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Visions of “Blighty”: Fairies, War and Fragile Spaces

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Estella Canziani’s fairy painting, “Where the Little Things of the Woodland Live Unseen” (1914) was informed by her fascination with the landscape and folklore. This paper explores the relationship between the sociocultural and psychological condition of English society during WWI and the enthusiastic reception of reproductions of Canziani’s painting. Her picture is analysed in relation to the revived popularity of J.M. Barrie’s protagonist Peter Pan and the proliferation of recruitment propaganda that inundated the British public during WWI. Canziani’s image located as a site across which viewers enacted self-interpretive, interrogative relationships between self/environment and reality/the imaginary is also positioned as key for a culture that fabricated a contemporary, mythologically based, omnipotent champion to personify English notions of the heroic soldier. In addition, the androgynous appearance of Canziani’s piper disrupts socially constituted positions of gender difference in English society that, with the onset of WWI, challenged and distorted gendered boundaries.

Keywords: Estella Canziani, fairy painting, WWI, Peter Pan, conscription posters

English artist Estella Canziani’s (1887–1964) fairy painting, “Where the Little Things of the Woodland Live Unseen” (1914) was informed by her fascination with folklore and with the landscape.¹ This paper explores the relationship between the social, cultural and psychological condition of English society, inundated by a proliferation of conscription posters during the Great War of 1914–1918, and the enthusiastic reception

¹ Estella Louisa Michaela Albertina Canziani was born in London in 1887. She was the only child of painter Louisa Starr and electrical engineer Enrico Canziani. Estella Canziani studied at an art school run by Sir Arthur Cope and Erskine Nicol in Kensington before training at the Royal Academy Schools between July 1910 and July 1912. She died in London in 1964. Estella Canziani entitled her painting “Where the Little Things of the Woodland Live Unseen”; however, the painting later became known as “The Piper of Dreams”.

of reproductions of Canziani’s fantastic image. I examine Canziani’s picture of a young piper in relation to J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan* (1911) which became important symbolic representations of eternal youth during WWI. By considering the possible ways in which Canziani’s painting was understood by early twentieth-century English viewers I seek to show how interpretations of Canziani’s picture operated upon an aesthetic which directed English society’s simultaneous yet conflicting ideologies of the reality of war and death and the unconscious propensity for escape into the imaginative realms of the landscape. An examination of Canziani’s picture in the context of early twentieth-century contemporary social developments, specifically related to WWI, will help reveal how the advent of the war shaped viewers’ response to reproductions of her work.

Representations of fairies in WWI

During WWI the English public held fast to their fairy pictures, stories and myths, including J.M. Barrie’s extraordinary tales of the fantastical escapades of Peter Pan and Wendy in Never-Never Land and reproductions of Canziani’s fairy painting which were transformed by viewers into a site across which anxieties caused by the war were dissipated. The first unconventional aspect of Canziani’s work was her use of popular, contemporary fairy iconography. Fantasy had become important in the lives of many modern-day viewers who were, for example, drawn to theatrical productions of Walford Graham Robertson’s *Pinkie and the Fairies* (1909). Robertson recalled that throughout the play’s highly successful run the theatre was filled with soldiers on leave from the military training camp at Aldershot.² The men wept at the close of the second act in which the vision of Fairyland slowly faded away until only darkness and silence remained. He wrote, “Aldershot sat weeping for its lost Fairyland, and the lights went up upon the rows of bedewed shirt-fronts” (Robertson 1909: 321).³

The overwhelming response to fantasy elicited from recruits at performances of *Pinkie and the Fairies* in 1909 re-emerged in soldiers fighting in WWI. One response to the war was for soldiers to engage in displays of public bravado: boisterous and down-to-earth humour called upon in an effort to minimise the very real private terrors created by the atrocities witnessed and suffered in modern warfare. Despite the realities of death and injury caused by the war, the media often idealised soldiers and war experience and disseminated artificial images of steadfast heroism and an exciting, even pleasurable life lived in the trenches. The reality of WWI, however, was far from

² Robertson’s fairy tale involves children who prefer childhood over adulthood. As opposed to Barrie’s *Peter Pan*, however, the characters do not forego adulthood completely but prefer not to take on adult responsibilities. “We shan’t have anything to do with her. She’ll be Grown up, won’t she?” (1909: 3); “Isn’t it queer that they never have any fun? [...] We shan’t be like that when we’re grown up” (5).

³ Robertson wrote that he was amazed that so many soldiers attended the play: “Night after night the stalls looked like a parade at Aldershot. I was much puzzled by this phenomenon, and finally asked a little soldier of my acquaintance to enquire into it. ‘Do ask them why they come so often – what is it that attracts them?’ He returned to me with a most unexpected explanation – ‘They say it makes them cry’” (1931: p. 321). See also Nicola Bown, *Fairies in Nineteenth-Century Art* (2006: 171).

idyllic but much of the news from the front was monitored and censored before it reached the English public. Despite the ongoing suppression by the government and the media of the magnitude of the horrors of the war, men and women were, nevertheless, aware of the potential for tragedy as a result of the war. Consequently, both the soldiers who fought in the war and those who waited for their safe return were drawn towards an alternative, perhaps less threatening, world of fantasy provided by the fairy.⁴

Soldiers who kept reproductions of Canziani's painting and copies of Robert Graves' fairy poetry also flocked to see revivals of *Peter Pan* while on leave, at times "booking out whole blocks of seats many months in advance" (Purkiss 2000: 280).⁵ Peter Pan's control of his own destiny by choosing not to grow up is one reason that the persona of Peter Pan, re-created in Canziani's fairy painting, became so immensely popular during WWI (Hanson 1993: 18). Barrie's development of the Peter Pan character and subsequent storyline is rooted in his ability to merge the important events of his own life with fantasy. Like Canziani, Barrie drew from myriad sources for his creation. Both Canziani's and Barrie's creations embody a re-transformation and re-configuration of ideas rooted in mythology, fairy and folktale and fantasy and life experiences. By amalgamating these themes into a fantastic imaginary entity, Canziani and Barrie addressed the search of a disillusioned society for identity and meaning both on a physical and a spiritual level.⁶

Canziani's painting and the landscape

Canziani's depiction of fairies in a woodland setting is also inextricably linked with the twentieth-century English attraction to the landscape and to an ongoing fascination with other worldly entities that populated the countryside. While her depiction of a child-like figure placed in an idyllic setting evokes a timeless quality and encourages and preserves fantasies of immortality, it also suggests visual associations between eternal nature and fleeting childhood. Exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1915, Canziani's picture of a young androgynous piper seated in a wooded area scattered with patches of gold-coloured leaves, bright yellow primroses and whimsically painted

⁴ Although Canziani's painting was not necessarily made in anticipation of WWI, she had direct knowledge of the consequences of the Boer wars and wrote about the response to her mother Louisa Starr Canziani's painting, "News from the Front", which was chosen as one of the most popular of fourteen pictures exhibited at the academy in 1900 (Canziani 1939: 4). Canziani also recalled her first introduction to the effects of war while on one of her many walks through Kensington Gardens (86, 87).

⁵ Soldiers carried copies of Robert Graves' poem, "I'd Love to be a Fairy Child" (1918) with them during WWI (Purkiss 2000: 279–280).

⁶ An important aspect of Canziani's attraction to folklore and folktales was her beliefs about supernatural phenomena. Her acceptance of the existence of a spiritual world was an integral and natural part of her life. Psychical research and experiment in spiritual matters evolved exponentially during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Britain, and Canziani and her mother maintained an avid interest in the subject. Louisa Starr Canziani and her friend Lady Nicholson were among other recognised public figures that became the earliest members of the Society for Psychical Research. Canziani wrote: "[t]his subject was accepted as one of the many unlocked doors in the search for Truth, which needed experiment and study" (1939: 84, 85).

blue and white fairies appealed to the men and women embroiled in grim warfare. With over 250,000 reproductions sold in 1916, the popularity of copies of Canziani’s painting in the form of posters was instantaneous.⁷ English society’s perceived message of her image, described as an “honorary guardian angel”, served as both a talisman of protection and as an inspiration for a nation at war (Clive 1964: 41). War historians cite the slang word “Blighty” as being synonymous with the English landscape which in turn encapsulated childlike ideals of an imaginative paradise. Men as young as sixteen enlisted for service and some who survived wrote about the carnage caused by the war: “The public have never, even to this day, been told how bad it was for the men. No words could describe the horror of it all. [...] It was truly a hell on earth. Lice, rats, trench foot [...] trench mouth [...] and of course dead bodies everywhere” (Lovegrave 1997/2016). Fighting claimed the lives of thousands of young men, and reproductions of Canziani’s fairy painting provided a respite for weary, war-torn men and women.

In light of ongoing turmoil caused by the fighting, it is not surprising that soldiers who longed to return home and yet did not expect to survive, and women who were fearful that they had lost loved ones, were drawn to reproductions of Canziani’s androgynous piper, represented as safely ensconced on English soil. Fairy inspired poetry, also popular during the war, cites the slang word “Blighty” as being synonymous with “England” in the mind of the soldiers. They wrote, “[i]n this one word was gathered much of the soldier’s home-sickness and affection and war-weariness [...]. Blighty to the soldier was a sort of faerie, a paradise which he could faintly remember, a never-never land” (Brophy & Partridge 1965: 85–86). Soldiers connected the romanticised fantasy of fairyland to dreams of the English countryside and in so doing achieved some respite from the day-to-day adversity of constant warfare. Reference to “Blighty” as the soldier’s idealised version of a “lost fairyland” prompts reflection on the dreadful consequences of fighting in the trenches during WWI. Soldiers faced with the prospect of being killed or permanently disabled sometimes inflicted upon themselves what was referred to as a “blighty” wound. Some young men went as far as to commit suicide rather than face any more time in the trenches.⁸ A similar popular source of refuge was found in Barrie’s ageless, invincible hero Peter Pan who played out his antics in the magical

⁷ The Medici Society obtained reproduction rights to Canziani’s picture in 1916. See in “Reviews and Notices” (Anon. 1916: 159), and also Estella Canziani’s account (1939: 203). Correspondence from the Design Team Coordinator at the Medici Society, London, Angela Banham, 11 March 2003, stated that Philip Lee Warner and Eustace Gurney created the Medici Society as a reproduction company, in order to bring the artist’s works to the appreciation of a wider public for the lowest price commercially possible (Correspondence from the Design Team Coordinator at the Medici Society, London, Angela Banham, 11 March 2003).

⁸ See, for example, Malcolm Brown (2002: xx, xxi, xxvi). The war-time poet Siegfried Sassoon’s poem “Suicide in the Trenches” makes incidents of trench suicide painfully clear; “I knew a simple soldier boy / Who grinned at life in empty joy, / Slept soundly through the lonesome dark, / and whistled early with the lark. / In winter trenches, cowed and glum, / With crumps and lice and lack of rum, / he put a bullet through his brain. / No one spoke of him again. / You smug-faced crowds with kindling eye / Who cheer when soldier lads march by, / Sneak home and pray you’ll never know / The hell where youth and laughter go” (1919: 39).

world of Never-Never Land. The propensity to envision Peter Pan and Canziani's piper in fantastic idealised surroundings allowed viewers to identify exclusively with an effortless existence and to reflect on an inclination to suppress traumatic events and to evade the reality of war. Canziani's fairy picture offers myriad meanings that were of particular importance to the artist's contemporaries, representing a complex interwoven network of meaning that embraces harmony marred by contradiction.

Canziani and the arts

Canziani endured the misery of WWI but also developed an extraordinary ability to perceive and to create beauty, even in this hostile environment. She engaged her prolific imagination to help distance herself from the ravages of the war, recalling, for example, a moment when the scent of incense drifted toward her: “[i]ts smell and the whole scene carried me away to days spent in other lands, and England and the War for a moment became a dream” (Canziani 1939: 255). On another occasion, Canziani remembered that she would go “to a favourite wood and [sit] down on the mossy trunk of a favourite tree to watch things” (305). Canziani possessed the ability to create a protected, delightful retreat in her imagination that allowed her to transcend the horrors of the war, even if only for a moment. She used her talent for creating the appearance of a sanctuary of peace and beauty when she painted “Where the Little Things of the Woodlands Live Unseen”. Canziani's education and experiences allowed her to establish herself as a contemporary artist among her peers while she was also informed by the work of earlier artists.⁹ She did not, however, share contemporary interest in the modernist edicts of “Art for Art's sake” (Canziani 1939: 43, 44). She agreed with her artist mother Louisa Starr Canziani's rebuttal of modern painting techniques as nothing but “a subterfuge, a means to hide ignorance” (43). Canziani did not welcome the proclamations of “ultra-modernism” espoused most avidly by the art critics Roger Fry and Clive Bell (cf. Gruetzner Robins 1997; Shone 1999).¹⁰ Although many artists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were inspired by the inundation of new ideas launched on the English public, Canziani maintained the painterly yet precise representation instilled in her by her training at the Royal Academy.

⁹ Canziani was acquainted with the work of many of the most celebrated artists of the mid and late nineteenth century, including Lord Frederic Leighton (1830–1896), G.F. Watts (1817–1904), William Holman Hunt (1827–1910), a cofounder of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, John Everett Millais (1829–1896), Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836–1912) and William Powell Frith (1819–1909). Canziani's work was also informed by the artists Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898), William Morris (1834–1896) and Walter Crane (1845–1915), and she was particularly captivated by the paintings of Burne-Jones who exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery. During her training at the Royal Academy, Canziani was also acquainted with Mary Seton Watts (1849–1938), Annie Swynnerton (1844–1933), the English sculptor Countess Feodora Gleichen (1861–1922) and May Morris. The friends met at Watts's home Limmerslease on a regular basis and most of the women, including Canziani, became members of the Women's Guild of Arts (Canziani 1939: 2, 57, 70, 71, 177, 180, 205).

¹⁰ See also the quoted book by Anna Gruetzner Robins (1997: 7–12, 15–21, 64–65), and S.K. Tillyard's *The Impact of Modernism 1900–1920* (1988: 81–137, 176–213).

Canziani’s allegiance to the Arts and Crafts Movement’s aesthetic principles rooted in middle-class social and moral consciousness and its aesthetic values derived from the conviction that art should be useful and accessible to all classes matched her own convictions with regard to modernity.¹¹ Despite her support of the old-fashioned Royal Academic decrees, her unconventional social views coupled with her early association with the Pre-Raphaelites encouraged her to incorporate innovative elements into her fairy painting rather than to maintain strict adherence to the exacting artistic formulae demanded by the Academy. Canziani’s self-proclaimed delight in her ability to create beauty and truth in nature aligned her artistic production with critic John Ruskin’s declaration that art should exhibit the true and the beautiful in nature, art, morals and religion, rather than with Fry’s and Bell’s emphasis on a formalist aesthetic. Canziani maintained a style that was distinctly her own. Unlike many of her contemporaries, she did not forego the painting techniques that she had learned from artists such as Singer Sargent in order to devote herself exclusively to modernist methods. Rather, she incorporated a variety of approaches in order to obtain the results in her paintings that she wanted (Canziani 1939: 176, 177, 297–298).

Canziani’s fascination with folklore also informed her paintings and was developed during family trips taken where she “discovered the unknown part of Savoy, and the unspoilt peasants who wore costumes and [...] began to paint them”; she was inspired by a mountainous landscape that seemed “inviting and unknown [...] what proved to be a real study of folklore began” (189). Canziani’s attraction to the unknown, including supernatural phenomena, prompted her to conduct exhaustive research into folklore customs and folk art which culminated in the creation of two of her early books *Costumes, Traditions and Songs of Savoy* (1911/1912) and *Piedmont* (1913) and subsequently led to her membership of the Folk-Lore Society.¹² She painted portraits of many of the people she encountered and also captured the intricacies of the indigenous flowers and trees and the beauty of the surrounding landscape. These paintings, coupled with the legends that she collected during her research, served as inspiration for her fairy painting, “Where the Little Things of the Woodland Live Unseen”.

Formal description and provenance

Canziani’s painting was hung “prominently in the watercolour room” by Sir Frank Short at the Summer Royal Academy Exhibition in 1915 (Canziani 1939: 203). It was

¹¹ Canziani revealed her social convictions when she wrote that she hoped that the English would become “less rigid in our class feelings” (1939: 6). Canziani was a member of the Arts and Crafts Movement and, as such, would, at least, have been privy to the reactions of those who knew of and even praised Roger Fry’s Post-Impressionist exhibitions. See, for example, Tillyard’s reference to the assessment of Canziani’s friend, Walter Crane, of contemporary art (1988: 108–109). In her autobiography, Canziani wrote that her election to the Arts and Crafts Society “brought her into contact with many of our finest craftsmen whom I should not have otherwise known” (1939: 81).

¹² To see a review of Canziani’s book *Costumes, Traditions and Songs of Savoy*, see, “Reviews” in *The Studio* 54, 225 (15 December 1911): 252. A review of her book *Piedmont* is also in *The Studio* 60, 249 (15 December 1913): 249.

purchased on Private Viewing Day for the sum of £15.15s.- by Elsie Mortimer from Surrey, England (Maas: 153).¹³ Canziani's watercolour, heightened with body colour, is painted onto buff paper and measures 47 x 34.5 cm or 18 ½ x 13 ½ inches (151). It is signed with a pictogram placed in the lower left-hand corner of the work. The pictogram, a "C" encircled with a star, alludes both to Canziani and to her artist mother Louisa Starr.¹⁴ In 1916 the Medici Society acquired the right to reproduce and sell Canziani's fantasy work (Canziani 1939: 203).¹⁵ In 1994 Sotheby's put the painting up for auction and the bid requested was between £6,000 and £8,000. According to Sotheby's auction results published on 30 March 1994, the painting was purchased by the Maas Gallery for £5,750. Subsequently, the gallery held an exhibition entitled "The Stuff that Dreams Are Made of: Fairy Painting in Britain from 1842 to 1915" between 19 November 1996 and 20 December 1996. As a result of this exhibition, Canziani's picture, under the title "The Piper of Dreams", was sold to Caroline Parker for an undisclosed amount (Maas 1997: 151).¹⁶

The initial positive response of the viewer to Canziani's painting is not hard to understand. Her picture is filled with impressions of dancing flickers of light and shadow which play across a serenely private space within a sunlit forest. Canziani depicts a young androgynous figure dressed in the work clothes of, perhaps, a peasant or even a shepherd. Vibrantly blue-coloured leggings are tucked neatly within the figure's sturdily shod boots which are laced at the ankles. The tan-coloured overalls end in buckled cuffs at the knees and cover a clean white shirt carefully buttoned at the wrists. A large blue-black sombrero, encircled with a rose-coloured sash and topped with an unlikely peacock feather, shades the wearer's youthful eyes from the viewer. Canziani's representation of youth coincides with the early twentieth-century attraction to depictions of childhood that re-awakened child-like fantasies. Paintings that depicted children at play or engaged in more leisurely pastimes appealed to an adult, often overworked and anxious, middle- and upper-class English public. Susan Casteras writes that the late nineteenth and early twentieth century "heralded a golden age of childhood". She goes on to say that "[a]lthough children were often important protagonists in Victorian literature and art, adult values clearly underlie the material", and that paintings "that dealt with themes of childhood were created almost exclusively for the enjoyment and emotions of adults [...]" (Casteras 1986: 4; see also Clive 1964: 81–94). Canziani's sentimental vision seems to emphasise an innocent and playful quality embodied in the figure of a child.

¹³ Correspondence from the Royal Academy of Arts archivist Mark Pomeroy, 25 October 2002, confirmed the purchase price for Canziani's painting.

¹⁴ Estella Canziani was named after her father's mother; Louisa Starr Canziani, sometimes called "Stella", signed her paintings by placing the letter "L" within the shape of a star, and Estella Canziani continued the practice (cf. Canziani 1939: 2–3).

¹⁵ In her preface to *Round About Three Palace Green*, Canziani confirmed that the Medici Society bought copyright privileges for the reproduction of her painting.

¹⁶ The Maas Gallery could not provide any other information with regard to the sale of Canziani's painting.

Her depiction of a child-like figure placed in an idyllic landscape evokes a timeless quality that denies the passage of time and encourages and preserves fantasies of immortality. Paradoxically, however, visual associations between eternal nature and fleeting childhood are also inherent to Canziani’s painting. Michael Cohen exemplifies this contradiction when he writes “every child/land-cape in art contains at least an implied contrast between youth and age when an observer reads it or stands before it. This main contrast, ever present, leads to associated contrasts of freshness and its fading, innocence and its loss, vigorous life and inevitable death [...]” (1987: 99).¹⁷ The complex layering and often contradictory symbolism intrinsic to Canziani’s fairy painting echoes the transitory nature of life while simultaneously suggesting the possibility of infinite youth.

The figure, seated at the base of what looks like a large oak tree within a thickly wooded area, concentrates on playing a small silver pipe. The solitary soul is encircled with patterns of brown, russet and gold-coloured leaves and twigs. Pale yellow-green patches of moss carpet the roots of the old tree. The lower foreground of the image is brightened with dazzling yellow primroses and a smattering of delicate, but brilliantly coloured, purple flowers. The music which seems to reverberate throughout Canziani’s painting encourages a plethora of almost imperceptible fairies to dance and play with joy. The inclusion of benevolent woodland creatures enhances a seemingly delightful scene. To the right of the picture plane, a small russet and tan squirrel clasping a nut between its tiny paws settles beside the young piper. The animal looks up and to the left, not at the central figure as might be expected, but out beyond the confines of the pictorial space as though distracted. A red-breasted robin perched upon the upturned boot of the figure seems similarly, if momentarily, distracted, while a relatively large fairy stares, somewhat spitefully, back at the little robin.

Symbolism, folklore and mythology

Important elements in the painting which may, at first, seem arbitrary are symbolically significant. The natural surroundings depicted in Canziani’s picture seem peaceful and harmonious. According to fairyology, the forest is considered to be one of the main habitats of fairies and other supernatural entities. Wooded areas, however, also suggest hidden terrors of the unconscious and of loss of control (de Vries: 1984: 199, Brewer, 1949: 1147). Flowers serve to brighten Canziani’s painting with their obvious beauty and add to the pastoral harmony of the picture. Flora, in general, symbolises beauty, joy and innocence and simultaneously signifies transition, birth, and death (de Vries 1984: 194). Fairyologists write that primroses are believed to make the invisible visible and that to eat them is a sure way to see fairies; fairy lore also, however, claims that primroses simultaneously open the door to tragedy (cf. Froud & Lee 1978). These plants, therefore, are particularly dangerous and can even prove fatal.

¹⁷ Other relationships between children/landscape and life/death can also be found in the revised edition of Rev. E. Cobham Brewer’s *Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* (1949: 243).

Robert Herrick's verse "The Primrose" exemplifies the contradictory capacity of the meaning of primroses. "Aske me why I send to you / This Primrose [...] / The sweets of Love are mixt with tears. / Ask me why this flower do's show / So yellow-green, and sickly too? / [...] These discover / What fainting hopes are in a lover" (1956: 208).¹⁸ Furthermore, the *Oxford Dictionary* describes the aphorism "to walk along the primrose path" as related to "the pursuit of pleasure, especially with disastrous consequences" (Pearsall & Trumble 1996: 1148). Interpretations of the primrose path, then, suggest that although the course of action seems appropriate it can actually end in calamity. The red-breasted robin is also a powerful symbol of English literature and folklore. It figured prominently in Early English poetry and ballads as well as in rhymes and stories such as "Who Killed Cock Robin?".¹⁹ Folklorists report that the fairy's dislike of the robin is rooted in their fear of the red-breasted birds. One reason is that, although fairies could transform themselves into birds such as ravens or crows, no malevolent fairy could shape-shift into the form of a robin (Froud & Lee 1978: n.p.). Furthermore, Maas writes, "It was held to be very unlucky either to keep or to kill a robin-redbreast because these birds were believed to bury the bodies of people who died or were murdered in the woods" (1997: 123). Besides, according to de Vries, folklorists relate that it is "extremely unlucky to kill or harm" a redbreast (1984: 389). It was this liaison with humans that contributed to the fairy's antagonistic feelings towards the red-breasted robin. Fairy painter John Anster Fitzgerald, for example, created several paintings that depict fairies capturing, torturing or attempting to kill robins. In his picture "The Captive Robin", for example, fairies have lassoed the defenceless bird.

The robin redbreast was also considered to be sacred, especially in England. Robins were venerated as guardians of children and spirits of the dead. For example, *The Children in the Wood* (1898) related the story of how two young children left in the woods to die were found, albeit too late, by a robin redbreast. The fragment is quoted from *Brewer's Dictionary* (Brewer 1949: 243):

Then sad he sung "The Children in the wood."
 (Ah! Barbarous uncle, stained with infant blood!)
 How black berries they plucked in deserts wild,
 And fearless at the glittering falchion smiled;
 Their little corpse the robin-red breast found,
 And strewed with pious bill the leaves around.

¹⁸ English poet Robert Herrick was born in London in 1591 and died in 1674. In the preface, Martin wrote that most of the material in this collection was published in 1648, and again in A.W. Pollard in 1898. In his preface, Martin (1956) also wrote that this volume is a revised version of an earlier edition published in 1915.

¹⁹ There are two copies of *Robin Redbreast* in the WD Jordan Special Collection at Queen's University. One beautifully illustrated copy was part of "Father Tuck's Nursery Series" published in London, Paris and New York, by Publishers to Her Majesty the Queen. The book was designed at the studio in England and printed at the Fine Art works in Germany. Although there is no publishing date, a note written on the frontispiece reads, "to Maggie from Maud Xmas 1903". The second copy is a compilation of poems and rhymes chosen by Florence B. Hyett entitled, *Robin Redbreast: Poems and Rhymes* (1925). The anthology also includes other poems about Robin Redbreast by Robert Herrick, William Allingham, William Wordsworth and Laurence Alma Tadema.

The poet’s reference to the bird’s “pious bill” is rooted in Christianity’s association of the red-breasted robin with martyrdom. The red shade on the breast of the bird is traditionally linked, in Catholicism, with spilled blood and with death. Canziani’s depiction of the red-breasted robin in her fairy painting relates to inspiration, hope and courage, despite fear, and in the face of danger. This would have been especially relevant to those soldiers who fought in the trenches during WWI.

The peacock feather in Canziani’s painting can also be related to several iconological sources. The boldly blue, yellow and rose coloured feather which protrudes jauntily from the musician’s large hat effectively draws the viewer’s eye along the trail of the fairy dance that encircles the great tree, cleverly permitting the viewer to join the waltz. The dance seems pleasant and the fairies leap and twist in a gleefully wild reel. Human beings who interrupt their revels, however, should beware. Folklore warns that dancing within fairy rings leads to wasting sicknesses, and the spells caused by the dances often prove dangerous for human participants. The wild enchantment of fairy music compels humans to join the wild prancing. Once trapped, an escape is almost impossible (Froud & Lee 1978).

Moreover, in Christian tradition, peacock feathers have been symbolically associated with immortality. Christian doctrine venerated the peacock as a symbol of resurrection, and the markings on the plumes of the peacock’s tail feathers represented the all-seeing church (Sill 1975: 24, Metford 1983: 194, Hulme 1899: 57, 160, 191).²⁰ In addition, Greek mythology depicts peacock feathers as representations of the bird-god Phaoen ‘the Shiverer’ and was originally an attribute of Pan, the God of War (Cooper 1978: 127). Also in esoteric tradition, the peacock is a symbol of wholeness, because it merges together many colours within the spread of its tail feathers. The peacock demonstrates the intrinsic identity and the short-lived nature of all manifestations, since forms appear and vanish as swiftly as the peacock displays and, just as quickly, furls its tail feathers. The peacock’s historical celestial symbolism made it an enduring, appropriate representation of immortality and apotheosis and as such it became popular amongst aesthetes and designers such as William Morris and James Abbott McNeill Whistler.²¹

Canziani’s inclusion of a benevolent squirrel clasping a nut is an equally interesting iconological referent. According to de Vries, the squirrel is associated with

²⁰ James Hall wrote that “the ancient belief that its flesh never decayed the peacock became a Christian symbol of immortality and of Christ’s resurrection [...]. The peacock feather is also an attribute of Juno” (1979: 238).

²¹ Caroline Dakers described the famous “Peacock Room” designed by Whistler for Frederick Leyland in 1876–1877 (1999: 6, 108, 141–143). Luke Herrmann wrote that Whistler’s “Harmony in Blue and Gold: The Peacock Room”, “has long been recognized as a major monument of the Aesthetic Movement [...], every available space, including the doors and window shutters, was based on the eye and tail-feathers of the peacock. On the only bare wall [...] he painted a vivid and symbolic composition of two gold peacocks on the deep blue ground” (2000: 361). Estella Canziani recalled her visit to Frederic Leighton’s “beautiful house in Holland Park Road [...]. He showed me the stuffed peacock at the foot of the stairs, with its gorgeous coloured tail and throat, and also the beautiful tiles on the staircase, and the Arab Hall” (1939: 58–59).

playfulness and is also perceived as a messenger that communicates with animals that reside in “eternal enmity; both the celestial world and the underworld”. Significantly, this particular animal is known for its tenacity and courage and “fights with charm and cunning”; finally, the squirrel’s tail is linked with the Scouts of the American Revolution (1984: 438). This connection, coupled with its correlation with messengers, associates the squirrel with military service. Moreover, nuts are symbolically linked to hidden wisdom and reincarnation, and, paradoxically, within folklore tradition, also with the devil (345).

Canziani included several images in her painting that connected the work with fantastic representation, but the most obvious was the inclusion of fairies. Together with the misty ambiance of the background and the exotic peacock feather, it is the inclusion of the ethereal magical beings that specifically identifies the content of Canziani’s painting as based in the realm of the fantastic. The fairies in Canziani’s image whirl ecstatically and unfettered about the forest, sliding gleefully down the slim twig beside the figure. One impish being perches impudently within the wide brim of the piper’s hat. Canziani’s fairies are not represented as the nude feminine ideal nor do they possess the extravagantly coloured butterfly wings which are affixed to fairies in many fairy tale paintings. For example, John Simmons’s “Titania” (1866) depicts a thinly veiled nude woman bedecked with sensuously exotic butterfly wings and Thomas Maybank’s picture “The Court of Faerie” (1906) presents luminous diaphanous wings which serve as the focal point of the painting. Celia Haddon writes that “Victorian paintings often show faeries with butterfly wings and some faeries in literature seem to have these. But the older stories make it clear that faeries can whirl in the air without them” (1998: 30). Canziani’s fairies are more representative of those described in older versions of stories than those of contemporary, Victorian re-presentations. That Canziani’s fairies did not mirror those of her contemporaries is made clear in her autobiography. Canziani was amused when she wrote about one soldier’s assessment of the painting, “Yuss, she’s got them primroses all right and that there wood, but don’t you think she’s made them gnats rather large?” (1939: 204). Although Canziani’s fairies appear to possess wings of a sort, they are amalgamated into the being rather than presented as a focal point in the painting. Beyond the symbolic and representational elements included in Canziani’s painting, there are paradoxical components of the work which become increasingly clear upon closer inspection. For example, a tiny bright red devil darts in front of the squirrel heading towards the piper.²² Canziani’s representation of a fairy figure peers out towards the viewer, its expression not altogether benign. Moreover,

²² It is difficult to pinpoint the significance of the red goblin type figure. Estella Canziani, in her book *Piedmont*, refers to the Italian peasant’s belief that beings referred to interchangeably as “sourcies”, “witches” or “fairies” can shape-shift at will, and that the Devil who is also capable of such deception is usually dressed in red (1913: 48, 49 and 57). However, although the colour may refer to the Devil, the figure does not possess typical physical characteristics such as hooves or horns which most typify references to Satan. Edain McCoy in *Faery Folk* describes a fairy indigenous to Italy which is called the Folletti, and which is said to “don red clothes and live in hollow oak trees” (1994: 223). Another possibility is that Canziani depicted the Greek mythological sun god, Dionysus (Bacchus); see Ad de Vries, *Dictionary of Symbols* (1984: 382).

myriad thematic dichotomies also filter throughout Canziani’s fairy tale painting. Her picture reveals both goodness and evil; paradox and contradiction, but with subtlety.

Canziani’s enigmatic approach might go unnoticed when compared with more obvious allusions to malevolence depicted by her contemporaries and predecessors. For example, literary scholar Carole Silver (1999) reveals examples of blatant sadism in her study of unnatural cruelties depicted in nineteenth-century fairy paintings. She specifically highlights Sir Joseph Noel Paton’s “The Quarrel of Oberon and Titania” (1849), John Anster Fitzgerald’s “Cock Robin Defending his Nest” (c. 1858–68) and Richard Doyle’s “Triumphal March of the Elf-King”, an illustration in *In Fairyland: A Series of Pictures from the Elf-World* (Allingham & Doyle 1870). Malicious mistreatment of animals and insects by fairies in each of these paintings is clear. For example, the margins of Paton’s painting are filled with scenes of violence: five fairies bully and poke at a frightened owl, a small creature is tortured by fairies and a small frog is beaten to death. In Fitzgerald’s picture a group of fairies are about to kill a robin, or, at the very least, steal its eggs. Fairy aggression in Fitzgerald’s *Cock Robin Defending his Nest* is unmistakable, as male and female fairies alike are armed with “long lances made of thorns, and a gargoyle-like goblin has already stolen one of the helpless bird’s eggs” (Silver 1999: 160–161). Similarly, Doyle’s painting depicts fairies mistreating, torturing and sometimes killing defenceless creatures that live in the environment alongside the fairy population (Silver 1999: 160–161). In contrast to this overt cruelty, there is no direct display of violence in Canziani’s picture – only a subtle allusion to the possibility of shattered peace. Rather than portray explicit hostility in her picture, Canziani chose to present a seemingly idyllic scene in order not to disrupt a sense of peace experienced by the viewer. Therefore, the pleasant scene encourages optimism. Nevertheless, although Canziani’s painting embodies calmness, solidarity, physicality and harmony, it also depicts immutability, the unknown, and the chaotic.

Canziani implemented her knowledge of drawing and colour application gleaned from her training at the Royal Academy Schools in order to create the impression of an implicit tranquillity in her painting.²³ The central figure, for example, is constructed by utilising layers of interconnected pyramidal and triangular shapes that help to create the illusion of a solidly enclosed and safe haven. The line which extends from the tip of the peacock feather to the brim of the figure’s sombrero creates the shape of a wholesome solid pyramid. The shape of the pyramid, as well as of the triangle, has been historically associated with both the Holy Family and the Trinity in Catholicism, and

²³ In *Round About Three Palace Green*, Canziani makes clear her attention to detail and referred to her diligence in learning the skills of drawing and painting throughout her autobiography. She included an Appendix 1, entitled “Methods of Painting – A Technical Chapter”, which chronicled much of the technical methodologies taught at the Royal Academy Schools. She wrote, “I made daily notes of the remarks made by the visitors who came to the R.A. Schools, [...] the one aim of every visitor was: (1) fine drawing and line; (2) composition; and (3) beautiful luminous colour” (1939: 373–392).

also with stability.²⁴ The triangle also represents both latent strength and a harmonious conjunction of opposites. Furthermore, Canziani's scrupulously modelled figure enhances the solid, three-dimensional quality of the centre of the picture.

Canziani applied this basic triangular shape repeatedly and effectively throughout the central forms of both the figure and the tree trunk. In so doing, she constructed and contained the figure in a securely controlled environment. For example, the shape of the figure's hat by itself reflects the shape of a pyramid. The top of the hat displays a black indentation which serves as a pivotal point for the creation of a pyramid whose base ends both at the top of the shoulders and across the bottom of the seated figure. Furthermore, the positioning of the figure's hands clasped about the pipe creates a pyramidal shape while the crossed boots of the figure form yet another triangular shape. Finally, the entire body of the figure repeats the shape of a pyramid which is itself contained within a large triangular space shaped by the roots of the tree. However, although initially the figure appears to depict an ordinary peasant child, the peacock feather worn in the large blue-black sombrero is associated with the exotic and the magical. Besides, the fairies that surround both the figure and the tree trunk are a clear indication that the viewer is witness to something other than a purely natural phenomenon. The viewer, therefore, is drawn into a world of enchantment and unpredictability. Simultaneously, however, Canziani preserves the illusion of a reliable foundation secured within the confines of a natural predictable world by applying fundamental drawing skills.

The interior area is uncluttered and the solid, closed, self-contained, androgynous figure is unwaveringly settled – seemingly focused only on the creation of music. Perhaps the figure is unaware of the surrounding activity. However, an equally valid interpretation is that she/he is the deliberate cause of the mounting activity. Is it possible that Canziani's figure is not human, but fairy? Folklorist Robert Kirk wrote in the 17th century about the elusiveness of fairy and their ability to shape-shift: “[they are] of a middle nature betwixt man and angel [...] [they have] light changeable [b]odies (lyke those called astral)” (as quoted in Froud & Lee 1978: no page). Fairyologist Brian Froud states that “[t]he importance of the faerie shape-changing ability cannot be over-emphasized. It affects every aspect of faerie life” (1978: no page). Fairies are described in fairy lore as master shape-shifters and therefore have the ability to assume almost any guise and change their appearance.

Canziani invites the viewer into the painting by depicting a tranquil and inviting setting. There is, however, a remote distance inherent in the figure within the enclosed space. His/her large hat is pulled down, effectively hiding her/his eyes from the viewer, implying secrecy. The piper is completely immersed in her/his music. Fairies are said to

²⁴ See Ad de Vries, *Dictionary of Symbols* (1984: 376). Interestingly, the pyramid is also symbolic of androgyny. I have referred to the figure in Canziani's painting as possessing androgynous characteristics; the *Dictionary of Symbols* helps to support my conjecture. The description typifies symbolic characteristics of androgyny as occurring in nature and as having the productive powers of nature (473). Most significantly for my paper, however, the dictionary states that “fertility Gods and heroes often go through a ‘female’ stage and exemplifies Dionysus or Bacchus as one of those Deities” (13).

have the ability to create beautiful yet plaintive melodies that induce wild, unpredictable behaviour in both humans and non-humans. Fairy music also, however, possesses a deadly charm for mortal ears and has the power to lull the listener into a fatal sleep (Froud & Lee 1978: no page). Therefore, Canziani’s painting, though inviting from one perspective, is not necessarily welcoming from another.

When compared with the solid three dimensional quality of the centre of Canziani’s picture, the periphery is ambiguous, chaotic, fragmented, transitional, and, in places, seems two dimensional. The haze which cloaks the forest in the background is softly muted and suggests a secretive place; a liminal, in-between state of being or space. Further, the softly muted shades of colour in the periphery of the picture are subtle compared with the more vibrant, solidly painted interior of the work. The confusion of twigs and branches coupled with the spiralling configuration of the ethereal dancing fairies suggests activity, even turmoil. At the same time, however, an overall unnatural stillness permeates the scene. Clarity is present, yet, simultaneously, so is an amorphous confusion. Canziani’s painting is deceptively harmonious. The forest, filled with the unknown, stretches farther than the eye can see, beyond even the comprehension of physicality. What cannot be seen can be perceived as simultaneously harmless and dangerous. The surrounding area’s hazy atmosphere portrays a disruptive activity in the forest. Moreover, the entire peripheral pictorial space is filled with objects, leaving no resting place for the viewer’s eye. The area is agitated, yet, simultaneously, eerily still. There is an inherent lack of clarity and no resolution. The initially perceived serenity is broken by the confusion of twigs, the inability to see into the distance and the frenzied dance of the blue and white clad ethereal beings.

Although the figure is both self-contained and enclosed in a relatively tranquil space and the scene presents a feeling of composure and strength, there is also a perplexing quality with regard to the agency of the figure. The ambiguity of the positioning of the androgynous musician allows the viewer an imaginary space within which to draw their own conclusions. Canziani’s painting encourages interrogative inquiry from the viewer. For example, is the protagonist unaware of the surrounding activity and a potential victim of it? Or is the figure an active agent within the pictorial space? The painted form displays characteristics considered by early twentieth-century English society to be inherent to the peasantry. Consequently, the figure is perceived as having a close affiliation with nature.²⁵ But, is the figure cognisant of the unseen? Or is the figure oblivious to the possible dangers of the unknown? The ambiguity of Canziani’s painting encourages not only passive contemplation from its audience but also active speculation.

Canziani created a two-point linear perspective by making the diagonal lines which depict the roots of the tree appear to converge into two separate points located in

²⁵ One example of the ways in which peasant life was characterised is exemplified by painted, idyllic scenes that depicted romanticised peasant life, often within a natural setting; for example, John Brett’s *The Stonebreaker* (1858), Myles Birket Foster’s *The Milkmaid* (1860) or Sir George Clausen’s *The Girl at the Gate* (1889) (cf. Herrmann 2000: 271, 344, 380).

the centre of the painting. The two bottom lines that make up the base of the tree root converge at the point where the hands of the figure are clasped around the instrument, while the two top lines that create the impression of the roots of the tree converge at the indentation point of the figure's dark hat. While Canziani's implementation of strong lines of perspective draw the viewer's eye to the figure, there is also, however, another focal point. The vibrant colour and strong line used to delineate the legs of the figure and the vertical line of the figure's pipe draw the eye towards the figure's crossed ankles which create a pivotal central axis. The viewer is guided skilfully towards the robin perched on top of the figure's upturned boot. The importance of the robin is made clear in its meticulous execution and use of warm inviting browns and bright reds. The image of the piper, although seemingly amicable, is painted with cool colours which serve, paradoxically, to alienate the viewer. For example, the contrast of the white sleeved shirt adjacent to the stark blue trousers defies the supposed composure of the central figure. Besides, Canziani created the figure with hard rather than soft edges and rigid rather than muted lines that further isolate the central character from the viewer. Incongruously, Canziani seems to have placed the figure in nature but not within it; oddly separate and alone, but yet simultaneously protected and contained. Finally, Canziani contrasted the clear central lighting with the unfocused, atmospheric, ambiguous background and produced an eerie, magical other-worldly quality.

In addition, specific colours in Canziani's picture are imbued with both secular magic and religious symbolic reference. The colour red, for instance, relates to anger, revenge, fairies and war, but also to purification, creativeness and resurrection. For Christians, red is associated with blood, sin and sacrifice and is also important in services which relate to the Passion of Christ and to the chasuble for the Apostles and Martyrs (Sill 1975: 29, de Vries 1984: 382–384, Brewer 1949: 908–910).²⁶ Moreover, according to fairyology, the colour red is associated with magic and is often worn by fairies (Froud & Lee 1978). Canziani's choice of white for the piper's shirt is related to the unconscious, and folklore links white to adventure and magic, particularly within the forest, as well as peace and redemption. Interestingly, folklore also associates the colour white with a "debased form and cowardice"; during WWI, for instance, men who refused to fight were often given a white feather which labelled them cowardly (de Vries 1984: 499). In a religious context, white is important because Christ was clothed in white after the Resurrection. White, therefore, is associated with adventure, enchantment, spirituality and the perfection of God but also with cowardice and debauchery (Sill 1975: 30). Finally, the deep blue shade that Canziani used for the figure's stockings is linked with spirituality and with heaven because it is the colour used to depict the Blessed Mother's robes (29, see also Brewer 1949: 149). Moreover, within the folklore tradition, the colour blue symbolises innocence and eternal youth but is also associated with coldness, cruelty and drunkenness (de Vries 1984: 54).²⁷

²⁶ For a detailed explanation of the symbolic significance of the colour white, see *Brewer's Dictionary* (Brewer 1949: 1135–1137).

²⁷ The reference to drinking can also be associated with the Greek mythological figure Bacchus.

The large tree trunk in Canziani's painting commands a pivotal, central positioning in the pictorial space. Froud writes about the importance of trees in fairyology: "[t]rees most favoured by the faeries are the Blackthorn, Hazel, Alder, Elder and Oak" (Froud & Lee 1978: no page). In Christian mythology, the tree is associated with eternal life, with death, with sacrifice and redemption: the branches reach to heaven, the roots to hell, and these two non-human realms are linked by the trunk, to the middle, earthly, human world (Yeoman 1998: 113). Canziani's image of a great tree trunk both supports and helps to contain the figure. The trunk also creates a solid axis for the painting that instils an illusion of balance within the picture plane. Other pictorial devices, however, such as the twigs strewn disparately about the peripheral of the image, serve conversely to reveal an understated but undeniable undercurrent of unease. Another example of the latent iniquity inherent to Canziani's painting can be seen in the moss that covers portions of the roots of the tree, as moss is associated not only with fairies but also with age and finally with death. Moreover, fairy lore postulates that phantoms and strange creatures haunt trees frequented by fairies and that those trees can become especially dangerous if twisted together (Froud & Lee 1978). Although initially the great trunk in Canziani's painting appears to offer a sense of comfort and solidity, one lone branch coils its way menacingly around its circumference.

Interestingly, Canziani chose to crop the painting so that the tree is cut off at the mid-way point which effectively encourages the viewer to imagine what might lie beyond the confines of the frame. Canziani leads the viewer to speculate as to what has caught the notice of the animals. Their attention is captivated by a phenomenon seemingly unnoticed but paradoxically, perhaps deliberately, created by the ambiguous piping figure. Moreover, the cropped picture alludes to the potential for movement and change, conjuring a space filled with momentary effects and the potential for unlimited yet indecipherable space. The tree trunk supports the leaning figure and serves to anchor the painting by separating the picture plane evenly into quarters that provide a sense of stability and solid corporeality. The painting seems focused on the natural physicality of the earth; however, the vertical line of the tree trunk repeatedly draws the viewer's eye upwards. This perspective is reinforced by the vertical rather than horizontal position of the canvas itself. Canziani's selection of a vertically positioned canvas draws attention to the spiritual, mysterious, heavenly and unknowable, characteristics intrinsic to the subject of fantasy. Canziani, albeit subtly, shakes the viewer's initial perception that all is right within this conceptual world. The tree being cut off at mid-trunk implies either the continuation of support, safety and security or the removal of it.

Canziani's use of symbolism connected to folklore and to religion was not lost on early twentieth-century viewers. On the contrary, author Mary Clive, for instance, wrote that, "though not strictly speaking a religious picture", Canziani's painting "hung over many a child's bed as a sort of honorary guardian angel" (1964: 41). Furthermore, the phenomenal sale of the reproductions of Canziani's fairy picture clearly indicates that it elicited a similar positive psychological and emotional effect on many of the young men involved in WWI. Despite repeated contradictions between positive and

negative consequences, Canziani's picture successfully presented both an impression of protected peace and a sense of the imaginary and the fantastic to the English viewer.

Canziani chose the background, the model, and even the specific type of boot that she wanted included in her work.²⁸ Furthermore, she included aspects such as the red-breasted robin, the peacock feather and the squirrel which suggests that she was inspired by images and ideas gleaned from a variety of sources. Canziani also utilised a precise methodological approach to the artistic construction of her painting. Despite an intrinsic initial impression of a calm serenity, strength, joy and self-containment, Canziani's painting simultaneously embodies feelings of loneliness, barrenness and a possible allusion to human ignorance. Moreover, a latent but dangerous malevolence is integral to her image. Although covertly embedded, Canziani communicates the potential for disruption and even hostility. Even though her painting suggests a unified whole and calm security, on closer inspection it implies a far more intricately conceived composition of oppositions.

Representations of fairies and WWI

Fairy plays produced at the turn of the twentieth century, which later audiences often assume were created exclusively for the enjoyment of children, were actually often frequented by adults. As mentioned above, WWI soldiers who purchased reproductions of Canziani's painting often visited revivals of *Peter Pan* while on leave. Barrie's representation of Peter Pan and Wendy's adventures in the magical space of Never-Never Land became an important symbolic representation of eternal youth during WWI, and early twentieth-century English society connected the piper in Canziani's fairy-filled idyllic landscape to the notion of an everlasting childhood enacted by *Peter Pan*. Barrie's play was first presented on stage in 1904, only two years after the end of the Boer War in 1902 and he expanded and embellished his stories continuously by synthesising his life experiences and incorporating them into his fantastic tales. Consequently, his theatrical production enacted ideals of patriotism and heroism, as well as the inevitable disastrous effects of war, all played out in the other-worldly realm of the fantastic landscape.

Soldiers would have had access to tales written during war time that connected fairies with young fighting men such as those produced by writer Robert Graves whose

²⁸ Jeremy Maas writes that Canziani created her painting in the spring of 1914, while she was visiting classicist Gilbert Murray. He also wrote that the model for the piper was Murray's son Basil (Maas 1997: 153). Canziani made specific choices with respect to the content of her painting. She wrote, for instance, "The back ground for the 'Piper' was painted in the woods near my cottage. My father [...] fell asleep, leaning against a tree while I painted [...] a tree and primroses" (1939: 205). When Canziani described how interest in her painting elicited notice from people from all walks of life, she also related her practice of making studies for her painting: "they wished to say how interested they were in catching glimpses of my painting in the garden and making studies for the 'Piper' boy" (206). According to Canziani, it was "[t]he son of my old model friend, Luigi de Luca, who...sat for my 'Piper'" (ibid.), and not only Murray's son. Canziani, while "staying with the Murrays [...] painting my 'Piper of Dreams' picture" noticed that "Basil Murray [...] had nice thick boots, and thus [...] he sat for the feet and boots in the 'Piper of Dreams'" (Canziani 1939: 182, cf. Maas 1997: 153).

collection *Fairies and Fusiliers* (1917) offers a complex combination of realist and escapist literature. Graves wrote about his dreadful experiences of the war in poems such as “A Dead Boche” (45) and “The Next War” (63), while simultaneously he attempted to find solace in fantasy with fairy poetry such as “I’d Love to Be a Fairy’s Child” (62).²⁹ Graves’ twofold response to war is similar to that of soldiers who publicly faced the ugliness of war and the possibility of death but who consoled themselves with fairy stage performances and prints of Canziani’s “Where the Little Things of the Woodland Live Unseen”. Historian Nicola Bown’s erudite summation of the experience of those who fought in WWI is insightful. She wrote (2006: 187):

Being a grown-up man in war-time means renouncing childhood forever; those who returned bore witness to the gulf the experience of war opened up between them and their past. It is not surprising, then, that marooned in the present, they took to dreaming of, and weeping for, the lost world of the fairies.

The diversion of fairyland was also important for those who remained at home, forced to wait for any news about their loved ones.

Fairy stories and images also provided an escape for an English public that was inundated with newspapers, posters and other propaganda that promoted the patriotic credos of Honour, Glory and England which were actively instilled not only in men but also in women. They created a “generation of innocent young men [and women], their heads full of high abstractions” who went off to war to make the world safe for democracy (Hynes 1990: xii, cf. Booth 1996: 6). One important task of the newly designed propaganda apparatus was to maintain a high level of morale and enthusiasm for the war effort, despite mounting evidence of the escalating severity of casualties suffered. For example, in 1914 enthusiasm was high and there was no shortage of volunteers but, as it became clear that the fatalities of war were enormous, voluntary enlistment naturally declined. In an effort to incite and to sustain patriotic obligation, extravagant recruiting campaigns were organised using posters that were carefully designed to elicit unconditional support for the war and they targeted specific audiences.

Some of the earliest war posters were directed at men and stated simply that the country needed soldiers. One example is the poster, “The Only Road for an Englishman”, which depicts long lines of eager men marching off to war. Later, when zeal for the war effort began to wane, posters assumed a more aggressive tone and “Women of Britain Say ‘GO!’” was aimed at women while “Daddy, what did YOU do in the Great War?” exploited the appeal of women and the innocence of children, and served simultaneously to encourage women to pressure or to shame men into complying (Sanders & Taylor

²⁹ Robert Graves’ “A Dead Boche” is a gruesome description of the war. He wrote in part, “To you who’d read my songs of War / And only hear of blood and fame [...] / War’s Hell! [...] propped up against a tree / In a great mess of things unclean, / Sat a dead Boche [...]” (1917: 45). “The Next War” p. 63 describes young boys who play at being soldiers without realising that one day they might actually be forced to “serve your Army and your King, / Prepared to starve and sweat and die [...]” (1917: 63). Conversely, Graves’ *I’d Love to Be a Fairy’s Child*, p. 62 is a light fantasy about the freedom of fairies (1917: 62). See, also, Bown, *Fairies in Nineteenth-Century Art* (2006: 186).

1982: 102–103).³⁰ The government and the media combined their efforts to present the illusion of a patriotic war steeped in the rhetoric of undaunted bravery. Newspapers displayed pictures that portrayed clean, well-fed soldiers who playfully hunted cartoon-like rats in the trenches while calmly awaiting the “enemy” (Booth 1996: 10). Although technical innovations had made images of the war available to the British civilian population, the government forbade the use and dissemination of photographs of corpses or scenes of actual combat. Images were romanticised and violence or any sense of actual death was elided (22).

In the following letter dated 21 November 1916, for example, a British officer expressed his contempt of the war press and the propaganda disseminated by the government (as quoted in Gordon Grant 1930: 175–176):

You have seen the papers lately, I suppose, and it is not for me to start describing places and actions after you have read all our Press had to say about it – only, you see, those newspaper chaps are catering for a very large public – and one has to be careful, and things have to be toned down to a nice, quiet hue that will not spoil the Brown-Smiths’ breakfast appetite. Yes, the ghastly, the horrible, maddeningly horrible, scenes are left out.

War historian Allyson Booth elaborated on the effects of the contradiction between the intangible, duplicitous, yet innate philosophy that advocated the rhetoric of honour, courage and country initially espoused by the soldiers and their families, and the tangible reality of the brutality, suffering and death caused by the war (Booth 1996: 21):

The extremely restricted space within which trench warfare was fought simultaneously ensured that Great War soldiers would live with the corpses of their friends and that British civilians would not see dead soldiers. Soldiers buried their dead and then encountered them again [...] but British policy dictated that the civilian bereaved would never have anything to bury. Soldiers inhabited a world of corpses; British civilians experienced the death of their soldiers as corpselessness.

Conclusion

Powerful ideologies that encouraged women to support the war, and, consequently, the brutality of war, did not however provide similar access to information about the atrocious realities of the war. Consequently, men experienced anger toward women’s so-called ignorance while women harboured resentment towards men for excluding them from active engagement with events in the war based on their gender. The

³⁰ The Parliamentary Recruiting Centre “organized more than 800 meetings and issued over four million leaflets throughout the country” during the initial recruitment drive (Sanders & Taylor 1982: 103). During the spring of 1915, however, a policy of “aggressive open-air propaganda” was conducted which included military band led processions through the streets (*ibid.*). But the most popular form of “constant direct appeal was the poster” which was “displayed in every available place from shop windows to country gate posts, from taxi cabs to trams and railway carriages”. In May 1916, the PRC’s publications sub-department calculated that it had printed nearly 12.5 million copies of 164 different posters [...] in addition, 450,000 copies of 10 different types of display card (104). See, also, *The First World War in Posters*, edited by Joseph Darracott (1974).

ambiguity embodied in Canziani's serene child-like androgynous figure resting in a seemingly delightful forest setting and in Barrie's creation of a fantastic Never-Never Land in which young men never really die provided a site across which both men and women could negotiate responses to deeply ingrained yet conflicting sensibilities. The patriotism and self-sacrifice enacted in Barrie's fantastic tale of Peter Pan and Wendy's experiences in Never-Never Land do not merely reflect innate feelings of innocence but also reiterations of socially constructed and deeply embedded doctrines. Barrie re-created the violence of war and its effect on the "soldiers" who acted as both the perpetrators and the victims of battle in his fairy tale. Barrie's character, for example, is cursed/blessed with an inability to remember events in his life. Pan's lack of compassion for his victims is disturbing but, for many soldiers who survived the trenches of WWI, the ability to forget and to dream was a necessary component of survival and provided access to some form of future recovery.

In addition, Barrie's Pan demonstrates numerous characteristics of the heroic soldier. For instance, Peter Pan's resolve to rescue Wendy and "the boys" from Captain Hook necessitates his becoming both fearless and heroic. Mythologically inspired "war heroes", such as Barrie's Peter Pan, attain the glory of success without suffering injury or death because of their intrinsic immortality and omnipotence. Soldiers, often little more than children themselves, who owned reproductions of Canziani's fairy painting and who looked forward to watching theatrical productions of Barrie's fantastic epic, would have found solace in these fantasies that offered the transcendence of death and the attainment of heroism and everlasting life. Although viewers may have found comfort and pleasure in looking at reproductions of Canziani's fairy painting, the picture embodies not only benevolence but also the potential for malevolence, as does Barrie's fantastic tale. Correlations can be made between the mothers portrayed in Barrie's many adaptations of his fairy tale and the mothers of WWI. Peter Pan's pseudo mother(s) continually abandon their son out of necessity, when Wendy grows up, for example; or out of ignorance, when he is replaced by another boy in Barrie's *The Little White Bird*. Recruiting posters produced during WWI encouraged women to pressure men into joining the armed forces and to expect them to fulfil early twentieth-century ideologies of heroism. Barrie details incidents of ruthless murder throughout his story, and Peter Pan's alter ego, Wendy, in her obligatory role as mother, admonishes her "sons" to die like English gentlemen (Barrie 1911: 255):

"Are they to die?" asked Wendy, with a look of such frightful contempt that [Hook] nearly fainted. "They are," he snarled. "Silence all," he called gloatingly, "for a mother's last words to her children." At this moment Wendy was grand. "These are my last words, dear boys," she said firmly. "I feel that I have a message to you from your real mothers, and it is this: We hope our sons will die like English gentlemen".

Barrie could not have foreseen that two years following the publication of his book, *Peter Pan and Wendy* (1911), mothers would feel compelled to insist that their sons demonstrate their patriotism by fighting in WWI (Caesar 1993: 5). Mothers, wives and sisters undoubtedly bemoaned the part they had played in the demise of their loved

ones during and long after the war. The androgynous appearance of Canziani's piper surrounded by an idyllic landscape and Barrie's protagonists Peter Pan and Wendy in the dream world of Never-Never Land embody conceptual ideologies in which men and women are both intimately connected and infinitely separated and are associated with men's and women's similar yet different experiences of WWI. In addition, the location of motherhood as potentially destructive is associated with the conflict between men's and women's activities and experiences of the war.

Both women and men, however, were uninformed and at times misled as to the actual magnitude of the atrocities enacted during the war. Barrie's character's control of his own destiny by choosing not to grow up is one reason that the persona of Peter Pan, re-created in Canziani's fairy painting "Where the Little Things of the Woodland Live Unseen", became so immensely popular during WWI. Sir George Frampton's re-creation of the heroic and ultimately indestructible Peter Pan stands today in the idyllic setting of London's Kensington Gardens in the place where Peter Pan made his first appearance in Barrie's original conception of his fairy story, and the delightful sculpture is conceived as a fitting memorial to those young men who fought and died in the Great War. Canziani drew from myriad sources for her creation and her re-conception embodies a re-transformation and re-configuration of ideas rooted in childhood, the English landscape, fairy and folktale, and fantasy and life experiences. By amalgamating these themes into a fantastic imaginary entity, Canziani addressed the search of a disillusioned English society for identity and meaning.

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Vizije Britanije: rat, zamišljaji i nadzemaljski prostori

Vilinska slika britanske umjetnice “Where the Little Things of the Woodland Live Unseen” [Gdje malena šumska stvorenja žive neviđeno] iz 1914. godine nastala je pod utjecajem slikarične fascinacije duhovnošću, folklorom i krajolikom. Ovaj rad istražuje veze između sociokulturnih i psiholoških preokupacija britanskoga društva za vrijeme Velikoga rata (1914. – 1918.) te entuzijastičnoga prijema navedene vilinske slike. Slika se analizira u kontekstu pojačane popularnosti Barriejeva junaka Petra Pana i vojne propagande (posebno novačenja) koja je preplavila britansku javnost tijekom Prvoga svjetskoga rata. Shvaćena kao prostor u kojem gledatelji mogu uprizoriti autointerpretativne, propitkivanju podložne poveznice između sebe i okoline, stvarnosti i mašte, vilinska slika Estelle Canziani shvaća se i kao ključ za razumijevanje kulture koja je stvorila suvremenoga svemoćnoga junaka, utemeljenoga u mitologiji, da bi utjelovio englesko poimanje junačkoga vojnika. Osim toga, androgina pojava frulaša na analiziranoj slici remeti društveno konstituirane rodne razlike u engleskom društvu, koje je, početkom Prvoga svjetskoga rata, dovelo u pitanje rodno određene granice.

Ključne riječi: Estella Canziani, vilinsko slikarstvo, Prvi svjetski rat, Petar Pan, regrutacijski plakati

Visionen von Britannien: Feen, Krieg und außerirdische Sphären

Der Ursprung des Feenbildes der britischen Künstlerin Estella Canziani “Where the Little Things of the Woodland Live Unseen” [Wo kleine Waldwesen unsichtbar leben] aus dem Jahre 1914 liegt in der Faszination der Autorin für die Folklore und das Landschaftsbild. Im Beitrag werden die Zusammenhänge zwischen den die britische Gesellschaft während

des Ersten Weltkrieges prägenden soziokulturellen und psychologischen Voraussetzungen und der enthusiastischen Aufnahme des vorher genannten Bildes erforscht. Das Bild wird im Rahmen der wachsenden Popularität von Barries Peter-Pan-Gestalt und der immer größeren Profilierung der Militärpropaganda – insbesondere in Bezug auf die Rekrutierung von neuen Soldaten – analysiert, welche die britische Öffentlichkeit im Ersten Weltkrieg überschwemmt hat. Canzianis Feenbild kann nicht nur als Raum verstanden werden, worin dessen Betrachter selbstdeutende und hinterfragende Beziehungen zwischen sich selbst und der Umgebung sowie zwischen der Wirklichkeit und der Einbildungskraft, inszenieren konnten, sondern auch als Schlüssel für das Verständnis der Kultur, in welcher der zeitgenössische, in der Mythologie begründete allmächtige Held als Verkörperung des Heldenmuts des englischen Soldaten fungiert. Darüber hinaus hat die androgyne Erscheinung von Canzianis Pfeifer auf die sozial konstruierten Geschlechterunterschiede in der englischen Gesellschaft, die zu Beginn des Ersten Weltkrieges diese Unterschiede in Frage stellte, eine zersetzende Wirkung ausgeübt.

Schlüsselwörter: Erster Weltkrieg, Estella Canziani, Feenbilder, Peter Pan, Rekrutierungsplakate