this is the way." People felt this was the work of the co-pixies again and if George had not met John Baker, who knew the right way, he would have experienced the same thing as Uncle Arthur. (77-144/50-7)

Keightley cites Brand for "cole-pexy" in Dorset, and an 1825 reference to the "colt-pixy" of Hampshire, "a supposed spirit or fairy, which in the shape of a horse wickers, i.e. neighs, and misleads horses into bog, etc." (305). Ruth Tongue gives the south Somerset phrase "cull pixying" for gathering the apples left after harvest, that is, gathering what was left for the fairies (Somerset 119); Gillian Edwards gives "colt-pixy" defined as a verb by Brewer, "to take what belongs to the pixies," and cites Halliwell on the Devon expression "colt-pixy" for beating down apples too high to be reached; she says "colt" is an "old cant term meaning to cheat," hence, cheating the pixies (158). In the idea of the taking of the fairies' due, we see the same mechanism that underlies the throwing of straw or berries to the wind: that the fairies can be pacified with a token portion or gesture. One informant made this clear when he

said that around North River, Conception Bay, people had found "plates of money and then lost it all to the fairies. They might have kept it, he said, had the fairies been offered even a dime of it" (70-20/45).

Because they are specific, small linguistic clues like "I twit, you twit," and "co-pixies" offer more conclusive evidence about antecedents than comparison on a larger scale, since fairy lore cannot always be neatly divided into "Irish," "English," "Scottish," and so on, and the quantity and quality of sources from different areas is uneven in any case. I suspect, for example, that carrying bread comes from old West Country custom, but I base this theory solely on the verses by Herrick and Clobery quoted in Chapter One, in which bread is explicitly said to be carried on the person as a preventative against being led astray or "affrighted." In fact, I suspect that the whole business of going astray is fundamentally more "English" than "Irish," for in southwest England it seems to be the principal kind of fairy experience, recorded even recently (Briggs Tradition 138-39), whereas in Ireland it seems to be a relatively minor aspect of fairy tradition. Nor does bread figure in Irish narrative as it does in Newfoundland, as in a story Mr. Joe told about a man working in his garden one evening:

He was sat down boiling his kettle. It was two women come up, dressed in red, he said, red dresses on them and white flyers on them, and some kind of dark

stuff on their head. And he come up and sat down alongside of them. So he never--he wasn't afraid or anything, you know, he never bothered, and after a time, he took out a slice of bread and he broke it in two, reached a piece to each of them. They disappeared right away. They went right on [off?], he said.

The apparent absence from narrative, however, may be the result of the tendency to summarize custom in statement form rather than retailing an incident showing its enactment. Estyn Evans does say that in Mourne County food, including oat bread, was carried in the mountains against the "hungry grass," a supernatural affliction that causes sudden intense hunger, weakness, and confusion (204).<sup>20</sup> O'Sullivan does not include bread in his list of protective talismans (Handbook 462); rather he lists oatmeal, and while the distinction between dietary staples is minor, it is perhaps more telling that there are no indications of oats or anything else being carried habitually, that is, by persons not in vulnerable circumstances. Oatmeal and salt were sometimes sprinkled on children on certain days (Halloween) or on journeys (Bell 75-77; Foster 30, 258), and there are closely related traditions, such as carrying bread and

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<sup>20</sup>Also called the "stray sod," and "lone sod." Diarmuid MacManus devotes Chapter Eight of his Irish Earth Folk to it, and Lady Wilde describes "fairy grass," which if stepped on gives an irresistible urge to travel without stopping, and the fear-gortha or "hungry-stricken sod," which creates hunger that causes death if not instantly satisfied (Legends 183).



cheese on the way to a child's baptism, to be offered to anyone met on the way.<sup>21</sup> Lady Wilde said that a large batch of bread was baked when a death was expected, so that evil spirits would be too busy eating it to molest the departing soul (Legends 213). In Newfoundland, bread was recommended at all times for infants out of doors, and for all people going in the woods, and specific occasions such as going to baptism have been remarked by only a few collectors; one said that in St. Joseph's (St. Mary's Bay), "many people would never take their babies to the church to be baptised without a slice of bread in their pocket to keep the fairies away" (75-250/32), and another that around St. Mary's Bay and Placentia Bay, the bread put in infants' clothes on the way to a baptism was called "company-bread," and the idea was that the fairies would take the bread and not the child (FSC64-5/221).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Wood-Martin says the custom existed "throughout Ireland" (39). These offerings often had a special name: Killip says that on the Isle of Man, as in Scotland, it was "blithe meat" or "blithe bread" (68); Courtney says the bread or cake given to the first person met on the way to a christening (and sometimes a wedding) was called "Kimby" in parts of Cornwall, that a nurse called it the "child's fuggan" (flat cake) and another informant called it the "christening crib," saying it was intended to ward off the evil eye and turn away envy (157-58). McPerson says that the birth celebration in which all visitors had to partake of bread was called "merry meht" (35).

<sup>22</sup>The Dictionary of Newfoundland English cites England's Vikings of the Ice (1924) for "company bread" as "bread carried when alone to ward off the fairies" (Story et al 111).

In Highland Scotland, J. G. Campbell notes, oatmeal might be carried in the pocket by persons going on a journey after nightfall, to keep the fairies away (47); listing protection practices for the newborn, he says that midwives would leave a cake of oatmeal by the bed (38). Kirk says that "the Tramontaines [Scotch-Irish] to this day, put bread, the Bible, or a piece of iron, in womens bed when travelling [i.e. travailling], to save them from being thus stolen" (54). For Northeast Scotland, J. M. McPherson mentions bread, the bible, and cheese under the pillow at childbirth, and cites Walter Gregor that at childbirth, "among the fishing population, a fir candle or a basket containing bread and cheese was placed on the bed to keep the fairies at a distance." "The bread and cheese," McPherson adds, "seem the usual offering to appease the fairies and recur again and again in connection with domestic rites of propitiation of aversion" (110). The Irish and Scottish references to critical times (baptism, childbirth) contrast with the more routine use suggested by Herrick's "Charme" of a crust of bread under children's pillows to keep "hags" away, and by one Mrs. Whitcombe who wrote in 1874 that in Devon, "there are the wicked elves, who change the babies in their cradles, and to prevent this mishap many a mother in former days placed a crust of bread under the cradle pillow" (45).

As in the Irish material, the deployment of bread does not seem to play much of a role in Scottish narrative. A possible exception is a legend given by A. A. MacGregor in which a man steals a cup from the fairies, who complain to one another (otherwise inexplicably) as they chase him, "Not so swift would be Luran, but for the hardness of his bread." The protective power of salt may be indicated here as well, for it is not bread which saves Luran, but the advice of one of the pursuers to head for the sea, "since neither ghost nor elf can penetrate seaward beyond the contour reached by the highest tide" (Peat Fire 9-10). Bottrell tells of a Cornish band of smugglers set upon by red-capped small people ("spriggans" and "bucca-boos") when one of the smugglers interrupted their revels; the smugglers escape in their boats "because none of the fairy tribe dare touch salt water" (Briggs Dictionary 132-34). (Luran was, however, eventually spirited away during a boat journey.)<sup>23</sup>

Whatever its derivation, the reason for the prominence of carrying bread in Newfoundland is clear: the likelihood and dangers of going astray are much greater here than in the old world. Mr. Dan told about his cousin who disappeared when he went to his rabbit snares on the last day of October: "they said that was really a bad day to go, real fairy time." The searchers finally gave up when the

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<sup>23</sup>J. G. Campbell gives several versions of "Luran," with equally enigmatic references to bread (56).

snow came, and his body was found the next spring by trappers who were forced by high water to cross the river in an out-of-the-way spot. Although he knew the woods intimately, it seems he had somehow crossed the Salmonier Line without even knowing it. (Moore had this story from his father, who said it happened in 1938 and that "Jim Costello was a real hunter and knew the woods well.")

It is seldom stated why or how bread affords protection. Some say that it works as a sop or a substitute; some that it was for captured persons to eat so that they would not have to eat fairy food. Religious symbolism offers another explanation: one student said that her mother called bread "blessed and holy bread" (FSC80-282/\*\*), and another, citing its use against "fairies and other creatures," said that "the bread was supposed to be blessed in that it resembled the sacred Host" (FSC80-295/\*\*).<sup>24</sup> One student wrote:

Bread in a number of Newfoundland families had great religious significance. A housewife when making the bread would make a cross in the rising dough, then make the sign of the cross over the bread. On Good Friday a small loaf was made and this was kept until someone became sick, when a small piece was fed to the patient. Often I have heard one of the family say when someone was wasting a piece of bread, "That's blessed bread you're mauling there." The people in the household

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<sup>24</sup>Whitcombe mentions that in Devon, Eucharist bread would be taken home from church by communicants "to preserve the house from all evil" (45-46).

would be worried about me and consider me ignorant unless I broke a slice of bread in two rather than cut it.<sup>25</sup>  
(FSC67-3/57)

Bread provided a talisman of domesticity (and culture) against the perils of the wilderness. Its association with everything human is encapsulated in the metaphor for pregnancy, "bread in the basket" (FSC80-289/\*\*), and its protective essence lies--like all charms for everyday life--not in some rare or singular virtue, but in its very mundaneness. In a magic analogous to the fairies' transformations of everyday artifacts, bread, salt, and coins are invested with supernatural strength.

The salt in bread probably contributed to its prophylactic properties, and salt was used on its own as a protective and saining agent.<sup>26</sup> Virginia Dillon gives a

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<sup>25</sup>Gregor observes that in Scotland "old people looked with much reverence on 'bread,' as well as meal. To abuse either one was regarded as profane" ("Bread" 196).

<sup>26</sup>In his essay on "The Symbolic Significance of Salt," Ernest Jones discusses the sexual significance of salt, bread, and money as used in their various combinations for protection against evil. To summarize his argument crudely, salt=semen=urine=the essence of humanity. If the lines of his argument were applied to fairy tradition, perhaps the fairies could be said to represent sterility and impotence, and are banished with "vital" substances. Such an equation would be supported by David Buchan's delineation of the strain of "sterile negation" in the interaction between humans and otherworlders in wit-combat ballads (390). It is interesting, too, to consider the related "wet" and "dry" symbolism Alan Dundes finds in evil eye beliefs (life=liquid, death=drying) in relation to the fairies: people taken by the fairies are often prematurely old, shriveled and withered ("scriveled up"), that is, dried up. Not only major motifs--throwing water, leaving water out for the souls--but minor motifs gain significance in this light:

detailed description of its use in Mobile, on the Southern

Shore:

When a person has seen fairies, heard or seen a ghost, or has had a supernatural experience of any kind, he is given salt and water. The salt is stirred into the water and the Sign of the Cross is made by both the "victim" and the person administering. Three drops of the salt water must then be taken... The salt and water was usually mixed in a cup and after the three drops had been taken, the rest would be thrown into the fire in three parts, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. I have never actually heard anyone say why this is done but it seems to be considered as protection against some evil which might otherwise result from the experience. I have often seen my mother give this salt and water and I have taken it myself several times although I do not remember exactly why.

She adds that it was not necessary to have seen or heard anything "not right," but merely to have been in a "place where there were fairies" after dark. She also mentions her grandfather, who came to live with her family after a stroke:

He had had a stroke and his mind was not quite right. He came from Witless Bay,

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for example, Dundes's suggestion that toasts ("drinking healths") really mean, "I drink, but not at your expense. I am replenishing my liquid supply, but I wish no diminution in yours" (267-28) is intriguing with regard to the fairies' invitation quoted above, "I drink, you drink." Their claim to sweat ("I twear") can be seen as a pathetic pretension to (salty) humanity. One would expect, incidentally, not only in accordance with this code but simply from its prominence in Irish tradition, that spitting would be an important aversion technique. I have not found a single report in MUNFLA, but perhaps informants considered it too rude to mention, or maybe no one asked.

two miles away, and he didn't like to be in Mobile. He was always talking about going home. He'd say to my mother, "Give my some salt, I'm going traveling." My mother says that "the old timers wouldn't go anywhere without a bit of bread and salt." (FSC64-1/81-82)

Several of Moore's informants recalled an Uncle Peter Moore, who had died forty years before, saying, "There's no salt in the fairies' grub." Mr. James explained to Moore, "They never can eat salt; just as you never eat their saltless food, they never eat human food with salt in it" (25). This explanation raises some interesting if insoluble questions about the fairy traditions of the past and present. Does it suggest that the customs of the past were part of a fully articulated belief "system," in which they had an overt rationale? The concept of the separable soul, for example, was quite explicit in the past, according to Moore's father, who recalled that when he was a young man,

the older men often spoke about the spirit in the body. Mr. Johnny Nolan said that the spirit is in the body like a man in prison. When the body is asleep at night, the soul leaves it to roam in freedom until morning. This is why you should never awaken a sleeping person quickly in the middle of the night, for the soul may be far away from the body and not be able to get back. The result is death for the awakened person. (FSC-71-42/26)

It is interesting that both this "prison" analogy and the fairies' "saltless grub" were recalled in connection with a certain individual. Could this suggest that the

explicitness was unusual and therefore memorable? Or were these people simply more articulate or better versed on generally shared concepts? I have suggested that most information about the supernatural is found in narrative rather than abstract statements or discussion, and I have found that people who fluently relate memorates or legends have not necessarily given much attention to the underlying premises; but this is not to say that native exegesis does not, or did not, exist. A Southern Shore informant, for example, was eloquent on the lost meaning of certain customs:

Some of the things old people used to do used to have meanings but you don't understand all of them. For instance, going to the well. I minds my grandma making us take a stick with us if we were going after sunset. But she'd make in [sic] the fire first and get a stick and put it in the stove. She'd put the stick there and hold it. Now the stick would catch fire. Grandma, she'd just blow off the blaze and she'd say, "Come on now, and go to the well." If you had to go to the well after sunset you had to take that stick. Yes sir, Grandma never let us go unless we bring it too. I suppose, Aubrey, blessed fire, you take Holy Week, the fire is blessed and you got to get a little bit of blessed fire and bring it home and put it in your stove. So it all leads up to something about the fire, see, the fire is blessed.

Collector: But why would you have to take the stick with you?

Mr. C: You know one needs protection. That's what it's for. Yes, it was for protection. One time if you walked in a meadow in the night time, you could get



what you called a blast. You know, if you walked in a meadow in the night time, a child could get a sudden pain in your arm or leg or you might be crippled for life after that, see. That was why the old people used to bring the fire.

Collector: Do you know of anyone who got the blast, Mr. C?

Mr. C: Well, I don't know how well to believe this, but Grandma told us a story about a young lad who got the blast. He was coming home one night and dark was here. It was dark you know and he was going all he could to get home. And then it happened. Yes, the blast hit him. He took a pain. It was a bad one, too, so Grandma says, right here (touches upper arm). He was only laid up for a few days, you know, he wasn't crippled for life or nothing. But you can be. Yes, that blast can be mighty awful.

Then if you washed your hair, I minds this well enough, if you washed your hair after night, the pan of water had to be put under the bench and salt put in. You had to put salt in it and leave it be until morning. I minds poor Tom Hersey, Lord have mercy on h<sup>i</sup>m, he'd dead now. He threw out a pan of water through the door in the night and he come back, and you see he was going over and getting a tumbler and he says to his wife, "Where's the salt to, Mary, where's the salt to? They're after me, they'll catch me out there," he says. "I'll banish them now, I'm gonna banish them. Hold on now." He gets the salt and water and puts in it three drops, "In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost," he says. "Now," he says, "I'll throw it out now and all the harm that goes with it."

Collector: What was he trying to banish, Mr. C? Was it fairies?

Mr. C: No, no, child, not them. It was those bad spirits. You had to put salt in the water cause that would keep them off and they'd do no harm. Poor Tom

must've forgot what he was doing and threw the water out after night. Now he knew some bad would come. He had to fix that, you know, and salt could do it. Yes, salt is the only thing to banish those spirits. It wasn't fairies, bread is what you need to banish them. (76-82/90-97)

This informant, who himself encountered the devil in the form of a dog, a pig, and an amorphous black shape ("before the cars came, shocking queer things went ahead") uses a term for the fairies derived from Gaelic:

Mr. C: Now let's see, what will I tell you about today? I didn't say nothing about the dalladadas, did I?

Collector: What are the dalladadas?

Mr. C: Why, they're fairies. Little people, you know... This fella was going ducking, going in through the woods. And when he came to this meadow, it was an open meadow, he looked and about twenty-five of them came. Fairies or dalladadas came. They were little small men and they had tossle caps on. But they didn't do no harm. They didn't do no harm just went right off the path. This fella didn't know where they went. He didn't see them after. Fairies can run so fast, you know, they runs so fast that you don't know where they went. (77-78)

In English as We Speak it in Ireland, P. W. Joyce give "dallag" as "any kind of covering to blindfold the eyes," and "dallapookeen" as "blindman's bluff," both from the Irish "dall," blind, and "dalla," blinding (245).<sup>27</sup> The

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<sup>27</sup>I have not encountered the term "dalladadas" in the English language Irish material on fairies. Yeats (Fairy Tales 75, 99) and Croker (2:98) give "dallahan" and "dullahan" as a "headless phantom." There might also be a

small tricky fairies described above move too quickly for the eye to follow, and Mr. C. gives several other incidents in which they pop about in various forms, including little black men. Some women were berry-picking when the ground began to shake:

They looked up in the very place where they picked the berries in the first part of the day, around the rock. And here they were, about the height of that table, all shapes and sizes, and there was clay and rocks going up everywhere and all these little people were playing around and jumping around. Annie says, "Them are fairies," she says, "take off our coats and let's turn them inside out, throw some bread on the ground"... When they were coming out the path there was a little green tree on each side of the path. One of them said "Look," and they see a little black man and then on the other side there was another little fella. When they got out on the hill they heard a noise. It was a noise like a horse and cart coming up over the hill. They sat down to eat some bread while they was waiting for the horse to come along...and that horse and carriage never came over the hill. Then they started to come on home.

Collector: What do you think happened to the horse and carriage?

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linguistic connection with the "dubh dael" or "dara dael," a black insect of reputed "demonic character" (Cavanagh). (Mr. C. also uses the Irish term "bibe.")

Mr. C: Why, there was none. It was the dalladadas the whole time.<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps their eating bread prevented an appearance of the horse and cart, although Mr. C. makes its illusory nature clear. Aural manifestations are more common than sightings; Mr. Dan related his father's experience with such tricks:

We was in the country, logging in the winter. My father was smart then, he knowed every place we was through. He used to have the kettle boiled, and I used to come out with a load of logs. And when I'd go in handy to the place we was at, I used to see the smoke, fire place, they'd have the Kettle boiled and ready for lunch, you know. And this day I went in, 'twas no smoke. And I said, "That's strange," I was outside of the place then, on another lake, gully we calls it, [with] the old horse and sleds. Went on up in the path, and never heard a [creak?]. No fire started or nothing. \*\*\* astray. And I tied on the horse and gave her something to eat, and went up over the ridge, and hauled out, and hauled out, and begar, after awhile I met him coming. He didn't know where he was to. The logs he had cut, was after cutting himself, used to come and pass by him, and say, "Some man's got a nice lot of logs cut there." And he had a scarf on, a woolen scarf, he took that off, and he never saw it after. He laid it down on the thing where he was cutting logs. He used to have that on for going in the morning, the frost and stuff, and put it on in the evening coming home when we'd be

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<sup>28</sup>There is an account of this incident in another collection from one of the women involved (72- 70:C1374); it agrees essentially with this one, although she does not use the term "dalladadas."

finished, and the topcoat. He never saw the scarf after.

A whole way of life is crystallized in this narrative. The frosty mornings, the smoke from the fire, the lunches that make the woods seem as familiar as a kitchen: the story of one freakish break in the routine captures a hundred ordinary winter mornings in the woods.

When I asked Mr. Dan if he'd ever heard that the fairies would take or change a child, Mr. Dan told a story he'd heard from the same sister who had sewn his overalls. She had heard it, "time and again," from a Marysvale woman while living in Sydney, Nova Scotia. This woman said she was baking bread, and sent her little boy to the back of the house for some wood chips to light the fire:

And he was so long gone she got tired waiting and she went to meet him. And hollered out to him, and when she went out around the house and the pathway, she met a little old worn man coming, right down low to the ground, and he with a pan of chips in his hand. And he handed her the pan. She didn't know what to say. And he came in, and boy, she said, they had him in bed for years sick, before he died, almighty God took him. This little old worn queer person, she said. It was no way handy to the child went out for the chips...And boy, she had to take and put up with it til he died.

BR: Was that long after?

DC: Yes, I don't know was it two or three years. Yeah, it was in bed, and she doing for it and tending on him, and washing him, changing him, just like the child.

BR: Can a person become a fairy themselves, do you know?

DC: Ah, yes.

BR: How does that happen?

DC: The child, now become a fairy.

BR: So they had it with them?

DC: Yeah, \*\*\*\* changed him. Took the child, see, and sent this old person.

It is curious that in a community apparently without a strong changeling tradition, the fairies, when seen, have a notable female bent. If one were given to the "composite" approach one might say that they didn't need to steal children since, being women, they could have their own. Indeed this notion would be supported by a story told by Mrs. Flynn of Avondale, given by one collector as follows:

One day when Mrs. Flynn's mother was walking across the barrens to bring dinner to her husband (who worked on the railroad line) she stopped to pick a few strawberries.... Anyhow, when she looked up she saw the fairies with their babies. They were running across the barren. The fairies were dressed in beautiful clothes which had many bright colors. Mrs. Flynn's mother was very frightened but since she had her rosary beads with her she started to say it and the fairies left. The expression she used when she retold the story was, "I said to myself, the fairies won't get me this time."

Mrs. Flynn told me that all the family believed that her mother had been bending too long and that when she looked up suddenly she was actually seeing something through blurred vision--not really fairies. However, Mrs. Flynn said that to her dying day [around 1964 at the age of ninety] her mother

always insisted that she had seen the fairies and actually had saved herself from them. (FSC71-9/28)

Tom Moore also had this story from Mrs. Flynn, who said that her mother, Mary Hicks, saw "young women in flowing gowns." When I visited Mrs. Flynn on Moore's introduction, she did not seem very interested in the subject; it was "all imagination," she told me, or perhaps high blood pressure. She said people used to tell a lot of fairy stories, but the only one she remembers is her mother's, which she heard many times. "Mother, you're crazy," Mrs. Flynn would tell her, but her mother would remain unperturbed and insist that she knew what she saw, and that indeed there were such things as fairies. It might be expected that such a short narrative from an unsympathetic informant would show little variation, and indeed most features are the same in the version she gave me--long bright dresses, babes in arms--but for one startling addition: when her mother said, "You won't get me today," the "swarm" of fairies "took off" for Lee's Pond, where they climbed into a boat; when she blessed herself a second time, they vanished.

This is one of the few instances in which the fairies are shown using boats on their own, so to speak, in Newfoundland. A Galway Bay informant told Lady Gregory, "They are on the sea as well as the land, and their boats are often to be seen on the bay, sailing boats and others. They are like our own, but when you come near them they are

gone in an instant"; another said, "I know they go out fishing like ourselves" (27). The presence of the sea is striking in Seán Ó hEochaidh's collection of Donegal fairy lore. In contrast, the fairies play little part in the vast body of supernatural tradition relating to the sea in Newfoundland, except for their vague generic relationships to mysterious lights and phantasms in general. They occasionally interfere with humans in the course of some sea-going endeavour, but these molestations are rare in comparison to those that occur on land. Spirits are sometimes said to weigh down boats much as they do wagons or carts; "There's no one allowed in this dory only her own crew" was a formula used by Branch fishermen "to keep ghosts or evil spirits from entering the boat" (FSC71-26/47). In 1963, a boat overturned near Portugal Cove, and all the men got to shore but one, who was found on the shore an hour later; according to one of the survivors, his previously black hair was white and "he had only four words to say before he died: 'the fairies got me'" (69-11/87). His last words are echoed in a cautionary tale from a boy scout camp near Torbay, in which a boy sneaks out for a midnight row on the pond, and is found the next morning with his hair, face and "everything gone bleach white on him," repeating, "The fairies got me! The fairies got me!" So "they brought him into the mental hospital and they still couldn't do anything



with him and he's still there to this day, and all he says is 'The fairies got me!'" (72-43/9-17).

The fairies "got" three children in Avondale, ferrying them across a lake on a piece of wood. Although the specific motif is unusual (F841.1. Ship (boat) of extraordinary material), it is typical of the fairies' rough and shadowy approximations of human activity:

This is a story about the fairies. The story dates back thirty or forty years. Apparently three small children were playing in the woods and got lost. All the men set out to find the children. They were found the next morning but they were on the opposite side of the lake than the one they were playing near. It was a large lake and apparently too long a walk for the children. The children were not cold or hungry. This is the explanation that was given by the children: the fairies had carried them across on a piece of wood and fed them fairy bread. It seems that as a result of this experience two of the children died when they were quite young. The other child, who is still living, was never in her "right mind" after this experience with the fairies. (FSC71-121/13)

Another makeshift fairy vessel appears in a narrative recorded in Conche by George Casey, in which a man is taken from his fishing camp on the Labrador. "That was true," said the informant, who heard it from the abducted man himself:

One night they were saying the rosary after their supper and a knock came to the door and he got up and answered the knock and that's all he knew. He don't know anything about them taking him from the house because you don't see them

first when they take you, but he remembers about being in a boat which was made of birch rind and rolled up in the nose like a toboggan, you know. He couldn't see them because the boat was going so swift. And they took him into a house where there were hundreds of small people--little people, and they gave him food, food on the table, all kinds of food, but he didn't eat it. He remembered about the old people telling not to eat the food. If you ate the food they gave you, they'd keep you, if not they would bring you back after so many days. They had him three days. Then the third night they took him on the same boat and took him back to where they took him from and they threw him out in the water--tipped over the boat and they hit him across the neck, like someone hit him across the neck with a smack of their hand. He got up over the rail of the stage-head and got up. He went up to his house and he got a pain in his neck and a big abscess rose up on his neck and he was crazy with the pain so they had to take him to the hospital at Battle Harbour and he lost his summer. They had to open his neck and they took out bough sprinkles, old blasty boughs and stuff out of his neck.<sup>29</sup> (67-23/42-43)

Another fairy sea story comes from Ron Maher of Flat Rock (near St. John's) who has recently written two accounts of an event supposed to have happened around 1818.<sup>30</sup> He

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<sup>29</sup>Another version may be found in 76-292/n.p.; it is basically the same, with the interesting addition that "for the first two days he could not see them."

<sup>30</sup>The first version was written for Peter Narvaez and published by him in Lore and Language; the second is a written version published by Mr. Maher in The Seniors' News March 1989. One interesting difference in the two texts is that in the first, one of the characters bears his own family name, whereas in the version written expressly for publication the name is different.

calls the tale "The Fairy Knap," the name of a grassy plateau where people were required to carry bread because "there were stories of people being 'took' by the fairies because they could not pay the bread ransom." It is about a stranger who offers to help a short-handed crew bring in their fish; as they are passing the knap, he looks up and says, "Many's the night we danced or played Buck-a-hurley there."<sup>31</sup> On landing he jumps from the boat and disappears. In the first version Mr. Maher says simply, "he was a fairy," but in the second he elaborates:

The story of the stranger and speculation as to who or what was his identity, was soon a prime topic of conversation throughout the community. The itinerant priest was consulted and he allowed the stranger could be a fallen angel. It could be a fairy or it could be the devil himself, personified.

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<sup>31</sup>Probably another Gaelic term. Aly O'Brien says the fairies played "pucka-hurley," and Adrian O'Hare, the Irish collector who recorded this, writes, "Hurley, of course, is the ancient game played with sticks...the word 'pucka' is an exact phonetic rendering of the Gaelic word 'pocadh' which means the act of striking (as a ball). The root word, 'poc,' which is a sharp sudden blow (as in games), also means a fairy blow in some areas" (74-118/3). A small girl on Merasheen Island (an Irish area) was taken to a fairy feast where they played "a game called hurley" (69-8/152-154). Hurling was also done in Cornwall--Robert Hunt even speaks of "hurling matches" as peculiar to Cornwall--(400), and there is a kind of fairy or spirit there called "Bucca" (Bottrell 163, 246). "Puck" and the "pooka" are common related terms, although I have not encountered them in the Newfoundland material.

Why the fairies or devil would wish to help haul fish-- or gather in kitchens or ride horses--is a mystery, unless one views this behaviour as reflecting the simple desirability of being human and doing everyday human things, a kind of envious emulation combined or alternating with mockery that manifests itself in silly tricks or malicious destruction. The taken-for-granted value of the human state may explain why people so seldom wonder why the fairies want to "take" people in the first place, the lack of motive which has often puzzled students of fairy lore. Dean Baldwin, for example, in a discussion of "Fairy Lore and the Meaning of 'Sir Orfeo'," points out that "in spite of the individuality of each version, there is this curious similarity among them: all fail to specify the reasons or motives behind the major events in the story," and that "we are never told why the queen is taken away. In fact, none of the versions even mention that the abductors are fairies until after Heurodis has been rescued by Orfeo." Considering in turn the reasons most often advanced (by scholars) for fairy abductions--to gain husbands or wives, midwives or nurses, or to pay a tribute to the devil (the "teind to Hell" of Tam Lin)<sup>32</sup>--he decides that none of them

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<sup>32</sup>To these reasons can be added one advanced by O'Sullivan: "The fairies, who are said to be bloodless try to get some blood by abducting humans into their world" (Legends 47). I have not encountered this idea in Newfoundland tradition, although it might explain why "red attracts fairies" (FSC72-129/17), or "the fairies especially went for people who wore red clothes" (FSC66-7/66). For a

apply, and that "we are left with an apparently capricious kidnapping." The intrinsic worth of humans goes further than motives extrapolated from various narratives (like the tithe to hell) to explain the fairies' covetousness.

Another reason for the apparent lack of motive may be that the fairies' ways are simply accepted as part of nature, like the habits of animals or changing of tides. It could be said, in accordance with this view, that their natural habitat is the woods and barrens, and they would be as unexpectedly encountered at sea as moose or caribou. Most Newfoundland settlers having come from farming rather than fishing backgrounds in the old world, their fairy traditions would be land-based, and so adapted to that aspect of the environment here. However, in all areas of the supernatural there is overlap, and as has already been mentioned there are associations between the fairies and sea legends such as jack-o-lanterns, phantom ships, the drowned dead, and mermaids.<sup>33</sup> One informant's father did see

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discussion and references for the tithe to hell, see E. B. Lyle, "The Teind to Hell in Tam Lin."

<sup>33</sup>The appearance of mermaids (pronounced "meer-" or "maremaids") usually presages a storm or disaster. A woman in Lancelotti "swore on the bible" that before the tidal wave of 1929, she saw "a stream of mermaids" swim toward land, beach on the cliff, and swim back to sea: "she knew that something terrible was going to happen" (FSC74-11/40). "A crew on one ship saw a mermaid sitting on the rock combing her hair near the shore. One man pointed a gun at her. She screamed and took to the sea. After, some of the men were lost when their ship was dashed on the rocks in a storm" (FSC74-11/41). "Mermaids are generally regarded as being evil or being able to entice sailors to a watery grave," but they

aquatic fairies when he was about fourteen years old:

Dad lived in Rocky Cove [says the informant], about four miles from Sandringham [Bonavista Bay], and they used to go berry-picking. One day he took his sisters and two cousins on horse and cart to pick berries. When they got there, they separated. When his basket was full, he went towards the beach. When he came to a knoll overlooking the beach, he saw six girls swimming. Thinking they were his sisters and cousins, he went back to the cart. The girls were there, and their hair and clothes were dry. They said they had not been swimming. He went back to the beach and the swimmers were gone. He searched the area, there was no one around. There are only two ways to get to that spot, by cart or by boat, and it would have been impossible for the girls to get from the beach to the cart before he did. As far as my father is concerned, the only possible explanation is that the girls he saw were fairies. (FSC67-21/124)

A memorate from Northern Bay, Conception Bay, combines two unusual elements, fairy-like sea creatures and supernatural help with chores. The informant, the collector's forty-one-year old uncle, told how he and a buddy were trouting before dawn at the point where a brook entered the ocean. He was standing in about four feet of water, and when he dropped some of his bait, he switched on

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night also lead mariners to safety (FSC68-3/153). They are also associated with the motif of three wishes; one man so favoured described his benefactor as having long hair, a pretty round face, and tiny white hands, and "from her waist down she was only a fish" (FSC71-37/34). More narratives may be found in 71-14/33, 75-252/27, 73-71/45, and FSC71-43/45.

the flashlight to look for it, and saw two men swimming in the water in front of him. Getting "all flusticated," he fell in the water and lost his gear in his scramble to get ashore. For years after that, every time his friend would come into the garage he operated, he imagined that he was laughing at him:

I would think, "Ah, that bugger is making fun of me again, the morning I saw the two men swimming in the salt water." Anyhow, I told an old gentleman named Johnny Hogan (a real old woodsman who lived by himself, no fear, nothing in the world could frighten him) who I used to go down to see when I was a boy. One morning I was down there and I was telling him about it. He said, "Sir, don't be talking, sir, that's the hollies, sir."

They were there, Mr. Hogan said, to take any trout that the informant would catch; he knew about them because two hollies used to help him haul kelp on the beach in the fall of the year: "Everybody would say how hard poor Johnny Hogan worked this morning," but really it was these two men, whom he equipped with prongs, who filled thirty or forty cartloads. "They would be living on the bottom all summer, sir"; one smoked and the other didn't, and one liked the buns he would bring them and the other didn't (77-141/11-6:C2978/6). The collector is unsure whether by "hollies" Mr. Hogan meant the "the ghosts of the seamen in the bankers disaster" who usually go by that name, but another student who interviewed Mr. Hogan himself said that

the hollies were supposed to be the voices of the dead seamen who usually crawled up on the rocks in early morning and late evening crying out loud. Sometimes they helped an old sailor or fisherman to haul his trap or dory on the beach. Mr. Hogan, who fished alone, said he even saw them and fished with them for years. He says he was never happier than when he had a partner: the hollies.<sup>34</sup>

The shipwrecked dead are a special category of the dead which has strong fairy affinities. Northern Bay, being sheltered on the north and west, was an important harbour for schooners going to the Labrador and to the Grand Banks. In September of 1775 about forty schooners were anchored there after an extended period of calm, when a sudden southeast gale capsized most of them and over three hundred lives were lost. One collector said that the sounds of the victims are still heard when the wind comes from the southeast in August: "the cries and voices of the men and crew are now considered to be fairies" (79-378/13).<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Page 18 in "A History of Northern Bay" by Gerard Howell. This paper, done for a history class in 1972, is the same as "A History of Northern Bay" written several years earlier by E. O'Flaherty, except for the "superstitious part" from Mr. Hogan. (Both papers are in the Center for Newfoundland Studies in the MUN library.)

<sup>35</sup>The same kind of spirits, wailing around the time of a storm or on the anniversary of the wreck, are found throughout the province, but have attained such fame in connection with the Northern Bay disaster that they are mentioned on a plaque at the provincial park there. The term probably derives from "holler," or "howl"; in Sandy Point, for example, the ghosts of men from a shipwreck "howl" to be rescued after midnight (82-208/43).



Another said that "long ago people used to say that you should never go near Trepassey Harbour after twelve midnight because men who had drowned from ships became spirits and would take you with them" (FSC75-179/\*\*). The grandmother of one collector told him that around 1860 or 1870 near Mortier Bay, her stepfather and some men were in the woods cutting, and pitched a tent on a path. That night they saw people walking through the tent; when they reappeared the second night, the stepfather asked, "What in the name of God are ye doing here?" The spirits told him to move the tent one foot to either side because they were in "the path that the shipwrecked dead used to use when they walked up from the sea" (FSC73-43/54).

Spirits plying their paths, fairies sporting in the sea: the images of the otherworlders going about their business without concern for their human counterparts counters the strain of wistful imitation and envy. As long as each world keeps to itself all is well; attraction of the inhabitants of the separate spheres to one another is the danger zone, as when people are drawn by irresistibly beautiful fairy music. Tom Moore's father heard an Aunt Polly Pentergast tell about how as a child she was picking marshberries when she heard "children playing and laughing":

They had a gay, soft, and very beautiful  
music to which they all danced in a

circle...they held hands and danced around like young girls. They were dancing on the top of the little hilltops and when she approached they moved on to the next one further in the distance. She walked the shoes off her feet following them.... They looked smaller than men, quite like little children dressed in white clothes. They all wore little pointed caps, and were all the same size. The people from Avondale found her the next day far in the woods. (22)

One of Moore's informants told him how her son heard beautiful music while trouting in Lee's Pond and wanted to stay all night and listen, but "he finally got afraid and came home against his will." The fairies, she said, were trying "to coax him to stay there" (21). Fairies in turn are drawn to human productions: a Bell Island student said that you should not whistle when walking alone at night "because the fairies are drawn to anything musical" (89-215/n.p.). Mr. Joe said:

Music is bad in the night. 'Twas a young man here in Avondale, he used to go around playing the accordion round to the dances, they used to have kitchen dances that time, you know. And he was out in Harbour Main playing to a dance, and coming home in the night--it wasn't night, it was morning, you know, but it was dark--he had the accordion lugged on his arm, he was walking along playing, you know, \*\*\*\* the next thing he was hung up. A big crowd of people hung him up on the road. And started dancing [chuckles]. And he--they was coming up towards him, you know, he was coming up this way and they were coming up towards him. And he had to turn around and go back. And the first house he come to in Harbour Main, knocked on the door, and they got up and let him in, and begar,

he was after getting a good fright. When daylight come, got bright and everything, one of them come home (?), they had to call the doctor to him.

BR: Oh, he got sick. Did he get better though?

JC: Oh, yeah, worked in the States after, that's where he died, in the States. The priest, they called the priest to him, too, and he told the priest what happened. The priest says, "You should never play music in the night, by yourself anytime at night." He said, "Music coaxes them around," he said. He [the man] said they had all kinds of rigs on them, flyers [scarves] some, and everything. It was women and men, he said; they was big, he said, some big and small.

The absence of the term "fairies," or indeed any other term for "the big crowd of people" in this account will be noted. Mr. Joe used the term "fairy" only once, in the first of five narratives, and his self-interruption to supply it suggests that it was for my benefit; in the next sentence he refers simply to "those people," and he adds at the end that "good people" was the common usage (I have emphasized these points below):

They used to carry people away, sure, and everything. One time up here, not far away from here, there was a man went looking for his cow, you know, the cattle used to be out at that time, grazing, and he went looking for his cow in the evening, he got--the fairies took him, coming on night, and carried him away. And he was out all night with those people. And he said they gave him everything to eat but he wouldn't take nothing. They gave him all kinds of stuff to eat but he wouldn't take it.... He slept with them all night so in the

morning they went looking for him and found him. The good people had him, that's what they used to call them.

Mr. Dan didn't call "them" anything, except in his sister's words, "the fairies would have you." (On my visit to Avondale in 1989, I learned from his daughter-in-law that Mr. Dan has seen the fairies "within the last twenty years" as well.)

When I left Mr. Dan's house after our first interview, Mr. Dan went out one door to lock up, but made me go out another because I had come in that way and to do otherwise would "change my luck." In the car on the way to Mr. Joe's house, he told me the legend of Father Duffy's well, where Father Duffy struggled with an evil spirit, and overcame it when he struck the ground and water welled out. At Mr. Joe's house, he tactfully repeated his story of the men in gray to show the kind of thing I wanted, and left, saying "God bless you." (A year later Mr. Joe and his wife moved into the St. Patrick's Mercy home in St. John's, where Mrs. Costello died in January 1990).

When I visited Mr. Dan in 1989 to take his photograph, I was impressed once more with his courtesy and kindness, as he sat patiently in various lights while I fiddled with the camera. When I had finished, he took me to see his horse and then to his daughter-in-law's house, where he left us again with a benediction. Crossing the hundred feet or so between the old two-story house and the modern bungalow

that could sit on any California lawn felt like crossing a hundred years as well. It was not too hard to imagine the fairies rattling the dampers on Mr. Dan's old stove, there in the low, beamed kitchen, the walls decorated with holy cards, horseshoes, and oil lamps; rather harder to think of them dancing on the dishwasher in the newer house! Ms. Costello contrasted her way of life, oriented to St. John's, to that of the old people to whom St. John's is a foreign place, visited only when someone is sick or dying in hospital. It is almost as if there are two Avondales, a new suburban community superimposed on the old self-contained one. The old Avondale was a complex place, with room for more than its momentary inhabitants. The otherworld lay just outside the thin membrane of everyday life, and the inevitable brushes of the denizens of the various worlds with one another are chronicled in memorate and legend. To one used to such a wealth of possibility (however fearsome), the present-day community, whose official worldview excludes such dimensions, must seem a rather flat and pallid place. Ms. Costello thinks that once Mr. Dan and Mr. Joe's generation is gone, it will be the end of fairy tradition. Whether her family or generation will remember their narratives, perhaps bringing them out occasionally like old photo albums, remains to be seen.

This chapter completes the broad overview of Newfoundland fairy traditions. The analysis of the delicate

relationship between the human and fairy worlds begun in Chapter Two has been elaborated, as has the overlapping relationship between the fairies and the dead. A long examination of fairy paths led us to a direct equation of the fairies with the dead. This equation, however, is made almost algebraically, by demonstrating the interchangeability of the two in a body of narrative, and would not be apparent from a single text. The question arises, then, whether such a relationship obtains in real life, that is, whether it has relevance for tradition bearers or for the understanding of individual narratives. Could the assembly of an "overview" produce a whole that is misleadingly more than the sum of its parts? Changeling traditions are a good example of possible distortions. In Avondale, I found the same distancing of the subject as in Riverhead, in Mr. Dan's story of the Nova Scotia boy and in Mrs. Parsley's flat denial of ever having heard of the idea. It is still not apparent whether this apparent absence is due to geographical distribution, reticence on the subject as it pertains to local people, or reserve in the face of a stranger (or any or all of these factors), but the important point here is that whatever it springs from, this contextual feature, crucial to a true picture of the working of the concept, does not show up in an examination of archive data.

With this caveat, we can follow the fairy path to a further equation, that of the fairies with the ordinary

dead, as opposed to those who died in special circumstances or who have some reason to "return." This equation is congruent with other traditions, such as the heightened activity of the dead and the fairies at All Souls' day, and with certain characteristics of the fairies themselves, such as their appearance in anonymous crowds. An exception is the identification of the shipwrecked dead as fairies, although the association probably comes from their having died en masse, long ago; in this they are like the fairies on paths, the faceless corporate dead.

The shipwrecked dead as fairies is also an exception to the general absence of fairy lore in sea-going affairs, which, while possible to rationalize in terms of the tradition itself (the fairy aversion to salt, for instance) more likely comes from the background of the original bearers of fairy lore to Newfoundland, which was agricultural not maritime. In the matter of antecedent sources, we have also seen in this chapter that at least a few small items can be attributed with certainty to Southwest English provenance. Although it might be taken for granted that both West Country and southeast Irish fairy lore would form the base of Newfoundland fairy tradition, the popular notion that it is mainly Irish, and the clarity and ease with which Irish parallels can be drawn, make it worth demonstrating English roots.

In the further examination of various fairy manifestations, we have found that the fairies create auditory as well as visual illusions: an approaching train, a rumbling horse and cart (which was only "dalladadas"), even remarks: "Some man's got a nice lot of wood!" Most of their appearances described in this chapter have been as people, whose size has ranged from that of ordinary adults to that of small children to six and three-inch manikins. They have appeared in groups of women, men, women with babies, children, and in mixed groups, and singly; an interesting exception, not only in this chapter but on the whole, is that there seem to be no couples, that is, a man and woman appearing together. Possibly this reflects the basic sexlessness and sterility of the fairy world that the bread and salt are meant to ward off. Protection of some sort is essential lest one "become one of them," as the fairies' interest in humans is essentially predatory, and the seductive charm their shadowy activities sometimes exert may be fatal. One carries one's own bread, or silver or salt or religious artifacts, as tokens of membership in human society.

But we must not let the fairies trick us into looking so intently at them that we lose sight of the real dramatis personae of fairy narratives, the people in them. Mr. Dan's sighting of the men in gray is as much about a small boy crowing over his new clothes as about the fairies; but with



the fairies as an ostensible focus, narrators can give unselfconscious portraits of themselves and others going about their work and play. A fairy incident, too, gives point to a catalogue of mundane activity by making it the backdrop for the dramatic event. Mr. Dan could have described any of a hundred winter mornings cutting wood with his father, but the one interrupted by fairy tricks was transformed to a magical setting.

Dan Costello



## IV

## Tradition and the Interpretation of Experience

Having laid the groundwork of a broadly-based comparative sample of Newfoundland fairy narrative, we can now move to a closer examination of individual narratives and narrators. This chapter is an investigation into how and why people decide that an incident involved "fairies," and into some of the uses and results of such an interpretation. "How" includes "when," for interpretation is not always a single definitive act, but can be a process that continues over time and varies according to narrative context; accordingly, "a" narrative is not a static entity but subject to reevaluation and reworking over time and in different circumstances, and each performance or text illuminates the others. The uses of fairy narrative may be personal or social, or both, and like the fairies themselves range from positive and humorous to downright sinister; some are demonstrable, others speculative. The memorates and personal experience narratives on which this chapter is based come from three married couples from three different communities, who have several features in common: all are successful, active members of their community, who can in no way be considered "marginal" or even unusual; they enjoy and support each other's narratives; and, they are kind and

hospitable people, as the help they have given me in the following interviews will make apparent.

Roy and Mildred Kelloway live in Perry's Cove, a Protestant community of about a hundred people which relied mainly on fishing in the past, although as in most Conception Bay communities people traveled to Labrador, to St. John's and Bell Island, and to construction projects throughout the Avalon peninsula; there is no fishery in Perry's Cove today. Mr. Kelloway was born in Perry's Cove in 1919 and has worked as a fisherman, miner and carpenter. In two MUNFLA collections, he gives an account of seeing the fairies, which I found striking for his unambiguous assertion that it was indeed the fairies, for his emphasis on the clarity of the memory, and for the visual detail in his narration of it. These traits are also pronounced in the version he gave to me in August 1984. Mrs. Kelloway, who grew up in nearby Victoria, also had a fairy experience; it was noted in the previous collections, but she recorded it for the first time in 1984.

The three texts from Mr. Kelloway, taken together, show the variations to which even a personal experience narrative may be subject over time, and how this can change the reading of any single text. The first was recorded in 1976 by Eleanor Penney, a relative of Mr. Kelloway. He described to her how, at the age of nine or ten, he and two brothers were pulling bog stumps in an area called the Droke one

October afternoon. As they came out of the woods they heard voices singing "Abide with Me":

And one said to the other, "Well, listen to that," you know; so they heard it, never passed too much remark on it. When I got out a little further I said, that's two women I know--two girls they was then, they weren't married, not then--I said that's two girls I know, I thought 'twas Suse Swain, Suse Butt she was then, and Nina Kelloway. That's who it sounded like. But anyway, they was singing this beautiful hymn, boy, and they were really singing it but now 'twas getting up towards dark, now, just starting to get between twilight and dark, you know, come on out and we had to come down towards--there was a marsh in there called Bakeapple Marsh, we had to come down around me father's garden, make this turn around the garden, every now and then they'd stop and make this big "Who-hoo," like this, you know, those women. So anyway, Lewis wanted to answer, Lewis was the smallest feller, the youngest, he wanted to answer and I had sense enough to say no, don't do that, you know.

EP: You were afraid?

RK: I had an idea there was something different about this, you know, so anyway I looked over in the marsh after I heard them who-hooing a couple of times and here were these two beautiful women over standin' up, big, tall women, every bit of em dressed in white from the hat, they had a big white hat on; white hat, white dresses, even their shoes, I could see down to their shoes, this is honest as I'm sittin' to the table here now, right down to their shoes, stood up in the march, and they struck up singin' again, they kept on singing and they sung that hymn right through and that's a long hymn.

EP: [Did all three of you see it, see them?]

RK: Well, Lou says, with him tellin' it, 'twas little people was around him, smaller people, but the ones I saw was big...

His mother and her cousin met them and heard the singing and asked, "What's this?" but Mr. Kelloway says only, "I mean, we were young and we didn't pass too much remark on it any more than we heard that all evening," and goes on to tell how when he got an accordion years later, he immediately played "Abide with Me," which came to him "just as natural as if I was playing a gramophone." He concludes, "There's no make-up to that at all, I mean what I'm telling, I can really see it in me eyes now just as plain as I could then and I suppose that's what, that's over forty year ago" (76-330:C2884/1-6).

The second recording was made by Cavelle Penney in 1982. Mr. Kelloway again describes emerging from the Droke and hearing singing:

Next thing, I saw the fairies, or saw those three women over in the marsh, big women, all dressed in white, every bit white: shoes, hat, dress, the whole works, everything white. Oh, yeah, I saw them, really saw them, you know. They had those big-brimmed hats on. And they were stooped down picking--it was a bakeapple marsh, it was--they were stooped down picking something, I suppose it was bakeapples, you know. They were singing the hymn, "Abide with Me," that's what they were singing. And they sang that hymn right through. But anyway, me brother wanted me to sing out wanted me--I wanted to sing out to them, my brother said, "No, don't sing out to them," he said, "don't do that because they might lead us astray." And he had

the same thought that I had, that that's what fairies would do, you know.

CP: Lead you astray?

RK: Lead you astray, take you and lead you in the woods somewhere, take you off your track, you wouldn't be able to get home. But anyway, we came home, and--I didn't shout out to them after all, I didn't bother with shouting out to them--we came on out, and when we got out a little farther we met Mother and this other woman coming to look for us. And this is a true one I'm telling you, 'cause mine (?) is really true.... So, I always believed in fairies after that. We had no trouble getting out, though, just the same, now, because we didn't answer the fairies back. (82-83: C10340/my transcription)

The first student had written that Mr. Kelloway was "eager to tell about this, and I believe he would like to get a chance to tell this story which many people had scoffed at." So in August 1984 I asked Mr. Kelloway to tell it again. We both had a tape recorder for the occasion, as he was making a tape for his grandson. This had the minor drawback that after a story was "complete," he would snap off his machine and motion me to do the same, so that some valuable contextual information is not on the tape. There was an advantage, however, in that it meant that he was not tailoring his account for me. It also lent a feeling of mutual enterprise to the process as we recorded his experience of half a century ago:

So anyway, we were piling up these stumps, like I said, and getting late in the evening, almost sunset. So we were kind of hurrying up at it; now we always



take a turn [pile of wood] each, then, to bring out, the drier ones, you know. But just before we left we heard those women, like two or three women, the voices of women, singing. And it sounded so good. It was a hymn they were singing, "Abide with Me," that's the title of the hymn they were singing. But anyway, they sang away and sang away, and we picked up our stumps. And we didn't know, we thought it was someone, people around here we'll say, just inside berry-picking or something; that's what we thought about. But anyway, we picked up our turn and come on, and as we come out we used to hear them, when we got clear of the hills and come across the little opening again, we'd hear the voice again, pick up the voice again, they were still singing the same; that's a long hymn, you know, this "Abide with Me" hymn is a long hymn, you know.

So anyway, they kept on singing and kept on singing, and we came out and by and by we came to an opening out here, and looked over across in the marsh, and there were three women. So far as I was concerned there were three women, they was standing up. Big women. As big as the wife there [gestures to his wife, who laughs] but not quite so fat, but they were so big as that. And they were standing up in this marsh. And everything that they had on was lily white. They had a big-brimmed hat on, each one of them, like straw hats, we'll say, you have on in the summertime. And their dresses were white; even their shoes, you could see down to their shoes, that was white. And we looked over and they stood up. And they looked over at us and they started to make some sounds like, "Whoo-hoo," you know.

BR: When they saw you.

RK: When they saw us, they started to "Whoo-hoo" like they wanted us to answer them back, you know. So anyway, we looked over towards them again, and they done the same thing again. So the

youngest brother, he was only about, what, eight and a half or nine year old at that time, he wanted to answer them back. And the older brother said, "No, don't do that." So, he didn't do it anyway. Now we came on. So now it was getting dark. And we were coming on out now. And we had a little cart just in on top of the hill there, and when we got out to that, on the level, we put the turn and stuff on, put the three turns on and hauled it out. But anyway, my mother and my cousin's wife, they got uneasy, they were worried about us, see? So they came to look for us. And when we got out we stopped and we seen those two women coming in, almost dark then-- this was my mother and my cousin's wife --coming in to look for us. So they came up where we was to and asked us what happened, you know, we was late. We said no, we was just working away and time went by and we didn't think about coming home, not then, you know. But while we was at that, this--those sounds came up over the hill again, alongside of us. And we all stopped and listened. The five of us. And they sang that hymn, the last part of that hymn again, the last verse of the hymn. They finished off the hymn. And Mother said, "That's fairies." She used to be telling us stories about fairies, years ago, when we were growing up, you know, "Watch what you you're doing if you goes in the woods, don't cross the marshes," and so on, you know, and turn your pockets inside out if you happen to go in the woods, that would be a good thing to do to keep the fairies away, this is what the old people used to tell us, years ago, you know. Now whether there's anything to it or not I don't know; but I know I turn my pockets when I goes in the woods, if it's winter, summer, anytime, I always turn one of me pockets inside out, you know, just take it and pull it out, you know, that's all there is to it. But anyway, Mother said we'd have to go on home. So we left and come on out, put our bit of wood on the cart and come on home. And as we were

coming along, they finished off that verse, anyway, or they disappeared out of our hearing. So when we got home-- Mother didn't say too much, in there, about those fairies--but when we got home she started telling us a story about it, you know, about those fairies, and what they do with you, and so on, see. But I've heard other people talking about fairies, fairies as a-- some people say, a small people. But those were three big women that we saw. And it was no one here in the Cove, we found out that much, there was no one in there that day from around here, this neighborhood, you know. So it had to be, uh, it had to be the fairies that Mother was telling about years ago.

I shall call the three versions of this story #1, 2, and 3 for the purpose of comparison. The most obvious variation is in the number of women, from two in #1 to three in #2 and #3; it is especially striking in view of his assertion after #1, "I can really see it in me eyes now just as plain as I could then." It is, however, not a surprising modification, three being the standard for characters in folk narrative and for mysterious women in particular.<sup>1</sup> It also balances

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<sup>1</sup>Briggs quotes Holinshed's Chronicle of Scotland description of Makbeth and Banquo's encounter with the three sisters:

...when sodenly in the middes of a launde, there met them iiii women in straunge & ferly apparell, resembling creatures of an elder world.... This was reputed at the first but some vayne fantastick illusion by Makbeth and Banquo, in so much that Banquo would call Makbeth in jeste kyng of Scotland, and Makbeth againe would call him in sporte likewise, the father of many kings. But afterwards the common opinion was, that these women were eyther the weird sisters, that is as (ye

would say) the Goddesses of destinie, or  
 els some Nimphes or Feiries. (Anatomy  
 237)

M. Latham comments on this passage:

The similarity between fairies and the  
 goddesses of destiny here is especially  
 significant, since in the original  
 source of Holinshed, Hector Boece's  
Scotorum Historiae a Prima Gentis  
Origine, and in the immediate source of  
 Holinshed's Chronicle of Scotland, The  
History and Chronicles of Scotland by  
 Hector Boece, translated by John  
 Bellenden, from which this account is  
 taken, the term, "three women," is the  
 only designation given the three beings  
 who appeared. The explanation of these  
 women as fairies was added by Holinshed.  
 (71-72)

(It is interesting to consider that the three sisters hail  
 Macbeth and Banquo--"Whoo-hoo!")

Scot gives an invocation for "three sisters of  
 fairies": "I charge you that you doo appeare before me  
 visible, in forme and shape of faire women, in white  
 vesture, and to bring with you to me the ring of  
 invisibilitie" (Ritson 27). Wright says, "The 'white  
 ladies' are mentioned in the Life of Hereward [the Saxon  
 hero]...in such a manner as to leave little doubt on our  
 minds of their having been identical with the fairies of  
 later times" (248-49). Walter Scott cites Schott's Physica  
Curiosa of 830 on "witte wiven" (white women) who stole  
 people away to subterranean caverns, from which "cries of  
 children, groans and lamentations of men, and sometimes  
 imperfect words, and all kinds of musical sounds were heard  
 to proceed" (Minstrelsy 2:315). Burchard of Worms inquired  
 of his flock, "Has thou done as some women are wont to do at  
 certain times of the year? That is, hast thou prepared the  
 table in thy house and set on the table thy food and drink,  
 with three knives, that if those three sisters whom past  
 generations and old-time foolishness called the Fates should  
 come they may take refreshment there?" (McNeill and Gamer  
 338).

More recently (in 1888), Lady Wilde tells of "three  
 beautiful ladies, all in white," who assault a girl for  
 refusing them milk (Legends 97). And in 1932, a Dartmoor  
 peat-cutter told a collector he saw the fairies: "They'm  
 like white ladies dancing along-like, but it doant do to  
 speak to 'em, aw no!" (Fielden).

the actors symmetrically, three women to the three brothers.

A second notable change from #1 is the omission of the smallest brother's vision of "little people all around." It may be possible to explain this, and other variations as well, by a consideration of the audience. I was a stranger, and my position in terms of belief was unknown to Mr. Kelloway. The second student did not give her views, at least in her paper. The first student, however, was clearly in sympathy with the entire idea. She herself had experienced something unusual on the spot where the women in white were standing, when she was playing there as a child:

I never spoke or told anyone about it, but I can remember getting an odd, eerie feeling. However, fairies never entered my mind. My aunt, with whom I stayed, had often mentioned how Roy had seen the fairies, but I did not know exactly where. I think, however, she believed him. (5)

Possibly it was her aunt's version of Mr. Kelloway's experience, or her own imperfect recollection of it, which this student reported on a Survey Card before her interview with Mr. Kelloway:

[Mr. Kelloway], along with his two brothers, went berry-picking late one afternoon. They went to a place called "the Droke." This one brother saw three women, whom he at first thought were members of the community. Upon getting closer he knew he had never seen them before. They were strangely dressed and were singing a hymn, "Abide with Me." They were holding hands and dancing in a circle. He even remembered that the soles of their shoes were white. Since

then he has always sworn that he had seen the fairies. (FSC76-140/\*\*).

I was quite taken aback by this card when I found it after my interview. Despite the changing number of women, and other differences in the three taped accounts, there was a consistent emphasis on a strong visual impression with which "dancing in a circle" seems incompatible. Moreover, my impression of Mr. Kelloway was that, although, as he says, he enjoys telling "old cuffers," he does not consciously embroider them.<sup>2</sup> He feels that stories should be true to be worthwhile; he said, for example, that he knew someone who could tell me fairy stories, but they would all be "lies." "What I'm telling you is really true," he insisted, "if it didn't happen to me, I wouldn't be able to tell it, you know what I mean, it's not a story I heard someone else telling because it really happened to me, you know." There is nevertheless clearly some latitude from telling to telling, which Mr. Kelloway at one point acknowledged himself, when the second student asked if he had any other experiences with the fairies:

Not too much with fairies after that. I never went in the woods without turning me pockets inside out.... The fairies won't bother you if you got some of your clothing turned inside out...I'd turn meself inside out, rather than they'd

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<sup>2</sup>I took his meaning at the time to be old humorous stories; The Dictionary of Newfoundland English gives "cuffer" as "a tale or a yarn," "a friendly chat," or "an exchange of reminiscences"; as a verb it can mean "to converse, usually about old times" (Story et al 128-29).

carry me away, you know. [laughter] But that's the experience I had with the fairies now. [pause] That is true, too, I mean, I tells about a [few?] things, but most of it is true, you know. (my transcription and emphasis)

Recognizing a small degree of elaboration on a basically true story, then, and leaving aside the fourth text (dancing in a ring) as dubious, we can return to the possible influence of audience on the first three. The first student had heard the story before, and is ready to accept it in part as a confirmation of her own experience. Her recording is the only one to contain the smallest brother's seeing "little people all around," the most fantastic element of the episode. Its presence may be implied in #2 when Mr. Kelloway says he saw "big women," and in #3 by the remark, "as far as I was concerned, they were big women," but it was probably the first student's stated sympathy that led to its explicit inclusion in #1. #1 is also the only version in which Mr. Kelloway mentions being able to play "Abide with Me" (I confess to forgetting to ask about it in my interview); this element may be interpreted variously, as either simply showing the deep impression the experience made on Mr. Kelloway, or as a musical gift from the fairies.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Although the beautiful music of the fairies is a very common motif in Newfoundland, the idea that people might get melodies or musical ability from them (the latter prominent in Scotland in connection with certain families of pipers) seems to be fairly rare. One student reported that an Irishman named Dick settled a few miles from Branch in what

Mr. Kelloway's role in the story is most active in #1. The smallest brother wants to answer the women, but Mr. Kelloway "had sense enough to say, no, don't do that," because he "had an idea there was something different about this." In #2, Mr. Kelloway is the one who wants to "sing out" until his brother stops him. In #3, the oldest brother stops the youngest one from calling out, leaving Mr. Kelloway in a neutral position between them: "But my older brother thought about it, I suppose he had more

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came to be called "Dick's Path":

He knew many unfamiliar songs and the people believed he learned these songs from the fairies. He let them believe that the fairies talked to him and his songs came to be called "fairy tunes"... My father remembered his uncles and other older men requesting the fiddlers...to play fairy tunes" (FSC71-26/45).

This collector doubted that anyone knows the tunes now, but another collector recorded the continued existence of at least one. Dick English, according to this student, lived in the woods about ten miles from Branch and played the tin whistle at dances:

Dick claimed that one night as he was getting ready for bed some fairies entered the cabin. One of them took Dick's whistle from its place above the door and played a lively tune. Then the fairies departed. Dick took his tin whistle, tried the tune and found he could play it very well. From then onwards, Dick often played this tune, it was called "The Tune Dick Learned from the Fairies." This tune is played today by Mr. Patty Judge of Patrick's Cove and still bears the same title. (FSC80-315/\*\*)

For an Irish version of a piper who studies music with the fairies, see Evans Wentz (40).



understanding, and maybe heard more stories about it," he said. This appeal to tradition and authority, rather than to personal acuity, is strengthened in #3 by his mother's identification of the women as fairies, which does not appear in #1 and 2. Thus, in his version to me, Mr. Kelloway has slightly distanced himself from the original diagnosis, at the same time supporting it by showing that it was not his own invention; he casts himself in a less active role than in the narratives told to the students, who are relatives and long-time friends from a neighboring community.

"Women in White" is one of a set of stories, mostly of a humorous nature, which Mr. Kelloway told in all three interviews. In contrast, the following account is not part of an established repertoire, but was elicited by my question as to what kind of stories his mother told about the fairies. It might be termed "passive" or memory lore in that he does not perform it like the others, but it is active in that he remembers it clearly and in that it silently informs his understanding of his own experience:

So now I'm going to tell you this story, I suppose it's, oh that's a long time ago, Mother used to be telling us when we were smaller boys, you know, about the fairies. So she told us one about-- she had a twin sister and an older brother. And they lived in Spout Cove, 'ust down below us here, next settlement [now deserted]. So they went up on the railway track one day to--just went up to have a look around, to see the train coming or something like that, some

amusement, you know. And her sister started to run away from them. Started to go in over the railway track, all she could go, and they couldn't catch up to her, and they started to sing out to her and she wouldn't, she wouldn't stop, she didn't hear them, or something. But anyway, the older brother, he thought about what his mother used to tell him years ago, you know, about if anyone was fairy-led or anything like that and they couldn't get no sense into them, call their name back-foremost, see? So her name was Jessie, Jessie Trickett. And it came in his mind, and he sang out, "Trickett, Jessie." And she stopped. So they went up to her and asked her what happened and how she come to be running and so on. Well, she said she was in contact with a lot of little people, surrounded by little people. And they had green caps on, high green caps with tassels on the top part of them. They was only little small people. And they were going, and she was following them. And she couldn't, she didn't know anything about her brother and sister she left behind at all, she was just going with these people, you know. And she said she was very happy. Going along with them, you know. But when they stopped her and got her back, she got sick, then, after that.

BR: Oh, she got sick.

RK: Oh, yeah, for a few days. I suppose she realized what was going on, you know, and what happened to her and so on. So, that's what happened to her. So that's a true story now, that Mother used to tell me, and she used to tell lies no more than I do.

Linda May Ballard, citing an informant who believes his aunt saw the fairies because "she wouldn't tell a lie," writes that "respect for the previous holders of a belief

may, in itself, be a sufficient reason for sharing that belief. This is an important element in the passage of tradition" ("Stress" 38); certainly this is true for Mr. Kelloway. On the importance of family and community influence on the interpretation of experience, Lauri Honko writes:

It must be noted that during the experience itself a person often does not yet know what the creature he sees is. He might already be convinced of the supernormal nature of the vision, but the interpretation does not yet occur.... The interpretation frequently arises only as a result of later deliberation. A person's storehouse of memories can accumulate supernatural experiences, the meaning of which becomes evident only after weeks or even months.... A person who has experienced a supernatural event by no means always makes the interpretation himself; the social group that surrounds him may also participate in the interpretation. ("Memorates" 17-18)

The "fairy" identification by family members will be recalled from both Mrs. Meaney's and Mr. Dan Costello's personal experience stories, although the comparison of different versions from Mr. Kelloway and Mrs. Meaney suggest that this may be one of the more variable elements of the narration. The interpretation of an event over time, and the participation of the surrounding group noted by Honko are illustrated in an account Mr. Kelloway gave me of being lost in St. John's thirty years ago. Although he told the second student he had had no further fairy experiences, it

seems that he has decided, since then, that there was something unusual about the day he became confused in well-known streets. He describes his repeated attempts to orient himself:

But when I'd go around that bend, I couldn't get no sense, see nothing--everything was changed to me, the houses, and the shops--everything was different, you know. So when I looked across the street towards Prowse Avenue across Pennywell Road, on the opposite side there was a little store there, a little knick-knack store where you can buy a few apples, or ice cream, and so on, you know, I think it's still there on the corner. But anyway, this man was there standing on the corner looking over across where I was. So I said, I can't go ask the man what's going on, where I'm to, and so on, you know.

Eventually, however, he was forced to ask the man for directions, which instantly set him straight. It turned out that the other man had been in a state of confusion as well, and Mr. Kelloway gave him directions:

But when he said that, everything come right clear to me. I could see everything in a glance, you know. So I put him on the right road, told him how to find his way on Cashin Avenue, and he left and dodged across the street, and I went on down and went in the boarding house, that's all I thought about it after that, it never come into my mind to--but I often thought about those strange places I saw on Pennywell Road that didn't look like the places I was used to. Cause I traveled there, I suppose, fifty times before that, you know. Yeah.

"You were fairy-led," said Mrs. Kelloway, as we snapped off the recorders, and Mr. Kelloway agreed. This mutual support of one another's interpretations can be observed in the following recording of an experience Mrs. Kelloway had when she was about thirty-five years old:

My sister-in-law and I went berry-picking. Anyhow, come the rain, we got in over the hills, come the rain. So she said, "We'll go out this way now," she said. So I said, "Well, you'll have to get ahead of me because I don't know this place very well," you know? So me sister-in-law went on, we got in this narrow path, and all in around here, she led and I went behind her, we talking away, you know? So boy, we walked and walked and walked, and by and by we got to this place--everything looked so strange, and it was a little bit foggy, but not very much. So anyhow, we got to this place, 'twas a big running brook, was no way to cross the brook because the water was too high. And on one side was a big field of cabbage, and on the other side was potatoes and carrots and everything like that. Two big fields on both sides of this big brook, oh, way wider than this kitchen.

RK: No way you could get across it.

MK: No way could we get across it. Well, it struck me right quick. I said to me sister-in-law, I said, "We're astray. We're gone astray."

RK: It was foggy out, wasn't it?

MK: A little bit foggy. So anyhow, she stopped too, "Yes," she said, "we're astray." "Well," I said, "I often heard," I said, "when you goes anywhere and you thinks you're astray, turn, and go back, again." So anyhow, there's a place in here over the hills that when me other daughter was young she used to go swimming, they used to call it the

Dark Hole. And I was only in there once, that's all. So anyhow, I said, "If we could get back," I said, "to the Dark Hole," I said, "I'd find my way from that. I think." So anyhow, between where we stopped and this place they call the Dark Hole, there's rocks and hills, and trees, and everything in the world; it'd be hard to get through, but anyhow we turned and we went back and we never had a bit of trouble--I don't believe I seen one tree to go through, that's the truth.

RK: Those trees and rocks is really there, too, you know, they're in there right now.

MK: Yes. And all of a sudden we got to this place I knew was the Dark Hole, see? So I said, "This is it," I said to my sister-in-law, I said, "Come on, this part here," I said, "I knows." We only just had to go then a little ways and we could see the houses, you know, over on the other side of Perry's Cove. So we was okay, then, we got home okay. But we often talked about it, and we've trampled in over the hills a hundred times since that, and we never ever seen this big running brook, and we never ever seen the gardens where the vegetables was to. It's not in there! No, even--

RK: Oh, no, there's no way it's in there.

MK: Even the gardens is not in there. So I don't know--we must have been fairy-led that day, that's all I can say.

This account highlights several factors which may usefully be borne in mind for the many stories about women and berry-picking. First, like Mrs. Kelloway, many women married away from their home communities and were thus on unfamiliar ground when they first ventured away from the new community.

The sister-in-law might have been expected to be more familiar with it, but even she was in alien territory in that berry-picking was the only time of the year that most women spent appreciable amounts of time in the open, away from the home, community, and gardens. Queen Maloney of Bay Bulls has pointed out that berry-picking in the past involved travelling longer distances than it does today, because foraging animals would have grazed the bushes over around the roads and settlements.<sup>4</sup> So it is hardly surprising that people got lost. But in contrast to the stories of men who go astray cutting wood or hunting, who typically go to great lengths to establish their intimate knowledge of the area, Mrs. Kelloway freely admits that she didn't know it well, and that she and her sister-in-law were "talking away" as they walked.

The home-centered view of women should not be exaggerated, however. A Ferryland collector interviewed a woman "known as a great storyteller," noting that "she is a great berry-picker and she knows where to go to get berries. She travels for miles in the country." Mrs. Clover (also described as exceptionally well-educated) always carried bread which several times saved her from the fairies, once when she was lost all night along with her eight-year-old

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<sup>4</sup>"Trail Wanderings," The Seniors' News, October 1987.

son, and another time when she "fell and knocked herself out":

Mrs. Clover said that when she woke up she had a strange feeling about her which she couldn't understand. She felt the fairies were there and found the bread so they left her alone. (75-53/14-18)

Experiences in the woods provide raw material which the narrator can fashion to various ends. For anyone who took pride in his or her knowledge of the woods, the fairies could provide an explanation for having become lost, and a skilled narrator could convert the potentially embarrassing event into a heroic--or at least comic--exploit which emphasizes his knowledgeability and bravery in the face of understandable bewilderment. Some of these accounts are dramatic indeed, like this one from a Colinet man:

It was March 1940. It was raining hard that night. Now I had no oil clothes or nothing, but still I was as dry as I am right now sitting here at this table. I left Mt. Carmel four o'clock in the evening and never reached home until one o'clock in the morning. I came to Colinet and travelled across the ice to John's Pond. I was on my way home from John's Pond to North Harbour and it was at the Beaver Ponds that the fairies attacked me and took control of the horse. Whatever way I'd turn her, she'd head back toward John's Pond. The fairies would not let the horse leave the pond. So I tied the horse to a stump of a tree on the side of the pond. And you should hear the gibberish and singing all around me. It nearly sent me batty. No man would believe the singing, dancing, and music of these fairy characters. They were so handy they were within reach. When the cloud



left, I put my head close to the water, and I saw little things on the side of the bank, around eighteen inches high, like rabbits. I tried to catch them, but they played all around me. They were teasing me. So I said, "Have your way, ye damn things." I left them alone and went back and lay on the sled. I was going to stay there the night. I stayed for so long and couldn't stand it anymore. No prayer was any good. So I made oaths and swore on them. It was just like an orphanage when I started swearing. Such crying and screeching you could hear as the little creatures left and went eastward. The horse's eyes lit up the pond. When I finally got home, I untackled the mare from the sled and instead of going to the barn she headed right back up the hill again. I was from four o'clock to six o'clock in the rain, but still my cravat didn't have a speck of rain. After that the horse couldn't be held going across the pond. Others wouldn't ride her at all on the pond because she travelled so fast. Once she got off the pond, she was back to her own pace again. (74-210/37-40)

One man was walking in the woods wearing pot lids on his feet like "rackets" when he met the fairies: "I had to chop them off my feet, they got around me that thick" (64-13:C55/my transcription), he said, and although it is not clear whether he had to rid himself of the improvised snowshoes to escape, or he had to hack the fairies off them, the image of small swarming creatures is all the more alarming for being left otherwise undetailed.

Compared to such graphic accounts, Mr. and Mrs. Kelloway's experiences are mild, and readily explicable in naturalistic terms to anyone so inclined. The "fairy"

aspect of Mrs. Kelloway's experience, however, seems to be not so much in having gotten lost as in the fields and brook she never saw again, and in the absence of rough terrain between that spot and the Dark Hole. The claim that they are "not in there" should not be discounted too readily, because despite what I have just said about unfamiliar places, people did know cultivated or domesticated spaces well. Similarly, Mr. Kelloway's assertion in "Women in White," that "there was no one in there that day from around here," cannot be summarily dismissed, as people in a small community would often note the whereabouts of its members and the presence of strangers. Strangers unexpectedly encountered may, in legend, be taken for supernatural personages. A visitor to St. George's was once assumed to be a ghost as there was "no report of a stranger in the community" that day (81-491/32); a St. Bride's woman, seeing a strange man on a bike, rushed to her husband crying, "Oh Sacred Heart of Jesus, John, the devil is gone down the road on a swivel" (FSC80-315/\*\*).

The core of Mr. and Mrs. Kelloway's stories is realistic in that neither of them saw or heard anything impossible to explain in non-fairy terms. To see their experiences as fairy-influenced is a choice: they like to think they had a brush with the fairies. One informant was explicit about this, when he told about hearing voices and

laughter coming from the face of a cliff, which grew louder when he pressed his ear to the cliff:

Now the logical explanation of these voices were that I was on a high elevation on a clear sunny day. The children were out to recess at the school at Great Paradise and maybe their voices were echoed in the cliff at a distance of three or four miles. I prefer to think of them as the voices of the little people, or maybe they were poltergeist. (79-340/6)

A supranormal interpretation turns an everyday event into a remarkable one, and into a good story which attracts and engages other people. (The student wouldn't be interviewing the man quoted above if he said he heard schoolchildren's voices, for example, and I wouldn't have met the Kelloways if it had only been local women in the Droke.) The narrative impulse is often overlooked in the study of "belief," although the Blums take it as a working hypothesis in their study of Greek supernatural narratives, The Dangerous Hour: "We expected stories of the supernatural or the magical to provide an aesthetic and social opportunity for narrator and listener. In a village culture where only a few are literate now, and fewer were before, the story is an exciting artistic opportunity" (7). One need not be illiterate, however, to enjoy or employ an oral art form, just as one may not be unaware of alternative explanations of some "strange" event. The desire for a good story is surely as important as other psychological and sociological

factors. The latter, in conjunction with traditional models and materials, may determine how the narrative takes shape, but the desire to tell or hear something out of the ordinary may often be the primary or motivating factor. A choice in favor of the mysterious coins valuable currency for social exchange.

Individual choice is an important consideration, too, in which aspects of a body of tradition are accepted for "belief." In the attempt to give an overall picture or to represent the range of genre and attitude, a study such as this thesis risks giving a misleading impression of an overly-coherent or well-defined "set" of traditions or belief "system." But individuals are selective in what they take from the reservoir of available ideas and how they use them. People use "tradition" creatively even when they consider themselves to be merely reporting, and personality and circumstance influence how they fit it to their own ends, whether this is done consciously or unconsciously. This view may help to explain the wide variation in character imputed to the fairies. Perry's Cove did have grim fairy traditions; one informant recalled an event of 1932, when he was sixteen:

...he remembered seeing a girl being "taken away" by the little people. She was out sliding with a group of children one day--she was probably about nine at the time--and her slide tumbled off the route into the marshland. Several men who were working in the area heard her frantic cries and hurried to help her,

although a short interval elapsed before she was reached. No amount of persuasion could coax her away and finally physical force had to be employed while she kept crying out that "she wanted to go back." They brought her to the priest who blessed her and tried to allay her hysteria, but she was never really the same afterwards. All she would do was chop wood and keep it piled up in the kitchen. You couldn't get her to say anything and she even had to be told to sit down, otherwise she would remain standing and staring vacantly before her. She was just a young woman when she died, only in her thirties, and in all that time she never got any better. (70-20/53)

The Kelloways, however, knew of no instance of the fairies doing anything harmful. When they first told me that they never heard of the fairies changing children, I wondered if this could be an unconscious rejection of the idea because their daughter Karen has Down's Syndrome; but Mrs. Kelloway is willing to entertain the possibility that it did happen long ago:

BR: Did you ever hear that they would change babies, or that they would steal babies?

MK: Yes, I read about that, too. That happened one time years and years ago. How they took a baby--this [recorder] is not on now, is it?

BR: Yeah.

MK: How the woman went away, when she come back it was a different baby or something in the cot. But I thinks I can remember about that story that her own baby was brought back after, you know, after a few days.

BR: Yeah, I've heard those too. But that's something--you read that, that's not something you--

MK: I only read this, oh yes, I read that in a book. But this happened--that did happen to--like seventy or eighty years ago, you know, perhaps in my grandmother's time, you know. It happened, according to the book, it really happened, you know.

RK: I don't think anyone would make up these stories, I don't see how they could, you know what I mean, there's something almost impossible to do, to make up a real story like that, you know.

MK: And sure it really happened one time way back in me grandmother's time into Victoria that there was three women went bakeapple-picking in the marshes. And they was never found after. And never heard tell of them. I don't know what did happen to them, you know.

RK: Well, that's what happened, fairy-  
led, I suppose.

MK: I suppose the fairies carried them away somewhere, yeah. That's only, now, what I thinks, you know.

The Kelloways' scrupulous keeping to narration of their own experience would help them to rule out parts of fairy tradition they found unacceptable, but their amiable dispositions probably incline them to a benign view as well. To Mr. Kelloway, an optimistic and genial person,

There's something about those people, those fairies we was talking about, there's something about it that's always happy. You know? Cause my mother's sister, she was saying how those little people was happy, the ones she saw was small fairies, little ones--I suppose it's fairies, it was little fellows with

green caps on, you know. But the ones I saw were big women. Tall women, you know, like an ordinary woman, we'll say. All dressed in white with this stripey wide-brimmed hat on. So they was a happy lot; when you're singing a hymn you've got to be pretty happy.  
(laughter)

Most of Mr. Kelloway's other stories display his humorous disposition and a nostalgic view of the past. In Eleanor Penney's interview, when asked what they did for entertainment while fishing on the French Shore, he said, "We had no worries about that down there, there was always something to see to make you laugh. Them was the good old days, the happy old days." In all three interviews, he talked about the intense cold of winters in the old houses; how when you opened the hall door to go upstairs, the gale nearly knocked you down, and how the boys, all in one bed, heaved everything they could find over themselves for cover. Once he woke with his lip frozen to the quilt, it wouldn't come loose until the heated kettle was applied. "Twas hearty old days, happy days," he concludes. He told me that "everyone used to be happy," that they didn't have much but were content. He thinks it would be sad if people never know what life used to be like, which is why he is making tapes about it for his grandson. I think that for Mr. Kelloway the fairies are emblematic of this vanished happy past.

As with most of my other informants, the Kelloways' interest in the fairies coincides with an interest in the past and with a wide knowledge of other traditions. On one visit after our interview, we discussed charming--blood-stopping, toothache charms, worm knots, wart cures, and so on. Mr. Kelloway can "put away" warts himself, having been given a charm at fourteen by a man of about twenty-five; he can't disclose it without losing it. Mrs. Kelloway thinks that a good doctor has to have a charm and that perhaps they get one in medical school. She recently told a doctor that Karen had been having the "old hag" (a certain kind of nightmare); the doctor said that, being from Spaniards' Bay he knew what she meant, but if she told that to a doctor in the U.S., he would laugh his head off. Mrs. Kelloway's sister (I think it was) told her to put Karen's slippers outside the door every night, and she has been better since doing this.<sup>5</sup> Mr. Kelloway gets the old hag as well, waking in a "vat of sweat"; he says it happens when you're on your back and is caused by blood stopping up or something like that. Mr. Kelloway also says that he "died" once; he was in a huge red plush room with brass plates on the wall. There

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<sup>5</sup>An old cure: Cross reports one got rid of the nightmare in western North Carolina by "getting out of bed and turning shoes over," and that stockings turned inside out before retiring kept off witches (276). A correspondent of Robert Hunt's gave as a measure against night cramps, placing slippers with the toes turned inward at the foot of the bed (409). David Hufford has done a major study of the old hag in The Terror that Comes in the Night.



were all kinds of people there, all happy, and he was happy himself; he wouldn't have cared if he never came back.

(Here again the sunny side asserts itself. The Kelloways, characteristically, have never even heard that it is dangerous to try to see the animals kneel on Old Christmas Day.)

Mr. and Mrs. Kelloway agreed to tell me their stories because they would do "anything to help anyone with an education." I trust I have not repaid their kindness with a finnickin' analysis that misses the point; my comparison of the details in the three versions of "Women in White" might interest folklorists, but the basic story would appeal to anyone with a taste for things remarkable, mysterious, and strange.

In January 1988, when I picked up this thesis which had languished on a shelf during a spell of travel and early parenthood, I found myself missing the storytelling sessions that had sparked my earlier efforts; so I placed a short piece on the fairies in The Seniors' News requesting information from reader . I received a call from Mr. Nick Shannahan of St. John's, who has a summer cabin in Bellevue, Trinity Bay, where he has heard Mr. Jim Lynch tell "enough stories to fill several books" about spirits and other strange things, including being "carried away" by the fairies. In March 1988, I went to Bellevue and found Mr. Lynch in his yard, building a small ornamental bridge.

(Later, in summer, the yard was full of fantastically decorated and painted furniture of his own design; he built the house himself, too, cutting every board.) Mrs. Katharine (Kitty) Lynch invited me in. She is in her seventies, and Mr. Lynch was born in 1905.

It took some time and persuasion to get Mr. Lynch to talk. He said that you had to be in the mood to tell stories, that it was one thing to be sitting around having a bit of rum and a game of cards (apparently the situation in which Mr. Shannahan has heard him), but another to tell them "cold." Mrs. Lynch, on the other hand, was very forthcoming, and after she told a few stories Mr. Lynch got interested and told some himself. As usual, I did not tape on this occasion but asked to come back a second time. On the second visit, Mr. Lynch once again demurred, saying that I wouldn't understand a lot of the words he would use, because I didn't understand what life was like then; it would be no good because I "wouldn't be able to picture it." He was also put off by the tape recorder, but we (Mrs. Lynch, Martin Lovelace and I) encouraged him, and finally he was prevailed upon to tell how he'd gone to cut wood for railway ties and been mysteriously transported over several miles:

I went in the morning, and 'twas, the woods was dirty snow, you know, I said now, I've got a few old big ones, and cut them down, they'd get a couple ties out of them, and I wouldn't lose me day. And I knowed the place pretty good cause

other end of it. And I was after hauling three hundred [tons of ice?] across that pond that winter, never found ne'er path where I was to. So I said, I'll come back again. I come back down along by the side of the pond again, and still no path. And I said, strange thing. So, uh, the pond was only about a quarter of a mile up from the marsh, up from Samson's Pond, see? So I says I'll go up through the woods, now, I'll have to cross the path somewhere. So I was nearly up to the marsh when I comes across the path. And I went back to where I left from in the morning, it was only a quarter past ten then. I went over four mile of ground. And after that, when come four o'clock, \*\*\*\*\* in the thick woods, the dark came over like it was four o'clock, see. It's hard to believe it. So there was something strange about that, wasn't it?

(All agree)

BR: What month was that?

JL: Oh, it must be February, yeah.

BR: What was the weather like?

JL: Oh, it was winter weather, you know. It was snow, see, was on the woods, that's the reason why I was \*\*\*\*\* you know, the woods is too heavy to get through.

(All talk at once)

ML: So there's no way you could have traveled that far.

JL: Cause if I'd had to travel it, it'd take me half a day.

KL: But the strange thing to me is those two paths, and nobody working them. One path going one way, a wide one, and then there was a small path, he calls it a hand-slide path, going the

other one. And there was nobody in there doing any work.

JL: I looked across there, the other side of the bay, New Harbour, Green Harbour, and all down the shore, I could see the houses.

(KL assures me that he knew the woods inside out, "plain truth" what he's telling)

BR: And you never saw them after that.

JL: Never saw nothing, never heard nothing.

KL: Never see nothing, never heard nothing. But he told people about it, they told him it was the fairies playing tricks on him.

JL: Played tricks on me alright!

In this story there is a kind of reverse "supernatural lapse of time in fairyland," as it is usually called when someone thinks they have only been in the fairies a short time but finds that years have passed in the real world. Mr. Lynch thought he had been in the woods all day, yet when he emerged he found only a short time had elapsed, too short for him to have gotten to the other side of the neck of land in heavy snow; hence his idea that he was "lifted up and brought down there." The subjective sense of time seems to be the "strangest" aspect of the experience to Mr. Lynch, while Mrs. Lynch fixes on the objective fact of the paths that were not there before. She also mentions the community contribution: "He told people about it, they told him it was the fairies playing tricks on him."

Like Mr. Kelloway, Mr. Lynch has strong family tradition to draw upon. The fairies played a trick on his father once, when he was chopping wood on the Ridge, a long, very thin piece of land jutting into the bay, now a provincial park called Bellevue Beach. It was the site of the original settlement, called Tickle Harbour, until people moved to the "mainland" around the turn of the century:<sup>6</sup>

And when he started cutting wood, the fellow started cutting way off from him, see? And, uh, every chop he'd make, the other fellow'd chop handier. And begar, \*\*\*\* enough he got so handy he couldn't see nothing, couldn't see nobody, he knew he was chopping, he could hear the axe, you know, chopping down the tree. And he got so handy \*\*\*\*\* he said he'd leave it. He knowed about the fairies on the Ridge, cause they were \*\*\*\*\*, he seed them. Heh heh.

BR: He did?

KL (aside): People used to see them.

JL: So anyhow, he put the wood he had cut on his back to bring out to the beach, see? And when he started traveling, he got into the biggest kind of woods, big birch, and big dry rampikes and all that never grew on the

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<sup>6</sup>A short history of Bellevue (so named in 1896) is given by Angela Moulton in 84-370/A. Settlers came from England and Ireland, but it has always been a completely Catholic community. The first census of 1836 showed forty-eight inhabitants; there are about four hundred today. Moulton says that the move inland was precipitated not only by a growing population but by a huge storm that uprooted the trees on the Ridge.

Ridge.<sup>7</sup> And he travelled until he got tired, and said he knowed he was astray, so he hove down carrying the wood, you know, until he tried to get out of it his self, you know. Hove down the wood and axe, and tried to get out of it. So he got out to the beach, anyhow, it was there, got home. He told the wife about it, and they all had a laugh over it, see. After they'd got done dinner, they said they'd go up and see where the wood was to. And they got the turn of wood right against, laid to the water, the landwash. \*\*\*\*\* the woods. Heh heh. Strange, isn't it?

BR: Did you say people saw them? Did people ever see the fairies?

JL: Oh yes, the one, Winnie Pike, the fella took her, see, he come out with a red cap on.

Winnie Pike disappeared while playing around a doorway with another child, who said that a man in a red cap took her by the hand and led her away. The next few days there was "rain in reeves":

KL: And the third day, his [JL's] uncle was coming down from up the Broad, somewhere up the back of the Ridge, with a boatload of wood. And she--it was a little girl--she was scooping up water with a mussel shell.

JL: Walking by the edge of the water.

KL: And when he got in where she was to, she was asking for a drink. And the first thing he did was give her a drink. So he got her aboard, and he brought her down, anyhow, and she couldn't tell a thing about where she was. But everything on her was as dry as \*\*\*\*\*.

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<sup>7</sup>Patrick Kennedy cites the Irish usage of "rampike" as "a young tree stripped of its boughs and bark" (Fireside Stories 174).

She wasn't wet. That was funny. They said it rained awful hard, and where was she to when it rained?

Where indeed? One collector recorded the same incident in 1972 from an informant who said:

A little girl by the name of Pike, she was about twelve, thirteen years old, and she leaved home to go pickin' up shells. She didn't come home and in the night they made a search. And she wasn't found--eight, nine days before they found her. And there was a man goin' along, goin' along in a boat, and she was in the beach, still pickin' up shells. So they got her and brought her home. The first thing she asked for was a drink of water. They asked her where she was to, and all ever she told, she was away with the pretty women... They blamed the fairies for--she had been with the fairies. Still now they were dressed in black. (72-51: C1175/15)

The striking feature of these two accounts is the stability of the minor motifs of playing with shells, and wanting a drink immediately, in comparison with what most people would consider a major motif, the appearance of the abductor. In a third, more recent account, she is given a different name, but it would seem to be the same incident as she was lost during the "worst storm of the year":

Finally they found her, sitting alone on a rock humming a little song. Her clothes were bone dry. She wasn't even dirtied, nor was her hair "mussed" up. Everyone was shocked to find her so clean, dry, and happy. She hasn't even seemed scared about being lost. When they asked her what she had done for the two days, she replied that she had been picking berries when the nice fairy came and took her by the hand and played with her. When they asked her if she had

been scared when it rained, she asked, "What rain?" People accepted her story without question. The few who doubted at first also grew to believe her story; after all, what other explanation could be offered to describe the weird happening? (84-370A/18)

What indeed? As Mr. and Mrs. Lynch point out, she had to have been somewhere; and it must have occurred to at least some of the adults that she was with other people (humans, that is). It may not have been considered appropriate to discuss this possibility in front of children, who would be given an explanation that would not only discourage questions but would reinforce behaviour that would keep them safe. If the children were told that Winnie Pike was with the fairies as a put-off, this could explain the difference in the appearance of the "fairies" in the different accounts, as this would be an individually supplied detail. Even if the adults had no conviction in the possibility of fairies themselves, their children might grow up insisting that they "really believed." In any case, both collectors of the accounts above indicate firm belief in the past. The student who recorded the second (in which Winnie Pike was with pretty women in black) wrote:

To this day it is believed that the fairies took her. Those old people around home actually believe there were fairies. I've often heard my grandmother talk about them. She said they were tiny creatures who lived in the woods and came out in the late evening. When she was a child her parents and others around warned their children not to go very far from home



alone. I once asked my grandmother where the fairies are now. She said, "Oh, after everyone moved off the Ridge, the fairies must have left and gone somewhere else." (72-51/6)

The second student, who had the story from her mother, said, "One thing they believed very strongly in was the Fairies. The Fairies were little people, two to three feet tall, dressed in green tights, suits, and caps" (84-370A/18).

Winnie Pike was not harmed by her experience, but grew up to be "the best kind" and married a man in Avondale; Mrs. Lynch recalls her visiting Bellevue as an old woman: "Grandad told me, that that was the one, now, was brought away by the fairies when she was a child." Mrs. Lynch never heard of the fairies while growing up in nearby Chapel Cove, but was fascinated and listened avidly to the stories she heard when she married Mr. Lynch and came to Bellevue. She attributes this to the Englishness of Chapel Cove versus the Irishness of Bellevue; but her own example shows how quickly the traditions are assimilated by a new community member. It also underscores the importance of the movement of women upon marriage as a major factor in dissemination of legend. Mr. Lynch's mother, for example, was from Fox Harbour in Placentia Bay, and told her of the following incident that happened there which Mrs. Lynch remembers even though it doesn't all make sense to her:

But she said those two little boys come out from school, Saunders, their name was. And it was in the fall of the year, the evenings were short, and they

went into their rabbit slips. They wasn't going to be gone long, their mother was getting supper, and they were gone to the slips. So anyhow, time passed away, the boys didn't come. By and by everyone started looking for them. And they were never found. Somebody come to her house and told her they had them, one time, she said, and she had clothes up warming to put on the boys, thinking that they had them found; but they never were found. Nobody never found them. But they said the priest called three lots of fairies, three groups, and they wasn't in either group, the boys wasn't in either group that they called. Now I don't understand that part of it either, you know, I don't know.

Mr. and Mrs. Lynch's knowledge differs slightly: she knew about carrying bread but not turning a cap or clothes; Mr. Lynch never heard of carrying bread but knew about turning clothes. When I asked about changing babies on my first visit, Mr. Lynch said he never heard of it, but Mrs. Lynch said promptly, "The Smiths raised a child that wasn't their own." When I asked about this on my second visit, with the tape recorder running, Mrs. Lynch suddenly became uncharacteristically vague and evasive: "That was a long time ago. It might be true and it mightn't be, you know, I don't know. You hear a lot of old stuff, people tell you." The most important difference between the first and second interviews, however, was in the account she gave of her two sons and their friend getting astray in 1964. The first time, I am almost certain, it was simply that they had gotten lost; the second time, there were subtle but distinct

be gone astray. It's dark now, and if they were able to come out, they'd be out. They're not coming out now til somebody finds them." And it was after blowing, and raining, oh it was miserable. Blowing a gale of wind. But anyhow, he sat down on the rock, he couldn't stir out of it. Well, I said, I'll go up for Dave. I didn't come in the house anymore, where Josephine was to, I thought to myself, well, she's bad enough now, without me going in there. So I went on up, I went over Leo H's first, I told him about it, then I went up to Dave. So Leo was getting ready while I was gone up for Dave. And he said, "What time did they leave?" I said, "They left this evening." And he said, "You just come to tell me about this now," he said, "and they're gone since this evening?" Well, I said, "Boy, I didn't know it. I was out scrubbing the school, and when I came in, they were gone. And I went up meself, on top of the hill, thinking that I'd hear them, you know, but I didn't hear a sound." So Dave come down, they had the gun, and they were going to fire shots, see if the boys might hear the shots, you know. So Josephine had a lunch rigged up, made from bread, on the table, and when Leo come they took off. So somebody said, "Well, they haven't got the lunch," and somebody went up and called them, and somebody else ran with the lunch to give them you know, and--there was a car stopped down on the road. And when the car stopped this fella got out and came up, it was almost too dark to see him now, and it was Leo Brazil. And he said, "Your boys are in Thornlea." Well, I said, "My goodness, what did they do, walk right across that neck of land?" That's what I thought, you know. He said, "No, they were picked up in the fishing boats down on the back of the point, right down there." Then I said to myself, now, it's been blowing so hard, how did the men get out to haul their trawls, you know? A few days after, there was a man come over and

told me about--(pause) but when the boys got astray, they said, they were cold, they took off their big jackets up on top the hill, threw them down when they started walking, they got warm, and they threw them down not very far from our fence. And they went on the path; they never left the path, they said.

JL: They never walked over there.

KL: They say they never left the path. And when they got walking so long a time, they discovered they were astray. So they said they were on the path, now, they'd come back home. So I don't know whether they--what they done, but anyhow, when they come to theirselves, they could see the lights of the homes over on the other side of the--same place that he [JL] was, I suppose. So they made a shelter for themselves. And Jim said it was so cold, he thought that he'd get to haul off his long rubbers and emp the water out of them. But he said he couldn't get them off, he was too numb, too cold, to get the rubbers off. So the other boys lay down, they wasn't stirring, Andy said all he was afraid, he wasn't going to see "Danger Man" tonight, "Danger Man" used to be on the radio that time--the television (chuckle). Anyhow, they wouldn't stir for Jim anyhow. Jim says, "I hears an engine, I hears a motorboat engine." And they said, "No, boy, that's only your ears." He said, "You got to come up now, and get up now," he said, "and come out to the bank with me." So Jim said he hauled them up and he got them out to the bank, and couldn't hear the engine. And they couldn't see nothing. Because, see, the motorboat was under the cliff then, and they were up on a height, and she was in so far under the land that they couldn't see her. And now her engine was shut off and they couldn't hear her. So they went back again to this shelter that they made out of boughs, and Jim said he knew that they wasn't going to live that night. When they were going up the hill--if

they wasn't found, he said, our son-in-law, now, Dave, the fella that I went for--he said, that's the only one that would find them, if he could, if he knew about them, he would find them. But he said, they would be alive (?) when he would find them, because he said, he knew they wasn't going to live that night. Jim was the oldest one, see, in the crowd. And he was only in his early teens, twelve or thirteen, maybe. And, uh, anyhow, they lay down in their shelter, and they heard the boat again. And they heard it right plain this time. And the other fella heard it. So they got up and they went out to the edge of the bank and they sung out. And the boat that was handiest to the land got in on a point of rock somehow and he had an awful job to get them aboard but they did get them aboard, and the boys had nothing on, just a little shirt like that, you know, just a little half-sleeve shirt like that, you know, no coat, nothing. And the men took off their oilclothes and gave them to them to wrap themselves up in, you know, to keep the cold air, the wind off them. So they were shivering like a leaf when I found them over in Thornlea, brought them home. I put them in--I said, was he hungry, "No, that woman in Thornlea gave us a wonderful meal." Jim said she had sweetcake and everything, they loved sweetcake, you know. So anyhow, they went to bed. And I mixed up a drop of gin that I had there, made two parts to it, and I gave it to them hot, and I said, "Go to bed." And they never got a cold out of it. But the next day they done some talking about it, you know. Oh, my, did they ever talk about that. Andy said, "I bet I blaze a trail the next time I goes up in back of that stable." The stable was only right there in the garden, you know. But that's what they figure, they were brought away. But the man from Thornlea came over and he said, "They wouldn't live," he said, "they wouldn't be alive." And he said, "I had no intention of going down to my trawls."

"Well," I said, "Sir, I believes in prayer." Because I never prayed so hard in my life as I did when they were missing, you know. "Well," he said, "there must be something to it, Ma'am," he said, "because," he said, "I had no intention of going to my trawls." And this is the man who heard the boys shouting. And the rest of them didn't hear them. But he did. And he said, "Dead or alive, there's somebody up on that cliff." So the man that was handiest in the boat, after a long spell he heard them, and he got in where they were to, a younger man, he went in and got the boys, brought them home.

JL: \*\*\* with the sea beating on the rocks \*\*\*\*\* wouldn't have been able to land \*\*\*.

KL: He said the way the wind was blowing, it was lun [calm] under the land, it was lun, the way the wind was blowing....

BR: I bet they never forgot that.

KL: Oh, they'll never forget it. They'll never forget it, and I won't either. But I think it was an answer to a prayer that they were found. Because Jim [the son] had his self give up, he said, "When we were going up the hill, we looked out around the Broad and they were digging--" my aunt's grave, my aunt \*\* died that week and they were digging her grave--and he said, "when we were so cold and wet and miserable," he said, "I thought to meself, well, if they finds us, they'll be digging three more graves tomorrow." That what he thought about. Now I had some old gray blankets that everybody hated, they were, I suppose you could call them horsehair blankets, but they were woolly, they were wool blankets, and they were dark. Nobody liked them, everybody hated them. "Oh, Mom," he said, "what would I give to have one of them old gray blankets." (All laugh) Well, I said, you got to be

in a position like that to appreciate  
stuff, a lot of times, you know.

The cues to a fairy interpretation of this story are more subtle and tentative than in the accounts of other people's experience; the fortunate rescue of the boys meant that their going astray did not become the community-wide event it would have if a search party was involved, but became instead part of family folklore. Moreover, "fairies" are not one of the important elements of the story; rather, these are fear, the cold, wind, the near-miraculous rescue, and the rediscovered delights of safety and home (sweetcake and blankets) contrasted with the open grave. The story is every parent's nightmare with a happy ending, unlike the story of the Saunders boys in Fox Harbour (and no wonder Mrs. Lynch recalls the poignant detail of their mother warming their clothes on the stove when she thought they were found.)

An intense sympathetic participation in her family's experiences--Mrs. Lynch recounts the episode as if she had been in the woods with the boys--is shown in a story Mr. Lynch tells about nearly being lost at sea in a storm. Although Mrs. Lynch was in the hospital at the time, she "saw it all" as it happened in a dream. Mr. Lynch tells a number of stories of mishaps and close calls while working in the woods and on the water, and his fairy experience is part of this genre and repertoire. For all these near

escapes, Mr. and Mrs. Lynch say that there were seldom serious accidents ("not like you hear about today"), and Mrs. Lynch says that although they had little money they "lived like kings," always with plenty to eat. They had eight children, including a boy who died at fifteen months and a daughter who died at thirty-six. When I visited in June 1988, Mr. Lynch was digging potatoes; he said it's "foolishness" to put so many in (last year he got thirty-two barrels), but he's been at it so long he "can't stop now."

Like the Lynches, Mr. and Mrs. David Nolan raised a large family--twelve children--and continue to work hard at various personal and community projects. Mr. Nolan, born in 1913, began fishing at the age of five and stopped at sixty-four; he says matter-of-factly that he was the "best fisherman in Green Cove," and he still spends part of each day at the wharf in an advisory role (Green Cove is one of the larger communities toward the northern tip of the Avalon and retains an active fishery). When a film crew set up in Green Cove several years ago, Mrs. Nolan (also a native of Green Cove) organized their food and lodging. Although they are not in the least apologetic or abashed about the stories they told me, I have used pseudonyms for them and their community because they were concerned that I not use real names for any of the people they told about; because they told me in confidence about experiences of several of their children with spirits; and because they were the only



informants to express the fear that their stories might be laughed at. I visited them after reading a paper by one of their young relatives in which Mr. Nolan talks about spirits, ghosts, fiery dogs, lights, and the like (85-007:C7501). I guessed that he would know something about fairies as well, and within ten minutes of knocking at their door was seated in the kitchen hearing how Mrs. Nolan's mother had once been "towed away." As she told it on the second visit:

I suppose I'll start to tell you, the best way I can, anyway. I guess I was about thirteen year old, and my mother went berry-picking one morning. She went in with her friend, a Mrs. Butt. She didn't live too far from our house, so they took their bucket and their containers and they went in. So they were picking berries together, I don't know how long, she didn't have too many berries picked. So when she--when Mrs. Butt went back to empty her container, she couldn't find my mother. So she went all through the woods everywhere and she couldn't find her; she didn't pick any more berries herself, she was worried too much, she was looking for her. She went all over the woods everywhere. So in the evening she had to give up looking for her, and then she came home. So when she came home, somebody come to the house and said how Mrs. Butt was out, and we wondered where my mother was to. So we went down to her house and asked her, and she said she couldn't find her. She said she strayed away from her, and she was looking for her all day and she couldn't find her. Well, of course we all got worried, and my father said, "We'll wait for her awhile, now; if she don't turn up we'll go to look for her." So he got ready, he had his lunch, his teatime, and he went down to some of his friends,

and I was there alone in the house. Now I was the oldest, see? So I used to go from window to window, looking for me mother, no sign of her. So by and by, me father wasn't back either. So after a while, nine o'clock came, and no sign of me mother, and nine-thirty came. And when nine-thirty come, the door opened and in she come. "Well," I says, "in the name of God, where were you to?" I didn't know her. And she said, "Wait for a while, now," she says, "and I'll tell you." And she was all down over double, you know, and her hair all over her eyes; one shoe on and the other foot bare. And she looked right gone, you know; oh my, I couldn't describe to you what she was like. At them times you wore your hair up in a ball, it wasn't cut off. So my mother used to wear hers up in a ball, but that was all down over her face every way, you know? So she came in and she sat down, and she says, "My darling," she says, "I'm astray all day." I says, "Where did you go astray to?" She says, "I don't know. I was picking berries," she said, "and I got me container filled and I went to emp it in the bucket, and," she said, "something happened to me," she says, "and I don't know what happened to me. So," she said, "that was early in the morning, and we were only in the woods about an hour," she said, "when that happened. And," she said, "I was gone all day, and didn't know where I was to, and I didn't know I was walking. But," she says, "I came to myself laid down by a brook. Now there was no brook where we were to picking berries," she said, "neither one to be seen. And when I came to one of me boots were gone," she said, "one of me boots were gone, and my container was gone, and I had nothing on, my sweater was gone. So," she said, "I got up, and I pushed my hair back, and I started to walk." Now on Gray Cove she was picking the berries, but when she came to she was on Old Perlican barrens. Well, that was ten miles from where she was picking berries to. So she started to walk, she said, and

walked, and walked, through bushes and trees and woods and everything. So she came to a high cliff. And when she went on the edge of the cliff she looked down, and there was two women there, boiling the kettle where they were berry-picking. And they started to run, they got afraid of her. She said, "Don't run, my dears," she says, "I'm not going to hurt you," she said, "I'm astray all day. Where am I to?" "Well, they says, "M'am, you're in Broom Cove." Now Broom Cove was a long ways, wasn't it?

DN: Yes, it's way above Old Perlican.

MN: Yeah. So anyway, they asked her down and they gave her a cup of tea. And when she got--they wanted her to go to a house and stay all night, and she wouldn't go. And they didn't have nothing to give her to put on one of her feet. So she said, "Put me on the road now, and I'll walk home." So anyway, they walked her to the road. And they were in the \*\*\*, they wanted to go down and phone my father and them to the house. She said no, she said she'd try to do it. So she walked a long ways, and then she came across a car. Well, the man was in the car used to buy salt fish here in Green Cove, his name was Captain Perry, he belonged to Carbonear. He was always visiting our house, and come up and have a lunch and everything when he was buying the fish, and he knew all of us real well; he knew my mother because she was always tending on him, see? So she stopped the car, she put up her hand and stopped the car. And she says, "Will you take me home," she says, "Captain Perry, I'm astray all day." And he says, "Who are you?" "My," she says, "You know who I am," she said, "you visits my house every day," she said. He says, "No, I don't know you." She says, "I'm John Woodruff's wife," she said, "You visits my home every day and haves a lunch."

"Oh no," he said, "You're not John Woodruff's wife," he says, "Move from the car," he said, "I'm not going to pick you up," he says, "I don't know you."

So that'll tell you that she was disfigured, see? That'll give you an idea what she was like when she came home. So anyway, she kept on the road and walked seven mile with one foot with nothing on it. She used to tie something around the foot to try to help it along, her scarf or whatever she had there, so when she--that's what she told us. So when she came to the house then, she was almost gone. She was really disfigured, you know, she wasn't like herself at all. But she was in bed then for almost two weeks. So she told us, the fairies took--brought her away, and she was gone all day. The fairies took her and she didn't even know they were taking her. And she was--must, she must be asleep all day or something that they did with her, that she never came to until in the evening, by the side of the brook. But I often heard my grandmother saying that fairies would never touch you if you were near a brook. Fairies would never cross a brook.

BR: So that must be why they let her down there?

MN: Yeah, that's why they let her down. They came to the brook, see. Now that's really a true story. People may not believe it, but that was really true.

Mrs. Nolan shows the same empathy in her narration of her mother's experience as Mrs. Lynch in her sons', with recreation of dialogue and verbalization of her mother's thoughts. There is one difference in terminology between this performed account and a summarized version given by one of Mrs. Nolan's children (which I found after my interview):

My mother once told me this story about her mother. One day Aunt Annie, as she was called, left to go picking berries several miles away. However, on her way she felt the urge to sit down and rest. Doing so she found herself dozing and apparently she must have fallen asleep. When she woke up she was outside of a community twenty miles away and it was dark when she woke. She always said that the fairies or "banshees," as she called them, had taken her away for the day. For it was not possible to get to the place without tremendous difficulty, and totally impossible if one were asleep.<sup>8</sup> (FSC73-132/16)

Mrs. Nolan does not doubt that the fairies had her mother. To one disinclined to this explanation, alternative theories present themselves. One is that her mother experienced some sort of black-out, in which she walked for miles in a somnambulistic state or seizure. If so, it seems to have been a single occurrence, for Mrs. Nolan doesn't mention anything like it happening again. Another, more sinister possibility (already raised in connection with Winnie Pike) is that she was assaulted or taken away, not by fairies, but by humans. This would explain one of the most puzzling parts of the story, that is, Captain Perry's refusal to give her a ride. Surely even if he did not

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<sup>8</sup>As mentioned in Chapter 2, the banshee in Newfoundland is not always associated with death, but may simply be synonymous with the fairies. One student mentions a fiddle tune known in Green Cove, "The Chase the Banshee" (sic) (76-137/7).

recognize her, a man would not refuse assistance to a woman in such obvious straits. If she had been a victim of violence, however--as her appearance would suggest--his refusal may have come from a fear of being implicated, an impulse commonly enough observed today. The stigma attached to being a victim is equally well-known, and Mrs. Nolan's mother may well have been reluctant to report an attack. The social repercussions of any deviant behaviour or incident might be felt by an entire family for a long time, even if they had no responsibility for it. The penultimate sentence in the following provides an example rather shocking to modern sensibilities:

In the community of Green Cove, there is so much belief in folklore, that it would be almost impossible to name them all. One of these beliefs is connected with the fairies, and there are many stories about them. No one would be caught out "on the barrens" on a foggy night, for this is where the fairies were found. In most of the stories, the belief was that if the fairies got you, all you had to do was turn your clothes inside out and they would leave you alone. I am told that this happened to my uncle one time, but since the expression "the fairies had him" also has another meaning when older folks talk of drinking in front of children, I'm not sure if the real fairies really had him. However, the old woman who told me this swears that it really happened to her and some friends, one evening, when they were off picking berries. Mrs. James Nolan, my great-aunt by marriage, is the typical community busybody. Everybody rushes to her with news and to get it. She is about seventy and hasn't been outside her door in about fifteen years, since

her son deserted his family and was never heard of. However, "Aunt Annie," as she is known, is extremely pious and holy, so I would believe anything she told. (FSC64-5/216)

Community members might intervene in unacceptable behaviour they found extreme. The student who recorded the incident of the girl taken by fairies in Perry's Cove wondered "how the fairies could be called 'good people' when they did such awful things":

[The informant] looked calculatingly at me for some time before saying anything. Finally he began, "Well, sir," and went on to tell me about a man in North River who had mistreated his wife and spent many of his nights drinking. One time as he was making his way home, the fairies took him and gave him a ducking in the harbour. Now it was a cold winter's night and the poor man was almost gone. They pulled him out again and sent him home to his wife, bidding him tell her what the "good people" had done. I was satisfied enough then, and so were the others who sat around smiling at the old man and winking at me. (70-20/53)

A man in Greenspond, Bonavista Bay, met with rough treatment which cramped his subsequent courting style:

John X was on his way one evening to a scoff in the next village where he also was going to see his girl. On his way he met the fairies. They were having a feed and they got John to come with them. He followed them further and further into the woods. Then they left him. He could not find his way home. The next day friends went to look for him. They found him only a few yards from the road in a daze. His clothes were torn in small strips and he could hardly walk. This man would not pass this place alone afterwards. He

believed that if the fairies took him again he would never get back home.  
(FSC67-14/100)

In many cases of injury and disappearance, temporary or otherwise, some people were probably as happy to accept a fairy interpretation as to contemplate more unpalatable possibilities. There would not necessarily be a consensus of opinion; a collector wrote of a man who went to the well one night and was never seen again, "some say he only left his wife, others say the spirits took him away" (75-74/7). Another wrote:

This story was told about an old lady from Plate Cove [Bonavista Bay]. A certain Mrs. Drayton would disappear in the woods and would remain there for two or three weeks or even a month. When she would return she was well and unharmed, and the people were curious to know how she lived during this time. People could never find her in their search for her. They used to say the fairies had taken her. They begged the priest to find out from her where she was and what she ate but he did not succeed. He told her the next time she would not return and it happened exactly this way. After the priest's visit the next trip to the woods was her last one, but her body was not found until three years later by her nephew, and Mr. Ryan said it was just over a hill down between two rocks, a place where people had been many times.

The collector adds that the informant explained the woman's behaviour by saying that "she had had an illegitimate child, and in those days, especially in a small community, this was a disgrace so it affected her mind," although he also



thought that there might be "something to the belief in fairies" (FSC71-95/19).<sup>9</sup> Another account of questionable behaviour comes from a midwife in Trinity Bay, whom the collector said "strongly believes in the existence of fairies and says she often wonders what has happened to them because she hasn't heard much about them lately":

I'll tell you another one now and this is as true as the moon above us. Annie Humber, she was only seven or eight at the time, was out playing around the door one evening. When her poor old mother went out to look for her, she couldn't find her. They spent the whole

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<sup>9</sup>Sexual suggestiveness is an old strain in fairy stories; a character in John Fletcher's The Faithful Sheperdess says:

Yet I have heard (my mother told it me,  
And now I do believe it) if I keep  
My virgin flower uncropt, pure, chaste,  
and fair,  
No goblin, wood-god, fairy, elfe, or  
fiend,  
Satyr, or other power that haunts the  
groves,  
Shall hurt my body, or by vain illusion  
Draw me to wander after idle fires;  
Or voices calling me in dead of night,  
To make me follow, and so tole me on  
Through mire and standing pools, to find  
my ruin.

(M. Latham 136)

These lines also provide an example of the use of "toled" in connection with fairies, as in a Green Cove text:

Fairy's were a particular nuisance, in that they had the nasty habit of "tolling away" children, and mothers wouldn't let the youngsters outdoors without a piece of bread in their pockets with which to pacify the little buggers should they be encountered.

(81-400/111)

night searching the woods and never found her until the next morning they found her in the farm (about one-fifth of a mile away from the community.) She said she had been with the little people all night. They were tiny little men who climbed trees and drank out of cups. A short while after she went dumb, and never spoke a word in her life after that. Every night after that when it would get duckish her mother and father couldn't keep her in the house. She would go out in the bight where she said she had been with the fairies. Several people remember the incident and said that she used to go out with the fairies, in fact the parish priest made an attempt to stop this behaviour of going out into the woods at night. People said she was witched. Her sister, Mrs. Alison McKay, verified the story.

And another time poor Johnny Humber lived just across the road from me went out to emp the leaves out of the teapot four o'clock in the morning, got up to go fishing, he did. He said he saw the little people out in the garden and took after chasing them. He broke out in Trinity the next day (Trinity is twenty-five miles from Melrose). When he got back he said he had been fairy-towed and went across ponds and everything. (72-36/6-9)

The collector adds, "It is a fact that Mr. Humber disappeared one morning and was found the following day in Trinity. The man whom he was fishing with at the time was my grandfather, and my father says he heard my grandfather tell the story a hundred times, how Johnny never showed up to go fishing that particular morning." The memorability of the failure to appear on a single morning shows the interest aroused by any untoward activity. Whether the person

involved gives a fairy explanation himself or allows others to make it, such an explanation would relieve him of elaborating upon uncomfortable details. (Sometimes, like Annie Humber, he is relieved by the extreme expedient of becoming dumb; like blindness and paralysis, it is a well-known reaction to trauma, particularly of a sexual nature.)

Mrs. Nolan accepts the fairy interpretation of her mother's experience and therefore does not think Captain Perry's refusal to help remarkable, probably because in the terms proposed by the story and by fairy tradition, it makes dramatic internal sense. If we posit a thematic core of knowing/not knowing to fairy narratives, the metaphoric substance of his refusal is clear. He rejects her identification of herself, which is made in terms of her social roles ("John Woodruff's wife" who regularly feeds him), leaving an open question as to who he did think she was. And if it is unlikely that one person would refuse another as he did, then the implication is that she was not a person, but something else: a fairy. She had almost become non-human, her near escape symbolized by the loss of one shoe--she had had one foot in fairyland, or the grave--and her recovery on the edge of a river, the ancient symbol

of the boundary between life to death.<sup>10</sup> The following shows the narrowness of Mrs. Woodruff's escape:

Long ago it was believed that fairies existed everywhere and that they often carried people away. However, it was believed that the fairies could not carry you across water. One evening Joan Knox went to play in the woods. When she was gone for a long time her parents went looking for her. They found her lying by the edge of a river. Her hair was neatly combed and her dress was neither rumpled nor dirty. They took her home and put her to bed. Nine days later she died. It was believed that the fairies had carried her away and had caused her death. (PSC74-113/\*\*)

A connection, though not an equation, between the fairies and the dead appears in Mrs. Nolan's description of a "real old woman," Mrs. Copper:

She'd go around every day, now; she'd visit so many houses a day, and ask you for cookies, or a piece of bread, or a sandwich. Well, everywhere she went, everybody gave her what she asked for. She used to wear a great big white apron, you know, and she'd take the apron up here like this here, you know, gather it, and all the cookies and everything would be down in her apron. And then she'd go way in over them hills over there, you know, go up over all these hills every day. Now her husband was dead for years; his name was Mike. And she'd be up there all day sitting down talking to Mike, as she said. But everybody used to say, here, that she was talking to the fairies. And when she'd come home, then, she wouldn't have none of the bread or the cookies or

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<sup>10</sup>Maarti Haavio gives an extensive discussion of water-symbolism in folklore in "A Running Stream they Dare Na Cross."

whatever she had in her apron, she wouldn't have none of it.

"She was talking to the fairies" could have been a derisory remark indicating that she was a bit crazy, as the phrase "in the fairies" sometimes does, but this is not how Mrs. Nolan perceived it. In any case, Mrs. Copper's asocial bent is clear. Although I have been at pains in this chapter--indeed throughout this thesis--to show that perfectly normal people consider themselves to have had fairy experiences or to know people who did, the accounts above make it clear that there is some association between the fairies and personal eccentricity. The difference seems to be one of chronic association with the fairies (whether self-proclaimed or attributed) as opposed to a one-time experience; the latter may even serve to emphasize the person's normality by their successful extrication. The reputation acquired by regular association with the fairies was not necessarily bad (Mr. Johnny Hogan's helper hollies, for example), but usually dubious. Mr. Nolan described a woman in Gray Cove (next to Green Cove) who, according to his mother, went with the fairies every October:

They said she could do anything. You know, she'd do anything for you, if she wanted to cure you, if she wanted to do anything with you, she could do it. But she always kept herself to herself. \*\*\* she'd say, "My darlings, I'll soon be going away, now, you won't be able to visit me no more for a little while." That was it, she was going away, and she'd go away, nobody would know where she'd go to; nobody knew when she left

the house or anything. \*\*\*\*\* two weeks, she'd come back again. When she'd come back again, then she'd be-- they said she was right thin, you know, right--even her face would be changed.

MN: She was with the fairies.

DN: \*\*\*\*\* back to herself again. But they used to ask her where she was to, she went, "I was with the fairies." That's all they would get out of her.

BR: She would say that?

DN: Yes, she'd say, "My darling, I was with the fairies."

BR: And she could cure people and that kind of thing?

MN: Yes, she'd cure people and she could put a wish on you.

BR: She could?

DN: Yeah, she could cure you, yes. She could foretell things, you know, was going to happen.

BR: Good things and bad things?

DN: Yes, right, that's right. She could meet someone and tell their fortune. She'd meet someone and look at the palm of their hand, and tell them about their future.

The fairies are not commonly connected with the power to cure (or to curse), but another example of the association comes from Marystown on the Burin peninsula:

They said his house was built on the path of the fairies and so was Mr. Phonse Brakes's. And they said that the door would open on opposite sides of the house, the windows would open and close. Believed this was the fairies on the path. Everyone would go to Johnny Martin's with a toothache. He would

always be sitting on the chopping block because no one would go into his house. He would open your mouth and put the sign of the cross over the tooth and mumble something like, "On your tooth I place my thumb, from now on, it will be numb." Everyone believed that the fairies had something to do with it as he was an odd man. Whether or not it was the fairies it seemed that the toothache would be severe pain for a second and then no more. (75-251/58-59)

Another man in the community always wears a strip of red material with three knots in it around his neck against boils, as prescribed by a woman who was "silly": "the fairies took her away for three days once and she's been silly ever since" (64). One woman acquired psychic powers from a fairy incident:

The informant's [age 20] grandmother was endowed with supernatural powers after a strange happening when she was only a child. Her father and herself were picking flowers in a field back of their house on the Southern Shore, when the little girl was picked up and swept across the meadow at a very fast pace. She wasn't touching the ground but the heels of her feet brushed the daisies as she swept past. The father turned to see his youngest daughter "taken away by the fairies," as he suspected, and yelled the girl's name backwards, three times. Immediately the spell was broken and the young child was placed on the ground without harm. Since that time she has had special powers: predictability, an ability to read tea leaves, ESP, all unnatural but stemming possibly from her being "taken away" that afternoon in the meadow. (FSC76-24/\*\*)

There is not, in MUNFLA, much association between the fairies and witchcraft, although this may be an unexplored connection.<sup>11</sup> Mr. and Mrs. Nolan give a classic portrait of a community witch in the person of Mrs. Farmer, who put several "wishes" on people, including Mrs. Nolan's mother, when refused small favors. Witchcraft traditions undermine, or at least qualify, the rosy picture of egalitarianism and cooperation painted by some informants: "Of course you know everybody in a small outport like that, your neighbors were always wonderful, everybody helped out when anything happened" (84-45/17), one said of Green Cove, which she missed when she married and moved to Bell Island.

The Nolans are not nostalgic about the past, and recognize that they were lucky, in addition to being hard workers; Mrs. Nolan says modestly that she was "strong as a horse" and that raising a dozen children ("just like a set of stairs") was not too hard because the big ones took care of the little ones. In the house next door, a woman was forced to leave a child alone, with predictable results:

MN: Yeah, she had to go up and work at fish with her husband. So she dressed her baby in the morning, she dressed her baby in the morning, and washed her. She lived in a bungalow, not a two-story house. So she put her baby in the bed, you know; of course, now, she had the

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<sup>11</sup>Both were used as threatening figures; John Widdowson gives some features of the Newfoundland witch in this capacity in "The Witch as a Frightening and Threatening Figure." His If You Don't Be Good has a section on threats using fairies (125-30).



clothes folded right back over the baby where nothing wouldn't happen to it. So when she got her fish finished outside her house on her fish flakes, she came in and she washed her hands, she went right in to see to her baby. And all the clothes that she had fold back at the bottom of the bed was brought up over the bed; 'twas no sign of the baby. So, it frightened her to death, so when she turned back the clothes, the baby was changed into another features (?), and turned black. He wasn't the same baby at all, you know. So she did everything in the world, she got two basins of water, one of lukewarm and one icy cold, and she kept dipping the child's head back and forth, but she got the life back in; 'twasn't even no life in it. But now it--the features of the baby never came back. And that house where that woman lived to, 'twas always something heard there. They'd be sitting down in the night, you know, and the knob was on the door would be turning back and forth, you know, yet nobody would come in, and nobody would go out. But 'twas always a ghost heard in that house, wasn't it?

DN: Yeah, right.

MN: So that's what she claimed, that the fairies took the baby while she was gone, and changed it. So the features of the child never came back. It was always a queer-looking child, you know--

DN: Yes, only ten years of age, just like an old man of sixty.

MN: An old man. An old head and an old face on him. So they always claimed--now that was true, 'twas there, next door to us, you know. So anyway, the child never came back to its normal self, it always looked a real old man, you know. So that's what they all said, that while she was gone the fairies took the baby out of the bed, you know.

Here, for a change, is a changeling story close to home, although Mrs. Nolan herself is noncommittal: "that's what they all said." The attribution to the anonymous collective seems in this case less an appeal to traditional authority than a personal disclaimer, like Mrs. Lynch's, "it might be true and it mightn't be...you hear a lot of old stuff, people tell you," or Mrs. Kelloway's referral to an even more remote source, a book. (It will be recalled, however, that Mrs. Lynch and Mrs. Kelloway were both clearly put off by the running tape recorder.)

Mr. and Mrs. Nolan agree that not much is said about fairies these days:

MN: And when we were growing up, young girls, we'd want to go up over the hill picking berries too. Now the hill--I lived way over there, the hill was only up over my house. Grandmother used to always say, "Don't you go up over the hill without a piece of bread in your pocket, my dear," afraid the fairies would take you. So before she'd let us leave the house she'd always put a piece of bread in our pocket. Yeah, yes, always. You know, it was fairies. That was really true years ago.

BR: What happened to them, do you think? What happened to the fairies?

DN: I don't know, but there's no talk of them now, anyway.

MN: No, there's no talk of them now.

DN: They must be years ago, because the people'd be talking about them, you see.

MN: And they were always in dread of them, you know?

They believe, however, that spirits of the dead are as frequently encountered as ever; indeed, one of their sons quit a good job, for which he had specialized training, and took up fishing because he had seen the spirit of a man he knew at his workplace one night. Another son picked up a boy hitchhiking; when the boy jumped out of the back of the truck after the ride, he recognized him as a boy who had been killed by a car not long before. One of their daughters left a husband who was bad to her, and when a man who had always been kind to her at work died, she went to stay at his house. (Mrs. Nolan was shocked that she could do this the day after he died, but explained that in living with her abusive husband, "all fear left her.") She would hear the man walking and whistling, sometimes at the stove, but she wouldn't go to the priest as Mrs. Nolan wanted her to because she said she knew he wouldn't do any harm, and also because she did not want his daughter to know he was not "at rest." When her brother spent a night on the daybed there, he saw the dampers on the stove rise up and down, and heard footsteps on the stairs, but it was not until her children started seeing the man that she finally allowed Mrs. Nolan to get the priest to put him to rest.

Spirits appear because they need help getting to rest, which is why, Mr. Nolan says, you should ask them what they want. Mrs. Nolan says she is "fearful," but Mr. Nolan (who has had supernatural encounters himself) says that he is not

afraid, and that if he been in his son's place (the one who saw the spirit at work) he would have asked, "What the hell do you want?" Usually the spirit wants a priest, to conduct the offices necessary to allow it to rest. Mr. and Mrs. Nolan have great belief in the power of priests, although Mrs. Nolan does not think the priests have the same faith, and therefore the same power, that they used to. A Father Mackie once cured Mrs. Nolan's mother as she was on her deathbed:

So, years after, he would always come to the house, and he used to look at her, you know, he'd say, "I brought you back from the grave." And he'd say, "I suffered for it myself. I really took you back," he said, "from God. And I suffered for it myself." That's what he used to say to her. So, he really could cure, though. If you had anything wrong with you, and he crossed you, my dear, you'd really get better.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>It is common for miraculous powers to be attributed to priests in Newfoundland. The full range of these powers is illustrated in one student's paper on "powerful priests" in the Carbonear area, which includes narratives of curing, cursing, exorcism, and calling up spirits of the dead (73-61). The idea that they must do penance for exerting these powers is also well known. Some priests are prominent in supernatural legendry of various areas; Father Enright of St. Joseph's in St. Mary's Bay, for example (who died in 1968), figures in many narratives, and one student said that some people today pray to him as to a saint (75-250/33). Priests might encourage or discourage belief in fairies, spirits, and ghosts, as the Nolans say and as borne out by archive data: one Green Cove informant mentioned "a priest of the community who used to visit us would tell us ghost stories at night" (84-45/14), and a Green Cove collector had a priest as an informant for ghost and fairy narratives (76-137).

Given this strong religious orientation, the absence of priests in the Nolans' fairy narratives is striking. Perhaps it is because of the specific emphasis on spirits which the local priests apparently encouraged; the Nolans said that the priests would be angry if anyone said that they didn't believe in spirits. When I asked about the difference between spirits and fairies, Mrs. Nolan said, "A spirit won't tow you away but a fairy would, would always tow you astray," and Mr. Nolan said, "spirits is wicked, too, you know, some spirits is wicked. If they got anything in their mind, you know, and you don't stop, they're liable to do something with you, strike you or something, cripple you or something." Only Catholics seem to appear after death, they said, and only Catholics seem to see spirits. (A balance between Catholics and Protestants in Green Cove is suggested by the two large churches in town.)

It was with reluctance that I used pseudonyms for the Nolans, because despite their modest disclaimers, they are articulate and knowledgeable. The transcript of Mrs. Nolan's account of her mother's experience gives only a partial idea of the economy and artistry with which it was told. Mr. Nolan is hard to understand on tape, but not in person, and his wide knowledge of natural traditions, that is of weather lore, navigation, birds and animals, should be documented. However, I did not wish to risk abusing their confidence, and I felt it was important to include the

experiences with spirits (which are only outlined briefly above in comparison to the length of the actual narratives) in order to show the continued vitality of the otherworld, even if the fairies are viewed as historical figures within it.

Interviewing the Kelloways, Lynches, and Nolans as couples showed the importance of mutual reinforcement in the development and perpetuation of fairy traditions. Each partner took an active role in the other's narration, prompting, affirming, clarifying. In contrast to this marital accord is an interview I had with Mrs. Margaret Ennis of St. John's in September 1984. I contacted Mrs. Ennis after reading her and her sister's contributions to a paper on fairy lore, mostly from Outer Cove, where she spent summers as a child (73-74). It turned out that most of what Mrs. Ennis knew came from an uncle; although her mother was also a believer ("always that kind"), she never said much because Mrs. Ennis's father had "no time for it." Mrs. Ennis recalled an incident--not in the paper--illustrating the rift: she and her mother and father had gone berry-picking in the White Hills (just east of St. John's), and couldn't find the path when they wanted to come out, although they tried every direction.<sup>15</sup> Her mother turned

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<sup>15</sup>Irv Winsor, a dental hygienist, told me that as boys he and his friends would say there were leprechauns on Sugarloaf in the White Hills (24 January 1990).

the sweater on her shoulders, but her father said they should get on their knees and pray (both parents were "very religious"), and they soon found the way out. Later, her mother would tell people that the fairies had them, but she would only say this if her husband were not there to call it "a pile of nonsense."

Mrs. Ennis did not give her opinion of the incident (although the collector stated that she "still believes in the fairies"), nor did her husband, who was present at the interview, offer any comment. Mr. Ennis also remained silent when Mrs. Ennis told of seeing something that might have been "a ghost or fairy" (not in the paper): one night she and some friends were napping in a car on a lonely road while returning from St. Pierre. She suddenly woke to see a woman in white, with a baby in her arms, standing, then kneeling, in the road. She got her "prayer beads" out of her pocket and crossed herself, but the figure was gone by this time.

After relating this, Mrs. Ennis began to recall other details about the fairies, such as that it was "always nice" with them, and Mr. Ennis began to talk about "people's imaginations"; the interview became a polite disagreement over "lies" and "things that really happened," and somehow wound around to television coverage of the local election. It would seem that Mrs. Ennis's marriage mirrors her mother's in respect to fairy belief, then, and it is perhaps

significant that one of the stories she gave the collector was a personal experience narrative she heard from a woman on a bus, whose own husband thought she was "half crazy" (30). One can only wonder whether, if Mrs. Ennis had married someone with an interest in the supernatural, she would have maintained her fairy lore instead of allowing it to atrophy into vague recollection.

The Kelloways, Lynches, and Nolans all heard fairy stories from and about family members while growing up, with the exception of Mrs. Lynch who embraced fairy stories on coming to Bellevue (perhaps replacing Mrs. Ennis in the ranks of tradition bearers). We have seen that family members are a major influence both in the general transmission of fairy lore and in the interpretation of any particular incident. It is harder to document "community" influence in action. Most of the narratives I recorded for this chapter are family folklore, performed in the family. In the precipitating incident, there was not much potential for community involvement, as the threatening situation was resolved quickly: the Lynch boys and friend were found, Mrs. Nolan's mother returned. Had search parties been mounted, the possibility of "fairies" would likely have been raised, and the tentative elements (as in the account of the Lynch boys) would acquire more definition through repetition and aggregation; debate, if not consensus, would throw them into prominence, and for all the dissenters there might be, the



incident would be well on the way to becoming a "fairy" story. (This model would, of course, only apply to communities that have, or had, a strong fairy tradition.) If the outcome of the search were good, the story--if any--would depend on what the lost persons said, whether they had experienced anything strange or not. If the outcome were bad, that is, if the missing persons were never found or were found dead, disabled, or deranged, the "community" would take over and it would almost certainly become a fairy story, at least in some people's minds.

A fairy interpretation, then, might be placed on an event or situation at either a "private" or "public" level. We have examined some of the reasons this might be done. Some are artistic or sociable: to have a good story, to make things exciting, to make one's self interesting. Reasons may be mixed; a fairy encounter can do all those things even as it provides a time-honored excuse for getting lost, or showing up where one should not be, or not showing up where one should. One would not wish to be too interesting, however, nor to have many fairy encounters, for we have seen that there is an association--sometimes derisive, sometimes serious--of personal eccentricity or dubious character with "fairies." Nor could one avail of a "fairy" excuse very often without courting disapprobation; people who made a habit of it were not generally pillars of the community, although they sometimes had useful skills like charming.

The negativity of a "fairy" reputation may be related to the unsavory possibility that "fairies" could be used to cover up violence, abductions, or other aberrant behaviour, the motives for hiding which could be strong not only for the culprits but for victims and their families. "Fairies" may have been used as a put-off for children in this respect, just as they were used in reference to being drunk ("in the fairies").

It is ironic that these darker possibilities should arise in a chapter in which the fairy experiences of the informants were mostly harmless or even comical, but there may be something in the concatenation of data that has to do with the nature of the sources and the methods of collating them. Death and disability, for example, which loom so large in an archival "portrait" of fairy tradition, play little role in the personal experience narratives of the informants in this chapter, and indeed most other chapters. Yet as soon as comparative material is brought in, they are back: the dead girl by the stream, the Perry's Cove girl who lost her mind. The apparent discrepancy may have to do with distancing, whereby the worst things happen to other people; my informants do have stories about unfortunate events at some remove from themselves. This may have to do with the worst cases becoming public property, as mentioned above. The important point here, however, is that we have come to a point in this study where we can see clearly that one would

get quite different pictures relying on either source alone. As suggested at the end of Chapter Three, one might use archive data to assemble a falsely coherent overview, and to draw all sorts of connections which don't actually have much meaning in context or performance, or in individual repertoire. This chapter shows that it could be equally misleading to go completely on field research, for it would be possible to conclude from the accounts I recorded for this chapter (and, for that matter, the earlier chapters) that fairy traditions have mostly to do with strange but harmless experiences of mischief or illusion.

It may be that although tales of dreadful fairy fates do not figure in informants' personal experience or repertoire, they nevertheless form the backdrop for stories of even an innocuous nature; the potential for disaster imparts a necessary tension to tales of close encounters. If there were no danger inherent in the situation, the story would lose much of its edge as well as its hinge, which is the knowledgeable response or the fortuitous circumstance that short-circuits the fairies' design: Mr. Kelloway and his brothers knew not to answer and so were not led astray; Mrs. Nolan's prayers were answered and a man who normally would not have been out finds the boys; the fairies are forced to abandon Mrs. Nolan's mother by a brook. The effectiveness of countermeasures or counterevents that stem from the danger is taken as confirmation of the "fairy" nature of

the experience. The deliverance from harm allows the narrators, today, to relate the tales with a zest and enjoyment that the written transcription cannot convey.

Roy and Mildred Kelloway



Katharine (Kitty) Lynch  
and  
John Rieti-Lovelace





Jim Lynch



## V

**Fairies, Devils, and Other Impostors in Bishop's Cove:  
Tales of a Trickster**

This chapter adjusts the focus more closely on context and performance through an analysis of one informant's fairy traditions, their relationship to the rest of his narrative repertoire and style, and the possible influences of personality and biographical circumstances on their development. As usual, setting the primary material into context takes me far afield after various hares, the largest one this time being the historical background and possible Freudian interpretations of the "blast." The latter discussion is brought on by the peculiar characteristics of the Bishop's Cove area fairies, who, when not impersonating or possessing some ordinary person, make persistent appearances as little men with whips and sticks. They are more directly related to the devil than their counterparts in Riverhead or Avondale, possibly through an English Protestant ancestry which may also link them with witchcraft. "Chasing hares" may be an appropriate metaphor here, for just as one might shoot a hare in the woods and discover that the witch at home has been hit, so, I hope, will the vagarious discussions illuminate the material that was their starting point.

Bishop's Cove, Conception Bay, lies not far off the main highway from Spaniard's Bay, about ninety kilometres

from St. John's. Like Riverhead and Avondale, it has a strong fairy tradition with unusual texts, and good information in student manuscripts; and as in Riverhead, I was lucky enough to find a noted narrator, William George Smith, who contributed fine performances to this project. Several students have provided histories which, while they differ on various points, indicate that the majority of settlers came from England in the 1700s. One said that the first fishermen to "overwinter" were Quilties from Ireland and Smiths from Devon, and that they settled about a mile away from one another, at what are now opposite ends of the community (80-322/6). One student traces his family to Wales (70-25/5). Some say the name was changed from Bread and Cheese Cove on the visit of an Anglican bishop around 1850 (80-322/7), others that an influx of people named Bishop led to the change (74-218/3, 70-25/57). According to one paper, the bitter religious rivalry of the 1800s (there were riots in St. John's and Harbour Grace) had driven the Catholics out of the area by this century (80-322/70), but another says that there were a dozen Catholic families until about 1945 (72-262/3); in any case, there was never a Catholic church built there. Bishop's Cove is contiguous with Upper Island Cove; as one student put it, "the only thing that makes them two distinct communities is the sign

which is put right in the middle dividing the two."<sup>1</sup> Upper Island Cove (often called "Island Cove" for short) is also chiefly of English derivation and mainly Protestant.<sup>2</sup> Bishop's Cove has about three hundred people, Upper Island Cove about eight hundred. The fishery declined in the 1930s, when people went to work on Bell Island and construction projects throughout the province. In 1974, most Bishop's Cove men worked in St. John's or at the refinery in Come-by-Chance (74-218/3), and in 1980 the majority of men did construction work (80-322/20).

In 1972, Graham Smith wrote that his uncle, William George Smith (b. 1925) of Bishop's Cove, is "the finest storyteller in our place," and that "[his] hobby is telling stories to young children. You can go there at any time of

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<sup>1</sup>Uncatalogued paper by Darlene Smith submitted to Martin Lovelace, Winter 1989.

<sup>2</sup>One student provides a capsule history: The town of Upper Island Cove was supposed to have begun around the year 1595 when a banking schooner from Mercer's Cove ran aground on what is now known as the Big Island. The five surviving members of the crew made their way ashore and because it was late in the year had to spend the winter in Island Cove. When the summer came the five men, who were a Mercer, Sharpe, Barrett, Young, and Crane, liked the area so much they moved their families there. (Uncatalogued FSC by Harrison Sharpe submitted to Gerald Thomas, Fall 1988. His paper, "Folklore in the Fairies," and Folklore Survey Cards hereafter referred to as Sharpe.)

the day and you will always find several children there" (72-262/4, 22-23). Smith noted that Mr. Smith lived with his parents and ran a small shop, which he set up himself and had been his main occupation as a leg disabled by polio at the age of six had kept him from more typical pursuits. When I called on Mr. Smith in March 1985, he no longer kept the shop, and his parents had died; he now lives with his wife Rita, whom he recently married, and their young son.

Mr. Smith did not seem to think my inquiries were particularly unusual, perhaps because, like Mrs. Meaney, he is used to being sought out and listened to. Within half an hour he was telling chilling tales about "those other people" which he readily agreed to record in a second interview. His narration is much like Mrs. Meaney's in its formal style. He opened the second interview with a description of protective practices, leading to a general statement of his own position on belief in the fairies:

Well, see, it was this way, that when a child was born, they put bread onto the cut, in case that anything would happen to the child. And when the child got a bit bigger, they'd remove the bread, pierce a small five cent piece, and put it on the neck of the child so it wouldn't be changed back [pause] to those people. So after awhile longer, they'd take away the bread. So when they'd leave the house, they'd go and they'd take an onion. And they'd chop him in two pieces; they'd put one half to the back door, and one half to the front door, so that no evil spirits could enter the house in that form. So in order to reinforce and make it a bit stronger, they'd take and sprinkle salt

to the back door and to the front door, plus the onion and the small five cents so the child would be safe. Now that was old people would do that with the younger children. So in order to keep the luck of all that, they'd get a horseshoe and they'd nail it on the door, but be sure the horseshoe was bottom up, so the luck would bide into the horseshoe and wouldn't tumble out. You see, because that was the way of the old people in Bishop's Cove in them years. So right now it's passed away, an awful lot of people do believe into it and still carries on some of that tradition right now. I knows I do, I believes in that kind of stuff, in putting up me horseshoe. Do you see, you was speaking the other evening about [pause] fairies, or so-called fairies; good people, some people calls them good people. Some people calls them bad people. Do you see? From my point of view, probably they don't exist, but I wouldn't say they don't.

Off tape, he said that some people call them "devil's angels," and that Dr. Cron, a physician from Harbour Grace about whom a number of fairy legends circulate, called them "sons of bitches." Abusive language towards the fairies is an alternative to the flattering "good people," but it is harder to document "obscene" language because of polite restraint in front of strangers and, probably, women. Mr. McGrath's discourse to David Abbott was peppered with vigorous expletives on the "motherfucking fairies," although this seemed to come from general saltiness of speech as well as fairy tradition: "Well, I saw one that I was frigging well sure, it couldn't be anything else in this world, only a fairy," he declared at one point. Mr. Smith refers to

"that damn thing" twice in the following story, and I am sure the term "fairy," which he deploys so emphatically, was mainly for my benefit; in conversation he refers simply to "them" and "that crowd." In any case, this is the story with which he went on to justify his view of "their" existence:

Because I'll tell you a story now about a young man, two young men that, the two of them was the one age, they was born to two sisters. One's name was Joe, and the other was Joe. But the only thing to distinguish one from the other, they called them "Little Joe" and "Big Joe." So one day in the spring of the year they decided they'd go in the country to bring out a load of firewood. So they went on, they went in the woods about four or five miles from home. They cut down their wood together, they lugged it together. But when Big Joe come back, Little Joe was gone and he was nowhere to be found. And when he come back, his horse, wood, and dray was also gone with the load of wood. So thinking to his self that Little Joe was left to come home, but he thought it funny that his cousin'd leave him in the woods. So that evening about five o'clock when he come back with his load of wood, Little Joe's mother come out and asked where Little Joe was at. But he said, "Little Joe is leaved, he wasn't there when I come down, he come away and leaved me." So when the mother looked, the horse was to the door, the dray was to the door, and the wood was to the door, but Little Joe wasn't home. So they waited and waited. Nine o'clock come, ten o'clock come, eleven o'clock--and no Little Joe. And the night passed away, and no Little Joe. And he never returned for two days. Two days passed, and in the evening they looked out, and there was this man, presumably 'twas Little Joe, as she thought, was out to the door. So she opened the door and let him in. So



he came in, she give him his supper, he eat it very savage because he was hungry. And on looking at him, she knew it was something wrong with him, but she still thought it was her son. And proud that he returned. But sometime that night she sent out for an old lady to come out to see Little Joe.<sup>3</sup> And when the old lady come in and looked at Little Joe, "By God," she said, "that's not Little Joe you got there, if that's what you call that damn thing to the door," she said, "that's not Little Joe. That's a fairy." And she said, "I'm going to drown him. Because it's not Little Joe." So the mother begin to screech and bawl, about what she said about her son after gone two days and returned to the woods; the old lady said she was going to make away with him. "Oh, yes," she said, she was going to get another old woman, they were going to heave him in the pond. "Because," she said, "that's not Little Joe you got there. Little Joe went away this morning," she said, "and he was a good-looking young man, smart. And that thing you got there sot down feeding it," she says, "is about seventy years old. So," she said, "I'm going to heave it in the water. Because it's not Little Joe. And Little Joe'll never come back while that's here." "But," she [the mother] said, "he got his jacket." "I don't care," she said, "what kind of a jacket he got on. That's Little Joe's jacket, but that's not Little Joe." So she sent for the other old lady, and the other old lady come in, she said, "No, that's not Little Joe. That's a fairy you got there. And we're making away with him." So they went ahead, took a blanket--with the woman screeching and bawling--they wrapped him up in the blanket, and they took him. They carried him down, they put bricks, or rocks into the blanket, they heft in the pond with him. And

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<sup>3</sup>In the first telling it was a midwife.

that's where he drowned, or that's where something happened to him. And the next day, about nine o'clock in the night Little Joe come back. With ne'er a jacket on because the fairy was after taking his jacket and putting it on \*\*\*. But he come back. Little Joe, just the same as he went in the woods four days before. Sat down, and eat his supper, and the old lady come back again. "Now," she said, "that's Little Joe you got there. Who in the hell was the other fellow," she said, "that come here," she said, "the fellow who drowned?" Now that is true. Because [it was] handed down generations to me.

BR: His mother didn't recognize, his mother thought the first one was Joe?

WGS: Thought it was Joe, because she was proud her son come home. So she was willing to accept anything. But the old lady was accepting nothing, only Little Joe. That's why she took this and hove it in the water. And Little Joe returned, safe and sound, the only thing his jacket. So he said, "The funniest thing that ever happened," he said, "was last night around about twelve o'clock when I was in the woods, I thought," he said, "that the old woman next door hove me in the water. And I come to meself. And jumped up out of the woods. Come back," he said, "and walked home."

Now that, it really happened, about 1900; Anyway, 1896, 1900. Because it was told to me by a man that went to see him. He seen the first ugly machine they brought there, and he seen--he knowed what the old woman done, and he seen Little Joe when he come back.

BR: Was he okay after that, Little Joe?

WGS: He was the best kind, lived to be eighty year old. Always happy-go-lucky.

"Little Joe" is an elegant illustration of the set of themes that I have suggested lie at the heart of fairy stories. The story turns on the question of identity: the impostor does not simply impersonate Little Joe, but has actually become him--Little Joe felt himself "hove into the water" even as he "came to himself" and jumped to come home from the woods. The play between nature and culture can be seen not only in the image of the person trapped in the wilderness, eventually to disintegrate there, but in detail as well. The jacket may be taken as symbolic of culture: the "fairy" puts it on in his attempt at humanity. The term "machine" ("He seen the first ugly machine they brought there") is especially apt in this regard, since in Newfoundland usage it means "a device, contrivance or contraption, especially one without a specific name; an object or phenomenon; thingumajig" (Story et al Dictionary 318). In "Little Joe" it combines indirect reference to the fairies with the picture of a kind of robotic contrivance stuffed into Joe's jacket and sent in to take over as Little Joe. (The broom-in-place-of-a-body motif works the same way: the bunch of twigs bound up on a stick is "culture," but just barely.)

In 1974 Graham Smith recorded "Little Joe" from an informant who acknowledged that it circulates in different

the winter. I'm out there," he said, "the whole summer not a stitch of clothes on me." His beard grew down a foot long, they hardly knew him. He said, "I'm out there in the woods the whole summer," he said, "and I couldn't get clear of them. I was surrounded by about ten thousand fairies and I couldn't get away from them," he said, "until that fella came back. When he came back," he said, "I got clear." He said, "I went out that night by the house," he said, "and when I went out there was about ten thousand fairies around the house. They took me," he said, "and they brought me away. And they left this fellow behind," he said, "the fellow went up and got in the bed. They left him behind and they took me away," he said, "and I'm out the whole summer. My," he said, "if he hadn't got to drive him out," he said, "I'd be out all the winter." So that's the story, believe it or not. (78-54:C3295/my transcription)

Like Little Joe, he lost his clothes, and his long beard is another indication of his reversion to a "wild" state, so that "they hardly recognized him."

There is an affinity to folktale in Leach's text in the person of Jack. Martin Lovelace suggests that if one had to characterize the "Jack" of Newfoundland folktale in two words, it would be as a lazy trickster. He has also noted the treacherous nature of brothers in the folktale "Danny Redcap," in which Jack goes underground with a little red-capped man and gets gold and women, which his brothers haul up out of the hole; when it is Jack's turn to be pulled up, he ties a rock to the rope which the brothers take up part way and drop. "Huh! I knowed darn well what they were going

to do alright," says the narrator, "you can't trust your brother."<sup>5</sup> It is reasonable to suppose that tensions would arise around this basic family and economic unit, and that these would surface in narrative.<sup>6</sup> In the story of "Jack," the brothers are supposed to go to work together until one apparently gives it up for a little rest, tended by the brother's wife. The seemingly irrelevant opening about identical cousins in "Little Joe" hints at betrayal as well: they are supposed to do everything together, but Big Joe thinks at first that "he come away and leaved me." It may also be recalled that in Mrs. Meaney's "Night Kitchen," one brother is determined to learn the other's whereabouts; when he does, it is the brother, not the fairies, who flings the teacup. The longest Newfoundland version of AT503, "Gifts of the Little People," departs from the classic pattern by having the two hunchbacks as brothers, and by a happy ending: both men are freed of their humps (whereas usually the second is left permanently with two humps), and they get

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<sup>5</sup>Jack escaped on an eagle's back, and the brothers were "frightened to death when he come up." There seems to have been no hard feelings, however, for the narrator concludes that "they were livin' very happy when I leaved." (The tale--AT301A--is in Halpert and Widdowson's forthcoming Folktales of Newfoundland: The Resilience of the Oral Tradition; Martin Lovelace's commentary from private communication.)

<sup>6</sup>Melvin Firestone outlines the crucial working relationship between brothers in Brothers and Rivals: Patrilocality in Savage Cove, his ethnography of a west coast community.

riches and wives (another departure) from the fairies (73-102).<sup>7</sup>

Stories about adult changelings are uncommon compared to those of child changelings, and I know of only a few more examples. Anita Best heard one while teaching in Rock Harbour in Placentia Bay, about a seventeen-year old man who was near a waterfall "where the fairies used to dance or whatever" and was stricken dumb and lame. At home in bed, he wouldn't eat when anyone was in the room, but "even if they just left the room for a second, he'd devour everything that, you know, they managed to bring him up." So they called in a clergyman:

...and he said, well, that's not your son lying down there. The only way that you're going to get your son back is to, ah, is if you red-hotten a shovel, that is, you know, heat a shovel up until it's red hot, stick the shovel under him and heave him outdoors under the sun. So the mother didn't want to do that, because she really believed it was her son, and he was just sick or something, but eventually her neighbors talked her into it, and they red-hottened the shovel and hove him out, but Uncle Will [the man Anita heard this from] didn't remember whether the shovel burnt him or what, you know, but he said that he was himself after. But funny thing, when he--even when he was himself, when he come back to himself and he used to go

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<sup>7</sup>Stith Thompson notes that AT503, a very widespread type, is one of the few "fairy tales" actually about fairies (49). Other Newfoundland versions are in 73-103/24-26, FSC80-311/\*\*, and 67-21/41 (with spirits).

around, he was always a little bit touched, you know. (71-53:C984/15-16)

(Note again, "the mother really believed it was her son.") In a version from the South Coast, an eighteen-year old man was missing for three weeks, until one day his mother came into the house "and this fellow was lying down on the daybed." She asked him who he was, but he wouldn't speak; the neighbors came in and said it was the son (a reversal of the usual pattern). Over several weeks he became more "friendly," but he "wouldn't eat while they'd be looking at him, and as soon as they turn their back he'd clean off the plate in a minute." A priest was called in who told the men to throw him out on two shovels, one under the chest and one under the back. The real son turned up three hours later, saying that he had been out on the barrens in a "big company" that was "chipping and chatting, but he never knew what they were saying. He knew all the boats and everything that used to go in and out to Marystown and he knew their names and everything like that... but he still couldn't get clear of the bunch he was entangled with" (72-27:C1105/my transcription).

A huge appetite (F321.1.2.2) does not characterize child changelings in Newfoundland, but except for this last example, food figures prominently in this handful of narratives about adult changelings. If eating is symbolic of social integration (hence the taboo on fairy food) most

of the impostors try to gobble their way into human society (Little Joe ate "right savage"), although they are not able to do it normally, that is, in company; the exception is the "small devil," who betrays his nature partly by not eating at all. The importance of commensality as a symbol of normalcy is shown in the happy ending of the version of AT503 mentioned above, when the brothers and their wives sit down, "laughing and talking, to eat their supper." More pragmatically, the motif may express resentment about food consumed by a non-contributing member of the household, as these fairy-afflicted young men might have been ("always a little bit touched, you know").

Heywood, in his Hierarchie of Angells of 1635, says that the fairies "can assume the shapes and figures of men, and eat, drinke, sit at table, talke and discourse after the manner of our fellowes; so that they may be easily tooke for some friend or acquaintance" (M. Latham 70).<sup>8</sup> Even when they don't "sit at table," Newfoundland fairies may be "tooke for some friend or acquaintance" or family member, for as Sharpe (the Island Cove student) put it, they "have

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<sup>8</sup>Medieval demons also perpetrated impostures, usually for the purpose of temptation or defamation: one exemplum tells of a girl carried off by "devils" who leave one of their number to replace her while she is taken to a monastery to tempt the brothers; another tells of a jealous husband tricked by devils into seeing his wife out gallivanting when she was really at home (Tubach 135, 213). Map gives a tale of a woman accused of murdering infants until it was discovered that it was a devil in her shape that was the culprit (86-87).



the uncanny power to change themselves into someone you know to get you to follow them" (2). A Conche boy thought he saw his grandmother by a brook, offering him "candy and things," but when he went to the house he found her there; she told him that the double "was fairies, she was a fairy" (76-292/13:C2911/3). An Island Cove woman was taken by the fairies while berry-picking; she was ill for a long time during which she demanded that the little people be taken from her room, or that she go to the woods with them; later she said that on the day she was lost, "she thought she was being led away by a member of her family." She recovered, "but she never returned to her old self" (75-79/30-31).

Mr. Smith tells a story of an impersonation that was never exposed, despite the impostor's brazen announcement of his identity. A young man, whom we learn is unmarried only from the aside that he locks the door when he goes out, seems to have had no one to redder the shovel and pitch the usurper out:

The fellow that I'm telling about, that happened right in here in Bishop's Cove. A beautiful young man, about eighteen years old. And he was a beautiful young man. And one night--we used to, all hands would go to a certain marsh, to go, well, boys and girls, just to have some fun. And this night he thought it was someone on the marsh. But he went up himself. He went alone. And he told me the yarn over: he said when he got there, he thought there was people there, but there was no one that he knowed anything about, he didn't see anyone. And when he turned around, he seen an old man, as he thought, he said,

but he was a very small old fella popping around on the ice. So he went up to bid him the time of the night, 'cause he thought it was one of the other boys just trying to scare him off. And the old man had a whip in his hand. And he cut him across the leg, he always said he cut him across the leg. And the young man come out, and he took sick. And there was a piece of bass rope come out of his leg about three months after that, but he was always crippled after that, he could hardly get around. But they took a piece of bass rope--he said the whip was made out of bass rope, which was used to moor a boat--so he cut him across and about three months after that when they took it out, he never did come to himself to be right after. Because, one day I went in myself to the house he was living in. And when I went in--this is the truth--when I went in, he was sot on the bench. So I bid him the time of the day, called him by name, and this fellow looked at me, he said, "No. I'm not the fellow," he said, "that you thinks I is." Well, we'll use the word Joe, but 'tis not his name, because--so, I said, "Good morning, Joe."

He said, "No, I'm not Joe."

I said, "Who in the hell is ya, if you're not Joe?"

"I'm the Joe," he said, "that used to be."

I said, "You're what?"

"I'm the Joe," he said, "that used to be. But I'm not the Joe that you knows now."

"Well," I said, "that's funny. Who are you trying to scare?"

He said, "I'm not trying to scare anyone, because Joe is coming up the street there, up the road there now." And when I looked through the window, sure enough, Joe was coming up the road. But who was the fellow I was talking to? I don't know. So, Joe come up, and when he come he unlocked his door, and he come in and he said, "How did you get in?"

I said, "I opened the door and come in,

which way do you think I got in?"

"But," he said, "that door was locked! I locked the door before I went out," because he wasn't married. He said, "I locked that door."

"But," I said, "the door was unlocked." He said, "The door wasn't unlocked, because the door was locked when I just come there."

"But," I said, "when I come there the door was [un]locked, 'cause," I said, "I'm in here. I come in and the door was still locked?"

"Yes," he said, "I just unlocked the door."

"But," I said, "I was just talk--" and I said, "I was just talking to you." And when I turned around the bugger I was talking to, he was gone. And the other Joe was come home. So he said to me, he said, "Now, this is what I'm telling you." He said, "I'll be one place, but this--" he was very wicked then, he said, "this fellow that is me," he said, "I'm not [real name]--" but that was his right name, but 'tis, you know, I use the word Joe--he said, "I'm not Joe." He said, "Although I'm living here with you, and I'll do you no harm. But," he said, "I'm telling you that Joe, he is not--he's a fairy, he's turned into a fairy now. I'm the fairy. The other Joe is gone." You know, he could frighten you in that sort of a way. But then after I sized him up, he died a few years after.

BR: So he was young when he died.

WGS: He was only a boy, a young man around thirty-eight or forty. But they knowed, when he did die, that it wasn't the right fellow that died. Because when he died, he come right back to a beautiful-looking young man. You could see the young man then. He come back to his self. Because there was not a blemish on him. But the other fellow was going around was all scriveled up. So they claims that when he died, they sent back the right man. And they went

on. Because they never dies, they say.<sup>9</sup>  
And that is right. I seen that meself.

The last claim hardly stands close scrutiny, and I don't think Mr. Smith really intends it to; rather, his pride as a narrator would not let him give a denatured performance which does not include the appropriate certifications of authenticity. The skillful narrator of fairy and ghost legends attempts to induce feelings of wonder, fear, and amazement in his audience, and he will hardly do this without imparting conviction (unless he adopts the opposite tactic of utter neutrality, and claims to be reporting only facts upon which the listener can make up his own mind). With Mr. Smith I sensed, as I had with Mrs. Meaney, a certain conflict between literal and artistic truth. Still, Mr. Smith does believe in the reality of certain fairy incidents to the extent of refusing to speak of them on tape, and I think that in terms of belief "Joe" and "Little Joe" fall somewhere between these serious matters which he can hardly be induced to speak of, and the tall tales and legends which he relates in exactly the same

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<sup>9</sup>According to Ritson, Ariosto writes (in Harington's "Translation") that--

(Either auncient folke believ'd a lie,  
Or this is true) A fayrie cannot  
die... (33)

"Fairies often appeared as animals such as dogs or cats which would steal food or attack children. They couldn't be caught or harmed. They weren't born and couldn't die, at least by mortal means. Most wild animals were looked on suspiciously to be fairies" (72-181/7).

manner as the "Joe" stories. He has "yarns" and "lies" (as he calls them) about winds so high that gulls were stuck in the ice by their beaks, and a man was blown home from the Labrador in a barrel; a rope made of squid; and liniment so powerful it chased a pain through a man's body until he saw the pain shoot out of his toe across the water, leaving a hole in his toe and boot ("they don't make that kind of medicine anymore!")<sup>10</sup> One was about a morning so cold that he came downstairs to see that his grandparents, in a photograph on the wall, had donned mufflers and gloves. (In the midst of these yarns, he owned scrupulously if unnecessarily, "I say 'I' because it sounds better, you know.")

Mr. Smith also tells stories about tricks he has played, some of which were elaborately arranged and sustained over time. One, for example, involved a rubber spider put into some made-in-Korea boots, which had the town hysterical over an imagined plague of foreign spiders. Another was about how, on a bet, he got two fellows who had fallen out speaking to each other again through a faked

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<sup>10</sup>An old motif which appears in connection with the healer Valentine Greatrakes, who flourished in 17th century Cork. He cured by stroking with his hands, and once operating thus on two patients, chased their pain about their bodies until it was driven out through the toes (Charles Smith 366-67). (The idea is clearly related to the blast.)

phone call. I was not unduly disconcerted, then when I found this Survey Card:

William Smith claims that he was whipped by the fairies when he was a small baby. His mother left him in the crib while she went out to the clothesline. When she came back William was gone. They looked for him for three days, before he was found. As a result of this William, who was born a normal child, has been a cripple ever since. (FSC80-322/\*\*).

Nor was I too surprised when on my second visit, Mr. Smith and Rita told me how after I'd left the first time, they "laughed and laughed" over what they'd told me. Upper Island Cove has a reputation for wit, part of which is the putting on (or down) of outsiders. "It was always one up for the person who could pull a good one on anyone from outside the community--the minister, the boss, the salesman, the policeman, the magistrate or storekeeper," wrote one student, noting that the whole cycle of "Uncle Joe" jokes (Uncle Joe in court, Uncle Joe goes shopping, Uncle Joe on Bell Island) originated from this tradition (72-103/7). The story which particularly amused Mr. Smith and Rita, however, was not "Joe" or "Little Joe," which Mr. Smith continued to maintain are true, but one which was obviously fictional anyway. We recorded it on the second visit:

Well, see, a long while ago in Bishop's Cove there was an old gentleman and his old lady. They lived together for all their lives. So one day the old woman--it was late in the fall of the year--she said she didn't have a partridgeberry for to boil a bit of jam for the winter. So the old fellow decided--they was very

happy--decided, he said he'd go and get her a gallon of berries. Now he was born in the world, he never had a brother, and he never had a sister. And he had no known relations in the world. So he took the bucket, his gallon can, and he went off to get a \*\*\* of berries. Reached the berryground, picked his gallon of berries, sat down on the rock to get a smoke for himself. Proud enough that he had his few berries for his old woman. So, in a few minutes there was an old gentleman come along, a stick in his hand, and he sat down on the rock. Spoke to him, "No way," he said, "have you got any relations, have you got any relations? \*\*\*\*\*?" "No," he said, "I got no one in the world but myself. My father never had a brother or sister, and," he said, "I got no brothers or sisters." "Oh, yes," he said, "you got a lot of relations." "Oh, no," he said, "I haven't." "Oh, yes," he said, "'Cause I'm your Uncle Krinkle." "Well," he says, "If you're me Uncle Krinkle, that seems to be a very funny name, I never heard me father tell about Uncle Krinkle." "Oh, yes," he said, "I'm your Uncle Krinkle. And," he said, "You've got a lot of cousins, but you can't see them right now." "Well," he said, "that seems to be funny." So he said he talked away and he said, "What about me aunt?" "Well," he said, "she's here." So he said, when I turned around instead of being Uncle Krinkle on the rock there was an old woman. "Well," he said, "that's a damn queer thing because me uncle was just here. He told me he was Uncle Krinkle." "So he is," he said, "I'm here." So when he looked, he said, he was still there. So the two of them. So he said a few minutes after that, he wanted to come home, picked up his can to come home, and when he looked, he said, there was all his little cousins going off

with the full gallon of berries: every man, and every child, had a berry put on the hat-pin. And the gallon of berries was lugged away by the fairies, going off through the woods, he said, with no more than one berry on a pin. He said, there should have been thousands, he said, walking along. So he said, "That's how many cousins I had."

An extraordinary feature here is the fairy couple, prolific parents at that, for we have seen that the fairies seldom appear in twos, but in larger groups or singly. Even the occasional appearance as a pair is not male and female, although it may embody opposites of some sort: a man met two fairies, one laughing and one crying, and took the happy one on his lap (64-13/C74/15). In the parallel world pictured in "Uncle Krinkle," the fairy couple mirror the "happy old couple" who, typical of folktale, open the story.

Like "Little Joe" and "Joe," "Uncle Krinkle" may be read as a text par excellence about recognition, on knowing or not knowing people, particularly one's own relations. Indeed, "Uncle Krinkle" makes little sense in any other terms. One might well have a horde of unknown cousins in Bishop's Cove and Upper Island Cove, for there is a limited number of surnames. Graham Smith, describing the necessity for nicknames, says that ninety per cent of Bishop's Cove are Smiths (74-218/3); Barry Smith lists more names but says "most all of these families are somehow interrelated" (80-322/7). Sharpe records the tradition that Dr. Cron gave the nicknames in Island Cove so he could tell the families apart



(the Lynches, the only Irish surname among them, were "Fairies" or "Deanies").<sup>11</sup> Still, it would be incorrect to consider either place a static, inbred community. Mr. Smith's family background illustrates typical mobility: his father was born in Pennsylvania and moved to Toopes Cove in Placentia Bay at sixteen where he married; the family later

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<sup>11</sup>"The mickadenies will get ya!"--a St. John's fairy threat (80-75/19), presumably combining two Irish allusions. Virginia Dillon, noting the Catholic propensity for ghost stories, quotes a Protestant friend coming upon a storytelling session, "At the ghost stories again. No trouble to know you're a crowd of Micks" (64-1/7). "Denies" is probably related to "donnies" or "dawnies": Frances Kavanagh told me that if a person was not quite awake and talking without sense, people used to say that they were "in the fairies," but now they would say they are "in the donnies." A Conche student wrote:

I remember that if I kicked up a fuss about coming in for the night my mother would often say, "It's almost dark out now, there's no one but the dawnies on the go at this hour," or "You don't want the dawnies to get you, do you?" The "dawnies" were fairies or "the good people." (FSC74-132/\*\*)

Crocker cites the Irish usage of "dony" to mean tiny (1:75-76), and Joyce gives "donny" as meaning "weak, in poor health. Hence donnaun, a poor weakly creature, same root with the diminutive" (English 248). Singleton describes "lurigadauns," little men in red jackets ("Dairy Lore" 459). In The Sunday Telegram for 18 February 1990. Tom Furlong writes in a review of The Devil's Triangle, "In Fox Harbour, Placentia Bay, years ago when someone disappeared without a trace it was said: 'the macadandies took him'" (22).

moved to Bishop's Cove where Mr. Smith and his brothers were born (72-262/17).<sup>12</sup>

"Little Joe," "Joe," and "Uncle Krinkle" are about tricks and impostures, and therefore fit Mr. Smith's bent in this direction; perhaps that is why, out of all his fairy lore, he chose them to develop for performance, at least for my interviews. The influence of this personal proclivity is nevertheless limited, as the archive material shows for "Little Joe" and also for "Uncle Krinkle." Although Mr. Smith says that he picked that name "out of the air," his claim to wild invention is tempered by this 1974 text from the Bishop's Cove area (the collector is unclear as to the exact provenance):

There was an old man who lived on Harbour Grace Ridge, he was called Uncle Stickly. Uncle Stickly used to buy berries. Another man, Uncle Ned, from the same place, went marshberry picking in amongst the rocks. Uncle Ned was picking berries when he looked up and saw what appeared to be Uncle Stickly. Uncle Stickly took Uncle Ned's berries and began to string them on straws. When Uncle Stickly finished--Uncle Ned still thought it was him, so he cursed on him, saying, "God damn you, Uncle Stickly." Uncle Stickly then took the berries on the straws and disappeared with a lot of little people chasing him.  
(75-79/5-6)

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<sup>12</sup>Graham Smith does not say whether the family was "native" to Pennsylvania or had gone there from Newfoundland for work; I assume the latter, for Smith is one of the earliest names in Bishop's Cove (Seary et al 88).

Skewered berries seem to be a local comic motif; Mr. James Crane of nearby Tilton (the informant mentioned in Chapter Two who thought I might be a spy) told me "a yarn" about a man boiling up after picking marshberries who looked around to see that the fairies had all his berries "ckivered up on knitting needles." There seems to be a certain mock laboriousness in this trick, as the fairies make off with the day's work. It is interesting to compare their disguise as a local merchant (or at least middleman), "Uncle Stickly," with the following usage of the term "fairy":

Uncle Ray firmly believes in fairies and spirits even to this day. For he says, "What would you call that old merchant who wouldn't give you your cent for the flake bough, if you wouldn't call him a fairy or an evil spirit of some kind?" (81-314/20)

The metaphor works because in essence the fairies are robbers, their pilferings ranging from the trivial (berries) to tragic--children, health, sanity. In "Little Joe," "Joe," and "Jack," they are bent on theft of a human niche; they want a spot by the stove and plates of food, but they don't want to work for it.

Mr. Smith was robbed as a child of the mobility that made normal participation in the life of the community possible, since he was not able to go about freely with other children or attend school (he never learned to read or write). His role as storyteller and prankster restore power to him: as a narrator he draws people to himself, and as

trickster sends them running about at his bidding. He uses cunning to triumph over more simple-minded types, at least symbolically; Graham Smith gives the following:

Before you go in the woods put a hole in a nickel and tie it around your neck to keep away fairies. The fairies will see the bright nickel and be frightened away. This was not believed by my uncle [Mr. Smith]. As a boy he would wait behind a rock for some young person to come along. He would steal their nickel. (FSC74-218/11)

Since Mr. Smith probably did not have the physical ability to do this, it sounds more like a compensatory fantasy than fact. He does, however, successfully perpetrate long-standing falsehoods. In September 1987 I met David Osbourne, a student from Bishop's Cove who told me that it was only recently that he learned that Mr. Smith had lost the use of his leg to polio, not in the war or in the mines on Bell Island. He described going to Mr. Smith's shop with his friends to hear stories, and said that the closing of the shop and his marriage have curtailed Mr. Smith's former audience's access to him. He also said that Bishop's Cove consists of four parts, each with a storyteller who would gladly kill the others. One informant, describing the importance of storytelling, said that "whenever a time [party] was being held at a neighbour's home they wouldn't even call it a time unless they had a few good storytellers there" (74-218/34). Storytelling, then, was an arena in which Mr. Smith could compete on an equal basis with others.

Perhaps the lessened opportunities to go out and get "raw material" in the form of experience made him especially attentive to traditional sources, hence his extensive repertoire.

Mr. Smith also lays claim to various psychic powers. He says that people used to say that "things cast their shadows before them," and he is sometimes able to foresee things. One morning several years ago he thought the sea looked funny, and told Rita that by nightfall "part of Newfoundland would be under water"; that day there was a big flood in Argentina. Another day a series of numbers came into his head, and he told Rita to buy a lottery ticket with those numbers; she either forgot or got the wrong ones, but if she had gotten the ones he said, they would have won a million dollars. He can also "see" backwards: sometimes he goes into a kind of trance and events of two hundred years ago "come to him." Rita confirmed his predictions, as well as his claim that he can make people tell him all about themselves, whether they want to or not; he did that to her, she said. He said this ability is "handed down" (I am not sure whether through teaching or "gift"), and he got it from his grandfather, who could stop horses with his mind, and could make people think that a pencil was a snake.<sup>13</sup> Rita,

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<sup>13</sup>Possibly this involved a sort of hypnotism, for Mr. Smith said that he would just talk to the people for a while, and they would see the "snake"; Mr. Smith often saw it himself. It is very like the illusion-producing capability attributed to those who have a "black art" or

a robust woman in her thirties, rushed in and out of the house during our interviews, offering comments and suggestions, checking to see whether I'd gotten this or that on tape. She says that Mr. Smith sometimes "scares her to death" with his stories, but she clearly takes pride in them, and it was she who brought out a photograph of Mr. Smith accepting a car that he won on the "Cream of the West" television quiz show in 1965.

A concern with control can be seen in Mr. Smith's claim that he is hard to knock out. Once, for example, he pulled some of his teeth with pliers, and when he went to the dentist to have the remainder removed, refused anesthetic because he said it wouldn't work anyway. (I thought he was joking about this, but Rita, coming in just then, said she'd found him in a pool of blood in the yard that day.) He does not normally drink, but when challenged to a drinking match

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"black heart" book. One possessor of this tome, for example, made people see rooms full of fancy furniture in his empty house (FSC70-3/133, FSC68-16/120); another, during a lumber camp card game, turned the queen of hearts into a real woman in a red dress and high heels (64-1/16); a third, when refused a ride to St. John's on the coastal boat, caused the clothes of the captain and his wife to drop off on the deck (70-12/97-103). One man sailed from Bell Island to England on a stick transformed into a ship, but couldn't get back (70-20/44). Birth deformities on Bell Island were sometimes blamed on practitioners of the "black art" (70-20/44), but most black art activities seem to have been card and conjuring tricks, or fortune-telling. The book is usually said to have been obtained from the devil in exchange for one's soul (FSC73-17/19, FSC73-57/16, FSC68-16/64, 64-1/16); one might also get "the black stick(s)" with which to do magic (FSC69-19/42).

one time, remained unaffected while the seasoned drinkers reeled. As a child, he said, he never slept more than two hours a night, and his mother predicted that he'd never see thirty. (One night, while he was roaming about, he saw a huge hovering object with bright lights; the next day, when a young boy who had also seen it was accused by his parents of lying, Mr. Smith came to his rescue by confirming it.)

Mr. Smith is, then, by his own portrayal, "a hard case." Possibly he has been telling so many stories for so many years that in many cases he himself does not quite know what he believes. There are nevertheless some which can easily be seen to be fiction, and others which, without a doubt, he takes seriously. In the former category are tall tales and legends for which he employs the same style as that of "Joe," "Little Joe," and "Uncle Krinkle." For example, dialogue and the repetition of words and phrases almost like refrains characterize this topographical legend (the transcription of which does not convey the similar rhythmical properties):

And people used to say that Bishop's Cove was a very nice place. So this old gentleman used to always say Bishop's Cove was the last place the devil found out. Being the shore was rough, and they couldn't get fishing, so he always said that Bishop's Cove, he said, "The devil found Bishop's Cove." So one day, there was another man alongside, he said, "I got to have proof that the devil found out Bishop's Cove," he says, "Have you got any proof?" "Yes," he says, "I got rroof the devil found Bishop's Cove. It was the last

place he found, and I got proof."  
 "Well," he says, "give me the proof."  
 "Well," he said, "the two hills in there named the Tolts."  
 "Yes," he said.  
 "Well," he said, "there's the Devil's Hole."  
 "Yes," he said.  
 "There's the Dinner Hill."  
 "Yes," he said, "the Dinner Hill is there."  
 "Well," he said, "down under Garman's Gulch (?) there's a hole that goes in under the clift," he said, "about a quarter of a mile."  
 "Yes," he said, "but what have that got to do with Bishop's Cove?"  
 "Well," he said, "the devil got mad. He kicked the two tolts and he split them apart; he went in the Devil's Hole," he said, "and he rested; he come out on the Dinner Hill, he eat his dinner; he went down," he said, "and he kicked down there, it was the last place he hurt his foot," he said, "and he kicked a hole a quarter of a mile in through last. So," he said, "if it's not the last place the devil found out," he said, "I got the proof," he said, "that he did find it out."

A fissure in one tolt has been a focal point for legendry. One student said it is a "crack two feet wide...caused by a thunderbolt" (70-25/86), and Mr. Smith has a story about the "bolt":

Well, see, inside in here on the Ridge, there's two hills, there's the upper tolt and the lower tolt. But in the upper tolt there's a split, the tolt is split right in two pieces. But this was handed down to me by an old gentleman of Bishop's Cove years ago. And I decided one day that I'd ask why the two tolts was split in two. And he always had an answer for everything you asked.  
 "Well," he said, "boy, I'll tell you why," he said, "the tolts is split in two pieces," he said, "that was done by



a thunderbolt." He said, "One time the two tolts was properly together and," he said, "the thunderbolt struck and split the upper tolt and put the other tolt across." Which it did happen, probably. So, he told me that--I asked him, what was the thunderbolt, was it lightning, a ball of lightning? "No, boy," he said, "not a ball of lightning. A thunderbolt," he says, "is a long bolt." "Yes," I said, "And how would you know?" "Well," he said, "a long time ago," he said, "when we was boys," he said, "I had a brother, his name was Nat. So me and Nat decided, right after the thunderbolt falled, that we'd go and see, the ground was tore up, what we'd find. So," he said, "we went, and we were digging for a week and we couldn't find anything, and this day," he said, "me brother sung out and said he had the end of something. And we dug up a piece of iron," he said, "a hundred and twenty-seven feet long." And he said it was very large. Now, as you might--you mightn't know that a grapple is a thing that it'd make to moor a boat, instead of an anchor. So he said, "we pulled it out, got the horses and pulled it out to the yard. And all hands," he said, "come to see the thunderbolt." They didn't believe it was a thunderbolt, thought--so he said, "we chopped him up, and we give every man a piece of thunderbolt. And every man made a grapple.... every man in Bishop's Cove," he said, "had a grapple made out of the thunderbolt that split the tolt in two pieces." He was a comical man.

One student wrote of the famous thunderbolt:

Many years ago before electricity came to Bishop's Cove it was believed by the local people that the fairies lived on a hill called the Tolt. One night a thunderbolt fell and the Tolt split and rocks were sent hundreds of feet in the air. The people believed that this thunderbolt was sent by God to destroy all the fairies. Fairies have not been

seen since this event in 1901. (FSC80-322/\*\*)

Of course it was not really the end of the fairies, for the same student also said:

"In the days of darkness" when there was no electricity people used to use the oil lamps. During this period (1940s-1954) many people had encounters with the fairies. They also saw ghosts and weather lights...There are no fairies here today, they all moved away when electricity came. (80-322/21,26)

"The older people," he claimed, "believed that the devil lived in "Devil's Hole Hill," and young men on the way to fight in World War Two would spend the night there and put their names on the wall: "the purpose of this trip was to show their bravery and when they returned home they were praised for outsmarting the devil. If they were weak the devil would have taken them" (80-322/12). Another student said that in "the Devil's Cave,"

all the names of the people of Island Cove are supposedly carved by the devil. To keep track of all the souls that were in the town, when anybody died in the town the family would go to the cave to see if the name was still there or if it was gone. If the name was gone then your soul had gone to hell, if your name remained then your soul had gone to heaven. This cave has been partially caved in by a landslide but you can still find some of the names of citizens of Island Cove carved in the rock, some of the names going back to the early 1800s. (Sharpe FSC)

"The Devil ate his dinner" on Dinner Hill (70-25/85), where the fairies also dined. One report makes the familiar

## Irish/fairy connection:

The first inhabitants that came to Bishop's Cove were from Cork County, Ireland. These people believed in fairies. There is a big hill directly over the settlement. The settlers named it Dinner Hill because this is where they believed the fairies came and gathered each day for dinner (80-322/\*\*).

Like the collector quoted above on the thunderbolt and electricity driving out the fairies, Mr. Smith casts the fairies in the past in one breath and resurrects them in the next. About sixty years ago, he says,

the last fairy was seen in Bishop's Cove. He was seen on Dinner Hill. And he was supposed to be getting his dinner too. That was the last one, until the other year that woman I was telling you about, which I'm not telling, because that's an actual fact, and the people are still alive today.

The latter reference is to an incident which is among those he treats seriously and refuses to speak of on tape or at all. It concerns an "educated, clean-living" woman who was picking berries one day when a strange, well-dressed man-- "one of them"--appeared and tried to get her to go in a direction "she knew wasn't right." She ignored his coaxing and sat down on a rock reciting scriptures to herself, where she was found, unharmed, in the morning. Most of the stories in this group, however, involve injury or death through some dark agency. Recently a man out in a boat was surrounded by a swarm of "busybees" (bumblebees). He got

sick and was taken to the hospital where he died although there was not a bite on his body. The bees were fairies, Mr. Smith implied, and when I later asked if he'd ever heard of a "blast," he said that's exactly what this man had gotten. He also said that several years ago, a boy "lost his mind" and the doctors didn't know what was the matter with him. Mr. Smith knew, because he could recognize it from the old stories about that kind of thing. But when I asked what happened, he shook his head and refused to say more.

Another story he refused to record was about a woman who ended up in "the mental," or psychiatric hospital, as a result of seeing a strange old woman on the road. This somehow affected her so that "her mind stopped where it was," and everything is as it was thirty years ago to her; she doesn't recognize her grown son, insisting that her son is only two months old. But even for stories he treats seriously, Mr. Smith shuffles the various elements and motifs like a deck of cards, displaying them in a different configuration each time. For example, the identical fate was met with by a "beautiful young woman" whom Mr. Smith told me about several years later. She went into an empty house formerly inhabited by a hunchbacked man who had moved to Vancouver. (This man could write, even though he didn't have an education, and Mr. Smith quoted verses he had

written on his door.)<sup>14</sup> "Something bad" happened to everyone who went into this house, and the woman felt "hundreds" brushing against her on the stairs and in the rooms, even though she could see nothing. She too ended up in the "mental" with time standing still. It is useful to observe an individual performing the reshuffling that is so clear at a general level, that is, in aligning texts from different informants in an area. Another constellation of the above motifs, for example, can be seen in this recent account:

A girl from Upper Island Cove was believed to have been "whipped" by a fairy. When she was just a school child on her way home from school one day, her friend threw her mitten into a deserted house. Since it was winter she went to get her mitten. When she went in she saw a little man who "cut her with a whip across the legs." After this she became sick and crippled. The doctor came to see her and performed surgery on her leg. He removed bones, bits of cloth, and other strange things that did

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<sup>14</sup>The suspicion aroused by this preternatural ability is shown in a report from a nearby community:

There is a story which has been circulating for years about a family from Bryant's Cove, of which all members are said to be in the fairies. One of the sons died at about sixty-five years of age and he was never seen by anyone. He supposedly had a big whisker and he wrote a book and songs even though he had never gone to school in his life. People say that the house was across a fairies' path. Also one daughter of the family was in the bed for seven years.... My uncle told me this with a smile but he was puzzled about the story too. (FSC71-21/38)

not belong. While she was sick, her grandfather came to see her. When he was going to her room upstairs, there were many little people coming down the stairs. The house was full of them. After a long time the child recovered, but was never the same. Scars and marks remain on her legs today.<sup>15</sup> (Sharpe/18)

The continuous recycling does not seem to affect the credibility of any particular incident; two Bishop's Cove students gave first-hand accounts incorporating familiar themes:

When I was about twelve years old [c. 1960] we went skating on a pond (marsh). There was always talk of things being seen there. For some reason or other I had to leave my friend alone for a while; upon returning I found that he had fallen down and couldn't get up. He fell on his stomach. He said that someone whipped him on the back. Sure enough there were about a dozen whip marks across his back and they are there today. His parents and others said that it was the fairies who did it. It is very strange and unexplainable. Even a bruise would disappear after eight years. (FSC70-25/80)

Ten years later the victim's brother described the same incident:

One night my brother was sliding and he stayed after dark. When ten o'clock came and he didn't return home my father and grandfather went to look for him. They found him lying on the ice, he was

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<sup>15</sup>Croker gives a narrative of a girl who is struck with a switch by a small child; then a strange old woman slashes her across the knees and feet with a whip. She--"or whatsoever thing we had in her place"--died five days later, saying she had seen a "whole heap of fairies" on horses with girls behind them, waiting for her (Croker 1834 ed. 50-52).

conscious but he could not move. He told them how the little men came and sung and danced around him in a circle, then they took a whip and whipped him on the back. His back bears the marks of the whip today as proof of his experience. (80-322/22-23)

If the fairies didn't do it, perhaps the boy was involved in a clash between "Ridge goats" and "Cove goats," rival gangs of preadolescent boys from different sections of Bishop's Cove. "There is ill feeling between the children of these two parts towards each other," said a collector, and the "goats" often fought for sovereignty (70-25/5). On the subject of violence, this student also described the now-defunct "Teek" or "Tag" day, January 6, the last day of Christmas and of janneying when "people used to dress up and go around cracking others with sticks." The collector did it himself; they were not supposed to hit hard, he says, but an acquaintance's father was once beaten by two men for "devilment" (70-25/78). "I also wish to add," he writes, "that adults played a major part in the dressing up and beating of others. I heard one man say that men used to await others for hours on the roofs of houses. He said it was the risk of one's life to go outdoors on Teek day" (FSC70-25/50).

Bishop's Cove and Island Cove fairies, mostly male, show a marked predilection for whips and sticks. An Island Cove woman gave two collectors accounts of a fairy she saw around 1968. She and her daughter were out looking for her

son, and, according to her niece, said:

As we went we saw this little man. My daughter wanted to know who he was but I wouldn't let her say anything. He was about three feet high and had on red pants, red shirt, straw hat, and had a whip in his hand. When we got farther down the road I looked back and he was whipping his whip in the air. I could see he had big ears right down on his shoulder. We went right on home without looking back. (FSC76-128/\*\*)

The other description is the same, except she doesn't mention the ears, and instead of a whip he had a "white cane," and he "danced around" and then disappeared (FSC73-179/22). This little red whip-wielding fellow is a rather irresistibly phallic creature, and it is easy to find more of his kind: it will be recalled that the great patriarch Uncle Krinkle carried a stick, and Narvaez cites a "little boy without hair" and a fairy's "red pointed hat and long beard" in this regard (36), and a nicely detailed specimen comes from a Placentia man who saw it, appropriately enough, when he went behind a fence to relieve himself:

...and just above the ridge of the dike he sighted what he has often referred to as "his little man." Rubbing his eyes and taking a second look he noticed that the man wore a little red coat, a matching cap, coiled at the top, and on his feet were little black boots "twisted up and turned in" at the tops. "Well, Mr. Man! That's a leprachon for sure," whispered Mr. D. to himself as he watched the little fellow prance along over the ridge and disappear. (75-295/n.p.)



"Very small people with red caps dancing around in a ring" (73-103/13) makes a fine sexual metaphor; while there is little overt erotic content in Newfoundland fairy tradition,<sup>16</sup> an association of the fairies with irregular sexual conduct was shown in the last chapter and in the case of the "fairy-child" begotten on the barrens mentioned in Chapter Two. This direct contextual connection is not the same thing as the arbitrary translation of motifs or images according to a list of supposedly subconscious symbols, but it does lend support to such equations. And there is in fairy lore a veritable welter of Freudian folkloric symbols--wells and ovens, chimneys and sticks--which lend themselves rather well to a Dundesian approach.<sup>17</sup> The various penetrating projectiles, for example, seem suggestive, as in this account from Graham Smith:

I didn't get this tale on tape but I remember it very well: It's about Uncle Joe Drover. When he was a little boy about eight years old he got in with the fairies. What they did to him was that

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<sup>16</sup>This may be due to the constraints of collection, but the only example of a fairy lover--or would-be lover--I know of was recorded by Margaret Bennett from Scottish Gaelic tradition on the West Coast. A girl "happened to see one of them" and take "an awful liking to him" but she could not have him; he told her (in Gaelic), "I am under another power; I cannot be set free from the other world" (180-81). Leach notes the absence of fairy lovers in Cape Breton fairy lore (52).

<sup>17</sup>I call them "folkloric" because like most people, I have not actually read Freud, but know that long projectile things are "male," and round receptive things are "female." But being a former student of Professor Dundes, I could hardly resist trying them out.

they pricked his finger with a small needle. He didn't know for sure if the needle was still in his finger until one year he was down on the Labrador fishing. One day he felt a tingling in his elbow and then a sharp pain. When he rolled up his sleeve, what should he find but a needle sticking out from his elbow. After forty years the needle had worked its way up through his arm to his elbow. (72-262/14)

A Fortune Harbour informant said he didn't know whether a certain man "was struck by a fairy or not," but his arm got sore and broke open, "and there was all kinds of stuff come out of it, they claimed it was needles and stuff like that...needles, and he lost the use of his arm" (64-13:C66/14). "A traditional story in Bay Bulls tells of a lady who often crossed intersecting paths in the woods without bread in her pocket; for not carrying the bread the fairies gave her a 'blast,' i.e. shot needles at her and took away her voice" (70-26/50). Another common projectile is bone: a girl crossed a marsh without bread, so "the fairies struck her," and her mother took "old feathers and old pieces of bones and all stuff out of her leg like that" (64-7:C13/my transcription). Two Spaniard's Bay informants give another example:

Informant 1: Dai use to call em little people, ya know. Dai was all dressed in white and de be only about t'ree or four feet high.... See now, de wife's brodder down dere look when he was small he was suppose to be lugged away by de fairies... Dai took a bone out of de calf of his leg...just like fish bones....

Informant 2: When he was gettin' over

de wall he felt a belt flickin' him  
across de legs. An den he took sick, ya  
know, took sick and his legs started to  
swell. And sure Dr. Cron come up and he  
said, "Miss," he said, "Miss, where now  
has dis boy been flicked with the  
fairies?"<sup>16</sup> (75-163/18-19)

In his investigation of couvade, Dundes makes a case for a bone as a penis symbol (as in "boner": "Couvade" 164); and the hair or fur that is also found in the (symbolic?) wound of a fairy blast can also be read as a genital symbol; since they fill the same narrative slot (that is, the extruded matter), they are what Dundes calls "allomotifs," or functionally equivalent units ("Rabbit Herd" 172). In the same discussion, Dundes mentions the potential of the mouth as a genital symbol (171), which would give an interesting reading to an already startling account of a girl who went for water one night and crossed a "fairy marsh" without bread. She was gone a long time,

and when she returned she said that she had been on merry-go-rounds with lovely people. Then she giggled and laughed continuously. During her laughing, her mouth kept going up until it reached her ears. The next morning her parents took her to the doctor in Spaniard's Bay and he said it was definitely the fairies who had caused this. He then crossed her mouth. Her parents had to bring her back for this treatment nine days in a

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<sup>16</sup>In Upper Island Cove, "a limb becomes wooden if you are 'flipped by the fairies'" (FSC71-41/19). A psychosexual reading of the blast might note the usage of "flicking" for "fucking," given in Spears's *Slang and Euphemism* (139), as well as its phonetic similarity to related phallic terms like "dick" and "prick." Spears's dictionary also gives "needle" for the penis (268).

row. On the ninth morning her mouth returned to normal and no further treatments were necessary. (FSC74-113/\*\*)

The number nine is important in folk medicine, particularly in birth-related practices where perhaps it echoes the number of months of gestation.<sup>19</sup> Nine also figures frequently in blast narratives, and whatever one thinks about the "phallic" significance of individual motifs, I think that there is a clear analogy to impregnation and birth in the blast. In a text from North River (near Spaniard's Bay), the unwholesome issue is even alive, or at least animated by an unnamed force:

One time there was a dance in the parish hall and during the evening one young man noticed that his hand had become infected and was festering, although he had no recollection of having injured himself. He betook himself to the priest who told him to go home and put a poultice on the infection, and to throw whatever came out of it into the fire. Well, he did this and whatever was inside flew straight across the room. He picked it up and threw it into the fire, whereupon it shot up the chimney like an explosion. He was alright after that, but there was another man with the same complaint who, for some reason or another, failed to throw the contents into the fire. When a sequence of calamities began to harass his family, the man went back to the priest hoping for further advice, but the priest said only, "Well, I told you what you had to

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<sup>19</sup>Women used to stay in bed for nine days after a birth, for example, and one student wrote that miscarriages would occur nine days after a serious fright or injury, and that an infant breast-fed longer than nine months would become frail (75-295/n.p.).

do and you didn't do it, and now there is nothing else to be done." (70-20/47)

Sometimes the extrusion is kept for future inspection; a Bay Roberts man painfully (laboriously?) produced such an artifact:

One old man told how he went up to the garden at twilight to have a last look at his vegetable garden before retiring. There was a white gull sitting on his prize turnip (the largest one). He started after the bird and kicked at it. When he did the bird vanished and the man took such a pain in the leg that he could hardly get home. The leg got continually worse, swelled up and crippled the man. There was one night it was particularly sore and a huge boil seemed to rise on the leg. The man's daughter [the informant's wife] was there with several neighbors trying to comfort the man, who was in agony. They concluded that the boil should be "let" and proceeded to do so. As soon as the boil was pierced, a long white string came out and continued to fall in a pile to the floor. It fell of its own accord and the swelling abated as the string accumulated on the floor. The string was kept for years after as proof for unbelievers, but the man always had a crippled leg to his dying day. (78-185/24-27)

According to Ernest Jones, birds are a very common phallic and birth symbol; he outlines the reasons in the same discussion in which he delineates the "fertility" symbolization of water and wind ("Conception" passim). The blast is often received in connection with water (as on a marsh, going to the well, or drinking from a stream) or with wind. In St. Brendan's,

One woman...became a cripple at the age of thirty five. She explained that it happened one evening when she was weeding a cabbage patch. She was struck in the legs by a straw. The straw was carried by a fairy. Fairies were small creatures wearing full tail dresses, they were found on marshes. Their presence was felt by a strong gust of wind and straw blown around by the wind. People say they went around in a circle making a hissing noise. Today the older people still believe in fairies.  
(FSC75-262/\*\*)

Jones also claims that breath and wind are functionally equivalent; such an equivalency is apparent in older records of the blast (although not in the Newfoundland material). According to Croker, "the blast is a large round tumour, which is thought to rise suddenly on the part affected, from the baneful breath cast on it by one of the 'good people' in a moment of vindictive or capricious malice" (1:307). Cromek writes of the "pernicious breath" of the Scottish fairies, and gives a cure for a "breath-blasted" child that involved a virgin getting water from a blessed well in a pitcher that had never been wet (246). Jacob Grimm discusses the "blighting breath of the elves": "Blowing puffing beings language itself shewes them to be from of old," he says, since "spirit," "ghost," and related terms are derived from verbs having to do with breath and wind (Teutonic Mythology 2:460-61). Charles Singer, discussing the "native Teutonic" medical magic of England, says that

two of its four characteristic elements are "the doctrine of nines" and "the doctrine of elf-shot." He quotes from the Lay of the Nine Healing Herbs, which herbs work against, among other things, "worm blast, water blast, thorn blast, thistle blast, ice blast, venom blast," and three other "blasts" lost from the manuscript. He says the term from which he translates "blast" (which could also be rendered "blister") comes from a common word for a breath or spirit, and he goes on to point out an "obvious" analogy between wind and disease; the wind carries the "venoms" or "on flying things" which produce disease (and, he adds, the best translation of both "blast" and "venoms" might be "infection"). After listing the nine venoms and nine diseases, the passage continues with a call to the four quarters of heaven from which the disease-bearing winds or blasts come (353-56).

There is perhaps something ludicrous about attributing "symbolic" significance to wind and water in Newfoundland, where the absence of either is more remarkable than their presence (although that in itself may argue for a symbolic interpretation of their importance in narrative). On the other hand, it seems only reasonable to suppose that as fairy tradition takes its imagery from human life, it is bound to have sexual underpinnings and overtones. Moreover, the blast is not a particularly Newfoundland motif. Like changelings, it has parallels in modern popular culture: the

famous scene from the 1979 movie Alien, for example, in which the implanted space creature bursts from the human host's chest, and "modern" legends of infestation and contamination such as hairballs in lungs and spiders in hairdos. It is also related to widespread conceptions of disease as an invasive entity which must be expelled.

The roots of the blast, however, run deep into the past. Singer writes that "Anglo-Saxon and even Middle English literature is replete with the notion of disease caused by the arrows of mischievous supernatural beings" (357). Nancy Scheper-Hughes identifies the earliest recorded folk belief about mental illness in Ireland as the Druidic priests' power to inflict madness by casting a "magic wisp of straw," and cites ancient Irish laws on the necessity of "fettering those upon whom the magic wisp has been cast" (78). Bewitched persons across medieval Europe routinely expelled bizarre items: "one of the best-known symptoms of bewitchment was the vomiting of bones, nails, needles, balls of wool, bunches of hair, and other things," Kittredge observes, citing as one example Wier's attack on "the belief of his time that witches, by the devil's aid, send into the bodies of their victims straws, pigs' bristles, fish-bones, thorns, etc." (133-34).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Kittredge gives copious references (453-56). He also gives numerous examples and references to the concept of disease as a foreign body (134, 455-56).



Cataloguing witches' supposed crimes, Scot says, "some write that with wishing they can send needles into the livers of their enemies" (6), and indeed needles were such popular projectiles that they were seized upon by pretenders to occult powers: Rowlands in 1602 knew "persons who pretended to have the art of shooting needles into the flesh," and an Elizabethan "cony-catcher" claimed the ability "to fill a Letter full of Needles, which shall be laide after such a Mathematicall order, that when hee opens it to whom it is sent, they shall all spring up and flye into his body as forceably, as if they had beene blowne up with gunpowder" (Kittredge 133-34). Pins and needles punctuate West Country witchcraft tales: Glanvil described a Taunton girl who claimed a witch made her swallow pins which came out of various swellings on her body, adding, "examples of this sort are infinite" (332); Kittredge cites the case of an evil spirit which stuck pins into some Bristol girls in 1762 (134).<sup>21</sup> There is also, in West Country folklore, an uncertain connection between feathers, rope, and witchcraft.

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<sup>21</sup>Ireland has a Gaelic "slumber-pin" motif. Ciarán Bairéad summarizes a narrative in which a man has prevented the fairies from carrying off a woman when she sneezes by saying "God bless you!": "The fairies take their revenge by putting a slumber-pin into her hair which deprives her of speech" (144-45). Other examples are in Béaloidéas 35-37 (1967-68): two old women (fairies) from a fort put a "slumber-pin" in a girl's ear and substitute a changeling (357); fairies put a "slumber-pin" in another girl's ear and a goose in her place in bed (368).

In 1887, Abraham Colles described in Folk-Lore his find in a Somerset attic of a rope with feathers woven into it, which the neighbors identified as a "witches' ladder"; they were vague as to its use. (Subsequent correspondence, typical of the era, brought a flurry of hypotheses and references to the importance of feathers in sorcery in far-flung locales, but the Somerset question was never answered satisfactorily.)

Seymour gives examples of exotic retchings from Ireland, where a bewitched woman vomited "needles, pins, horsenails, stubbs, wool, and straw," and pulled pins from her arms (109-10), and an Antrim girl vomited "needles, pins, hairs, feathers, bottoms of thread, pieces of glass, window-nails, nails drawn out of a cart or coach-wheel, an iron knife about a span long, and fish-shells" (195). But more recent Irish examples of strange extrusions associate them with the fairies, and they come out of the body through wounds rather than vomit. Ó'Súilleabháin includes in his questions for fieldworkers, "Were thimbles, pieces of bone, or other objects removed from the wounds of 'elf-shot' people or animals?" (459), and specifically with reference to the stroke or blast, "Was it believed that some object thrown by the fairies should issue from the sore part of the body before a cure could be effected (e.g., a piece of bone, stone, rag, knife, etc.)?" (479-80). The term "blast," as in Newfoundland, applies to other afflictions as well.

"When a child suddenly fades in health and pines away, he has got a blast," writes P. W. Joyce, "i.e. a puff of evil wind sent by some baleful sprite has struck him" (English 216); and O Conchubhair defines a "blast" as either "a fairy wind" or "an affection of the eye" (188).<sup>22</sup> In 1891 William Wilde described the case of a young man who "got a blast" from the good people and died after falling off a horse that bolted at wisps of straw in a whirlwind (121); Westropp describes a Connaught wise woman who poulticed a client's leg and took out "a thing like a blade of grass" (109).

In England, the use of the term is more obscure. The virginal heroine of Milton's Comus could cure shepherds of "all urchin-blasts and ill-luck signs/that the shrewd meddling elfe delights to make" (134); (urchin = fairy or evil spirit: Keightley 320). Herrick gives "The old Wives Prayer" against "the blast that burns by day" and "all hurtfull Feinds" of night (238). Aubrey does not seem to know what it is, but associates it with jack-o-lanterns, in a passage with interpolations by John Britton, editor of The Natural History of Wiltshire:

Ignis fatuus, called by the vulgar Kit of the Candlestick, is not very rare on our downes about Michaelmass. [These ignes fatui, or Jack-o'-lanthorns, as they are popularly called, are

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<sup>22</sup>"In symbolic terms, a pair of eyes might be equivalent to breasts or testicles. A single eye may be the phallus (especially the glans), the vulva, or occasionally the anus"--Alan Dundes ("Evil Eye" 267.)

frequently seen in low boggy grounds. In my boyish days I was often terrified by stories of their leading travellers astray, and fascinating them.--J.B.] Riding in the north lane of Broad Chalke in the harvest time in the twy-light, or scarce that, a point of light, by the hedge, expanded itselfe into a globe of about three inches diameter, or near four, as boies blow bubbles with soape. It continued but while one could say one, two, three, or four at the most. It was a pale light as that of a glow-worme: it may be this is that which they call a blast or blight in the country.<sup>23</sup> (17-18)

And John Webster complained in The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft of 1673:

And we ourselves having practised the art of medicine in all its parts in the North of England, where Ignorance, Popery, and superstition doth much abound, and where for the most part the common people, if they chance to have any sort of the Epilepsie, Palsie, Convulsions, or the like, do presently perswade themselves that they are bewitched, forespoken, blasted, fairy-taken, or haunted with some evil spirit, and the like; and if you should by plain reasons shew them, that they are deceived, and that there is no such matter, but that it is a natural disease, say what you can they shall not believe you, but account you a Physician of small or no value, and whatsoever you do to them, it shall hardly do them any good at all, because of the fixedness of

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<sup>23</sup>"Blight" is not a common term in Newfoundland, but there is one case in which a doctor removed "feathers, twigs, and dirt" from a woman's swollen hand, telling her that "a fairy had done it," it was "the Fairy Blight" (70-6/19). She had gotten it when she threw dishwater at an approaching light, confirming the connection made by Aubrey.

their depraved and prepossessed  
imagination. (M. Latham 33)

(Dr. Cron was more sympathetic, for "he always told his patients to curse the fairies and the devil and they would recover from their illnesses much quicker"--FSC80-322/\*\*.)

In Newfoundland, as in Ireland, the blast has been given over almost entirely to the fairies, spirits and ghosts, but for a single instance from Bishop's Cove of a lone late human practitioner of the missile-injecting art:

A woman told me one time of an incident in her childhood which she will never forget. She and one of her friends were laughing at a poor old man who lived in an old house. One day he ran after them and her friend fell. She injured her leg and a doctor was called. An operation was made on her leg and bones (fish) and straws of grass were taken out of it. That woman is now in the mental but this happened long before she entered the hospital. How the stuff got into her leg is unknown. The old man was then believed to be behind it.  
(FSC70-25/94)

Witches' victims who spewed foreign matter usually did so during fits, their loss of volition being another hallmark of bewitchment. Elements of possession and trance are strong in Bishop's Cove fairy lore:

Many years ago it was believed that a person could be possessed by the fairies. One man, Hansen Smith, was led away by the fairies and he wasn't found for three days. When the local people found him he was naked from the waist up. He had gotten hungry and eaten his sweater. (FSC80-322/\*\*)

He was "never the same after," and it was probably fortunate that he lost his memory as a result of this experience (80-322/23). "Fairies are supposed to be little men about two feet tall who wore red suits. They usually led night walkers away on a parade in which the fairies danced around the person as he walked," said one student; they "took control of a person's mind and led him astray," as in the case of a man who failed to return from a trouting expedition:

They found him walking along an old grassy road. He seemed to be talking to little fellows around him. It was no use to talk to him so one man smacked him in the face. He came out of it but didn't remember what he had done. He was said to have been "in the fairies." (FSC70-25/79,81)

Another student said:

"Don't whistle in the forest. If you do you're sure to have bad luck." Whistling was supposed to attract fairies that inhabit the woods. These fairies were supposed to lead you astray. Since there was so much talk about fairies my grandfather firmly believed in this and still does. Years ago two men were led astray for this reason. When they were found they were supposed to be fairy-flicked--a sort of hypnotism. (FSC74-218/7)

The old hag in Bishop's Cove can take much the same form, according to a student who wrote that "if you think or speak badly of the dead, they will 'hagg' you" (FSC70-25/78); the "hag" is the dead person who "visits" the sleeper. The "hagged" person might become "lightheaded" and

talk in his sleep, and would be said to be "in the ditties."

Or,

The hag doesn't let the person beset rest. The hag is usually supposed to lead the person, or place him/her in a frightening position such as in a graveyard at night.... The person who was beset would be struggling to get back to reality but couldn't. He knew that he was asleep and that by waking everything would be solved.... One could be hit by the hag and wake up feeling the force of the blow. (70-25/10<sup>A</sup>-5)

The hag, he said, is supposed to be an old person ("over sixty"), and while this concept may come from the terminology (old hag), it also suggests ambivalent attitudes toward the aged. On the one hand it would appear to encourage respect toward the memory of the deceased, but on the other it depicts old people as fearsome and powerful, unwilling to relinquish control even after death.

A strong association with old people may, like the blast and possession, link Bishop's Cove fairy lore with witchcraft traditions; the fairies in Bishop's Cove seem to take the form of old people more often than in their opposite guise as small children. Mr. Smith's narratives illustrate: there is the "old man" or "small old fella" who struck "Joe" with the rope (after which Joe becomes, or is replaced by, a "scriveled thing"); the fake Little Joe ("that thing you got sot down there feeding it is about seventy years old"); Uncle Krinkle, "an old gentleman"; and

the strange old woman the sight of whom put a young woman in "the mental." One student's grandfather was terrified by the sight of "an old man" who appeared on certain mornings; he would walk over the stage into the water, or out of the water and across the stage (74-218/24). These "old" apparitions are generally malicious or frightening; a direct equation between old/bad and young/good was made by a collector's grandfather who "talked for hours and hours about the mermaids," a folktale-like elder bad sister and younger good one:

He claimed that there were two sisters who were mermaids. They lived in a place called Beacy [sic] Cove. He says that they would come up by the side of the boat and talk to him. They were very beautiful creatures, half woman and half fish. The older sister was bad and used to cast a spell; this spell was counteracted by the younger sister. The mermaids would come in on the beach at night and comb their hair. These mermaids were daughters of the sea and would bring him strokes of good and bad luck as well as played tricks on him. Once they warned him of a storm and saved his life.<sup>24</sup> (80-322/26-27)

The equation is reversed, however, in one Island Cove collector's distinction between "old fairies" that are good and "young fairies" that are bad. His father gave him a Gulliveresque story about a local man, six feet four inches tall and weighing two hundred and forty pounds, who was

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<sup>24</sup>Mr. Smith had a story about a mermaid ("meermaid") who foretold a boy's future, a prophecy fulfilled with the help of his dead mother.



working in the woods one evening when he was approached by six small men "about twenty to thirty inches high":

He immediately recognized them as being "fairies" which he had heard about from his father. He was completely overcome with fear and when these "fairies" beckoned him to follow he did exactly as they commanded. They had led him far into the woods when Mr. Sharpe realized that they were young fairies. He now feared that they were leading him to his death. It was in the month of January and he thought that they might wish to lead him far inland to die from fatigue, exposure or starvation. When snow began to fall Mr. Sharpe became terrified. He refused to follow the fairies any farther and tried to force him to go (sic). Since he was so large and they were so small he lay down and refused to move. He couldn't fight them because they would appear and disappear very quickly. However, they could fight him but were unable to get him to move because they lacked the strength. They completely stripped him of his clothing.... At sun-up they were gone and Mr. Sharpe had to use a few branches for trousers. He later found the spot where he had first encountered these fairies and here he found an old sack which he had placed his tools in. He now used this sack as trousers and this is the condition in which his family and friends saw him return in. He was very tired after fighting off these little people and was frost-bitten in the hands and legs because it had been a very cold night.

I questioned my father about this story, telling him I didn't believe it was true. He became angry with me and went on to tell me that Mr. Sharpe was a man well-noted for his honesty as well as being noted as one who positively refused to believe in ghosts, fairies or superstitions. Dad said that many people believed that such an experience happened to Mr. Sharpe because he

refused to believe that fairies existed.  
(Q68-250/4-5)

For some, the necessity for respect and reticence in regard to the fairies is strong. Graham Smith observed:

One thing I did find strange while I was collecting was that some people were frightened to death to talk about omens and fairies. This is especially true of anyone who had seen some of these. An example of this type of person is Aunt Rachel.<sup>25</sup> She was willing to talk about anything someone else had seen but there was no way to get her to talk about some fairy that I knew she was in contact with. Grandfather Smith [Mr. Smith's father] was negative on this point also. In fact he was frightened to talk on anything to do with this. Some of the people home believe that these spirits are still here. If you happen to laugh at these they would get frightened to death.... My father says that his great grandmother didn't want him to build a house where he did. The reason for this was that it was two feet too far to the south which meant it was on fairyland. Dad answers, "That's okay, I have a spare room built on for them." Aunt Sarah (Dad's great grandmother) replies that she wouldn't say that for all the money in the world.<sup>26</sup> (72-262/14-16)

The reluctance to speak of frightening events is well-documented. One Bishop's Cove man "saw something on the gate post" one night at the stage which so frightened him he was sick in bed for three days after. "He has never told

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<sup>25</sup>Described by another student as "a sort of community doctor" (80-322/13).

<sup>26</sup>Smith also refers tantalizingly to "the fairy that Aunt Sarah used to see every night," saying that the story is on his tape; that tape, unfortunately, is completely unintelligible.

what he saw," writes the collector, "Now and then I hear of this type of story in the community--of seeing something and not telling what they saw" (FSC70-25/93). A Bishop's Cove informant told about some men who went to cut wood on Good Friday; when they put the axe to the tree, "a gush of blood" poured out. "Well, they lived through the fright somehow," he said, "They never talk about what happened. No. Not to anyone. Queer stuff happens sometimes you know" (74-218/17). The tabu on speaking of frightening or sinister subjects makes it hard to know when the full range of supernatural tradition is represented, and underscores the importance of "native" collection. Even "ordinary" lore might not be offered freely to a stranger; David Osbourne (the Bishop's Cove student I met in 1987) told Martin Lovelace that his father, on hearing of my work, expressed surprise that anyone would tell me anything at all.<sup>27</sup> On my first visit, as Rita left the house at one point, Mr. Smith cautioned her not to tell anyone who was there, or what we were talking about. (Possibly he wanted to keep this information to be given according to his own inclination, after curiosity was aroused. When Rita returned she reported, rather gleefully I thought, all the questions about my visit.)

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<sup>27</sup>Private communication, Fall 1987.

It is unlikely that I exhausted Mr. Smith's repertoire, as every time I visited him I learned a little more. In July 1986, he gave my six-month old son a Newfoundland nickel, which led us to talk of its protective power. I mentioned an incident that had been in the news that week, about a young boy in Nova Scotia who had gotten lost; even though he was spotted by searchers several times, he fled, and was found some days later dead. "Something crossed his mind," said Mr. Smith; some "force" had him, because there was no way he could have eluded adults like that. They were looking all over for him, he said, and he may have been under a stump all along. He said that in the old days they would have thrown bread all around and it probably would have worked.

He also told me that his grandmother would put a child born with "retardation" on the doorstep at midnight, and take it in later. Eighty percent of the time it would be normal, he said, and it might even come back "with more power than before." He had mentioned this cure before, but not that his grandmother did it; and during a visit in November 1987, he went even further and said that his grandmother once wanted to put a child out, without its clothes, so that the "real child," who was "out in the woods," could be brought back. The child's father wouldn't allow it, even though the grandmother told him "what they had could be anything, could be the devil"; eventually the

girl had to be kept in a "pound."

On this visit, Mr. Smith also said, for the first time, that the reason the fairies took people was to get their souls, that this would make them "wiser." This was not an interview-induced generality, but was in fact a correction of the friend who was visiting with me, who asserted that fairies usually took children; Mr. Smith said that they preferred adults for this reason. The separable soul is depicted graphically in this Bishop's Cove narrative:

My father told me one night that he saw a big black dog running along the road; by the time it got to where he was standing it shrank to the size of a kitten. When he arrived home his grandmother was dead. The shrinking animal was her soul. (FSC80-322/\*\*)

"Bishop's Cove is not strongly religious," wrote one student, "but there is a belief in things being" (sic) (FSC70-25/76). Despite this alleged lack of religious tradition, Bishop's Cove retains a fallen angel legend which aligns the fairies directly with the devil:

My father says that fairies are real. They are little green men that dance in the air. He said that the fairies had caused war in heaven and were forced to leave. They are on earth so that they can harm people and bring them bad luck.<sup>28</sup> (FSC88-311/\*\*)

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<sup>28</sup>Also, fairies are "angels driven from heaven because they were bad. They had nowhere else to go so they came here on earth. The fairies lived in the woods and on the marshes and bogs. These little people often did bad things and led people astray" (80-322/23).

The fairies were foiled in one attempt to take a woman when the people rang the churchbells at midnight and frightened them away (80-322/24).

This diabolical strain extends even to healing; Bishop's Cove is the only place I know of where "being able to charm warts, etc., was said to be 'Satanic Power'" (FSC70-25/68). However, Mr. Smith tells about a number of charmers and healers with no indication of such an association. One blood-stopper was probably schizophrenic, for he was completely normal sometimes, uncontrollably wild at others; he died in the mental without passing on his charm. Mr. Smith had a wart charm himself (involving tying a string and saying "In the name of the father," etc.), but he told it and lost it. When Mr. Smith contracted polio as a child, everyone said he would never walk again, but a Catholic man gave him a nettle and told him to pray to it, or to something else; it didn't matter what, as long as he believed he would walk, and didn't tell lies (the serious kind) or kill anything. (Mr. Smith does walk, and also drives). Mr. Smith's views on religion are iconoclastic by traditional standards: referring to the Bible, he said, "I suppose you should believe it." He once shocked his grandmother by saying that the moon was only a rock, while she saw it as a light put there by God.

In November 1987, I asked Mr. Smith about the expression "in the fairies," which made him and Rita

exchange looks and smile; he embarked on a story about an Island Cove man who had been in bed for years. The day his mother died, the people returning from the funeral found him at the kitchen table. "Now why was he in bed so long?" Mr. Smith asked, and I never did find out what the answer to that was. Apparently the man is mildly retarded; he is now in some sort of group home in St. John's, where he gets on well. Later that same day, Elsie Drover of Island Cove (whom Janet McNaughton was interviewing about her midwife grandmother), showed us a picture of a woman about three feet tall who used to keep a shop and who was considered very clever. "Would people have said she was a fairy?" I asked, thinking of her size. "No, my dear, she was not in the fairies!" said Mrs. Drover emphatically, the implication being that she was much too "sharp" for that. Mrs. Drover also said that there is now a housing tract on the old cemetery where people used to say the fairies had their funerals, and that "you never hear of them now."

Harrison Sharpe's recent collection from Island Cove suggests otherwise. The eighteen narratives from thirteen informants also confirm the essentially bad character of the fairies of this area: two of the encounters are "neutral," that is, there seems to be no threat of harm to the persons involved; five are near escapes; and in the rest the human protagonists meet with injury, madness, or death. The familiar themes and motifs resurface: people compulsively

follow "jackies" and little red men into woods and ponds, or follow voices they take for friends' or relatives'; a little man pulls straw out of a woman's knee ("so it would not give away the secret of their little hiding place"), and a boy's leg gives out paper; a young girl is greeted in the road by a strange little man and dies the next day. Very corporeal fairies like those in "Joe" and "Little Joe" appear in two versions of a tale unparalleled in MUNFLA:

A young girl from Upper Island Cove while sitting in her house one night was captured by the fairies and dragged away. As the fairies were leaving the house, one was captured and chained to the same chair that the little girl was taken from in order to make the fairies give back the little girl to her parents. A few weeks later the girl's parents heard a noise in the living room. When they went to look they found the girl in the chair with her clothes turned inside out. Later they discovered she was crippled. Until the day she died she could not walk due to her experience with the fairies. (16-17)

"Version #2":

There is a story of a young girl from Upper Island Cove who in the late 1800s was taken by the fairies. She was taken from the back porch of her house and replaced by a fairy. The girl's family would leave the fairy in the porch each day after the event, hoping that the other fairies would return the girl and take back the fairy.<sup>29</sup> The girl, however, was never returned.

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<sup>29</sup>The motif of a captured fairy is not very common elsewhere either, although there are a few in which they are kept almost like pets. Robert Hunt gives the story of a Cornish man who takes one home to his children to play with, until the fairy parents come fetch him; it seems to be related to captured leprechaun stories in that the fairy



"Two hundred years ago or less," a Bryant's Cove informant's mother told her, "there were many towns and villages in Newfoundland swarming with ghosts and fairies" (75-5/n.p.). The late 1800s seems to figure in folk tradition as a time when fairies were still so common that no description of their appearance was necessary, as they commandeered kitchens in Avondale or bodies in Bishop's Cove. Referring to the general run of phantoms and fairies, Graham Smith asked one informant

why such things as a "Drummer" or a "Headless Dog" were not seen around here now. He replied, "There's too much noise and rackets going on now, sure. So many cars and stuff. Years ago, when the sun went down and it got dark sure everything was still. Now people don't move until after dark. They're around, boy, you just don't hear them." (74-218/35-36)

"I also feel the old fellows like to brag a little," Smith adds, "a good many times I heard the comment, 'Nothing happens now like we had in the good old days!'" Mr. Smith tells me the reason fairies are not seen now is that "these things" (fairies, UFOs, phantoms, and so on) go in twenty-five year cycles, and we are in an "off" cycle at the moment.

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promises to show them where crocks of gold are hidden (450-51). Lady Gregory spoke to a couple who said they kept a fairy on their kitchen dresser for several weeks, feeding it on bread and milk (Visions 220).

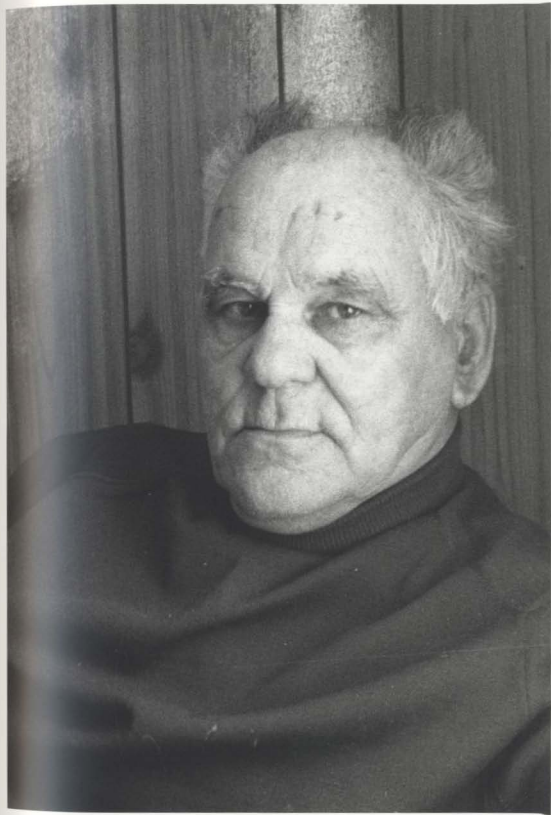
On one of my later visits to Mr. Smith, I remarked that I would like to have a time machine to go back just one day and see what life was really like in an outport of the past. "You wouldn't want to come back," he said; once I got on a hill berry-picking with a bunch of women, I would know how fine it was compared to today. I was surprised to hear Mr. Smith say that modern life is "poison" to him, for despite his intense interest in the past, I had not sensed a strong nostalgia in him before. But Mr. Smith has had several heart attacks since I first recorded him, and has been in weakened health ever since. He can't understand it, he tells his doctors, since he is only thirty-five. And, clearly, a hard case.

Mr. Smith's repertoire (by which I mean not only his stories but all of his knowledge about the fairies) shows that it is possible to have fairy traditions too serious for discussion with an enquiring stranger, as well as jocular tales and entertainment legends. There are implications for this in the reading of archival repertoires and texts, for it shows how dangerous it could be to generalize from that data alone. If one were to encounter, say, a set of obvious fictions or yarns, one could deduce from it neither the narrator's attitude towards the fairies nor the representativeness of the fairy characteristics therein. Another contribution of Mr. Smith's repertoire to the interpretation of archive material is that we can see in his

performances the realization by an individual of the dynamic observed in Chapter Two whereby events of long ago are retailed in a more detailed, animated fashion than those of more recent occurrence. We also see that in different performances at different times, Mr. Smith juggles a stock of themes and motifs into different narrative combinations. We do not usually see this building-block approach on the part of an individual, because most informants are recorded only once; and those who are recorded over time are not usually creative narrators like Mr. Smith.

This chapter makes it clear that for all the similarities of fairy traditions throughout the province, there are differences in the general cast and overall character of the fairies in different areas. This is evident not from a single text but from a corpus; a set of legends from Bishop's Cove would not be confused with a set from Riverhead, although most of the same motifs and concepts are found in both. If a little man flicks you on the leg with a whip and you go mad, you are in or near Bishop's Cove. Or, you might meet "one of them" there and not even know it.

William George Smith



## VI

**UFOs: Urban Fairy Oddities, and Some Modern Influences on the Genesis and Evolution of Fairy Tradition**

Although ancient and remarkably stable, fairy traditions do show syncretism with "modern" legend and current ideas, which come not only from oral tradition but from print and electronic media as well. The association of fairy and UFO lore is a notable example, and raises important questions about analysis and classification. Does it make a difference, conceptually speaking, whether a crowd of little people are supposed to have come from another planet or a nearby bog? When a person has an experience or tells a story that is recognizably (to one acquainted with fairy tradition) a "fairy" one, but does not make that identification or interpretation himself, is it still a "fairy" story? In other words, does one take what David Hufford calls an "experience-centered approach" (Terror) and concentrate on the experience itself rather than the label? The problem is not a new one for fairy lore, since there has always been the avoidance of naming "them"; but there may be other, newer reasons for omission of the term, such as its

modern use in reference to a male homosexual,<sup>1</sup> and the increased exposure via television to the fluttery sprites (Tinkerbell et al) from which this usage derives. A St. John's seventh-grader, on assignment in 1971, presented an amalgam of Disneyesque and more traditional fairy lore:

If you were in the woods and you broke or even touched a mushroom, these were supposed to be the fairies' properties, so they would come in the night and take you away. The fairies were supposed to be little, short women with long white dresses and red hats and boots and sort of a little stick which is called a magic wand. If you crept out of your house in the morning, you could walk along part of a lonely road and it was said you would see little women running and playing off in the distance, these were said to have been the fairies that you seen. The stories about fairies may seem foolish to believe now but back then they were really taken very seriously. I got these beliefs from my father, who said he got it from his uncle. These beliefs come from down around the bay like Conception Bay and Torbay, and some of it come from the Southern Shore. Also speaking about fairies it was believed that if you were sleeping out in a tent without a light on, they were said to take you off in the sky somewhere and kill you or do something drastic like that to you. Fairies are seen on marshes in the fog and also they were playing games and singing. Fairies were claimed to look like short small women with red hats and red little boots. Remedies given to people who claimed to have seen fairies:

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<sup>1</sup>Question: "Why didn't anyone die on the Carson?" [a ferry that sank in the Gulf of St. Lawrence] Answer: "Newfoundlanders don't go down on ferries" [i.e., perform fellatio on "fairies"]. There are others to this effect, which I have forgotten; I neglected to record when or where I heard them, but I never heard any from my informants.

the people in the olden days would give the person taps on the head and try to convince the person that they had not seen any fairies and in the olden days this indeed was very hard to do. (71-41/10-11)

This recital also provides an example of the belief, found among "townies" and outporters alike, that fairy traditions come from "around the bay" from "the olden days." The stereotype that fairy traditions thrive only in remote rural areas is exploded in this chapter which takes many examples from the St. John's area. The related notion that old and isolated communities best foster fairy lore is dismissed through an examination of Bell Island, which has been one of the most heavily trafficked places in the province and one of the best for fairy lore. Although it might be hypothesized that such "urban" regions would show a tendency toward amalgamation<sup>2</sup> of fairy lore with modern or "urban" legend, in fact fairy narratives of the St. John's region and Bell Island are not much different from those of the outports, except for their setting. Finally, on the question of the decline of fairy traditions, I examine legend cycles about two individuals which establish a definite terminus post quem for their active development and

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<sup>2</sup>The term probably occurs to me here because of the present debate over civic "amalgamation," whereby St. John's would absorb surrounding areas such as St. Phillips, St. Thomas, and the Conception Bay South region into an "expanded urban core." The term "urban" is always relative in Newfoundland; St. John's proper has about a hundred thousand people, with fifty thousand more in Mt. Pearl and other adjoining areas.



transmission on a large scale. One of these people is David (Davy) Mercer of Bell Island; the other is Lucy Harris of New Melbourne, Trinity Bay, whose story was originally disseminated in large part by the St. John's news media. Her story also opens avenues for an experience-centered approach which lead from Trinity Bay to the Antarctic and up Mt. Everest.

The three chief informants for this chapter have in common an extroverted, expansive personality. The first is Mr. H. Miles Furlong, who contacted me in response to my article in the Seniors' News. A lifelong resident of St. John's, he is nearing retirement from his position with the Roman Catholic school board, and says that because he is "Irish and Catholic," he "believes in miracles"; so if I were to tell him, for example, that I saw St. Patrick's Hall across the street from his house turned upside down, then as far as he was concerned, I did see it, and I was not drunk or crazy either. ("Whether it happened or not, is something else. A person tells me something, I believe that person is telling me what he honestly believes. And you can sense between what a person believes, and when he's pulling your leg, 'cause I have that kind of experience.") This was the attitude he took toward the story told to him six or seven years ago by the late Ron Ennis, a former policeman. They were standing on the steps of the Basilica after Mass "swapping yarns," and Mr. Furlong told Mr. Ennis that when

he was a boy, the sacristan of the church told him about seeing a black, well-dressed gentleman (the devil) on a staircase:

And he [Ennis] said, I'll tell you one now, he said, when I first joined the police force. A young, raw recruit, do anything the sergeant told me, the lieutenant told me to do, I'd do it, no matter what it was, I was a policeman, I was going to be the policeman, the best policeman that ever was. And there wasn't any school for that sort of business, you had to learn the hard way, on-the-job training, sort of, from day one, you see. [He is sent to investigate the theft of some lumber from Holy Cross School] ...and Brother Ryan [the principal], his reaction to the policeman showing up was that this was good enough, now, to let the people know that they were sailing on thin ice. So, uh, he said, uh, "Ron, look over there in that garden, and, uh," he said, "do you see anything over there?"  
 \*\*\*\*\* Looked over the garden to see if anyone was lurking about, so to speak. And he said, "What do you see, Ron?" And he said, "A garden, trees, not a very well-kept garden, it's toys there, kids playing, I suppose there, and grass is not cut; a few trees growing wild and uncared for. And there's a \*\*\*\*\* at the back of the house, steps coming down." He says, "No, Ron, do you see anybody?" He says, "No, Brother, I don't." He says, "Do you see that little fellow at the top of the steps?" [Pause] Turned around, and said "What the hell's going on here?"  
 \*\*\*\*\* He said, sure enough, there he was. Little short fellow. Very short, and sprightly. And he says, "Yes, I do see him." And he says, "Do you see any more?" "Hmm, by gosh, you're right, Brother, there's three or four of them, three or four of them there." And \*\*\* goes back and forth and after awhile it was getting on towards dusk, and Ron wasn't feeling very comfortable, so he

says, "Okay, Brother, I'll go back in the morning and report to the assistant chief," I think it was, and uh, "very good," he said, he couldn't get out of there fast enough. So he got home and didn't anticipate, didn't think about it, he had his notes, and when he went in in the morning to report in the morning to work to the chief, he told him that he'd gone up and inferred from Brother Ryan that the main purpose was that someone should see a policeman walking around there looking at the lumber, and obviously there was something being done about the thefts up there. But, he said, he didn't seem to be very concerned about losing a few planks, whatever it was. But he said, "I saw another strange thing up there," he said, "he pointed out to me in the garden adjacent to the school, ah, that there was--he showed me, he pointed it out, that the fairies were out there. And," he said, "I did see them. There was probably five, six, seven, eight of them there." And started to describe them, he said, "The old chief made a roar at me, bawled at me, 'Get out of here, Ennis, you've been at the--you've been into the sauce again. So you get out of here now, and I won't send you up there anymore. You can leave all that business alone, forget it'." And that was the end of the story. But we laughed hearty over it, the two of us, but, uh, Ron was not telling me a fabrication. What Ron was telling me was what he--I believe that he honestly thought, honestly believed he thought. Now whether that's power of suggestion, whether it's fact or fancy, or maybe he was in the hooch, but he said he didn't, hadn't had a drink, he wasn't drinking style (?) at the time. But that is the story that he gave me.

BR: And he was perfectly serious when he told you. I mean, you knew him, and-

HMF: Well, he was sort of matter-of-fact, telling me this. He was not

trying to impress me, he knows me better than that. At least he knew me, \*\*\*\*. He was a typical policeman type, you'd tell him nothing that he could hang you with, because he would.

BR: Did he say what they looked like?

HMF: Small people, very small, within a range of--well, what I infer \*\*\*--maybe a foot, two feet in height. Very sprightly, as I say, and quick of movement, and rather--he didn't describe their garb, but the way it was--he talked to me as if I should know what a fairy looked like. And, for that reason, then--the--I didn't press him on the matter, and he was well into his story, and this is what they \*\*. So, in that way, I can only infer, the way he described them was sprightly, and very small little people. Nothing grotesque about them, or anything like that. Uh, their garb was, I suppose, whatever fairies should wear, whatever fairies would wear, or should wear, in that case they were wearing. But I think he mentioned something about a tasseled hat, or something. Uh, and that was--he's the only person I've ever known who told me about that way, uh, described them, tried to describe to me in a general way. Ah, they were playing games of some sort or other, or bring \*\*\* something. Uh, they had music, he didn't say who played what or what they played, but there was music there, they seemed to be quite happy, and very jolly. Through his description, the house would be a rather old house on Patrick Street, a four-sided peaked roof...and I think if you looked there on Patrick Street there you'd see that house. It's very solid, very heavy, good place to look for fairies if I was looking for them.

This incident could have happened anywhere; if we were not told it was on Patrick Street, our only clue that it was not

some small outpost would be, perhaps, the figure of the policeman. The "sprightly" fairies are identical to some of their outpost cousins, as can be seen by comparing the text with two recorded by Virginia Dillon which also share other interesting features with the account. The way Mr. Ennis does not see the figures at first, and how, when he does, the two men watch them for some time, shows that they were no fleeting impression or product of panic, although Mr. Ennis "wasn't feeling too comfortable about it." In Dillon's first account, the vision was watched in leisurely calm detachment:

When my grandfather was a young man, probably in his early twenties, he was walking home to Mobile from St. John's with some other men. They were on their way home from "the ice" [the seal hunt]. It was just about sunset when they came to Witless Bay. Just before they entered the settlement one of the men happened to look into a meadow which was near the side of the road. A group of small figures were dancing around in a ring. I think they are described as being dressed in red and green, but I don't think my father is sure. The men stood there looking at them for maybe half an hour. An interesting point about the story is that only some of the men could see the dancing figures. The figures were called fairies by the men who told the story. (64-1/26)

In the second case of shared vision, some children sliding on a frozen marsh see "strange little figures" dancing among themselves when, as Brother Ryan did, someone points them out:

Someone cried out something like, "Look at the fairies," and of course all the children looked to see what was there. Some of them, including my uncle, saw nothing, but several of the children saw them and could describe them to the others. All of the children of course went home immediately. Those who had seen the figures could vividly describe their dress and behaviour.... My father heard this story many times from his brother, Bert, who died in 1942. He can't remember exactly what the fairies were but the children who saw them immediately thought they were fairies. (64-1/27)

Sometimes strange sights can be made "contagious" by touch: "If you see something and someone else doesn't, you just touch the other person and he'll see it too," explained a Colliers woman who communicated her vision of a fairy woman to her husband in this manner (74-150/17). One of my informants, Frances Kavanagh, says that "there are such things that some people will see and some people won't. Like ghosts--everybody don't see, but some will.... They claims it has to do with the time of the day that you're born. If you're born between two lights [between day and night] you're apt to see things."

Mr. Clive Tucker, a wildlife officer from St. Phillips (once Broad Cove, just outside St. John's)<sup>3</sup> would explain

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<sup>3</sup>The spelling varies; Seary gives both St. Philips and St. Phillips (90, 273), but local usage tends toward the latter, so I have used that here. St. Phillips is now suburban car-commuter country, and has always been commuter country, being one of the chief supply areas for wood and farm goods for St. John's.

the difference in what people "see" in terms of psychic ability. My article in the Seniors' News reminded him of two experiences he thought I might like to hear about; he also thought that I might share his interest in dowsing. Mr. Tucker divines the location, depth and quality of water through a process which he cannot explain, but which does not require that he be anywhere near the site. He can also screen houses for radon gas, and applies dowsing experimentally to other objectives, such as treasure, bodies, or poachers' guns, with varied results. On his second visit to my home, Mr. Tucker brought a diagram he had made of the house, showing two veins of "positive energy" running through it. (Coincidentally, I had just rearranged the furniture to facilitate tape recording, and had set a chair for Mr. Tucker right in the spot where the lines converge.) I had already recorded, on his first visit, his strange experiences on Three Pond Barrens, on the northwestern edge of St. John's and now part of Pippy Park. The first took place when he was about eleven years old, with a friend:

It was just the first year of the second World War. And we came across, it was just after dark because we were catching, or trying to catch trout after dark. So we left to come home in the dark and we looked down to our left, what would be to the east from us, and about five hundred feet away in the marsh, where I showed you on that map,

we saw, like, people going around--and first of all, we thought it was people with kerosene lanterns, looking for something that was lost. It was similar to, uh, even if you have people going around looking for lost money or a lost wallet, or something of that nature. And a lot of people just wandering around the marsh with little lanterns looking for it. And after we watched it for a while, we were going to go down and see what was going on, then we begin to think, that it was German paratroopers or something after landing. And we got afraid, and we just booted out of there as fast as we could. And when I landed home--I went home with the little fellow, the young fellow, and then I went home--I was a big little fellow--and uh, I told my father about these lights we'd seen, and we thought it was German soldiers and everything, expecting to call out the troops and everything; and he told me, go to bed, it was only Jack O'Lanterns. And that kind of eased my mind, he told me they wouldn't hurt me or anything, it just eased my mind, and that was the end of that, at that time as far as I knew. I never did see the lights the rest of my life, not like that.

When I later--off tape--brought up the subject of UFOs, Mr. Tucker said that he and his friend had in fact been watching for UFOs, and that just before they saw the lights they had seen a glowing orb go across the sky. Had I not expressed an interest in this topic, this would probably not have emerged, just as he has kept the following experience to himself for almost fifty years. It happened several years after the first, but he says that I am the first person he has told about it:

What happened there, I had come up across the marsh, up to the edge of the



marsh, I decided to take a shortcut which would bring me through the marsh, or across it, where I would pick up the trail that I knew was on the other side and I would go on which would be a great help to me, at that time. So I tried it, the first time I tried to get through, and I ended up right back where I started. Well, I just figured I got threw off the course. So I started again. I took my bearings a second time, and I \*\* started to come through again. Uh, the second time it was similar. I ended up right back the point; I started off again, \*\* so I took a hard look at it, and I said, "Really, this time I'm really going to do it this time, this is it, this is it, third \*\*\*." So I really set off with determination. And I come up, and I pressed on it, and I tried to get through, get through and get over to the road that was on the other side of that marsh and the third time I ended up back, and by that time it was dark, and I didn't know how long I had spent there, it could've been ten minutes or a little bit more, ten or probably twenty minutes, or half hour, could be an hour. Cause it's gotten dark in this length of time, I had no watch, no means to tell \*\*\*. So eventually, I said, the best thing to do is to leave and go up the trail I knew, and then pick up the trail farther up and go on \*\*\* which I did. It puzzled me. So the next day I was back in the same area, and I went down to where I had been the previous evening, and I looked across, the same as I did the evening before, and I started, and I walked across it with no problem. But ever since--and that's a long time ago, it's, you're talking nearly fifty years--ever since that, I've often--now and then it comes to mind, I wonders why I couldn't go across that. At the time I wasn't so wise then as I am now, but at that time I was puzzled.

Earlier he said that some people might have blundered on through like "an elephant walking on daisies," and compared the situation to that of a "primitive" person coming up against a plexiglas shield and not knowing what it was:

Same thing, it was the same thing. It was just like I was getting into a situation where, like I said, like there was a barrier just keeping me out, which I don't know what it was, but it was something \*\* that I couldn't see, and apparently didn't feel much, it just had a psychological effect or something, it was just throwing me off course. In other words, I was going around, but I wasn't going anywhere. I wasn't going anywhere, I was just, I was just muddled. But the minute I got on that trail, to go the other way, \*\*\* best kind again, \*\*\* I mean it was dead on. So it could have been a magnetic set-up that did it, or there could have been some other reason to keep me out of it, or for some reason I would've went through it, I would have saw something there that maybe you wasn't supposed to see at that particular time. And, uh, that's why I often wondered about it.

He gives two stories as analogies which show a direct traditional precedent for his own. One he heard as a small boy, from a man who had been setting rabbit snares on the Windsor Lake watershed:<sup>4</sup>

And he was going for years and years and years. And he was a level-headed man. And he went through, and this evening he came home, and he told about this little small grove of woods and he tried to go through, as he had done for a thousand times before; he just couldn't seem to get through. He tried, and he tried,

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<sup>4</sup>Windsor Lake lies at the top of the Three Pond Barrens and is the water supply for St. John's.

and he tried, and finally he gave it up and he went around it. And he went on about his business, finished his snare lines and stuff, and he came home. And he told my father about it, and I was sitting down listening to him. So a couple of days after that when the time came to go back to his snare line, he went back, and when he came home that evening, he dropped into our house and was discussing it again with my father-- I was still listening, all ears--and he told that he had gone back through the same area he had gone through, and he had no problem, like he had several days previous. There was some reason that he just couldn't, or wasn't allowed to go in that little area, that spot, at that particular time.

A report from St. Phillips may contain a variant of this story. Like Mr. Tucker, the informant does not mention "fairies," but offers the account in response to a question about them:

Asked a Mr. Francis Maynard about fairies and he told me that something unusual happened to him. He said that one day when he was walking across a path in on Thorburn Road where he grew up, and [which he] knew like the back of his hand, he just became totally confused and disoriented, almost as if he was under a spell. He said that he tried between five to seven times to find his way in this familiar territory but just couldn't, so he finally went home. (FSC74-6/40)

Mr. Tucker considers a variety of possible explanations for this type of experience, both natural and supernatural, although he clearly leans toward the latter:

And for him to be in that area, setting snares, it would mean he was around a marsh, there was a marsh involved. Now whether it was some sort of psychic

barrier, or whether it was methane gas or something coming up that was affecting people--they could be breathing it, and thrown off that way--there's a lot of things, eh? So it could be a lot of things; well, there's a lot of stuff, eh? So probably, it was to keep him away from harm. Because when people are born--they've always said, it's a normal thing around here, now I don't know where you came from, you grew up--but around here, people always say when children are born there's a guardian angel comes with them. That's why little kids have been known to walk out in places where really, they should be killed and gone. But they don't, they survive and they push through, and they come on back out of it again, eh? And they don't get injured, they don't get harmed. Sometimes they'll fall out of a four-story window on a sidewalk and get picked up, and they don't even wake up sometimes, they're asleep, eh? Uh, so, if a person do have a guardian angel, there is some truth to that, that could be the force that was keeping you out, that something in that marsh would harm you, that you'd breathe the vapors that could be there, or could be, like I said before, could be--if it's the spirit world or whatever, could be involved. And it could be this gas that would cause you--it is methane gas, science says, that may be harmful at that particular time. So some people may blunder through the marsh, but then other people are just gifted in a certain way that they just psychologically \*\*\*\*\*.

The second story Mr. Tucker tells on the same theme is about how his father was mysteriously saved from disaster as a young man in the late 1920s. Seeking work at a lumber camp on Grand Lake (near Grand Falls), the elder Mr. Tucker arrived at night only to learn that the next morning there

would be hiring at another camp twenty or so miles away. So he set out for that camp on a footpath, until he came to a small rise in the path which he could not mount. He tried running up several times, even starting from the hill behind him to gain momentum, until suddenly he lost consciousness. He awoke in the morning covered with snow, but only slightly chilled despite the frigid temperature, and walked up the slope to discover a sheer cliff on the other side, over which he would have plunged to his death had he been able to continue.

Mr. Tucker has had strange experiences as an adult as well. Once he was in a canoe on a large pond when a storm came up and threatened to swamp him. He paddled furiously toward a lighted house on one shore, only to find upon reaching the shore that there was nothing there. Another time, he and a friend were driving through a snowstorm in a two-ton truck, when there was a bump, and to their horror a man's arms cleaved the snow on the windshield like wiper blades, and a face pressed up against the glass. They pulled over, but when they got out there was no man and no tracks either. Mr. Tucker has no explanation of this, but notes that there was a river running under the road in that place: he connects many strange occurrences with the presence of water. On another occasion, he was camping with another man on one side of a valley, when he saw lights like "little lit-up needles" or "tinsel off a Christmas tree"

going up the valley. This went on for a while, and finally he mentioned it to his friend, who said he had been "sizing up the same thing":

I didn't mention it to the other person, because I thought--well, I wouldn't want him to think I was weird. And he didn't mention it to me for the same reason. [chuckles] So sometimes people see things similar, they say nothing to each other. It's only once in awhile to mention something, and find out the other person had a similar experience.

Some experiences and opinions, then, might be kept private unless or until one is assured of an appropriate audience with a shared perspective. A shared or widely known tradition creates an automatic audience, whatever the individual differences in attitude or belief. A change or decline of audience, through growth or breakdown of community, may precede the decline of tradition, driving it underground, so to speak; that is, people may continue to have the same experience that would have qualified as "fairy," "ghost," or whatever in the past, but no longer offer it for public scrutiny. One implication in this for the collection of folklore, especially folk belief, is that an informant may feel isolated in his or her own culture or community and in fact more in sympathy with "outsiders" who express an interest. Mr. Tucker, for example, says his family is not especially interested in his dowsing; for a sense of collegiality, he subscribes to The American Dowsers, the journal of the American Society of Dowsers, a compendium

of reports on standard on-site dowsing and wildly psychic applications to diverse areas such as health, archaeology, and creativity. He feels more in tune with these imported ideas than anything offered by his immediate culture, in which his attempts to discuss technique with fellow dowzers have met with resistance on their part.

In March 1989, Mr. Tucker brought me an article from the National Enquirer of December 1988, "UFO Experts Claim: Fairies Throughout History Were Really Space Aliens":

The fairies described in folktales were actually alien beings from another planet! That's the conclusion of two UFO experts--who declare that the accounts of fairies throughout history closely resemble the modern reports of ETs or extraterrestrial creatures. Here are the astonishing similarities, according to Brad Steiger, author of "The UFO Abductors," and Hayden Hewes, executive director of the International UFO Bureau...

The similarities are small size and green colour; the power to disappear at will, to make humans see things that aren't really there, and to levitate themselves, objects and human beings into the air; the "missing time" experienced by fairy and UFO abductees, and the circular patterns made by landings of UFOS (Ruehl). The likenesses have not escaped Newfoundland observers. "My grandmother said that in her childhood days they would tell stories of fairies as we would tell stories of space men," wrote one student (FSC74-1/14). Mr. Smith said that a woman in Bishop's Cove thought

that the reason a changeling was put out was so that the space people could retrieve it. In Heart's Content,

People say they saw jack-o-lanterns what were people from another planet or elsewhere who stood on the water. These little people held lanterns in their hands. My source [father] never saw one but those who did usually had a buddy to corroborate the story. (FSC71-119/08)

Jack McGrath (the man who saw Bridge Hearn carried off in the pook of hay) told about a man who was crossing Graveyard Hill in Brigus alone in a slide when a piece came out of a bolt, forcing him to stop and make a repair; "a woman passed him the key in his hand," and disappeared:

It had to be a fairy. Had to be something enchanted or something--alien, well, there was no aliens then. Probably that's the aliens now, coming back in the shape of aliens.... That's what it is, boy, the aliens now, that was the fairies then.<sup>5</sup>

Some of the most striking similarities are in accounts in which the informants do not make the UFO equation themselves. When a Carbonear student asked his mother about a spot that "was once haunted by ghosts or fairies," she told him what she had heard from an old woman who lived across from it:

She said every night she used to look over across the brook in Barry's garden, but she used to call it Barry's hump. She said she used to see a big light in there every night. So somebody said that was haunted in there, so she went

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<sup>5</sup>Unaccessioned tape submitted to Marie-Annick Désplanques, Folklore 2000, Summer 1989. My transcription.



over in her yard this night, and when she saw the big light she said there was a bird flew over, bigger than a house, she said the bird flew over and landed on the middle of the road. So she had a big dogberry tree in front of her house, she went out and sat in under the dogberry tree and she said she watched this moving out the road and she said it frightened her to death. So she went in and got [her brother] to come out. Well, Pad got as far as the gate and he wouldn't go any further. He said he was going to bed. The next morning she got up and for curiosity she said she had to go out on the road to see if there was anything happening. She said it was just like somebody came and took the boughs and hauled them all over the gravel road and cleared it off as clean as anything. This is what happened to it, the big bird came and cleaned off the road.

Collector: What did she think it was?

Informant: She said it was a big bird!

Collector: Just that?

Informant: Just a bird. (76-133/11-13)

An Outer Cove man appears to have been zapped by an ET:

There was a man one time who went outside his house at night to fill a couple of buckets with water. It was on a large farm and the well was a considerable distance from the house. As he neared the well he could see a little man sitting on the stump of a tree. He wasn't a very nervous man himself by no means even though it was very late at night. He walked up to the little fellow and something very strange happened. A blast seemed to come from him and the man was thrown into the air and landed on his back in the middle of the garden. When his family found him he was in a daze and they carried him inside the house and called the doctor. He spent the next two weeks in bed and

he never did really recover from the shock. (73-74/28)

Mr. Tucker almost certainly feels he has encountered extraterrestrials, although he stops short of saying so directly. On the day he brought the UFO article, he told how he often sees lights in the wilderness, which he long took to be poachers; after a while, however, he realized that there was a pattern to their appearance, and he would know ahead of time when they would be seen. But if he were to take anyone along to see them, "they" would seem to "know" and fail to appear. Once he and another man were parked on a pinnacle when they saw a light coming toward them about fifty feet above the ground. As it neared them the radio, phone and lights of their truck went out, and the truck would not start; it suddenly began to snow, even though it was only early fall. Somehow they finally got the truck started, and went down the hill to where it was not snowing, and saw the light disappearing in the other direction. On another occasion--the night before the famous ball lightning (or whatever it was) struck Bell Island in

the late 1970s<sup>6</sup>--Mr. Tucker saw a light circling over the island, but did not think much of it at the time. But later he heard of someone who saw two lights "fighting" above the island; one finally shot the other, and it plunged to the ground (it was a UFO battle). Mr. Tucker thus retains the youthful interest that led him to look for UFOs on Three Pond Barrens, although he keeps it mostly to himself. I can never help thinking of the seeming incongruity of his private interests and his public persona--as he put it when we were talking about people's looks one day, he is "not the kind of guy you want to meet with a moose steak in your pocket." Who would suspect that this down-to-earth officer of the law has an eye on the sky for unearthly visitors?

Mr. Ed (or Ned) MacDonald of Kingston, Conception Bay, also considers extraterrestrial interference as a possible explanation of "fairy" phenomena. Probably about ten years younger than Mr. Furlong and Mr. Tucker, he is like them in his expansive, confident personality and open-minded interest in supernatural traditions. Like Mr. Tucker, he possesses psychic abilities, and has had a number of strange

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<sup>6</sup>A famous event in Bell Island folklore. Philip Hiscock gives what he can recall of it, which he figures is probably fairly close to the general version. It happened on an Easter Sunday, and American military specialists from Texas flew in within twenty-four hours. They refused to speak to the press, although they supposedly determined it was not the Russians sending electric rays (or something like that) to Cuba; Philip thinks that it was finally given out to have been some kind of "super lightning" which was attracted to a patch of iron ore in the ground.

experiences, several of which he described for his niece, Louise Mullaly, for a term paper she called "Facts on Fairies: Rules and Stories in the Area from Kingston to Northern Bay" (79-378). When I phoned Mr. MacDonald in October 1984 to ask if I could come talk to him about these experiences, he interrogated me briskly: Did I believe in ESP? Prophetic dreams? Tokens? Apparently my answers-- along the lines of "certainly something to it"--satisfied him, as he told me I could come by anytime. The first day I went, he was busy in the carpentry shop adjoining his house. Over the pounding and sawing, he also told me that his fairy experiences were not a matter of "going astray," which he has done through carelessness, and there were no fairies involved; rather, there was a "sense of presence," of "something there," and the environment, though familiar, was somehow different. (He noted casually that there is a presence in his shop that has sometimes pushed him aside.) Favouring what David Hufford might call an "experiential source hypothesis" over a "cultural source hypothesis" (Terror 14-15), he suggests that "fairies"--which the old people called "good people" or "little people"--is just a convenient term for an certain experience or sensation that can happen to anyone anywhere, whether they have fairy traditions or not; no one knows the real cause, which could be, for example, an investigative source from another planet

that puts people in a "hypnotic state" in order to study them.

Whereas Mr. Tucker's "fairy" experience involved not being able to get into a certain space, Mr. MacDonald's involved not being able to get out. Since I never did hear about all of the experiences directly, Louise Mullaly's paper and transcript are used for these accounts. Once, he was cutting a Christmas tree near Mt. Pearl (a city adjoining St. John's) in a wood so small that he could hear children playing and dogs barking in a nearby subdivision. When he wanted to come out, however, he walked and walked but was unable to find his way:

Sat down and was calm enough about it, had a smoke to figure out the situation, but I couldn't hear the dogs barking nor the kids playing, but I could hear something, you know what I mean, I could hear someone talking but like someone whispering.... I could hear voices but there was nobody there. I said, what I'll do is walk back, backtrack, now I left tracks in the snow. So I backtracked--I knew where I came into the woods, I came in through a clearing, I got back to the clearing, I backtracked and sure enough the tracks were going backward all the ways until I came to the middle of that clearing, and you know the tracks stopped right exactly in the middle of the clearing. Now I couldn't just come down out of the sky and make the tracks, right? Started to get a little bit frightened then, so I says okay, the tracks stop here and I'm about fifty feet from a fellow's house; I knew right where I was, but I walked for an hour and I was still in the woods; now I got a bit panicky then--Christ, I'm going to die here in the woods. So I started walking, I walked

for two and a half hours and I came out to this strange place I never seen before in my life. Never laid my eyes on it before, but it was a populated place, paved streets, modern houses, so I stopped a car, I seen a car coming and I stopped it. I still had the axe with me. The fellow stopped and I don't know for sure I didn't know him but probably he knew me, because I lived around there. I said what place is this? And he says this is Glendale. And Glendale and Mt. Pearl was like Ochre Pit Cove and Western Bay, you walk out of one place and into another, closer than that even, I mean it's all the one place now.

He walked on, still hearing "the whispering and noises" until he recognized a house and "snapped out of it," arriving home hours later from "a patch of woods that either way you'd walk out in ten minutes" (17-18).

On another occasion, he was staying with friends in St. John's, sleeping on their chesterfield in the living room, when he awoke in the night needing the bathroom but was unable to find the door:

No, no, I wasn't drunk, because I started in the corner and counted the corners, 1-2-3-4. Now if that door there is open and I'm walking from corner to corner groping around, I got to find the door, right? I couldn't find it but fortunately he had the fireplace there.... But I mean you don't believe in it because you don't believe in fairies, but I faithfully believe in fairies. (19-20)

A third experience happened when he was much younger, and his father sent him to the barn to give the horse some hay. He couldn't find the hatch and was "trapped" in the loft

until his father came looking for him several hours later, and the hatch reappeared.

Just as Mr. Tucker tells stories of other peoples' experience similar to his own, Mr. MacDonald gives a story in which can be seen a model for his own experiences of impeded movement. He told it to both Louise and me, and although he doesn't mention the fairies, she called it "Grandfather's Encounter with the Fairy Power." It is about how his grandfather (in Western Bay) overslept for the first time in his life and, having missed the other men going in for wood, set out on his own. As he proceeded there was something pushing against the cart, which became so heavy he could not go on; as he put it to me, "there was a force pushing him back; the nearer his destination he got, the harder the force got, and finally he had to give it up and turn back." Later that evening "the cry went out that Bill Lench wasn't out of the woods," and search parties set out for the place they knew he had been cutting--where Mr. MacDonald's grandfather had been attempting to go. In the group of three men who found him was Dr. Dunn, a local folk practitioner. As they neared the spot, "Dr. Dunn said, 'We're too late, his spirit just crossed the pond.' And when they got there he was just dead, right, his body was still warm." His load of wood had toppled over on him. If his grandfather had been there, said Mr. MacDonald, the man

could have been saved; but as he said on Mullaly's tape, "call for one, couldn't take two" (26).

I was reminded of this fatalistic notion on a visit in March 1985, when Mr. MacDonald asked me if I had "seen anything" in the place I was renting in Victoria; a man had been murdered in one of the cabins there. This man, whom he knew, had always felt he would come to a violent end, and had recently refused to go to the States with a band because of this fear. Later that week I visited again (with a tape recorder), and we talked about blood-stopping, charming (he can do warts),<sup>7</sup> curses, prophetic dreams, and the old hag (he's had it). He spoke of Dr. Dunn:

The amazing thing about Dr. Dunn was he used to make his own medicine. Now he was a firm believer in fairies. In fact, at that time, the mode of transportation at that time was horse and buggy, right? They say Dr. Dunn, being a kindly old gentleman, he'd pick you up, you know, if you were hitch-hiking at the time. I don't think they used to use that term at that time, "hitch-hiking," I'm not sure. But he'd stop and give you a lift. But if he had a wagonload of fairies, he couldn't pick you up. He'd say no, he'd stop and tell you, "I can't pick you up 'cause I've got a wagonload of fairies here." But he used to make his own medicine, he never bought any ingredients for his medicine. And apparently he had some

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<sup>7</sup>For everyone but his own family; it works through "power of suggestion" and "belief in the cure," he says, and their lack of confidence in him foils the process. This reminded me of Mr. Tucker telling how once he could not find water for a man who considered dowsing "against his religion," which negativity set up some kind of counterforce.



miraculous cures. He wasn't a doctor, by the way, he didn't have his M.D. But he was recognized by the Newfoundland Medical Association--he was allowed to call himself "Doctor." I'd say he was the only quack in Newfoundland who was allowed to practice. Right now he'd be prosecuted, right?

(Later Mr. MacDonald directed us to the graveyard in Kingston to see that Dr. Dunn's tombstone does in fact say "Dr. Richard Dunn" on it; I couldn't see the dates for the snow.) When I asked an old man near Western Bay about Dr. Dunn, he told me that he used to say, "Come on up, boys!" and the fairies would pile on his wagon.<sup>8</sup> It seems that both Dr. Dunn and Dr. Cron encouraged these stories about their fairy connections. A Bell Island informant said that Dr. Cron himself told him about his car stalling at a gravel pit near Harbour Grace which was supposed to be haunted by the spirit of a murdered woman. "Okay, Mother Geheine, you can have her for the night but I wants her tomorrow morning," he said, and walked to his patient in Upper Island Cove. The next morning the car started immediately (72-

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<sup>8</sup>Field notes March 1985. The invitation may be traditional: Padraig Ó Tuathail gives a story of three men driving a cart who see a crowd of small people in red coats: It was a pass-word with the people at that time to say: "Let them all come!" So they said it, and with that they all climbed on to the wheels and up on the horse's back and on every part of the car where they could possibly sit. (88)

95/13-14).<sup>9</sup> Another Bell Island informant said that "a story was told of a doctor who believed in fairies and their mystical powers," whose Model T stalled out on a sick call one night. "He cursed the fairies and said they could have the car and off he trod over the hills to his patient." When the car started easily the next morning, he concluded that "the fairies just wanted to use it" (73-171/11).

Drs. Cron and Dunn's easy familiarity with the fairies no doubt enhanced their authority and their patients' confidence in their ability to effect a cure. Whether they cultivated the role or not, the image of doctors and priests as intercessors with otherworldly powers makes them natural figures for the accretion of supernatural legends. Their travel at all hours, often in relation to life-and-death situations, would provide much raw material for potential conversion to legend. Indeed, anyone who regularly traveled alone might have legend-worthy experiences. Louise Mullaly gives the story of a butcher on his round: who discovered a man who had been transported by the fairies to a remote barren:

After this event it was a well-known fact that every time the butcher passed Heart's Content barrens, someone (the fairies) always got in the buggy or on the slide with him. The butcher said he could always feel the presence of someone being there. (9)

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<sup>9</sup>Another student describes the murder of a Mrs. Geehan, whose body was put in what is now called "Geehan's Pit" (72-116/22).

The fairies readily transfer their attentions from carts and slides to cars, which are also prone to harassment by extraterrestrials. Cars have even replaced horses as registers of supernatural presence, stalling out instead of balking, as when Mr. Tucker's truck went haywire at the approach of the mysterious light.

Mr. Tucker and Mr. MacDonald seem to pick up interesting experience and items wherever they go. Mr. Tucker brought me a list of potential informants from all over the Avalon Peninsula, with suggestions on what I might ask them about. Both Mr. MacDonald and Mr. Tucker, as younger men, did stints as orderlies at the Waterford Hospital; it was there Mr. MacDonald heard about "padlocking," a curse put on by a "bad widow" which could only be removed by a "good widow," and where Mr. Tucker received the electric shock (not electroshock!) which he thinks may have tripped his psychic abilities. With the exception of John Ashton's work on lumber camps, the role of large employment centers in the transmission of tradition has been neglected in comparison to that of small communities, but as Mr. Tucker's and Mr. MacDonald's conversation shows, they provided a forum for narrative exchange and opportunities for new experience.

Proof that migration and admixture can be a powerful creative force is offered by Bell Island, that great iron-

ore magnet that drew people to work in the mines from their opening in 1895 until their closure in 1966. Bell Island also provides an even better example than St. John's of fairy traditions thriving in an industrialized, if not exactly urban, setting. About nine miles long and three miles wide, it rises out of Conception Bay on sheer cliffs which afford landing in only a few places. There were no inhabitants in the second half of the seventeenth century (Seary et al 7), but by 1794 Aaron Thomas observed that there were residents on Bell Isle, "reckon'd to be the fertilest spot to be met with on the northern coast" (66); it remained an important agricultural area long after the mines opened. During the entire period of operation of the mines there was a continual flux between the island and "mainland" communities. The Newfoundland Royal Commission 1933 Report describes the early seasonal arrangement of two six-month shifts, one made up of those who fished in the summer and worked in the mines in the winter, and another of those who worked in the woods in the winter and in the mines in the summer; and even at the height of operations, many miners commuted on weekends to homes in Conception Bay (Seary et al 36). It is not surprising, then, that a large number of stories collected on Bell Island are about other places; one student found that people would talk more readily about Conception Bay than about the island, and that "'bay stories' are a part of the folklore of Bell Island"

(72-95/4). However, there is also a large body of indigenous fairy lore, that is, of fairy incidents on the island, involving island residents. The abundance of fairy narratives in MUNFLA attracted me to Bell Island, where, as I mentioned in the introduction, I heard my first fairy story. I was not the first to be so drawn: one student set out purposely to collect "fairy tales" there because he "heard that there are very many on the island" (72-144/2-3). Indeed, Bell Island seems to have something of a reputation for fairy lore, which borders on blason populaire in this account:

A friend of mine knew a woman living at Sandy Point who used to live on Bell Island. When Jennifer went to visit the woman after not having seen her for a few years, she asked the woman where her husband was. The woman said the fairies had taken him away. When Jennifer expressed disbelief and asked if he had died, the woman said no, he wasn't dead, he had been taken away by the fairies one night and she hadn't seen him since. The woman got most upset when my friend continued to express disbelief. My friend said people from Bell Island are known to be strange anyways, so she passed it off and didn't mention it to the old woman again. (70-6/19)

Bell Island is the only place I have heard of having a special fairies' day, other than October 1, May 1 or Halloween:

A night in February, Fairies' Eve, it is claimed that one can see the fairies dancing on the West Dam. A person, when he encounters the fairies, should stare him in the eyes until he can plug his ears. This way he is unable to hear the

fairy music which lures people away.  
(74-43/11-12)

Bell Island fairy lore differs little in its outlines from that of the "mainland." It does not appear to have adapted particularly to the presence of the mines, although one informant and her friends did watch "hundreds of men" emerge from an abandoned mine one day (72-95/48-49). There are no reports of "knockers" or mine spirits as found in Welsh or Cornish folklore, and in general the mines seem neither to have deterred the fairies nor to have afforded new narrative possibilities; the fairies appear just as they might in the woods, for example, in this account:

One of the men who worked up to No. 4 compressor claimed that one night when he was on duty the fairies visited him. He said that they were little men about three feet tall and they were all wearing red stocking caps on their heads. He started to cuss and they went away. At a certain time each year on Bell Island in a certain area near the mines numerous people have seen a fairy celebration, dancing and making merry. These people have sworn to what they have seen. (71-75/22-23)

As elsewhere, the fairies were associated with the woods (as near the east end and Lance Cove according to 72-97/8) and other natural features. One man was unable to cross Perry's Brook (now Main River) at certain times of the year for the "hordes of little people" that were crossing it themselves (72-97:C1284/5). "The older people," according to one report, said that the eastern head, a supposedly unscalable

column of land rising from the sea at one end of the island, "belongs to the Good People"; in foggy weather they would be seen singing and dancing and building a bridge to the "mainland" (72-95/10). Another wrote:

There were marshes nearby on the front of the island where we lived and stories were told about fairies who lived there. There was one particular piece of marshland which used to shake like jelly when we would run across it. Stories were told that it would open up and swallow us up like it had done to other people. This particular place would never freeze over and stories were spun about the evil that dwelt there. (71-109/29-30)

There are, on Bell Island, the usual reports of the fairies' banishment:

There is a house in a big meadow situated on Lance Cove Road. Near this house is a huge rock. This house and rock are believed to be haunted. At night it was said that the fairies were seen dancing around this rock. A Mr. O'Toole built this house for his future bride but she died, so nobody ever lived in the house. According to some people, one day a flash of light appeared high over the rock and over it could be seen the sign of the cross. Apparently, the fairies continued to return to the rock. Monsignor Bartlett, who at that time was parish priest, came up and blessed the rock. This was around twenty years ago and there have been no reports of fairies since. (73-123/10-11)

And as usual, this is not quite the case, as a number of personal experience accounts show. Some are quite detailed, as from the collector who wrote:

[My informant] was coming home late one night (about twelve-thirty) walking

along the railroad track when by a small path to the side of the track he heard strange voices, rather high-pitched as if of two people fighting. Mr. Jackson, thinking that it could be a man and his wife who lived nearby and who were a little bit "queer" and always fighting, decided to investigate. He says he felt "compelled" to investigate, strangely. Previous to this happening Mr. Jackson had no fear of or belief in fairies or anything connected with the supernatural. When he started following this pathway, the voices would go back further and further, so that they always seemed the same distance away from Mr. Jackson. He continued, as if under a spell, to follow them until he realized that he was but a few feet from a dam. Coming to his senses he stopped and thought that perhaps this could be the fairies. He turned as if to go, then took from his lunchbox a piece of bread and threw it ahead of him, and took a pair of rosary beads from his pocket and made the sign of the cross. As he went to turn around he felt a strong tugging and pulling at his pant legs, and he had to run with all his might to get away from the spell. For the first and only time in his life he felt sheer terror. When he got home his wife said he was actually gray in colour. Mr. Jackson wanted the two men at the house to go back and investigate but they just refused. Mr. Jackson passed that spot about the same time a number of other times but he never after heard or saw anything like that. (FSC67-3/34)

The same collector reported another incident in which the fairies were actually seen:

Mr. Gerard Nelson of Bell Island is reported to have seen a group of fairies when he was in the woods on Bell Island about twelve-thirty one night. The area is called Scotia No. 1. The fairies were about two and a half feet high and they surrounded him and his female companion and jumped up and down around



them. They did them no harm. Shortly before or after this event, in practically the same spot by an old public well, a young girl was assaulted and murdered and thrown in the well. My informant could not tell me if these events were linked in any way but she figured that somehow the fairies might have been trying to tell them something. (FSC67-3/35)

Another enigmatic association of the fairies with murder appears in Thomas Power's memoirs of his childhood on "Belle Isle" in the 1890s. During a May Day party held in the loft of his family's barn, while the rest of the children sang and circled the May Pole, he sneaked away and dressed himself "in a weird manner"; he returned, and sticking his head up through a hole in the floor shouted, "I'm the fairy who killed Collary!" Pandemonium followed the unexplained utterance (26).

The dangerous, fearsome aspect of the fairies on Bell Island is embodied in the person of David (Davy) Mercer, the stories of whom form a veritable catalogue of fairy motifs. He was a small man of unusual appearance, and it is not clear whether he was mentally normal or not; he died around 1960. All accounts agree that he was taken by the fairies, but the age at which this happened varies as do the details of the encounter. Some describe his condition on emerging from, or being found in, the woods: he "was unable to speak plainly and was limping, one leg was shorter than the other" (73-123/12-3); "one leg had a malformity, his face was

'acned,' and he had a strange fairy-like voice (a high-pitched nasal voice)" (71-109/43); "he had a limp and his face was pulled to one side" (72-117/9); "he was all disfigured and scared and simple-minded" (71-75/21-22); "they found him wandering around in the woods all crippled up deaf and dumb" (74-43/14); "he had twigs in his nose, his body was slashed and bruised and ever afterwards, although he was very intelligent and quite normal formerly, his speech was impaired, his intelligence seemed to have diminished, and he became hunchbacked" (FSC67-3/37); "they took ribbons of green grass out of his leg" (72-95/11); and so on. Although most accounts say that he cannot recall what happened, several purport to give Mr. Mercer's own explanation. One says that he forgot bread on a berry-picking expedition:

One night some time later some friends of his asked him where he was going and he told them about the time he went into the woods without the bread and the fairies took him. He told them the fairies said he had to come back in the woods every night at twelve o'clock. Well, this night his friends held him and wouldn't let him go. The next night he went and never came back for three days and three nights. After he returned he could only say a few words and appeared to have gone silly.  
(FSC71-22/30)

One informant claimed that Davy Mercer "wrote about how he was let go because he was so cute [local = "acute," i.e., smart] and small that they took pity on him, but they struck

him deaf and dumb so he couldn't tell where they was living" (74-43/14). Apparently, as an adult Davy Mercer did odd jobs for a living, and it is suggested that some of his skills were learned from the fairies: "While he was with the fairies he learned how to carve figures from wood" (71-75/21-22); "he was afterwards...renowned for his beautiful penmanship, the like of which no one had ever seen" (FSC67-3/37). He did carpentry, and many informants mention a model church he built; "He wanted the fairies to come to it," claimed one (74-43/14). He "sold portraits for some company and took pictures as well" (71-109/43), and "sold little things around the neighborhood and took measurements for clothes" (74-43/14). "Davie Mercer was extremely skilled with his hands and had an almost fanatical love of flowers," wrote one collector, "he would love [my informant's] lilacs and would come to the house when they first bloomed. He went from door to door asking for odd jobs, like framing pictures.... [He] was very affectionate and generous and hated to be given charity" (FSC67-3/38). This last description contrasts rather poignantly with the frightening figure he cut, especially among children. "There goes Davie Mercer, he was took by the fairies," they would whisper when he passed (FSC67-3/37). He must have been used extensively by parents as a warning figure. One collector's father recounted his case in proof of the fairies' existence:

I still persisted to question my father as a non-believer of fairies. He next told me about a man who I personally had known. He was a Mr. David Mercer who lived on Bell Island. He was a short thin man. He walked with a limp, his face was very white and wrinkled, his speech was not a stutter or a stammer but a mixture of the two. And he had a perpetual grin which was horrifying. He was a very awkward and even frightening individual. To see this person would quickly lead one to believe that he had experienced a great shock of some sort. The look of terror was painted on his face. Dad explained what had happened to turn a perfectly normal man into such a horrible specimen. One evening just before darkness Mr. Mercer went into the woods to look for his father's sheep. It soon became dark and he didn't return home. The next day a search party went to look for him. He was soon found curled up by a tree in a fit of terror. He was crying and mumbling, his clothes were torn and he seemed to be in pain. The sheep he had gone to look for were all dead. They had been torn apart but not eaten. Many of the people who were present when he was found believed it to be the work of the fairies. Mr. Mercer was taken home and a doctor was called. He was baffled at the condition which this man was in. He treated his broken leg but couldn't revive him from his state of shock. He later had Mr. Mercer admitted to a mental institution where he received the necessary treatment. After he returned to Bell Island, Mr. Mercer couldn't recall any part of that dreadful night which had rendered him so. However many of his friends and neighbors who were present at the time can't be convinced that it was not the work of the little bad ones and would never think about returning to that fatal spot at night. (Q68-259/6-8)

The efforts of the doctor and hospital belie the common theory that a "fairy" diagnosis is made in the absence of

medical models of disease; indeed, "doctors baffled" is a motif used to reinforce a supernatural interpretation, and confinement to the mental hospital a common result of fairy affliction. A high school teacher told his students about a girl who was taken by the fairies and on her return began to waste away:

Her worried parents sent her to St. John's to the hospital. Here doctors could find nothing wrong with her, but they held her for observation. Several months later she died stark raving mad with hair grown out all over her body. An autopsy revealed nothing. (Q68-44/6-7)

On Bell Island, health care was in fact once more accessible than it is now. "At no time were you short of a doctor," said one informant, comparing 1971 unfavorably with the 1930s, when you could get one of three doctors within half an hour of a call (72-97:C1285/12). Still, I have found no reference to a natural malady such as polio or a stroke in connection with Davy Mercer's condition, although most accounts point to a single traumatic incident rather than a chronic condition. The following account was recorded in spring of 1989, and is the first I have seen from an informant who actually claims to have been involved in the precipitating event:

My grandfather told me of a fairy happening that he had seen himself. One day in the early 1920s, Poppy and his friends were playing near the woods. They were afraid to go in the woods because they had been warned of fairies. Suddenly they heard a giggling noise,

one that sounded very unusual. Poppy and his friends ran as fast as they could to the nearest house. When they got there they realized that one of the boys was missing: Davy Mercer. They were afraid to go back and look for him, instead they went to the Mercer home and told Davy's parents. Mr. and Mrs. Mercer gathered up a few more older folks and began to look for Davy. They had no luck in finding him. It was a week or so when he found his own way home. His parents were shocked: their darling little boy, who was completely normal before, was now practically deformed. They pulled sticks, rocks and things from the lumps in their son's skin. Davy was now mentally and physically disturbed. From that time onward, he was never the same. As he grew older, he became stranger. He walked around crimped [sic], wearing a long coat and a top hat. He always carried a brief case and tried to sell things; however, no one ever saw what was inside the briefcase. (89-215/15-17)

This "secret briefcase" is reminiscent of the Black Heart Book in that no one but the owner is supposed to see its contents, and in 1983 Mr. Arthur Clarke of Bell Island told me a story about Davy Mercer which cast him in a decidedly witch-like role. During a card game Davy Mercer entered the room, and one of the players said to him, "Go away, Davy, you'll bring me bad luck." "You'll always have bad luck after this," said Davy (here Mr. Clarke's voice rose in squeaky imitation). Sure enough he always did. And so the small, unlovely, but apparently respected figure recedes into legend, marked by the crueller forces of the world for a place in history he probably would have preferred not to

occupy. After death he was granted the normalcy he never enjoyed: "I have not been able to talk to anyone who saw Davie after his death," said a collector, "but it is rumored that he went back to normal shape" (FSC67-3/38).

Davy Mercer had a St. John's counterpart in Stuart Taylor. A collector's grandmother who lived next door to him on Cabot Street said that he had been "carried away by the fairies," and that after this he could never work in the daytime (FSC74-6/37). "Every night he would go off to the woods and generally people thought he was a fairy himself," wrote another student, whose informant told him this story:

Mr. Taylor was building a chimney for Mrs. Hayes on Cabot Street but they found that they had run out of bricks before they were finished. They needed a hundred and fifty more bricks but neither Mr. Hayes nor Mr. Taylor had the money for these. That night Mr. Taylor went into the woods again and the next morning at five A.M. when Mrs. Hayes looked out her window she saw a neat pile which contained exactly one hundred and fifty bricks stacked below her door. It was believed that Mr. Taylor had gotten his fairy friends to bring them.  
(72-181/13)

"It was said that wherever he was at midnight he would have to leave because the fairies called him or had some claim on him," reported another:

It seems he did not claim this himself but people said it because he had some strange ways, was tiny and elf-like in appearance, and was frequently noticed leaving the church service at odd times. He played the violin in the Salvation Army services. My [second informant] adds that the man was partly blind, and

was often seen to go and sit on a certain stone in a certain field. This stone was known, at least to the children, as a fairy stone. [A third informant] says that this man was believed to have been changed into the short elf-like man that he was when he went into the woods one day and the fairies got him. His appearance before this had been quite normal. (FSC71-86/22)

(The field was probably Martin's Meadow, behind Lime Street and Carter's Hill; one collector's grandmother saw the fairies there, "little men dancing around playing ring-around-the-rosie" and beckoning to her (80-75:C5614).) Mr. Taylor was said to have uncanny abilities:

[My informant] has been told about a man who was a real fairy or will-o-the-wisp. His name was Stuart Taylor, a very small and tiny man. He was reported to be able to get out of any room, no matter how many locks you had on it. They decided to test him one night. They put him in a room with no windows, only one door, locked from the outside, and the men stood guard so that there was no possible way he could get out. Within a few minutes he proved them wrong. They say he was "not of this world." (81-186/13)

In his 1931 Paths to Yesterday: Memories of Old St. John's, Newfoundland, John Maclay Byrnes mentions Stuart Taylor, "known to the small boys as the 'fairy man' or 'changeling,' who played incessantly on a tin whistle" (76). This was in a section on "quaint St. John's characters," in which Byrnes noted that "genuine kindness...tempered what otherwise might be possibly considered a regrettable attitude of levity



towards their really pitiable misfortune" (64). One of the "characters," his neighbor, was often pelted with stones and rotten vegetables by children; perhaps understandably, he could be overheard shouting "savage imprecations" against people in his nightly prayers (67). The idea that an abnormal person might possess supernatural powers would be an important tool for gaining the respect compromised by the abnormality. As an unidentified writer said of Stuart Taylor, "to say we were scared stiff of him is only putting it mildly. There were stories about him saying he could turn us into goats or cows, whatever."<sup>10</sup>

The stories about Davy Mercer and Stuart Taylor circulated mainly in their own communities, although, as would be expected with the travel to and from Bell Island, reports of Davy Mercer come from various locations in Conception Bay as well. But the most famous figure associated with the fairies was known all over Newfoundland, her story spread at first not only by word of mouth but by the St. John's news media. In March of 1985 I was unaware of the famous Lucy Harris case, although the name was vaguely familiar from MUNFLA. I don't know which reports I had read at that point, but they were probably some of these:

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<sup>10</sup>An unattributed quotation in a high school student's paper. The author remarks that he is "well past sixty the mark" (72-116/31-2).

[The informant] says she remembers hearing about a young girl named Harris who was cared for by the fairies. This happened about twenty years ago in New Melbourne. The girl was about seven or eight years old. She disappeared in the middle of winter and was said to have been taken away by the fairies. The young girl eventually turned up safely and the child herself said that she had been fed berries by the fairies. (70-26/56)

In New Melbourne, Trinity Bay, a little girl got lost in the woods and was given up for dead. Several weeks later she walked out of the woods completely safe, unhurt, and well-nourished. She was asked how she had managed, and she said that the fairies had taken care of her until she wanted to come home again.... [The informant] said the little girl it happened to is alive now but is an old lady, so it must have happened some time ago. (70-6/18)

[The informant] remembered an incident which happened at Old Perlican, Conception Bay, about forty miles from Harbour Grace. He is not certain of the date but thinks it was around 1939-40. A small child named Lucy Harris became lost in the woods while she was berry-picking with her family. Searchers looked for her for days but could find no trace. Weeks later (forty-seven days) the girl was found by the roadside not too far from where she disappeared. She was healthy, well-fed and her clothes were neat and clean. The child said that "little people" took care of her while she was in the woods. People believed, says Mr. Butler, that she was looked after by the fairies. (FSC74-132/\*\*)

In March 1985, Hubert and Ethel Burke of Victoria told me that a long time ago Lucy Harris of New Melbourne was

lost for a long time (they didn't know exactly how long), during which she was taken care of by "little men and women." There was something like a bear, too, Mrs. Burke recalled, and Mr. Burke thought it was a big black dog that lay down by her at night and kept her warm.<sup>11</sup> I should go there, they said, and "ask anyone." So on March 10, I did.

In the small, quiet town, I wandered near the beach admiring Trinity Bay until four teenage boys came by, and I struck up a conversation (well, actually I waylaid then grilled the taciturn fellows). I asked if they had ever heard the "old legend" of Lucy Harris, and to my amazement, they said, "Well, why don't you go ask her?" I had been under the impression that it had all happened so long ago she was now dead or at least ancient; but when I went to her house--unable to think of a good reason not to--I found she is not even old, but maybe in her sixties. As I prefer not to recall the most embarrassing episode in my fieldwork, and do not trust myself not to downplay the awkwardness of it if I elaborate, I reproduce my field notes here:

Ms. Harris seemed offended at my probably bungled explanation of my visit. "Fairies?" she asked scornfully, "I don't believe anything like that!" It happened when she was about ten; she was gone ten or eleven days, and didn't eat anything; and to my great embarrassment, her sister (?) came in

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<sup>11</sup>They may have been thinking of the unearthly Newfoundland dog said to guide travellers lost on the road which runs across the barrens from Victoria to Heart's Content (Q68-37/4).

and informed me that she had lost both legs as a result of their having been frozen. I bumbled rather lamely on about how interesting the legend process was since other people attributed it to the fairies, etc. etc. "The Lord above protected me," she declared firmly, and I apologized for bringing it up and, dropping by unannounced like that. She said it was alright, she didn't mind. Still, although they relented a bit at my discomfiture, I don't think she or her sister (?) were too pleased; I had the impression that I was not the first to ask about it. Her brother (?), who had greeted me very kindly, said nothing the whole time and I left after about ten minutes. As I drove out of New Melbourne, I noticed that one of the old churches has been converted to the "Pentecostal Church," and I wonder if she could be a convert whose new views do not take in fairies?

On 1 April 1985--three weeks after my visit--the Evening Telegram carried an article by Michael Harrington in which, drawing on the Evening Telegram's original reports, he recounted the events of 1936 when Lucy went astray (the edited article is now in his Offbeat Mystery of Newfoundland and Labrador.) When it was discovered on the evening of March 26 that Lucy had not been seen since that morning, when her sister left her in the woods near their house, a search party set out. Over the next week, during which snow, fog, and rain alternated with clear freezing days, the number of searchers grew to over two hundred. Most gave up after a week, but her uncle and a few others continued to search, and on April 6 her uncle, three miles from the house, heard someone say "Hello." He turned to find Lucy

sitting upright against a tree: "I'm the little girl who is lost in the woods," she said. She was taken to the Old Perlican cottage hospital and then into St. John's; on April 9 an editorial headline in the Evening Telegram read:

"I'm the little girl who is lost in the woods" greets searchers for nine-year-old Lucy Harris who spent eleven nights in the open--saw rescuers but was too weak to call out--birds sang all day and kept her from being afraid, she said.

(Variation was creeping in even at this early stage, for the article itself says that she heard the searchers, not saw them.) It went on to describe how she sat down under the tree the first evening and did not move the whole time, ate snow, and slept at night. In the following days the Telegram continued to note her progress, and when it was found necessary to amputate her legs, launched a subscription appeal; there was also a big benefit concert, and Harrington mentions that the story was "featured in the fledgling radio broadcasting service" (Mystery 48).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>It seems to be part of the folklore of the case that the story was famous around the world; on 29 April 1936, a writer to the Telegram "wondered why the press of St. John's made so little of this remarkable case while the press of other countries was featuring it under striking headlines" (4). (The St. John's Daily News, perhaps conceding a Telegram scoop, had limited itself to a second page item on April 13 which quoted Lucy, "I'm the little girl who is lost.") I have not been able to find these "striking headlines"; the Associated Press did pick up the story, which ran April 10 on an inner page of the New York Times as follows:

An eight-year-old girl, lost in the forest for twelve days, recounted in Perlican Hospital today how she had lain down to sleep like the 'babes in the

On 10 April 1986, Don Morris resurrected the story once more for the Sunday Express. He used mostly the old Telegram accounts, but he did phone Ms. Harris, who told him that the incident is "still vivid in her mind." (He also reported that she is a devout member of the Pentecostal Church, confirming my earlier hunch.) A more informative interview had run in the Evening Telegram for 21 December 1961, in which Ms. Harris (then thirty-four) described how she had wandered absent-mindedly until she realized she was lost, and began to run in panic, losing her shoes. She sat down and went to sleep, listening to the birds. "Today Lucy remembers this all as a dream," the article continues, "but

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woods,' expecting never to waken. The child, Lucy Harris, endured hunger, rain, snow and frost while the whole neighborhood hunted for her, but hospital authorities said she would survive. Her hands and feet were frozen and she will probably be maimed for life. "I wasn't lonely or afraid because the birds sang," she whispered in hospital. The searchers never expected to find her alive. Her feeble cry: "Hello, I'm the little girl that's lost," startled them on the twelfth day of the search. (16L)

In London The Times carried a notice on April 14 in its tiny-print column, "Telegrams in brief":

Lucy Harris, a nine-year-old girl who did not come back from a trout-fishing expedition, has been found. After a search lasting twelve days, in which two hundred people of New Perlican, Newfoundland, took part, her uncle heard a voice saying, "Hello, I'm the little girl who is lost in the woods." (9)

It is possible that the story was featured more prominently in less mainstream newspapers.

she does recall that she received hundreds of dolls and toys from all over the world.... She was a favorite with both doctors and nurses in the hospital where she kept telling the story of her experiences" ("Lost" 48).

But what story did she tell? The question that tantalizes me is whether she herself said anything about the fairies. It is only to be expected that legend would have her say so, since otherwise there would be no "story," only surmise. The narrative embellishments afforded by putting the story in her own mouth are shown in this account:

This event happened in New Melbourne, Trinity Bay, about fifteen to twenty years ago [c. 1950]. It involved a woman, and my grandmother thinks her name was Lucy Harris but doesn't really remember. This woman was supposed [to have been] "led away by the fairies" in the woods in the late fall, at a time in the season when extreme exposure to the elements would cause death. My grandmother said that the woman was gone for several days, and after this length of time was found deep in the woods, sitting up against a tree trunk, unbelievably, alive. She had been frost-bitten, though, and as a result lost a limb, either an arm or leg, my grandmother doesn't remember this either, and said she wouldn't guess because she didn't want to give me any false information. The story that this Lucy Harris told was that she was led away by the fairies maliciously, into the woods until she was lost. Then when it became cold and she couldn't find her way out of the woods, Miss Harris said that the fairies took pity on her, changed their attitude, and hovered around her keeping her as warm as they could until the search-party found her several days later. Miss Harris said that she did not imagine she saw the

fairies--she really did: She said that they were little people but my grandmother does not remember how they were supposedly dressed. (FSC74-1/14)

Lucy's sense of companionship--if indeed she did feel such a thing, whether of birds, God, or fairies--has a basis in a more widely recognized experience than might be apparent at first glance. William Thomson recounts the experience of two climbers descending Mt. Everest who camped in a snow hole and later "told of a curious sensation that a third person had been sharing the hole during the night," and of a German climber who "was aware of a companion advising him that he had dropped his gloves," although there was no one there when he turned to speak. Thomson points out that since it often occurs in company, the experience cannot be explained by the need for companionship, and he quotes one climber to the effect that it is "an accepted phenomenon of mild hypothermia" (194).

Sir Ernest Shackleton and his team had the experience during an Antarctic expedition:

When I look back at those days I have no doubt that Providence guided us, not only across those snowfields, but across the storm-white sea that separated Elephant Island from our landing-place on South Georgia. I know that during that long and racking march of thirty-six hours over the unnamed mountains and glaciers of South Georgia it seemed to me often that we were four, not three. I said nothing to my companions on the point, but afterwards Worsley said to me, "Boss, I had a curious feeling on the march that there was another person



with us." Crean confessed to the same idea. (209)

The situation need not be life-threatening, it seems, for the phenomenon to occur. The British mountaineer Frank Smythe was once comfortably seated on a ledge waiting for a fellow climber to ascend and surveying the view:

I was letting my gaze wander thus, while gathering in the rope foot by foot, when I saw out of the corner of my eye my companion appearing out of the top of the chimney [rock formation] a yard or two away. I turned towards him, remarking: "Hallo, you've come up very quickly," but, at the same moment that I said this, I saw to my astonishment that there was no one there and heard his voice a long distance below.... I at once told myself that I had only imagined that I had seen him, though I was wholly unable to rid myself of the impression that I had seen someone. No doubt I would have forgotten about the incident if many hours later when we were talking about the climb Graham Brown had not said: "You know, Smythe, throughout the climb I had the most curious feeling that there was a third man on the rope, and I couldn't rid myself of it all the way up." (125)

On another, more stressful occasion, Smythe was exhausted, ill, and climbing alone when he had a near escape:

And now I must recount the first of two strange experiences that befell me that day. All the time that I was climbing alone, I had the feeling that there was someone with me. I felt also that were I to slip I should be held up and supported as though I had a companion above me with a rope.... When I reached the ledge I felt I ought to eat something in order to keep up my strength. All I had brought with me was a slab of Kendal mint cake. This I took out of my pocket and, carefully dividing

it into two halves, turned round with one half in my hand to offer to my "companion." (208)

Cold conditions are not a prerequisite for similarly comforting or disconcerting effects, which have been reported in physically and mentally taxing situations of all kinds. R. U. Sayce, noting how easily they would be "related to current beliefs" such as fairies, gives some examples:

During the great retreat from Mons, troops marched almost to the limit of their endurance, and it is recorded that many of them thought they saw lights ahead of welcoming villages where there would be rest and refreshment. More recently a South African native soldier escaped from Tobruk (South African Outlook 1/10/1945, p.151), and tried to make his way across the desert to our army. He suffered greatly from thirst and was nearly exhausted. When in this condition everything appeared small; a man looked about the size of a fowl. We heard of sailors, who, after spending days or even weeks in open boats, had visions of relief ships, which appeared to be visible to several members of a crew.<sup>13</sup> ("Folk-Life" 237)

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<sup>13</sup>Elsewhere (in "The Origins and Development of Belief in Fairies"), Sayce discusses "Lilliputian" and "microptic" illusions--in which small people are seen--and their possible physical causes (ocular problems, stress, cold, fatigue, and so on) as sources of fairy visions (105-09). It is interesting that Sayce does not mention the "angels of Mons" in this connection, for in 1943 H. J. Rose suggests that these battlefield apparitions, born in fiction, had gained legendary status.

An early Newfoundland example comes from a 1919 pamphlet by P. J. Kinsella, Some Superstitions and Traditions of

Newfoundland:

The sailor has one strange fear, a fear that attaches itself to him, and makes his "watch" a dread, particularly in the lone hours of the night. This dread is the peculiar belief that whilst he is guiding the ship a spirit stands by his side. He cannot tell you just what this "fetch" may be, or who the lonely watch keeps there. (39)

Given the apparently common experience of a "sense of presence," then, and that Lucy must have been half-conscious or delirious much of the time, it would have been more surprising if she had not reported seeing anything than whatever she did say. Oral tradition would quickly act on any ambiguous statement, easily jumping from birds to fairies, for example, since fairies often appear as birds. Religious imagery would be expected as well, as in the account which says that "Lucy told them that each night a woman came and put a blue cloak around her. This was supposed to be the Blessed Virgin, of course" (86-23/10).

Whatever form the supernatural guardianship took, it had ample traditional precedent. A well-known story about a Colinet girl is often conflated with that of Lucy Harris. Michael Harrington couples the two stories in his book, and says that between 1905 and 1911, a four-year-old girl named O'Keefe went missing for ten days, was found by young Simon Nolan of Salmonier, just returning from the States; she was

found lying on her back, her mouth full of leaves and grass, but survived unhurt, and "some of the older generation...were convinced that the 'good people' had something to do with the almost miraculous ending" (Mystery 46-48). In 1950, Leach had the story from an informant who heard in 1918 how an eleven-month-old girl was lost in Colinet and found twelve days later, sitting under a tree playing with dead leaves and laughing. "So that's the story," the informant concludes, but when Leach asks how they accounted for it, a voice from the background pipes, "the fairies." "Oh, the fairies," replies the informant in what sounds like mild surprise, "oh, yes, the fairies was supposed, it was supposed that the fairies took the child and kept it alive" (78-54:C3295/my transcription). One Simon Nolan of Salmonier said that another Simon Nclan--no relation to himself--was returning from the States around 1914 when he found the girl in a sand-pit; although it had rained during the nine days she was gone, she was neither wet nor hungry, and "everyone says up to this day that the fairies had her" (FSC74-102/\*\*). In another version the girl's rescuer is her uncle, who was in the States when he "had a dream telling him to come home to Newfoundland and look for her in a certain gravel pit. He found her there. She told the searchers who found her that 'the little people fed me'" (FSC70-14/117).

Stories of supernatural protection are found in other locations as well. A Petit Forte girl was gone for a week, and "said that she was with the good people, they were the fairies, see, and they gave her stuff off the hills, they picked berries and kept her alive" (76-350/21). "Years ago a girl disappeared from [the informants' community, Cupids]. She was eleven years old, and after searching for over a week, they had given up any hope of finding her alive. However they did find her in a clearing of wood sitting alone. She explained that she had been fed and sheltered by a group of small men" (83-39/7). Around 1955 near Seal Cove, a girl named Anne was lost and given up for dead but found twenty-one days later: "she claimed that the birds and fairies had brought her food in the morning and evening. Just after sunset, she said, they would cover her with leaves and this kept her warm" (79-455/11). In St. Joseph's, a small girl who was gone for a day said that "she was in the company of some nice friendly people all day and at evening a lady in blue came and took her back and put her in over her own fence" (71-93/2). One informant said that when his aunt in Bonavista Bay was about five, she disappeared for nine days and was found paddling in a brook; she said she had been "with a crowd of girls havin a good time," was given berries to eat, and finally taken safely home; "I suppose 'twas the good people had her, that's it, ya know," the informant concluded with a laugh (64-7:C13/6).

Only occasionally is the protected person male or old. A collector from Conception Harbour said that around 1950, a good friend of his grandmother's, in her eighties, was lost overnight and "said that the fairies had kept her company all night. This story was even in the papers at the time" (FSC64-5/232). Around 1910 in Grate's Cove (not far from New Melbourne) a woman in her seventies was lost for a week in the late fall, and found "abnormally well, considering":

She was later asked how she had survived this period and her answer was that someone had been taking care of her. The local people were surprised at this and asked her what she meant. She said that she didn't see them but she felt them, at which point the locals seemed to understand. My grandmother says that opinions on the source of this "care" were divided. Some--most--thought that the fairies were the source, while the remainder thought that she was taken care of by those who had been praying for her. It was themselves, they thought, that she felt but couldn't see. Those who had thought she was saved by the fairies did not change their opinion of the old lady because of the event.

The collector adds an important explanatory note on the last statement, that "the fairies were evil and might have changed the old woman for the worse, or they might have thought she was wicked, for them to want to save her in the first place" (FSC71-46/37). The young children cared for by the fairies seem to be exempt from this suspicion, just as they are from the usual taboo on eating fairy food. These seeming contradictions are part of the polarized nature of

the fairies, by which they might be good or bad, and may help or do harm. One might be taken or taken care of by the fairies, the fate of Bridie Power of Salmonier being typical of the former possibility. Around 1952, Bridie disappeared from a skating party of children, and was found by her uncle a week later running in the woods; she had to be tied to the sled "because she was so wild." Once home "she started vomiting green grass and the people knew right away that she had been taken by the fairies: that was a strict belief of the people--the fairies fed the lost people grass and their own type of food." She died two days later (72-16/8-9).<sup>14</sup>

It is perhaps surprising, in spite of this duality and Lucy Harris's grave injuries, how consistently the fairies are said to have helped her, and how infrequently they are said to have led her astray in the first place. One collector did report that she returned with "no hands and feet," and that "people believe she was taken away by the fairies" (76-41/3); and another informant said that when she was found she was like an eighty-year old woman with snow-white hair, and was very sick and lost her legs, but "she told them that she wasn't lonely there, the fairies were with her, the little people, the fairies she called them, and they fed her and kept her warm, they fed her little berries" (72-72:C1117/6-8). Perhaps the relative

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<sup>14</sup>Lucy Harris also vomited grass and herbs, according to Don Morris's account.

consistency suggests that the story was indeed put forth by Lucy herself. One collector's grandfather, who knew her, said that "the only explanation she had of where she had been or how she survived was that the fairies had taken care of her" (86-006/39-40). In any case, whatever Lucy said, "her" story did have the advantage of a relatively happy ending, and the existence of an "authorized" version seems to have diverted the more usual development, that someone taken by the fairies will be foolish, strange, "never the same."

The "babes in the wood" theme appealed to city literati as well as the "folk." One collector had the story of the Colinet girl from his grandfather, who told him that around 1920 or 1930, Matthew Rorke was walking from Salmonier to Colinet to see his brother, and had stopped for a nap when he was awakened by crying:

When he opened his eyes he saw a little girl in her nightgown standing before him. He spoke to the girl (Lucy Keefe) who was about two and a half and after he had given her something to eat he carried her in his arms to Colinet. Just outside the community he met his brother who was surprised to see the young girl--apparently two weeks earlier she had left her home during the night and she had not been heard of since. Of course, this was another case of the fairies. Grandfather then went to the bookcase and pulled out a book entitled Sea Room by R. A. Parsons. He opened the book to a poem entitled "The Gloucesterman" and invited me to read it; when I did I found that it was the story that I'd just heard. At first feeling disappointed I asked him if this



is where he had heard the story, whereupon he said, "Of course not! I was told this by old Mr. Taylor not long after it happened."

When I was finally able to get a word in, I asked Grandfather if he thought there were really fairies. His answer was a direct "No!" [Later], I wondered out loud "How could these children do these things?" In reply my grandfather began to tell me that they could not do this on their own...As he tried to explain how this could happen he used expressions such as "miracle" and "something strange" and purposely did not use the word "fairies." Therefore as he built up his argument, he showed me, without really saying so, that he did believe in fairies.

(73-55/6-8)

The finding of Lucy Keefe is a subplot in R. A. Parsons's

1963 poem about Matthew Rorke:

And there were those who said, and yet  
 who say,  
 Of their belief unto this very day,  
 That fairies led the little girl astray  
 And nourished her in their mysterious  
 way;  
 For we have old and wise men, who agree.  
 That there be little men, we cannot see,  
 Who yet inhabit forest land and hide  
 Amid the valleys of the countryside,  
 And ancients now, who solitary make  
 Long journeys through the woodlands take  
 Some little offerings in meat or cake,  
 The gnomes and fairies to propitiate  
 And leave these here and there by boughs  
 of green  
 Observed by none, save the little men  
 unseen. (43-44)

Parsons may have been inspired to name his character "Lucy" by Lucy Harris, or by Wordsworth; Margaret Duley, in her 1939 novel Cold Pastoral, based in part on Lucy Harris's story, has her characters reciting "Lucy Gray" as they sit

in the kitchen awaiting news of the lost heroine (41).<sup>15</sup> One winces at the liberties these "creative" writers take with folk tradition. Certainly Parsons, a St. John's lawyer, is the only person I have ever heard suggest that bread or meat (!) was placed about the woods as offerings,<sup>16</sup> and it is amusing to hear him echo the conventions of his illustrious predecessors in assigning fairy customs to "the ancients." On the other hand, there is a note of authenticity in his description of how "Rorke told his tale again, and o'er and o'er/One hundred times and like a hundred more" to listeners who came round repeatedly, "perchance already bent/to get the best in future argument." And there is an almost traditional challenge in the invitation to readers to check the story out for themselves:

And you, my masters, if beyond belief  
 My tale may seem, inquiry make of Lucy  
 Keefe  
 In Colinet of those, who knew her there  
 And yet recall the Gloucesterman and  
 where  
 He haply found the maiden trav'ling near

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<sup>15</sup>Not implausibly, for "Lucy Gray" was in the Royal Readers, forcibly memorized in many schoolrooms. Hilda Chaulk Murray points out that Royal Reader content did enter everyday talk, as in that of a woman who used to say of a stormy day, "It's as bad as the time Lucy Gray was lost!" (58) Lucy Harris may even have been thinking of the poem herself, when she spoke of herself in the third person, "I'm the little girl..." (One arresting parallel with "Lucy Gray" is that, as in the poem, searchers for Lucy Harris found tracks in the snow which ended abruptly.)

<sup>16</sup>A woman from Flatrock did say that she carried bread when she went into the woods "and would place it on a nearby stone if she wanted a favour" (72-181/4).

The road, due West, he chose at  
Salmonier. (54-55)

Duley's use of folk tradition is more disturbing, perhaps because of her stature as an important writer. Alison Feder considers it "faultless" (48), but Clara Murphy has pointed out some of the inaccuracies regarding fairy and folk religious traditions, calling Cold Pastoral "an urban perspective on rural Newfoundland belief in fairies and indeed on the rural Newfoundland way of life" (113). Drawn from the beginning as too sensitive and ethereal for outpost life, Mary Immaculate imagines the fairies with "spangles, wands, wings, and tiny silver bells" (28), and is lost after she purposely omits the "ceremony at the door," a preposterous ritual her family was supposed to enact for protection against the fairies each time they left the house. Found after three days (when searchers are led to her by a "changeling" whom she had befriended), she is taken to hospital in St. John's, where she recovers completely, is taken up by a wealthy New York philanthropist, and is adopted by a doctor's family into upper-class St. John's society. Duley, of course, was licensed by literary tradition to make what "sounded like a Cinderella story: coaches and horses, rags to riches" (60), but it is annoying to see her invention take the direction of stereotype. "Pure Irish, I'd say by the sounds of her. I know the shore she comes from," whispers one of the nurses outside Mary

Immaculate's hospital room, "I was there once and it took me back to Grimm" (53). Most of Trinity Bay, including New Melbourne, is neither particularly Irish nor Catholic; Seary notes that part of the Trinity Bay coast of the Avalon is the only place on the Peninsula in which Irish family names are not found (Place Names 472). Duley seems to have drawn less on real life and observation than on her own "townie" folklore of the outports as bastions of outlandish, if picturesque, customs and beliefs. It is worth noting that the city-dweller's view is not restricted to Newfoundland but is part of a wider stereoptype that is only occasionally challenged as such. One "Hibernia," discussing in 1868 "the superstitions of the benighted wild Irish," says:

In fashionable suburbs of London, amidst polite and educated circles, I can truly say I have seen them surpassed. An English lady, well-informed, intelligent, and displaying on most matters sound judgment and common sense, whom I knew some years ago at the West-end, was a firm believer in fairies, and a subscriber to a monthly magazine entitled The Spiritual Herald (edited by a retired colonel), the pages of which were filled with accounts of visions of sprites, and elves, and spectres. The book had an extensive circulation.  
(367)

More recently, Anthony D. Buckley has observed that in Ulster, magical cures and fairy belief are "typically associated in the popular imagination" with rural areas, old people, and Catholics, a profile which "does not remotely fit the facts" (19).

In Newfoundland, it has never been necessary to leave the St. John's area to hear fairy stories or have a fairy experience, and a few more examples in proof of this will close the chapter. One comes from an informant whose father was a member of the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary in the 1890s, who told him how they once mounted a search for an old Mrs. Barnes who had gone missing while picking berries on the Three Pond Barrens. They had given up after three days of solid rain, when they saw her "coming down the path dry as a bone." She asked them why they were there ("no wonder there's so much crime out in town," she said, with them in there picking berries); so the constable "figured the fairies had her" (72-72:C1116/1-2). An "old Mrs. Coffin" did not fare so well when she was lost overnight on the Three Pond Barrens, but was found the next morning, unconscious and with both legs broken. The legs wouldn't heal and she had to take to a wheelchair. One day some time later, some men were bringing logs from the Three Pond Barrens in for the fire, when she pointed to one of the big ones and screamed, "the little man, the little man, that's the one who broke my legs!" She jumped up and ran to the fire. (The collector had this story from his grandmother; his father also told him that the Three Pond Barrens is "a well-known faery place," and his aunt said she saw "a faery man" there, although she denied it when asked about it for the paper, 67-20).

One student's mother had a story from her St. John's co-workers about a man who worked on Water Street who went fishing one Victoria Day:

He and a companion got lost when the fog came in and were lost for approximately fourteen days. When they finally managed to come out of the woods they said that the fairies had saved them. He said that every time that they had wanted to lie down and go to sleep because they were exhausted, a little man with a green suit and red cap would make them keep walking. Otherwise they would have undoubtedly died of exposure because the weather on the 24th of May here in Newfoundland is never too warm. My informant [his mother] told me that when she was smaller that she and her friends were afraid to go up over the Southside Hills after dark because they were afraid that the fairies would take them. She used to believe in fairies but now she doesn't. (FSC74-6/38)

A paper on "times" opens:

A St. John's lady went to a dance with her husband. Across the room there sat a woman with a vaguely familiar face. The lady ventured over to her table and inquired, "What do you do when the fog comes in?" The lady immediately responded with, "Get in before the fairies get ya." Instant friendship. What created this bond between them? They were both Southsiders. (84-539/1)

Bewildered in the urban wilderness, a visitor to St. John's left a house on Circular Road to visit a friend on Belvedere Street one midwinter's day:

And here I walked into this, this summer place. Nothing but the straight road and I never found that place since. 'Twas straight road as far as you could walk and I was meeting people--baby carriages, youngsters with ankle socks

on them, lovely bows in their hair, and the tallest kind of people--men and women. No one speaking. They all walking, and the trees on the side of the road were right tall. You couldn't hardly see the sky. No houses or nothing. And I said, "Where am I to at all?"... And I said, "I'll never get out of it" ...when just as quick as you'd snap your fingers, here I was right by where I was going, and here was the youngsters digging in the snow, the big piles of snow piled up.<sup>17</sup> (81-207/106-7)

One informant's aunt started out for Holsworth Street but walked compulsively until she found herself in woods; a man came along and told her to turn her gloves inside out and make the sign of the cross, and she was able to return. "The only explanation anybody could give was that she had been taken by the fairies," and despite the apparently harmless experience "she never was really the same afterward" (74-9/12-14).

This story brings us full circle to the stories that opened the chapter. Unlike the famous case of Lucy Harris, most "fairy" stories are unspectacular, private affairs, unaccountable little slippages in space or time, oddities pondered from time to time by the people who experience them. Small people dance in a Patrick Street garden, an invisible wall rises in a marsh, a scrubby patch of trees becomes a labyrinthine wilderness: little fairy tricks, and

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<sup>17</sup>Yeats mentions "a topsy-turveydom of seasons" in the fairy world (Gregory Visions 317).

suddenly everyday reality is open to question. If present plans are carried out, there will soon be a four-lane highway through the middle of the Three Pond Barrens. The fairies have literally lost ground all around St. John's: the "Sand Pits," once "the home of the fairies" (72-181/9), is now the (rather inauspicious) site of the Health Sciences Centre; the fairy lights that Aly O'Brien's father and cousin used to see at a certain spot on Kenmount road have been replaced by traffic lights for the Avalon mall (74-118/6-7); the "Water Line" fairies of Major's Path (76-269/17-21) must not mind the scream of jets if they are still there. Still, strange things can happen anytime, anywhere, even in the city.

It seems reasonable to suppose that synthesis of fairy lore with "modern" folklore such as UFOs and new age psychic stuff will increase, although it is also possible that there could be a complete switchover from, say, fairies to extraterrestrials, without much hybridization, or that people will continue to mark the similarities but keep them in separate categories. In this chapter (as in the others) we have seen that people use a variety of media (oral tradition, books, tabloid papers, television, radio) in interpreting their experience and that of others, and the interpretation tends to be accordingly eclectic. The study of evolutionary change in legend and belief requires careful, ongoing fieldwork with a wide conceptual net.



Given the special characteristics of Newfoundland legendry, in which ancient types long dead elsewhere exist alongside a completely modern corpus of wormy hamburgers and deadly suntan salons, we could get an unprecedented picture of change over time in oral tradition. Will the devil give up card games for teenage cults? Will the aliens drive out the fairies, or have they been here all along using that name?

William Clive Tucker



## VII

**Fairy Traditions as Discourse on Time and Change**

By this point, it should be apparent that fairy traditions, whatever their decline in relationship to a former status, are not extinct. They do, however, frequently serve as a vehicle for discussion of the past, and for reflection on the ways in which times have changed. Their perceived recession into the past makes them an evocative symbol of that past, and carries with it images and concepts of a time in which the way of life and worldview were more amenable to fairy tradition than those of the present. Most of the informants in this chapter feel that the present is uncongenial to fairy lore, being inimical to the fairies themselves (as when lights, crowds, or roads are said to have driven them away), or non-conducive to narrative and belief (people are more unbelieving now, they don't tell stories anymore, and so on). Most of them, even the most active narrators, consider themselves to be telling stories from a past tradition, even when their repertoire includes recent events. One would give much to know if this has always been so, or if this is a function of fairy lore in late twentieth century Newfoundland, a transitional phase on the way to its demise. In any case, the idea that fairy narratives mostly concern

the "old days" makes them a natural medium for talking of change, and almost paradoxically, of contemporary culture.

In this chapter I concentrate almost as much on the conversation or situation surrounding the fairy narratives as on the narratives themselves, which will by now be very familiar to the reader indeed. For all the caution I have suggested is necessary in working with archive texts, singly and as a body, their ultimate reliability is shown by their high predictive value. When someone is flicked in the eye by a branch, one knows what is coming next! Still, there are a few surprises, and there are the differences between areas which are so intriguing; a juxtaposition of material from two communities, Bay Bulls and Marysvale, will be our final example of this variability.

This chapter is also intended, in part, to ameliorate some of the drawbacks of my research methods. Most of the interviews done for this project were conducted in carefully arranged conditions in which I led the discussion and kept it to a relatively narrow focus, that is, "the fairies." The natural context in which fairy traditions are narrated or actualized would of course be quite different. But while it is theoretically desirable to record or analyze "real situations," in practice there are obstacles to this beyond the obvious fact that one cannot hang about indefinitely, hoping for them to occur. In my fieldwork, I often found that the more "natural" or spontaneous the occasion, the

harder it was, later, to work with the material. When a discussion becomes lively and people begin to talk at once, it is impossible to attend to more than one of them at a time, and even if recorded, the conversation is impossible to transcribe. In the interest of obtaining clear, complete texts, then, performance dynamics such as audience interaction and reaction, evaluation, and debate have perhaps been given short shrift.

A more serious shortcoming of the formal interview is the isolation of the subject from related topics. The separation of fairies from ghosts, tokens, and so on is an arbitrary one, as in narrative practice a vast array of mysterious experiences and events flow together without pause. This narrative complex is exemplified in an interview with two informants which has the further advantage of being conducted largely by one of them. To preserve the integrity of this interview as well as its natural rhythm and flow, I will present it here in modified transcript form. I have summarized in brackets the "non-fairy" narratives, and it is impossible to transcribe all the expressions of agreement and mutual affirmation which characterized this conversation. The informants are Mrs. Queen Maloney and Mrs. Annie Hayes of Bay Bulls, a town of about twelve hundred people twenty-one kilometres from St. John's on the Southern Shore. Queenie knows about folklore through her work with Gerald Pocius, who sometimes takes

students to her home; this is how I first met her in 1983. She is a keen local historian, and writes a regular column, "Down Memory Lane," for the Seniors' News. When I visited her in search of the fairies in January 1985, she mapped a campaign with the efficiency of a general, and we descended on several households demanding information in a way that would have been unthinkable for me to do on my own. Several weeks later we did the following interview with Mrs. Hayes, who taught school many years in Brigus South, and who has taken folklore classes herself:

AH: About the fairies' path: It's supposed to be a path in the woods where nothing ever grows. And nobody walks there, but still, nothing ever grows there. And now, I remembers as a youngster, hear tell of one man had a dog, and he brought the dog in and he did everything possible to get the dog to walk on the path. No way. That was the fairies' path. And then they used to have what they called the "fairies' ring." Did you ever hear tell of that, the fairy ring?

QM: [with interest] No!

AH: It's kind of a circle. Now this is supposed to be where the fairies danced in the night. And it's a little grassy place, and every place else was covered, but this place was bare. And the old people used to say, well, the fairies danced there last night, and that's why there's nothing grows there. So they had the fairy path and the fairy ring. Well, then the fairy bread, remember? If you were going anywhere in the night, you'd always take a bit of bread with you.

QM: Right.

AH: 'Cause I remember my youngsters now, when I'd be going down to Brigus [South] in the night, my mother would say, "Don't go without taking a bit of bread, fairies will get them." So you'd take the bread with you. But can you imagine, now, giving bread to anyone?

BR: How was the bread supposed to protect you?

AH: I don't know, it's supposed to be fairy bread. Now, remember, there's fairies, and there's good people. Did you ever hear tell of the good people?

QM: I heard it out to Bertha's the other day [on a visit with BR].

AH: Well, the good people are supposed to be the people that were in heaven, when St. Michael rebelled against Our Lord. And Our Lord turned out St. Michael and these people went with him. Now they were called the good people, see? But the fairies were only small, little, tiny. But the good people were the same as any adult. But they used to wander the earth, looking for some place to go, you know, the good people. But I remember hearing my mother saying that her mother--that was years and years ago--was cow-hunting. And it got dark, you know, foggy, in the evening. And she was going away in the woods, she was going astray, maybe, and she heard voices singing out, "Go back, go back," you know, to her, telling her not to go any farther. So she stopped. And she could hear a lot of talking, but this one person's voice was singing out over all the rest, "Go back." And she recognized the voice, she said, as her godfather, and he had been dead a number of years. But she went back and no time after there was people came to her, you know, looking for her. And they said to her, "You shouldn't have gone any farther, 'cause that was the good people."

QM: I see.

AH: You know, they were singing and that. But now, up where I lived in Brigus, they used to--I supposed it's true, anyhow, everybody told it. This old lady, she was eighty, I suppose, Mrs. Gregory. And she went picking berries, not very far from the house, now, like we'd go out there, picking them. But when night came there was no sign of her. All the men went looking for her and everything. And they found her in Tierney's (?) Marsh, that's about eight miles from Brigus. And they said there was no way the old lady could walk there, cause there was marshes and bogs and everything, you know, it was not like now, no road or anything. But they found her in there and they



brought her out. So when she got better, a few days after, somebody was talking to her and she said, when she got in there, she said, there was like children, little children, playing around. And one child came up and offered her something to eat, a bit of bread or a bit of cake, but she said an old man shook his head. And he said, you know, that--she didn't take it. And they were saying that if she had to take [had taken] the bread the fairies would have her.

QM: Yeah, that's--that's right.

AH: The old people--and they were saying another little boy, up in Edward's Brook (?), he was about three or four, \*\*\* the little one of Molly's. He was out playing around the door. And it was in the evening, and when they went looking for him they couldn't find him. And they found him down on Brigus Road, that's four miles away. But the story they told about him was, when he grew to manhood, every year on that day, he'd be gone for a day and a night. It seems like he had to go back to the fairies. People never found out where he went, but he was, you know, gone for a day and a night. But now that's the stories the old people used to tell, I don't know what credence you can put in them, but that was it.

QM: I don't know, there must have been something to it.

AH: Yeah.

BR: Was he alright otherwise?

AH: No, they said he was never right after, you know there was always some little thing--

QM: [knowingly] Yes.

AH: Yeah, something wrong with him after. But that could be now, like we explain that you got astray, and you got afraid and all that, wouldn't you. But the old people used to say the fairies took him. But the Irish were really superstitious that way, you know, they really believed in the fairies.

QM: Yeah, that's really where it came from. A lot of Irish people were here.

AH: Now, see they had ghosts, and they had good people, and they had fairies.

BR: And the good people and the fairies were different.

AH: Different. The fairies were small little things. Like a lot of children, you know. But the good people were the size of average adults. They were supposed to be turned out of heaven, and wandering the earth, looking for a place to go. In there now, you know the White Horse going into Brigus? Well, always up on White Horse there was something seen. You know, nobody could pass there, everybody used to be afraid. But I remember being small, now, my mother and--this evening, three ladies were come out picking berries and it was right late. And Mom asked them, she said, "What kept you so long?" "Well, they said, "we couldn't pass White Horse. Because there was people there dancing." And Mom said, "Dancing! You know there's nobody--" "Oh, yes, we saw them. And we couldn't pass. We had to sit down and wait til they went away." And she was talking about it after to the older people and they said, "Oh yes, that's where the good people are." So I mean there must have been something to it.

QM: Yeah, there was something.

AH: Yeah, something to it. And I remember between Cape Broyle and Calvert, there was a place, Three Rocks, there was supposed to be something seen there. But this old man used to drive the priest then in a horse and carriage, no cars or anything, he told the priest about it, he said, "Everybody sees something there, a certain time of the night." "Well," the priest says, "When you comes to it, you tell me, and I'll get out of the horse and carriage." So when he came to the spot he said, "That's there, now, Father, where they see it." He said, "You go on." So the priest got out, he put on his stole, and he took his book. And he walked up the hill, all the ways up. And when he came up he said, "Yes," he said, "they won't see anything there anymore." But they never saw it. Now what they used to say then was, so many people dying without seeing the priest, that they had their Purgatory there. And I heard an old man--well, he was my great uncle. He said he was walking home from Calvert to Cape Broyle,

and it was dark and the night coming on, and he said he thought he heard horses' bells and he stopped. He stepped off the road and stopped. And he said a \*\*\* funeral passed him, the horse and the coffin, and all the men behind them. And nobody ever spoke. But this was the place now where the priest said they could have seen something, you know.

QM: Did you ever hear it said, in regards to ghosts, if there's three people, or two people walking along, and it was a ghost, it's only one will see it?

AH: Yeah.

QM: The other won't.

AH: The other won't.

QM: Or, two out of three. Now, I'll tell you that. [She and her brother saw shadows near a graveyard, although her mother didn't; later, three sailors' bodies are dug up there.]

AH: Well, my, I don't know, years ago they used to tell so many things, I don't know if half of them are true or not, but they used to tell an awful lot. That's how they spent their nights, wasn't it, recreation. Telling ghost stories, and telling things like that.

QM: Gather in houses. There was no television or radio.

AH: I remember a Mr. Johnny Morey, in Ferryland one time, he told me that this girl was working with the priest over there, an old priest. But she went out twelve o'clock of a Saturday night to the well, to get a bucket of water. She was passing by, right by the church, Ferryland church, cause the priest's house was near it, and she saw lights on. And like he said, she was so curious, she went in to see what was going on. But when she went in, she said, it was a rush, like people coming out past her. So when she went home she told the priest, and the priest said, "Well, you have to go back there the same time next Saturday night." "Oh, Father," she said, "I can't." He said, "You'll have to." So the next Saturday night she went back a bit earlier. And this priest came out on the altar. And he said,

"Anyone here to serve Mass?" And of course she fainted with the fright. She went over, she told the priest again, he said, "You've got to go back again." And he said, "If he asks the next Saturday night, you say yes." So she went back again, she was frightened to death, she went back, went in, the priest come out, he said, "Anyone here to serve Mass?" And she said, "Yes." And she said with the same, there was a big noise like people standing up, you know, the congregation standing up. But the priest told her after, must be a priest died, and wasn't after saying all his masses. Now Mr. Johnny Morey often enough told me that, he said it was really true, it really happened. 'Cause he knew the girl well that it happened to. So I mean there's such things, you know.

QM: Oh, yeah, right.

AH: The church is a lonely place in the night, there's something about it, you know.

[QM talks about poltergeists.]

AH: There was, up there in Cape Broyle where Frank Hayden lives there now, Mr. Greg Button, his daughter's now in to school with me--they told me that when they go to bed in the night, downstairs they hear the furniture being moved, the doors would be open, the dishes would be rattling in the cupboard, and everything. So that was alright, anyway, Mr. Hayden didn't want Frank Hayden to build there, you know, he said, "Now everybody in Cape Broyle knows about it." But Frank Hayden built, and he had a basement. And they said they had to move out of the basement. They never let on, but he lives upstairs. They had to move out of the basement. People coming in all hours of the night, doors banging, and dishes, and everything, you know. So there must be something, there's something to it.

QM: That can happen.

[BR says it reminds her of a person she and QM visited last time.]

QM: For instance, we asked Tuce about fairy stories, and he said, you know, in regards to just what you're telling, in other words, between fairies and haunted houses were so much alike.

AH: Yeah.

QM: But he told exactly the same, didn't he?

AH: Well, these girls were in school with me, Mary and Jean. And they used to tell us when they come to school, you know, everything in the night, they said they wouldn't get a wink of sleep. But some people don't mind. More just can't take it, you know their nerves can't take it.

QM: And some people don't believe, but--

AH: I'm shocking superstitious, Mrs. Queen, \*\*\*\*, I'm shocking! [three knocks preceding death]

QM: Yes, see, there's people psychic, that's what it is.

AH: I'm shocking, oh my--

QM: Yeah, that can be, that doesn't mean you're crazy!

AH: No, but it \*\*\*\* people up.

QM: Yeah, you're psychic. For instance now, this is a sad story. [Tells about tokens preceding her son's death in 1966, which she told me once before only in great confidentiality.]

AH: That's a token, that's what they used to call a token.

.....

AH: Oh, I'm shocking that way. If anything is going to happen, I'll know about it beforehand. So now, lately, I don't say anything, because Molly's always after me, "Don't be telling them old things, Mom." But there's something, because you'll know beforehand there's something going to happen.

QM: Oh, yeah, people are--do you read your horoscope?

AH: No, I never look at that at all.

QM: [surprised] Well, it's a wonder you don't.

AH: No, I \*\*\*. Now, my daughter, Terry out there, she looks at that all the time. I never bother about that.

QM: It don't always apply, too. We'll say, one person. But there are times it's so true. For instance, [examples, including QM's grandson killed by car.] But things are foretold.

AH: Oh, yes. I'm definitely sure of that, they're foretold to you.

[QM reiterates about horoscopes]

AH: Oh, we're shocking superstitious folks!  
[laughter]

BR: Do you think that people used to be more sensitive to things like that?

AH: Oh, yes, the older people. Oh, yes, yes. The older people were. The young crowd don't believe as much as we did, indeed they don't. Like now, another thing, if they saw a crow, that was a sign of death. [Daughter Terry sees crows as sign of her father's and uncle's deaths.] But now, there's none of that in Molly. Molly said, "I got no Irish at all in me." She don't believe in nothing like that, you know, like we're talking about. But there's some kind of a--

QM: Oh, yes, the black crow. And the three knocks. I used to hear Cyril's [her husband's] mother tell about the three knocks.

AH: Oh, yes, when you hear the three knocks.

QM: And sometimes a man, for instance, lost on a ship, and we'll say his wife or his mother or someone home knows what happened even though--

AH: Yeah. And you remember those three girls were lost up the Head here?

QM: Yeah.

AH: Well, Mr. Will Power in Brigus, he was down LaManche and it was in the wintertime. And he was coming up on his horse and slide, himself and his son. And he said when he was passing along there, he said it was just like someone got on the horse. The horse couldn't haul it. Could not, he said,

no way. And that horse, he said, he beat him up with the whip, said everything, and the horse couldn't haul, right until they got up past White Horse. But when he came home, the son came in and called for the Rosary. And they said that's the last thing he'd ever do because he wasn't religious like that. But there was something got on that horse and slide, and right in that spot.

QM: [emphatically] Yes, right.

AH: Yes, often heard it, he used to be telling us about it, whatever it was. And then they used to tell too, about people lost at sea, the people in the house would hear people walking with oilclothes on.

QM: Yes!

AH: Coming in with, you know, oilclothes on and all that. Well, this was all the older people, they always knew about those kind of things.

QM: Yeah.

AH: But I don't know if everybody's going too fast today or what it is, they don't believe in anything.

QM: Well, you know, the way everything has, well say, advanced, it is impossible to think there could be anything like it now. Because everything is lit up, you know. After all, it was darkness then. I can remember in the night, going over my grandmother's with a lantern in my hand.

AH: Yeah, right, I can remember that too. ....

[frightening sound of loons in marsh]

AH: But I don't know, the fairies were the main thing. They had you tricked. "Don't stay out after dark, the fairies'll get you."

QM: Yeah, right.

AH: "Be sure and put bread in your pocket, the fairies'll get you." And this sort of stuff.

BR: Were they ever good? Did they ever do good things?

AH: No. They never--they used to take people away, is the only thing I remember, you know, if they got in the way the fairies would take them, wouldn't they? I remember, Mrs. Queen, a fairy squall. Everything would be right calm, there wouldn't be a breath of wind. And all of a sudden a big fairy squall would come up in one part of the woods, wouldn't it?

QM: Yeah.

AH: Blow everything. And the old people would say, "That's a fairy squall."

QM: I heard my father tell about in there on a marsh. And a red hat going up the marsh and he following it.

AH: Yeah.

QM: And then he thought on what he had been told about the fairies.

AH: Yeah, the fairies used to wear red hats, I often heard that too.

QM: He followed a red hat, I heard him tell that.

AH: And up there on Brigus Road, now just above Brigus crossroads, there was a Mrs. Winter lived. She used to sell liquor. [The priest tells her to desist, but she doesn't; not long after she falls off a ladder and is killed.] When we were youngsters we were told, "Don't go by Winters', it's after dark." But the man that I boarded with when I was teaching [saw an old woman with shawl who disappeared]. But they used to say ther that's where you have your Purgatory, you know, the old people. They wants a prayer or something like that, they'd say, \*\*\*\*\*.

BR: What was it, that if you were seen, you were in Purgatory?

AH: Yeah, and that you wanted a prayer to get to Heaven, that was where you were to. Yeah, I don't know how true, but--But poor old Father Kennedy, you know, Father Mike?

QM: Yeah, right.



AH: When his sacristan was sick one time I was doing the altar, and it was in Lent, I think. Anyway, I was coming out, and I was going ahead of him. He said, "You'll wait. You'll wait," he said, "and lock the door behind me." And I was afraid for my life, the church in the night, you know. I said, "Father, I'm afraid." He said, "You let me go ahead of you." He said, "you know the Devil," he said, "is after the priest more than anyone else." He would not come out of that church last. And I heard lots of people say the same thing. He'd never let on, but he wouldn't come out. Sure, Father Maloney, we used to have rings around. Years ago, when Father Maloney was studying for the priesthood, I used to tell him, you know, about certain things were seen on Shore Road and Brigus Road, and--

QM: Yes.

AH: "Ah," said Father Maloney, "That's a crowd smuggling. There's nothing seen there." He'd be arguing with me. But when he went up to Parker's (?) Cove up to St. Joseph's, he used to sleep in the sacristy of the church, he'd go over and have mass, and that's where he used to sleep. So he wrote me a letter, and he said, "I'm after changing me mind an awful lot. Last night," he said, "I had to leave the church." Whatever came there, he never went back to sleep in the sacristy after, Lizzie Power told me. Something drove him out of it in the night. But he changed right over, he was a changed man, he believed. He said to me, "Yes, there can be things like that." But he saw something in that church, whatever it was. So I say there's a something, whatever it is, I don't know.

QM: Right.

BR: Would the priests ever say anything about fairies?

AH: The old Irish priests would. Dean McCarthy, up in Renew's, Monsignor McCarthy. Now he used to say---the children shouldn't be out after night, the fairies might get them.

QM: He was right from Ireland.

AH: Yeah, he was right from Ireland. And he told me when his people died at home in Ireland, he

always knew. He said he used to hear, you know, a horse and carriage would drive up to the door and he'd get up, think there was a sick call, nobody there.

QM: Yes.

AH: He was, oh, right Irish \*\*\*. Oh, yes, he believed in it, because he used to be saying, "I don't know how people can let little children go out like that. Don't they realize the fairies will get them?" And the other nuns would be laughing and everything at him, but he was right Irish. He believed in it. Well, I was listening there one day to some doctor, Mrs. Queen, he was talking about depression. And he said there's more depression in Newfoundland than any other province. And that's because the Irish were so superstitious where they came out of. You know, they were always picking at things. One morning there was a doctor on was talking about that. Well, it seems it's only the older people, the younger crowd growing up, they don't--

QM: No, they--

AH: They don't believe in anything like that, you know.

QM: With television and radio and all that, how can they believe? And the streets, everything lit up.

AH: I used to know a lot of stories, but I'm forgetting a good many, you know. Down through the years. But I used to tell one to the youngsters up at school, I used to be known for telling stories. I said, "Now, this is a true ghost story," you know, I said, "if the rest of them aren't true, this one is." [mock ghost story.] Well, the youngsters used to get some kick out of that. And they'd be telling me about the haunted houses in Cape Broyle. "Miss, you don't know about them. You were born here but you're gone a lot. There's three haunted houses." ...I said, "Don't be so foolish, no such thing as a haunted house." "Oh, yes, miss, they're haunted." See, now their parents must be after warning them, I suppose, these houses are empty, don't go near them, you know. So the youngsters grew up with the idea they were haunted, and they stayed clear of them. Sure, heavens, you wouldn't

keep them clear of them now, tell them they're haunted. No fear, they'd go in anyway. [laughter] But they don't believe in things like that. I suppose it's good in one way they don't believe in certain things.

BR: I guess it meant a lot of fear.

AH: Yeah, it did that. [frightening figures: Boo-man, Mac woman in Admiral's Cove]

[Mock ghost stories, wakes and pranks--"Look, if it was today, they'd be calling the mounties every day"]

QM: [Her brothers hide behind a tombstone and recite rosary to scare woman] So, Mary wasn't long taking in the clothes, she went in, "The souls were out."

AH: Oh, yes, that was a common thing. The souls were out. Oh, that's common, to say the souls were out.

BR: They were different from the fairies and good people?

AH: (chuckles) Yeah, they were the souls. [laughter] All Souls' Night, sure, Mrs. Queen, my, it used to be an awful night, they were afraid and everything, wouldn't they?

QM: Oh, yeah.

AH: They'd light candles and they'd open the doors of their houses let the souls pass through and everything. Like Molly says, must have been warmer than it is now. [laughter] Oh my... It was a real solemn night, not like now, people were so much afraid. And it was supposed to be that the souls of the dead returned. You know the old people had that feeling, that somebody belonged here died, they'd return. I remember my grandmother dying [apparition as forerunner; steps precede news of death; light shining into house is visitation of dead woman]

[QM talks about people gathering in houses for storytelling; one man used to read to people, substituting whatever came to mind when he couldn't read a word, since the others couldn't read at all.]

AH: That's the way it was everywhere, then, you know. People were more united.

QM: Oh, they were more united.

AH: They were a lot more united that they are now.

QM: Yes, people gathered together.

AH: Sure, they hardly know anyone now, from one end of the harbour to the other, do they?

QM: Oh, no.

AH: They hardly know anybody.

The discussion moved to a lamentable present in which everyone is off to bingo, people don't even know their own relatives, kids, who used to be nice, will "drive you mad," and grandparents are ignored in graduation ceremonies and other school events. But the tone of this litany was light, and I did not get the impression that Mrs. Hayes and Mrs. Maloney are really nostalgic about the past; they are perhaps too well aware of its limitations for that. (Once, as we were driving along the highway to Trepassey, Queenie remarked wistfully how much she loved to travel and how little opportunity she had ever had to do it; you see young women going all around with big backpacks nowadays, she said--that would be her if she could be young again.) Mrs. Hayes remarked that with memory, as you get old, "you can go way back, and tell, but you can't tell as much about now," to which Queenie replied that "you don't know as much about now, either. And it's a different world."

Nowadays, Mrs. Hayes keeps any foreknowledge of events to herself "because Molly's always after me, 'Don't be telling them old things, Mom'." Another daughter, Terry, reads her horoscope and has had experience of tokens, but "there's none of that" in the hard-headed Molly, who declares, "I got no Irish at all in me." (Here is the use of "Irishness" as a measure of "superstitiousness," not in reference to actual ancestry.) Queenie validates Mrs. Hayes's experience directly in modern terms ("you're psychic"), and by describing her own experience with tokens. Both see their generation as distinct from the preceding generation in regard to folk belief ("that's the stories the old people used to tell, I don't know what credence you can put in them") and also from the young people of today; perhaps the position of "something to it" represents a middle ground between the perceived deep belief and cynicism of the surrounding generations, a point from which one can swing in either direction on various topics. Mrs. Hayes's reply to my question if people used to be more "sensitive" to intimations of future events aligned her generation with the "old people": "Oh, yes, yes. The older people were. The young crowd don't believe as much as we did, indeed they don't." Queenie sympathizes with the "young crowd," though, for she says, "it is impossible to think there could be anything like it now. Because everything is lit up, you know. After all, it was darkness then." Although she cites

television and radio sources in support of some concepts, such as poltergeists and ESP, she considers them on the whole to be demystifying agents: "With television and all that, how can they believe?"

The prominence of religion in Mrs. Hayes's and Mrs. Maloney's accounts reflects the strongly Irish/Catholic composition of the Southern Shore. The role of priests in folk religion is a natural outgrowth of their position as custodians of supernatural knowledge. In the realm of folk belief, however, they are not necessarily considered infallible nor is their word always gospel. Glassie suggests since atheism is "unspeakable" for his informants in Ballymenone, "doubts are contained in discussion of supernatural phenomena less than God":

Fairies, ghosts, and tokens provide subjects for contemplative study. They are not equal. More people credit ghosts than fairies, more credit tokens than ghosts. None is universally believed, so all are open to colloquy. The goal is forming observations into propositions that can be tested in specific situations to determine what to believe and, more deeply, whether to believe. (66)

Tekla Domotor makes the interesting suggestion that for rural people in the past, for whom no formal education was available, "taking a keen interest in the supernatural was in reality also a means of conducting scientific enquiry" (14). In the debate over the existence of various folk supernatural phenomena everyone is equal, and personal

experience rather than official sanction the authority. Thus we see Mrs. Hayes arguing with Father Maloney, who is later converted, through experience, to her view ("He was a changed man, he believed"). Priestly omniscience may be challenged or denied. A humorous narrative from Flatrock, for example, carries a sly suggestion of mockery of the "power" to banish supernatural figures from the roads:

There was a road, down where Windgap Road was supposed to be. There was a lot of queer things seen on it years ago. But I remember there was one poor old man who was driving the priest home one night with a horse and sleigh. And the priest was reading his book and they were going along the road, and he says, "Jim, they tells me there's spirits and ghosts or something on this road." The man said, "Yes, Father," he said, "with all his cubs after him and chain around his neck and everything." So the priest said, "Where's this now?" He said, "Over that way there," he said, and the priest said, "Alright," and the priest cut the sign of the cross over on the place and started to read a few prayers out of the book. And he said, "Now, Jim, me boy, are there any other places around here like that?" "Yes," he said, "when the Devil's not here, he's down here...this is where he comes out at night. There's nobody that can get along the road with him.... He sits down on the road here, in the shape of a cow and everything down here," he said. So the priest blessed the road there and he said, "Ah, they won't see no more of him around here now," he said. "I hope not," he [Jim] said, "I'd like to be able to come back and forth the road with a bit of peace... As long as you can clear the devil off it, I don't mind the fairies at all." (72-61/18-20)

Although widespread, reports of clerical involvement in folk supernatural traditions vary considerably, as presumably clerical attitudes themselves would. When I asked Mrs. Ellen Keough of Marysvale, Conception Bay, whether the priest would ever say anything about the fairies, she dismissed the idea: "No, no, no. I don't suppose the priest would fool with anything like that, boy." The fairy traditions I recorded from Mrs. Keough and two other informants in Marysvale, when compared to the Bay Bulls' material, show the same striking differences and similarities that characterize Newfoundland fairy lore as a whole. In contrast to the distinction Mrs. Hayes makes between good people and fairies, for example, Mrs. Keough says they are the same, only that "good people" is a later term; it is the one she uses herself, "but most says fairies."

I met Mrs. Keough after reading her "life history" as written by Ferdinand Jones, who boarded at her house for several years (81-016:C8724). Mrs. Keough, says Jones, was born in Labrador in 1898; her family, of Irish descent, lived in Marysvale at least as far back as her grandparents. She was in three shipwrecks on the Labrador, where she worked in the fishery before later work as a maid at Government House in St. John's. Jones noted that "everyone in the community visits her every day and her house has become a place where passers-by stop in," so I enquired



after Mrs. Keough at the post office in March 1985. I was directed to the house of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Ryan, where she stayed winters, her own house having no plumbing and only a woodstove for heat. Jones said that she liked it that way, and so it was very disheartening to find, in 1988, that she had to give up living on her own after being accosted in her bed one night by a man (from the community) who threatened to kill her if she didn't give him money. The experience "took all the good out of her," she said, and she has been to the doctor three times since then.

Mrs. Keough's health was good when I interviewed her, but her hearing was poor, and she claimed that her memory was bad as well. It would have been impossible to do the interviews without the help of Mr. and Mrs. Ryan, who contributed substantial material themselves, both in the first casual chat and in a taped interview on a second visit. On the second visit I asked Mrs. Keough to tell again what happened to her brother:

Eh, good people! Yeah, the fairies. He was coming home from school, three o'clock. And he seen all these little boys used to come to meet him, see? And he seen them come, when they got near him, he says, "That's not them." And that was the good people. The fairies, he called them. And they beat him up, boy. His heart was on the left side;

they put it on the right.<sup>1</sup> Indeed he was beat up.

JR: How long did he live after that?

EK: He lived a good many years. Must've been thirty years, then, after that. But he was in bed for three years and three months...and his side then broke out, see, in nine holes... Yes, and everything come out of that. Yes, everything. Hairs, and--everything come out of it that you can mention.

BR: Is that called a blast?

JR: Yeah.

In Bay Bulls, Bertha Deagon told Julia Bishop and me that her aunt got a "blast" when she went to the well one night. Her finger swelled so much she had to wear a man's shirt, until she went to a "half-doctor" in Petty Harbour, who lanced it, and "pieces of bough, bone, every kind of thing" came out. The "doctor" told her she'd "gotten in somebody's way," perhaps some poor soul who wanted a drink.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The displacement of the heart may come from figurative language such as that recorded by Beatrice Maloney, in a story about a boy who hides from the fairies because they are so shy that if they saw him watching their dance, "it'd put the heart crossways in them" (91). Alexander Carmichael gives the story of a woman deranged by a fright after childbirth who flees to the hills and lives with deer until caught by a man, whereupon "the sudden start she got put back her heart in its place, and she became quite quiet and gentle" (5:169).

<sup>2</sup>Field notes, 28 September 1984. The same incident was recorded by the woman's granddaughter, whose uncle told her that she "received a blast from the fairies" which "meant that she was in someone's way." From the finger emerged "all kinds of strange things, for example, twigs, leaves, fur, hair and moss" (81-314/21-22).

Queenie and Bertha also told us about a Mrs. Moulter who, sometime around 1953, went astray and somehow got through miles of trackless wood and bog to end up at the lighthouse. They said that she used to tell how she dropped her rosary beads, and felt herself lifted into the air when she bent to pick them up. She was returned the next morning, in tatters, by the lighthouse keeper. "There had to be something miraculous about it," said Queenie, and although she and Bertha didn't know if it was fairies or what, they stressed that it was humanly impossible to have gotten where she did on foot.<sup>3</sup>

That happened at around four-thirty in the afternoon; one day around four or five o'clock in Marysvale, Mr. Ryan said, Clara Ryan was picking berries, when she found blueberries so profuse "she never seen the like of them," and began walking along, picking:

And when she ended up, when she come to herself, she wasn't in here at all, she was up in Colliers, on the north side, down against the salt water. That's where she ended up to, when she come to herself, eh? But she still thought she was in the other marsh, we call it, where she was picking the blueberries...can't remember leaving the

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<sup>3</sup>Field notes, 28 September 1984. They gave the story earlier to Kathy Kimlecik, who kindly let me listen to her tape recording of it. (It was as Kathy's "emissary" that Julia and I visited that day.) The late Paddy Deagon had joined that discussion, and they said that Mrs. Moulter didn't have "a stitch of clothing on her" when she got to the lighthouse. They also said on that occasion that there was another woman with Mrs. Moulter who kept calling to her to come back, but "she took off mad over across there."

other marsh, getting to Colliers, 'til she came to herself. When she came to herself she found out she was up there.

They just took her, b'ye. She must have started picking their berries, see?

Another recent instance of fairy teleportation in Colliers comes from Jack McGrath, who said that nine or ten years ago, Tom Hunt, an invalid for years, was found drowned in a dam three miles from his house: "Nobody knows how he got in there, he never walked."<sup>4</sup> Clara Ryan was unharmed, "they never actually caught hold to her face or anything, they left no marks on her. But most people, if they had any dealings with them, they left marks." They twisted Bill King's mouth, for example, and ruined Joe Bartlett's leg.<sup>5</sup> "When they touch you, they done the job on you."

Despite such recent occurrences, Mrs. Keough states flatly, "They be gone now, because of cars." "Too much light now, eh?" amplified Mr. Ryan, "And so much excitement." In Bay Bulls, Bill Joy ("the last livyer on the Clappers," Queenie calls him) pondered the fairies disappearance: "But what happened to them these past forty years is what I'd like to know. That garden used to be full

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<sup>4</sup>Unaccessioned tape by David Abbott with John Patrick McGrath, submitted to Marie-Annick Désplanques for Folklore 2000, Summer 1989.

<sup>5</sup>One student had Bill King's story from his mother, who said that "a woman came along to him and hit him in the side of the face, and the way his face was moved, that was the way it stayed. He said he had never seen the woman before and never saw her again" (FSC70-10/104).

of them." His grandmother saw them once but it didn't do her any harm, as she died in 1956 at the age of ninety-three. "What did she see?" asked Queenie. "Oh, the same as the rest of them--little blue suits and red caps."<sup>6</sup> On a later visit, he reiterated his skepticism, saying that if there were such things he surely would have seen them in sixty-four years. He wondered how the details in those stories could be so precise, and Queenie suggested that untreated high blood pressure made some people see things. "It would take more than high blood pressure to make me see little people in blue suits!" he laughed, adding that the only fairy tales you hear now are the ones in the election campaigns.<sup>7</sup>

"How did they used to be dressed, Nelly?" asked Mr. Ryan, "all in little red uniforms, didn't they?" "Little, down like that," replied Mrs. Keough, "red caps on them." When I asked if they were male or female, she said "we don't know that" because "they all dressed the one way." The yard near her sister's house "used to be fullled up with them, yes, fullled up." She said that they were always "a big lot together" and they didn't go into houses, but Mr. Ryan then called to mind a story about an O'Flaherty (or Flaherty) who was in the woods when a bird jumped on his horse, which was

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<sup>6</sup>Field Notes, 28 September 1984.

<sup>7</sup>Field notes, 24 January 1985.

"sweating mad" by the time it got home. The bird flew up into the loft, and that night "appeared as a man." They had to get the priest to bless the house, and take the bird back where it came from.<sup>8</sup> "That was an awful bad spot over there for them, too," he said:

I often heard my mother saying about that, right. When Frank McHugh, now--he bought the land off O'Flaherty--I often heard my mother saying, "He's going down with the fairies," hey, to live, because that's where they used to be known very well, in olden times, eh, at the particular spot.

Mrs. Ryan questioned whether the bird was really the "good people," and Mrs. Keough and Mr. Ryan were emphatic that it was. Although Mr. Ryan says he has gotten all his "information" from the "yarns" of the older people, his ideas about the nature of the fairies are quite firm. He is definite, for example, that they will never get back into heaven: "they were in Heaven, then, they had more opportunity than me or you. We'll probably have to go to Purgatory, right? But they were in Heaven, and banished out, and banished to earth." That is why "they hate to be cursed," and "they hate anything holy" (prayers, or

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<sup>8</sup>In a MUNFLA version, a man working in the woods finds a bundle of clothes and brings it home; he is followed by a bird, which that night tore up the house. The next morning he turned out the bird in God's name. At last an old man, bent and grey, appeared and told the man who had found the clothes he'd give him until twelve the next day to put the clothes back: "if not there's going to be trouble for you." Unfortunately much of this collection is rather incoherent (72-95/31-44).

artifacts like rosaries, scapulars or miraculous medals). And there was nothing anyone could do to heal a fairy-inflicted injury, although some healers could recognize it and say, "We can't do nothing for it, he was hit by a blast." Mr. Ryan clearly has some belief in the reality of the fairies, even if it is as a reality of the past. "Well, if there's no such thing as good people, how come there's something being written up in university about it?" he demanded, "There must be something."

Mrs. Keough said she never heard that you shouldn't talk about the fairies, and when I asked if it was dangerous to listen to the beautiful music they made, she laughed and said, "Oh no, they're not so bad as they used to be!" Her jocular attitude reminded me of Mrs. Meaney's; and in fact, the whole interview was beset with the same communication problems. Folklorists joke about the familiar lament, "if only they'd been there ten years earlier..." but there is sometimes cause for regret; some things are lost, especially in conditions of rapid cultural change. As I mentioned in Chapter One, the only "midwife to the fairies" story (ML5070) recorded in Newfoundland is from Marysvale,<sup>9</sup> although I didn't know this until after my interview. On a third visit, Mr. and Mrs. Ryan were not there, and Mrs. Keough and I could hardly converse at all; she knew the

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<sup>9</sup>In sadly garbled form--children had broken the informant's false teeth.

informant, but I couldn't get across what it was I was after (its rarity had excited my butterfly-collecting instinct). But if there is anything more frustrating than the feeling of having arrived too late, it is to learn that the stories had gone on after one left an interview. Mrs. Ryan told me that Mrs. Keough kept remembering more and more after my first visit; between then and my second visit they'd both forgotten them again! She said that Mrs. Keough sometimes tells a whole string of them to the children, who silently lined the walls during our interviews. Only future fieldwork will tell the fate of what they were hearing.

Any vestiges I might have retained of the notion that old people know the best fairy stories were nevertheless stripped away by my visits to Clarke's Beach that same month. I began by visiting the Winters (I have forgotten how I came by their name). This elderly couple regarded my request dubiously if not distrustfully: "Lies," snorted Mr. Winter when I explained what I wanted. Mrs. Winter seemed somewhat more desirous of being helpful and more inclined to think that there were true unexplainable experiences, and she told about a "reliable" woman she knew who about forty or fifty years ago saw a funeral procession of little people walking along the road between Cupids and Brigus. Mr. Winter, who occasionally added something almost in spite of himself, said there were often things seen there; walking along there as a young man his hair sometimes stood straight



out from his head. Both stressed the importance of fairy and ghost stories as entertainment in the past, and how easy it was, when you had grown up hearing them, to imagine all sorts of things when you were out alone at night. But even as Mr. Winter was assuring me that "all these things" were in the past and "you never hear of them now," his adolescent grandson--whose presence was possibly an inhibiting factor--volunteered that he had just heard something from the Caines about little people with accordions accosting someone in a marsh; he didn't know if it was true or not. The Winters (rather hastily) suggested that I see Frances Kavanagh, across the road, who was "a good one for that sort of thing."

At the time I interviewed her, Mrs. Kavanagh ran a school bus fleet with her husband, sat on the town council, and had several children at university. She is a confident person who takes pride in her knowledge of supernatural traditions, although she considers ghost stories her specialty and her fairy repertoire relatively small. "She can scare you to death," her daughters assured me, admiringly. They prompted her at several points in our interviews, and Mr. Kavanagh sat by the woodstove and made the odd contribution; it was clear that everyone present had heard these stories many times. Mrs. Kavanagh does not "believe in the fairies" herself, which is why, she says, she can tell stories about them. Yet she asserts the

factual basis of most of her stories, which she recounts in a low, serious voice.

Some of the incidents involved members of her own family. Her brother was on the way to a dance when he heard music he thought was coming from a house, but when he neared the house he saw that it was shut up and the music came from the marsh. So he "just went off," because

You're not supposed to stop and listen, that's apparently when they get power over you, it must be something like a trance or something. But that's when they get power over you, if you take an active part in what they're doing. And you are, if you stop and listen.

This idea is related, she says, to the idea that you're not supposed to talk about them, or use the word "fairy."

"You're supposed to be twenty-four hours in danger if you call them fairies," she says with a shout of laughter,

"You're not supposed to call them fairies! They're supposed to be good people!" In narrative, Mrs. Kavanagh does not use either term freely. She told of a young sister who died, who saw "them" in the likeness of her other sisters:

She said to Mother, "What is Margaret, Mary, and Liza doing," she said, "out?" And Mother said, "They're not out, they're in the kitchen." She said, "I seen them out sitting on the fence." [pause] So, there's no alternative, there's nothing else she seen.

A great-aunt also once took fairies to be members of her family, as she was walking home alone from a dance early one morning:

So down from their house was a little running brook. And when she got near the end, she saw those--down around the brook. And she figured, "Well, what are they doing down around the brook at this hour in the morning?" And she watched them and she walked on, she watched them, and by and by, when she got up close enough, she realized it was nobody belonged to her. [pause] It was the fairies! So she stopped, and she looked at them. And they started making a ring, going around. And when she watched them for awhile, she turned to go back. And when she turned to go back something hit her in the heel. That's alright, she went back, went to her friend's up in the Goulds, and she stayed there the rest of the night. And the next morning she woke with pain, and her foot gathered and broke. And there was stone, and there was bits of wood, and feathers, and everything worked out of it. And she was crippled for the rest of her life.

Listening to the tape of our first interview, I took the sentence "she saw those--down around the brook" to contain a spontaneous breaking off or shying away from naming "fairies," which a moment's deliberation converted to the reverse position in the declaration, "It was the fairies!" In December 1988, I took Peter Narvaez to meet Mrs. Kavanagh as an informant for a radio program on the fairies,<sup>10</sup> and he recorded some of the stories she had told me almost four years before. The wording of most of these was quite similar, indicating well-honed performances. In the story of her aunt, she said, "she seen those people down around

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<sup>10</sup>"The Fairy Faith," aired on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation "Ideas" series 29 June 1989.

the brook," and the word "fairy" doesn't appear at all; probably this was the more spontaneous wording. A comparison of the two texts also shows the equivalency of "blast" items, for in the first "stone, bits of wood, and feathers" come out of the heel, and in the second it is "bits of straw and wood and everything."

The internal stability of Mrs. Kavanagh's narratives shown by the two recording sessions contrasts with certain inconsistencies in our unstructured discussion, just as her solemn manner of narration contrasts with her jocular attitude in our talk. This may have been partly due to the way in which I pursued the matter beyond its normal termination in narrative, as after the story of her great-aunt (the first time):

BR: What did the people look like, did she say?

FK: They looks like ordinary people. Sometimes. But these did look like people, because she thought that they were some of her own family.

BR: You were telling me that they can take any form, or that they can take other forms.

FK: Yeah. Trees, birds; sometimes you hear of them whistling, really like birds. That's them.

BR: How can you tell?

FK: I don't know. People just know. It's them! It's not birds! [laughter]

But after a story about her uncle, she said they always look like small people:

He was making hoops, see, years ago, people used to make hoops for barrels and that, for the fishery; and he looked through the window and he saw them down dancing around the brook. And he went and called his wife to come and look. But they had hard hats on, and long-tail coats. And they were having a ring, they were all joined hands together and they were dancing around the brook. And when she got there, they were gone. That's the time that he left, went for her, and he got back they weren't there.

BR: Were they little?

FK: They were little, yeah. They always appear in the form of little people.

BR: Huh, always small?

FK: Yeah, always small.

When I asked about their gender, she said, "They were always referred to just as fairies, they were never referred to as --distinguished between, they were never distinguished between sexes, male or female." She also says that "they claim they are fallen angels whom God cast out of heaven because they were disobedient," and that "they expect pardon the last day, if not, they would destroy the world." That is why they are repelled by religious symbols like scapulars or rosaries. They can also be driven away by swearing; she mentioned that a man "got astray in the trees, and couldn't find his way, and cursed--the 'G-d fairies'--and next thing everything was gone." She also gave the following story

about her father:

Some do get astray, and it doesn't affect them somehow or another. Because I remember my father was surrounded by them, by little trees. And he took--it was in the woods--he took a turn of boughs on his back, and when he did--he was in the path when he put them on his back--and when he put the boughs on his back, he couldn't find the path, he was in a little thicket of trees. And he knew the trees weren't there. So he threw the boughs down, and he sat down on a stump. And he lit his pipe, and he said, "Where the heck am I?" He was astray, he didn't know. And that was in his own garden. And he lit his pipe, he sized the situation up, and by and by there were no trees there at all, there was the path! Maybe it's a figure of the imagination, I don't know. But, apparently, they claims these things happen.

It wasn't until my visit with Peter that, through the prompting of her daughter, it emerged that it was in fact her father, on that occasion, who had cursed the "G-d fairies." This small revelation served as a salutary reminder that even the apparently most forthcoming informant may not relate every detail of a personal nature.

Gardens into wilderness, the familiar suddenly strange: the threat of the fairies and nature itself. In Northern Bay, says Mrs. Kavanagh, a woman and her grandchild got lost in the fog while berry-picking; their bodies were found the following spring behind the fence of a garden right in the community, "the child was in her arms, they were sitting under a tree." A tug of war between nature and culture is

explicit in Mrs. Kavanagh's two accounts of changed children. One, as a baby, was laid on the grass while his mother got hay in; when they got home, "he was all scriveled up, he looked like a sixty-year-old man," and the mother "figured that that's what she had, they had taken the baby and left a fairy." He died at twelve, and until then, "when he'd get out he'd always want to go for the garden." Another mother took her "beautiful-looking little girl" to visit a sick neighbor at night, and on the way home "had to come across this old road." The next morning, the child was "different entirely. The child was not the same after. It was weird-looking, it was strange-looking. And the child was never--she never got out of it, she is still living." She is forty now, and although she falls about inside the house, banging the stove and all,

let her outdoors, and she goes like the wind, not a thing wrong with her. And she always goes for the hills. But, oh, yeah, when she gets out, it takes three or four to catch her. She's really wild.

If, as these accounts suggest, the hapless changelings were confined to the house, their break for freedom can be understood without recourse to symbolic interpretation. It is clear in comparison to other accounts, however (such as Annie Hayes's story about the man who, taken as a child, had to "go back to the fairies" for a night and a day once a year), that this compulsion is part of the fairies' hold

over them. Mrs. Kavanagh specifically mentions the idea of the fairies "getting power" in the story of a man who failed to meet a friend after hunting. A search party found him the next day up a tree, his gun trained on another man who had seen him and stopped to see what was wrong:

So they talked and got around him and they finally got him down out of the tree. So he came home and he wasn't right, he wasn't acting right. And they took him to the parish priest. Now he had food, but he never ate it. That time, they used to carry it in a red square like an handkerchief, they'd tie up their sandwiches in that. And anyway, the priest threw that in the stove, he said not to eat it. He threw that in the fire. And he told them they shouldn't have let him sleep. They should--no, because when you sleep, the fairies gets power. But he did what he could for him, but he wasn't the same after. Never. He had a wild strain about him. Crazy-like. That really-- that's true, that really happened.

The despoiled sandwich seems to have somehow absorbed evil from the encounter, an image possibly related to the pollution of the "blast" (which I suggested earlier might be part of a proposed nature/culture dichotomy, with its intrusion of noxious natural junk). Mrs. Kavanagh gave two examples of the blast: one man was "flicked in the eye" and went blind, another got a pain in the face when he drank from a brook late in the evening--"His face gathered and broke, and everything worked out of it, they said, sticks, stones, feathers, hairs, everything. But his face never went back at all." On my visit with Peter, Mrs. Kavanagh



added that you are not supposed to drink straight from a brook in the evening, that is, you should use a cup or a dipper. Perhaps the significance of this artifact (culture) is its separation of humans from animals, who drink straight--unmediated--from the water.<sup>11</sup>

"He's still like it," Mr. Kavanagh added when Mrs. Kavanagh finished telling of the man whose face "broke." I would have liked to have gotten this man's name and asked him about it, but even my nerve has limits. I did, however, meet a woman in Long Pond, Conception Bay, who showed me scars on her legs as the result of a mysterious injury she received when she was nineteen. I heard about Mrs. Hackett (a pseudonym) when in June 1987 I accompanied Julia Bishop on an interview with Mrs. Kenny (also a pseudonym), Mrs. Hackett's sister-in-law. When the subject of my research came up, Mrs. Kenny and her daughter told me that Mrs. Hackett (now in her sixties) always said that the fairies hurt her leg. She might tell me about it, they said, but then again she might not as she has recently "gotten religion" (a conversion from Church of England to Seventh Day Adventism). I called Mrs. Hackett on the phone with

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<sup>11</sup>I don't think it is a caution against drinking from streams in general, although the "water wolf," a creature which grows in the stomach from ingested eggs or larvae, is something like the blast in its hideous internal growth and eventual expulsion. Mr. MacDonald gave a good example of how the "wolf" must be starved then lured out through the person's mouth with a bowl of milk; he said there is a specimen in a jar somewhere in the General Hospital.

some trepidation, not lessened when she spoke of "evil in the world" and "Satan," but when I visited her later that week she was extremely pleasant and hospitable and didn't mention religion at all.

She told me how one September she and her brother and a friend were berry-picking in Middle Bight Road near Penney's Hill, in an area where several people had gone astray. She and her friend separated from her brother and were astray the whole day. The friend, who for some reason figured that the fairies had Mrs. Hackett, encouraged her to swear, but Mrs. Hackett couldn't bring herself to do that. Eventually they found their way back. Three days later, on her nineteenth birthday, she was berry-picking on different ground. Just before leaving she got a drink of lovely, clear water, but when her friend went for some (I don't know if this was the same friend), she couldn't see it. When Mrs. Hackett got home, she discovered a cut in her leg, although the cotton stocking and pant-leg were not torn; she thought she might have hit it on a stump, but didn't recall doing so. The leg was not painful at first, but it would not heal, and her mother and the older people said it was a blast. Mrs. Hackett said that like all the children she believed in the fairies while growing up, but had become skeptical by that time; she was frightened by this diagnosis, however, especially as the leg became painful and various remedies failed. A Mr. Sexton at the American army

base in St. John's, who used to do first aid, put various things on it to no avail, and a "Dr. John" on Bell Island (who had "escaped from the German ships," and who Mrs. Kenny said was a doctor in Germany but had no credentials here) unsuccessfully prescribed a poultice of blue potatoes and molasses every night, and olive oil every morning. Although she was Protestant, she went to see a Father Bradshaw on Patrick Street in St. John's, who blessed it; the pain went away but not the swelling. (On the way into St. John's the car turned itself around at the bottom of Foxtrap Road, so she knew "something was going on.") Three nights later someone (I don't know who) lanced it, and pus poured out. She went to Uncle Billy Cable on Peachytown Road, who had a charm, for nine days in a row, although he told her it was too late. The old people told her it was no good going to any doctor, and a woman who "read the cup" told her she would lose her leg. The leg was very bad for three years, and I'm not sure what finally cured it, although I think it was the charm. The injury had occurred on a Friday, which Mrs. Hackett says she figured was "a bad day anyway," and for years afterward she would "find her leg" every Friday. She showed me scars on her shin, knee, and ankle.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Possibly the sores were varicose ulcers, which Patrick Logan, an Irish physician, says "used to be called the opprobrium chirurgorum (the reproach of surgeons) because for centuries they were incurable" (Cure 109).

Mrs. Hackett concluded that the problem was probably an infection from all the cures she had tried, although she didn't say anything about the original cause. She did not make an explicit connection between the injury and the drink of water, and I did not recognize its importance early in the account, taking it as part of the circumstantial detail with which such accounts are typically filled. It was only later, making notes, that I realized that she told the story quite economically and that there was too much emphasis on the "lovely," sweet quality of the water, and her friend's inability to see it, for it to have been meaningless. I recalled a story Mrs. Kavanagh had told about two sisters playing in a barnyard, whose way was blocked by a big pool of water when they tried to go to the house. The "delicate" one, Maggie, couldn't cross it, so the other went on her own to get help. When she returned with someone, Maggie was gone; she was found the next day, two miles away under a tree in the Birch Hills, missing one boot:

So they presumed that's what happened to her, she was taken away--there was no water there! In the first place, where'd the water come from? The water wasn't there. They really only saw it. And she never lived. She was always sick, she never got the better of it. She was sixteen when she died.

Mrs. Kavanagh made it clear that the water was a fairy illusion, but in Mrs. Hackett's account this is only apparent from its proportion in the narrative and from an

understanding of other accounts in which it figures the same way.

Mrs. Hackett knows of other people who were supposed to have been affected by the fairies, but she does not talk about them with the same interest she does her own experience. Her mother's cousin had a blast, and "they say that everything came out of it, fishbones and everything." This cousin lived in Greeleytown in a house that they said must have been built on "a bank of fairies"; the priests and ministers had to come and pray at midnight to clear the house. The cousin had a child that they said got changed-- the midwife told her it was not the child she had delivered, and that she should throw it in the river to get her own child back. This was not done, and the child grew to have a "woman's head on a little body," and was never able to get out of her cot. She died in her twenties, and they said that there was nothing in her coffin. Mrs. Hackett's mother also had a stepsister who was "taken" and was found dead with her boots off (another signifier, like illusory water). She said that "good people" and not "fairies" was the usual term, and that if you used the latter you had to mention whatever day of the week it was at the moment. Some people said they were short people with red caps, and some claimed to have seen them singing and dancing in the hills. She mentioned Lucy Harris, saying that she was lost for twenty-one days and that she was able to describe the "beautiful

people" who took care of her; she was alright after it all, and the whole business helped her family, who had been very poor. Mrs. Hackett did not offer an explanation of the fairies, except to say that they could have been evil spirits and that perhaps evil is in the world in a different form today.

The case of Mrs. Hackett underlines some of the limitations of fieldwork as an outsider, and the limits on how far one can guess at private belief. I only heard about Mrs. Hackett by accident; and had I only my conversation with her to go on, I would have concluded that she considered "the fairies" only one possible explanation for her leg, a remote one at that. But only a few weeks after my visit, I ran into her niece and told her as much. The niece assured me that the idea of an infection is a new development and that Mrs. Hackett had always been adamant that the cause was the fairies. Perhaps Mrs. Hackett gave me a different story because she didn't know me, or perhaps she has changed her ideas because of her change in religion. Maybe she changed her mind for other reasons entirely, or a combination of reasons, including what Yeats called "the spirit of the times." After we talked about the fairies, Mrs. Hackett brought out pictures of her three children and grandchildren, and her recent travels with them; it did seem odd to think that the woman climbing into a helicopter for a ride over Mt. St. Helen's, or smiling on the beach in

Barbados, once had a run-in with the fairies.

Despite Mrs. Hackett's present naturalistic opinion about what ailed her leg, it is clear when she tells about it that she still thinks there was something strange involved. In this she is like Mrs. Kavanagh and a legion of other informants who reject the general proposition ("believing in the fairies"), but affirm the particular ("this really happened"). And even though Mrs. Hackett has abandoned, at least officially, her former position (positive attribution of the injury to the fairies), her story has entered tradition as a "fairy" story, for her niece will have none of the change. In this, the story is a little like Lucy Harris's, and it shows how in folk narrative, even memorate, there is no authoritative version even when the "author" is known. It also shows how fluid, ambiguous, and contradictory a matter is individual "belief," a thousand permutations of which constitute the subject referred to so automatically as "folk belief." Most studies of such "beliefs" are based on texts recorded from informants on a single occasion, but an understanding of the dynamics of belief (and the processes of oral tradition) would be enhanced if the various meanings of the "belief" in question could be documented at different points in the tradition-bearers' lives.

One valuable study of change over time was done by Rose Marie Barry, who in 1972 set out "to determine to what

extent, if any, the residents of my hometown, Brigus, believe in fairies" (72-236). Two of her informants were women whom she had known from childhood to have gotten "blasts" from the fairies. One was wary about the idea of being recorded:

As I was returning home with my notebook in hand I met Mrs. Efford who asked me what I was doing. I explained to her and said, "I believe you had some dealings with the fairies, didn't you?" "Yes," she replied, "the goddamned fairies, those sons of bitches laid me up for years!" I visited her house Sunday and her speech was much more restrained.... At first she said, "I'm not going to talk to you about me. I'll tell you about my grandfather." I jokingly replied that I knew her story anyway as I had heard her tell it before. She then said, "Okay, I'll tell you but you can't use my name." (3-4)

Mrs. Efford grew up in North River, a community adjacent to Clarke's Beach, where she was told that the fairies were "dead people who were too good for Hell and too bad for Heaven, so God sent them to roam about the earth until the Day of Judgement." "You can see for yourself what the fairies did to my leg," she said to Barry, showing her an indentation in her left thigh the size of a quarter:

Now then this is the story as my mother told it to me. When I was three years old I was out in a cart playing with four or five older children on the marsh. Apparently they all saw the little people coming and ran away leaving me, the baby, alone in the cart. Mother heard me crying and came and brought me in the house. My leg started to pain and a big lump came on it. Mother said it had to be the fairies



giving me a flick as they passed by, as there was no other reason to explain it. When I was four this lump got sorer and broke. It was running for four years and I can remember this. I believed my mother when she said it was the fairies and I still believe it, to tell the truth, and that was fifty-three years ago. I still find my leg and I had an operation on it two years ago. The fairies did it, don't you fool yourself. I never ever heard about the fairies doing anything good for anyone either.

Barry said that at one point in the interview Mrs. Efford's son entered and demanded "Christ, mom, what are you telling her?" Her daughter and husband also disparaged her belief.

Barry writes:

Her story has survived in spite of the disbelief of her children and her husband (I briefly spoke to him on my way out the door.) However, I am inclined to believe her story is changing somewhat these recent years. Maybe she does not want to appear too foolish in the eyes of her university-graduated son who recently has set up a professional business in the area. After his brief visit during our interview I detected a little bit of doubt creeping in--"Maybe if there had been doctors in those days..." Some of the details have changed as well. I used to play with Mrs. Efford's children when we were younger and I can recall her telling the story several times and saying how all sorts of things came out of her leg, even straw and fish bones! Then too, when I mentioned this project to my mother she said, "Oh, Mrs. Efford would be a good person to go and see. She really believes in the fairies and tells how fishbones and straw came out of her leg after the fairies flicked her." Yet when I asked Mrs. Efford if anything came out of the sore leg she replied, "nothing that I can remember."  
(64-66)

In contrast to Mrs. Efford, the second informant had the full support of her family, who have had fairy experiences themselves. She related it much as Barry remembered it, "in the manner of someone who has retold something many times":

When I was eight years old I was going across a mash (marsh) here in the Gullies with my stepsister Marge Perry, you know Mrs. Perry don't you? Well anyway, all the once a big ball of fire dropped to the ground right between the two of us. I said, "My God, Marge, did you see that?" "See what?" says Marge, "I didn't see anything." Then I felt a dart in me leg right here (she pointed to a spot on her left leg, halfway up her knee where there is an indentation about the size of a dime). Me leg got right sore then and started to rise. For years and years that spot would break out in May and October when the fairies shift their camps out in the summer and back again in the fall. Even now me leg comes again those months." At this point her husband Jim said, "You know the doctors laughed at Margaret when she told them that, the other year when she was in hospital." "Yes, they did," replied Mrs. Baker, "but I can tell you I was laid up for nine weeks and couldn't put my foot to the ground. Mrs. Daniels helped Mom tend me. She used to carry me upstairs over her shoulder like a baby. Mrs. Adams, who used to live up the road here told me after that if two people are walking along and if something happens, if you put your hand on the shoulder of the other person, they will see whatever you see. If I had to touch Marge, she would have seen it too. Well, me leg swelled right up that night and Mom kept rubbing it down so it wouldn't burst and she put a poultice on it. Three bones came out of me leg. One was this size (indicating about three inches) and the other two were about this big (two inches and one inch respectively). Mom put them in a glass butter dish with a

cover on it to bring them out to Dr. Gill in the morning. Do you know what? When she got up the next morning, the cover was still on the dish but the bones were gone! The bad people came and got them. I believe it was the fairies who did all this, my dear, and I'll believe it until I dies. I think they are still around but there's so much traffic back and forth now that no one ever sees them." I asked her if she herself had ever seen a fairy and she said, "Yes, I saw two of them that evening sure. They had turned-up shoes, red suits like the kind Santa Claus wears, hats with a little peak on them, and they were this high (indicates about two feet). I never saw their faces though. And my sons, sure, I've seen lots of fairy lights in the fall of the years coming home from dances and stuff. They used to say it was just green boughs shining but I knows it wasn't." At this point her daughter, Martha, spoke up. "Mom used to frighten me to death with all those stories about fairies." Her mother laughed and said, "Sure, I used to make you afraid, to keep you in." I then asked Marion if she believed that fairies existed. "Indeed I do and I still believe in them," she replied, "sure I was taken by the fairies myself! You tell her about it, Mom."

(Martha, at five, disappeared from the house and was found "up on the back behind the house with a lovely bunch of flowers in her hand in a place where no flowers had ever growed.") Martha knows her own story from what Mrs. Baker says, just as Mrs. Baker knows her own story from what her mother said ("When I went home with me leg that evening Mom said, 'Glory be to God, it must have been the fairies giving

you a blast'!")<sup>13</sup> Both Mrs. Baker and Mrs. Efford consider that the fairies still exist but are not noticed in the noise of modern conditions: "I think there are still some around," said Mrs. Efford, "but things are opened up too much for them to bother you."

Barry's study shows the great usefulness of previous acquaintance with informants (or potential informants) and their repertoires, and with other community members, in undertaking a formal study. In the first chapter, I mentioned that I know two people who denied knowledge of the fairies when I first met them but who, it transpired, knew about them very well indeed. One of these is Alice Hayes of St. Thomas, who assured me on our first meeting in the spring of 1983 (when I stopped to photograph her yard art) that she "never heard anything about that." On a later visit (bringing copies of the photos) I mentioned the subject again, and her daughter, not knowing of our earlier conversation, said, "Oh, Mom can tell you all about the fairies." But Mrs. Hayes said nothing, and although I visited her several times to record songs, the subject did not come up again until I stopped in on my way to visit the

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<sup>13</sup>Two other collectors give versions of Mrs. Baker's story. In one, she and a friend were berry-picking when she was surrounded by a circle of flame and her leg was "deformed"; the informant did not specifically mention fairies (FSC71-46/38). The second is from an informant who had it from Mrs. Baker herself; the informant said she attributed the incident to "bad fairies" who did it "because she did something bad or naughty" (FSC70-34/83).

Kelloways in July 1984. Moved perhaps by a spirit of competition (I mentioned why I was going to see the Kelloways), she launched into a string of stories of strange events, ghosts, dreams, tokens, and the like. Still, no fairies proper, and by March 1985 when I went to record music with Julia Bishop, I didn't expect an answer to my almost automatic question--it was a joke by now--whether the fairies didn't play beautiful music. To my amazement she agreed that they did; someone heard it once, and what's more her father once saw three or four fairies, who wore red stocking caps and were only a few feet tall, and who made faces at him. After all the evasion I was taken aback by the rather unspectacular nature of this incident. I was even more puzzled when I later discovered that she had given the story to another student, unknown to her albeit a friend of her granddaughter's; she told her that they were brightly dressed and said "Ya, ya, ya, Tom, boy"<sup>14</sup> (82-297/12). In March 1986, Mrs. Hayes told me the story again, adding that the fairies had said, "Nyah, nyah, Tom, boy!" She also said that the fairies once took her uncle; they threw him over a hedge, and gave him a "flick" in his neck which was lanced so that "twigs, everything came out of it." Although I never did figure out for sure the reason for her early

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<sup>14</sup>Another collector interviewed Mrs. Hayes on laying out the dead. A second informant (for the same paper) said that Mrs. Hayes's father "used to see seven fairies on the Beach Road, and even he was afraid to go there" (75-33/42).

reticence, it was a good lesson to have gotten early on in this project, for it showed the need for caution in making negative conclusions about the existence of fairy tradition on the basis of casual inquiries.

I met my second reluctant informant the same day I met Mrs. Hayes, also by photographing his barn. Richard Murrin lives alone in Shoe Cove, on a small farm which has seen little change in the way of modernization except for electric wiring installed in the 1920s. There is no running water, and the kitchen woodstove is the sole source of heat; Mr. Murrin does all his own cooking and baking, and having no car, goes into town only occasionally for supplies. Although as a young man he worked for a short time as a policeman in St. John's, he has long subsisted on what he grows, supplemented now by the "old age" pension (he was born in 1916). He is a solitary person disgusted by the modern world and depressed by his position in it. Nevertheless he is always kindly and humorous; he says if he ever did see the fairies, he would gladly go with them.

It wasn't until our third visit, however, that he made this joke. We had been discussing edible wild plants, and he said there was a certain kind of mushroom called a fairy cap, and I reiterated that I was interested in fairy stories and had read a lot about them. "There's fairies," he said, as casually as if he had never said that there weren't. Sometimes children were gone overnight or longer and would

be found safe, and people would say the fairies had taken care of them; on the other hand, there were "bad ones," like those that people said got a boy in nearby Pouch Cove, who was "foolish"--always laughing and grinning--and who died young. On a later visit, he said that his father had gotten a blast, which is when the fairies "shoot something" at you. He had been walking in a certain part of the barrens when he felt it in the leg; Mr. Murrin doesn't remember whether it worked its way out or a doctor took it out, but a rag emerged, and his father always walked with a limp after that. Mr. Murrin himself had experience with "spirits," when he came out of the barn three days in a row with one side of his face "blackened" with something like soot. Another day, he was telling Martin Lovelace and me about his father "limbing off" spruce boughs, when one flew out of his hand three times. "You often hear of the fairies doing that kind of thing," Martin remarked, and Mr. Murrin quickly agreed--"maybe they had a nest in that one or something." He almost certainly would not have said anything about the fairies if Martin had not suggested it; the recognition of possible cues is an important factor in drawing interpretation and further narrative from potential informants.

A certain obtuse persistence helps as well, and no doubt some of my "informants," pressed rather unwittingly into that role, thought at times I had a bit of a bee in my

bonnet. Perhaps Mrs. Hayes finally gave me the story about her father just to shut me up; perhaps Mr. Murrin felt it polite to humour Martin and me if we wanted to think that the fairies made the wood fly out of his father's hand.<sup>15</sup> I am aware that there is a certain indelicacy in pushing someone into talking about something, then writing it all down for the perusal of an audience outside the informants' culture or control. This is why I have included so much detail on how I met informants and got them to tell me what they did; and I am sure that if anyone looks foolish in this study it is me.

"You wouldn't see fairies around here now because it's getting too inhabited," says Francis Kavanagh, laughing, "When a place gets inhabited, they move to other places. They don't like too many livyers around!" She says that "it's only now, this generation, possibly is in doubt, you know, about them. There were fairies." I am not sure whether by this last remark (spoken hastily like so many revealing phrases) she meant that the fairies were real to people in the past, or that they once did exist. In any case, fairy narratives can be in no danger of disappearance as long as there are narrators like Mrs. Kavanagh. Nor are

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<sup>15</sup>On Christmas day 1989, Mr. Murrin told all these stories at my house (I had not asked for them, I do draw the limit at interrogating dinner guests; here again his motive was probably politeness.) He did give me permission to use them here.



new supernatural experiences in short supply. On my first visit Mrs. Kavanagh's daughter told a story about an Avondale woman's preternatural death. Several people had committed suicide in a certain house, and one day the woman was found dead in a rocking chair, handmarks burnt into her arm, her previously red hair white, and half her face withered: "And they say, a lot of people say it's the devil that was in her." "When did this happen?" I asked. "Two years ago," Mrs. Kavanagh and daughter replied in unison. When I visited in December 1988, Mrs. Kavanagh told the story herself (a good example of generational transmission upwards, so to speak), adding details such as that an autopsy showed that she died of "death shock" brought on by something she saw, and that when she was waked, they turned the "good" side of her face to viewers. Here is a fine example of synthesis of old and new: the half-transformed face appears in a late fifteenth century version of the Thomas the Rhymer legend cited by Walter Scott, in which the beautiful fairy queen, after intercourse with Thomas, becomes hideous: "one side is blighted and wasted, as if by

palsy; one eye drops from her head" (Letters 129).<sup>16</sup> The autopsy is a modern innovation.

The day she told "Death Shock," Mrs. Kavanagh also told us that only several months before, someone she knew (I think maybe her sister) was driving past a graveyard late at night when she saw, across the road from it, at least five figures in white shawls, with hoods over their heads. One had its arms out, as if holding a large book, but she could not see what it was doing. There was also some kind of animal, bigger than a sheep and smaller than a pony. Mrs. Kavanagh had no explanation of what this apparition could have been, but she suggested to the woman that she note the time and date and go by there again the same time the next year. As Mrs. Meaney might ask, "Now, what was that but the fairies?" Or to put it more pompously, only the lack of a label makes this incident any different from various fairy visions of old.

The fairies may be gone, but it is still not that hard to find people to talk about them. After giving a guest lecture on changelings to a folklore class in April 1989, I

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<sup>16</sup>The detail does not appear in the ballad versions of Thomas Rymer (Child #37). The postcoital discovery (which may be read as a transformation or a revelation) is a little like the modern "Welcome to the world of AIDS" legend, in which the incautious lover finds those words written on the mirror the next morning; and it is interesting to note the play with faces and mirrors in both legends--the two sides of the face, reverse halves of a whole, and the stunned morning-after confrontation with the self.

met Elizabeth Power, a first-year student from Frenchman's Cove on the Burin Peninsula, who says unabashedly that she believes in the fairies. She said she heard hundreds of stories growing up, many from her mother, who uses the terms "ghosts" and "fairies" interchangeably; they were told mostly for entertainment. She doesn't recall any of them in much detail, however, and it would almost seem that her belief is more a matter of faith than that of many of her elders who base their belief on personal experience or events they were close to. Elizabeth told me some things that I had neither heard myself nor encountered in MUNFLA, such as that infants were protected by candles over the crib and a piece of white silk in it until baptism, after which they were "in the hands of God" and the measures discontinued. In her childhood, boys were encouraged to be brash and bratty (for example, they would not be reprimanded for "talking back"), because the fairies only wanted "good, innocent" children. (It was not that they preferred boys, but that boys spent more time playing away from the house than girls and so were in more danger of being taken.)<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>An interesting example of folk practice prefiguring official prescription. In the presently dawning recognition of the ubiquity of sexual abuse, parents are counseled to cultivate assertiveness in children, for as one counselor puts it, the children most at risk are those "who have been taught to follow the rules, who have a great deal of trust" ("Frank discussion") This is not to say that the encouragement of brashness Powers cites was so motivated--presumably girls would have been similarly encouraged if that were the case--but that fairy tradition in this instance provides a model of a world beyond the parental

After a death in the community, children were not allowed in the area of the house in which it occurred because the fairies would be wandering there, looking for the dead person's soul; they were also not allowed near graveyards at night because of fairies. Elizabeth says that while these ideas are treated with varying degrees of seriousness, they are not just pedagogical ficts. Fairy traditions, then, at least in some places, continue to influence thought and behaviour. There is still much to learn about them and from them.

So this chapter closes like the last, with a call for more field research, not only on the fairies but on all the supernatural traditions with which they have been so inextricably woven. It would be much better to have verbatim conversational recordings, as of Mrs. Hayes and Mrs. Maloney, than to have to piece discrete "items" together like jigsaw puzzles and deal with all the problems of distortion to which such a composite picture is prone. Mrs. Hayes's and Mrs. Maloney's conversation especially shows how closely fairy traditions have been allied with religious beliefs and practices, many of which are now discarded by official church doctrine. Fairy tradition, having never been part of the official creed, cannot be so excised and so should outlive many aspects of folk religion,

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pale in which it does not do to be too tractable.

but it will not be the same without them; good records of the relationships should be made now for a future understanding of both the fairies and folk religion.

The call for more research may seem superfluous to some in the face of Newfoundland's present economic crisis, in which the decline of the fishery threatens the existence of hundreds of communities. But it would be too bad if a subject of such historical, literary, and ethnological interest as fairylore, which has received much attention in other places lucky enough to have it, should fade into oblivion marked only by a single monograph. It is true that if fairy lore is dying it is a lingering death indeed, but change is undeniable, and charting it essential for a full understanding of past and present meaning. Change in "a tradition" over time is the sum of hundreds of individual changes like those described in this chapter; and change is not only in content and form, but in the way people talk about and use the whole concept.

One of these uses is to compare the past with the present. This is done indirectly when the fairies' disappearance is attributed to modern technology or conditions, as when Mrs. Keough blames cars, Mr. Ryan lights and bustle, Mrs. Kavanagh crowds, Mrs. Efford roads, or when Mrs. Hackett suggests that had there been good doctors or medicine at the time of her leg injury, the question of the blast would never have arisen. It is done explicitly in the

reflections on change that are almost invariably part of a lengthy discussion of fairy lore, like that of Mrs. Maloney and Mrs. Hayes. The first chapter, it might be recalled, shows that both types of commentary are traditions of long standing; only the specific content changes, so that Aubrey blamed printing or the English civil war for "putting the old fables out of doors," while Newfoundland informants blame electricity or television. Thus the "old fables" remain ever modern, and it may be that the habitual assignment to the past is the secret of their longevity.

Frances Kavanagh





### Conclusion

It is easier to study narrative than belief, narrative being an entity that can be recorded and stored, and subjected to certain kinds of analyses independent of the narrator; whereas belief is often elusive, unarticulated, and changeable. Furthermore, the stranger or outside inquirer can never be sure how much she is being told of an interlocutor's knowledge or opinion. I have tried, in this thesis, to record faithfully--indeed doggedly--what I was told; but I think that a certain amount of imagination is essential (and inevitable) in any investigation of human thought, and so I have done a lot of guessing about my informants' ideas and motivations. If students of folk belief (or folk narrative, for that matter) were to stick only to demonstrable facts, many of its most interesting dimensions and complexities would go unexplored.

So constant is narrative compared to the variables of belief that it is tempting, at times, to dismiss "belief" as irrelevant--after all, the stories are basically the same whether they are believed or not! It is this fact that led me to seek interpretations partly in implicit themes such as nature and culture, or strangers and non-strangers, that would hold regardless of genre and attitude. On a more concrete level, there are ways in which fairy traditions can act in which belief is not an overwhelming consideration: as cautionary tale and social sanction, family folklore,

adventure stories; in preserving images of past folklife, or in a debate on the nature of the world outside the canons of official religion, to name a few examples from this study. Fairy traditions can do or be all of these without necessarily entailing deep belief on the part of tradition bearers.

As soon as it comes to the analysis of any particular situation, however, we see that the attitudes involved--of the narrator, audience, and people in the story--matter very much indeed, and that there can be no satisfying description or interpretation of function or performance without considering them. So it is back to grappling with the vagaries of what people think; for while there are some who do profess unequivocal belief (Mr. "I guarantee it boys, there's fairies everywhere" McGrath being our prime example), most are more reserved. They might "not believe in the fairies" but assert the truth of a particular story or incident; accept the premise or possibility of various "fairy" phenomena but balk at the term "fairies" (the "something to it" position); accept some fairy traditions but not others (going astray but not changelings, for example); vehemently disbelieve everything, but tell the stories anyway. The most difficult, but interesting, "problem" of all is that people are not always consistent in what they say they believe, either in one conversation or over years. People change, and constantly reinterpret past

experience in the light of new ideas and experience. Reevaluation might work toward or against a "supernatural" interpretation. Mr. Tucker, for example, considers himself "wiser" now, through the cultivation of psychic tendencies, than when he was young and dismissed his strange experiences on the Three Pond Barrens. Mrs. Hackett, whether through a change in religion or for other reasons, now stresses the element of infection in her blasted leg, while for years she insisted it was fairies. In comparison, Frances Kavanagh's narratives, none of which involved herself, remained almost identical in performances recorded four years apart. I was the audience on both occasions, however, and I have shown that people may adjust the degree of belief expressed according to audience; it might be recalled that even Mr. Kelloway's three basically similar versions of "Women in White" showed small but telling differences in that regard.

Bearing in mind that hardly anyone is a pure "believer" or "disbeliever," I will use these exaggerated categories to consider schematically some of the possible configurations of narrators and audience, or interlocutors. There could be believer to believer; believer to disbeliever; disbeliever to believer; and disbeliever to disbeliever. If a "neutral" designation is added in, there are five more combinations: "neutral" to believer or disbeliever, either of those to neutral, and neutral to neutral. Of course most stories are not told in a one-to-one situation, and in any group of

people there would be various positions which would shift about with each item under discussion. The point of envisioning these nine combinations is that only one of them, the first, entails complete belief on the part of all parties; yet not only is that the configuration envisioned by most collectors and many informants, but all the reports from all the other groupings go into building a great body of material which without caution might be used to support this view. When the material is looked at closely, as I hope I have done, all the combinations are represented; and the only evidence that this has not always been so is the present-day assertion that "everybody used to believe." We have, alas, almost no records of Newfoundland fairy traditions made before the 1960s with which to evaluate this claim; but the material in Chapter One suggests that it has been common in fairy tradition for many centuries. As I said in that chapter, I am not arguing that as many people believe now as ever did--although that is possible--but that every statement as to decline need not be taken at face value.

The blanket assignment of "belief" to the past masks not only the complexities of belief, but subtleties of interpretation as well. The folkloristic commonplace that changeling "beliefs" explain illness, discussed in Chapter Two, is a good example: by imagining an oversimplistic acceptance of the concept on the part of the folk, many

possible uses of the tradition have been overlooked. I am not arguing that changeling traditions do not have an etiology in disease; indeed it is the very obviousness of the association that stops analysis short of other interpretations, such as metaphoric or symbolic uses. Moreover, the contextual information for the changeling material seldom demonstrates that the people telling the stories had an immediate, personal need to explain anything.

The latter point brings me to the issue I have touched on in several places, that is, reconciling the interpretations made through an analysis of the content of a large body of archival material with individual accounts. The fairy connection with the dead, for example, which appeared so insistently in archive-oriented Chapters Two and Three, was not nearly so neat or pervasive in the more field-oriented later chapters. It is not that the findings are at odds, rather it is a matter of proportion and function. As I said in the Introduction, I was increasingly preoccupied with good description as I went on, and correspondingly wary of generalizations drawn from a composite body of material which lacks it. It might seem that the first of my goals--the examination of who the fairies are supposed to be, or what is meant by the term--could be met unambiguously enough through an examination of content, but even that is qualified by ethnographic fact, that is, in trying to match patterns that appear so clear-

cut on paper, like the relationship with the dead, to what people actually say. In short, my field research shows that it is easier to make broad generalizations if one never leaves the archive than if one deals with living tradition. Having worked with the complexities of a handful of individual situations makes it quite impossible to draw summary conclusions about my second goal or question as to why people envision such things as "fairies," for the answers are so contingent and diverse. It is perhaps obvious in a humanistic discipline that documents lend themselves more readily to hard conclusions than people do, but since in folkloristics we are often forced to deal with texts alone, it is worth demonstrating that interpretation of them may be intellectually coherent yet fall short of the range of real life possibilities. I am not saying that the traditions themselves, at an individual level, are necessarily rich and complex, for since the emic view does have twenty-five years' worth of reports from all over the province at hand, it is in some ways more limited than the scholarly one; one woman wondered how I was going to find much to say about the fairies because, she said, they would lead you astray and that's about it. To project the multiplicity of the assembled data on to "the folk" at large (the "fairy faith" approach) is yet another text-based pitfall.

This study has brought contemporary folkloristic approaches, with their emphasis on context, performance, and the individual tradition bearer, to a venerable topic of folklore research. The time-honored comparative method has also been essential in understanding both the individual text and the body of tradition as a whole, and in placing them in their grand historical perspective. As with other folklore field studies conducted in Newfoundland, the investigation contributes to the illumination of antecedent traditions, Irish and English, as well as those of Newfoundland. An old subject, one that has fascinated scholars and other folk for centuries, continues to offer surprises.

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