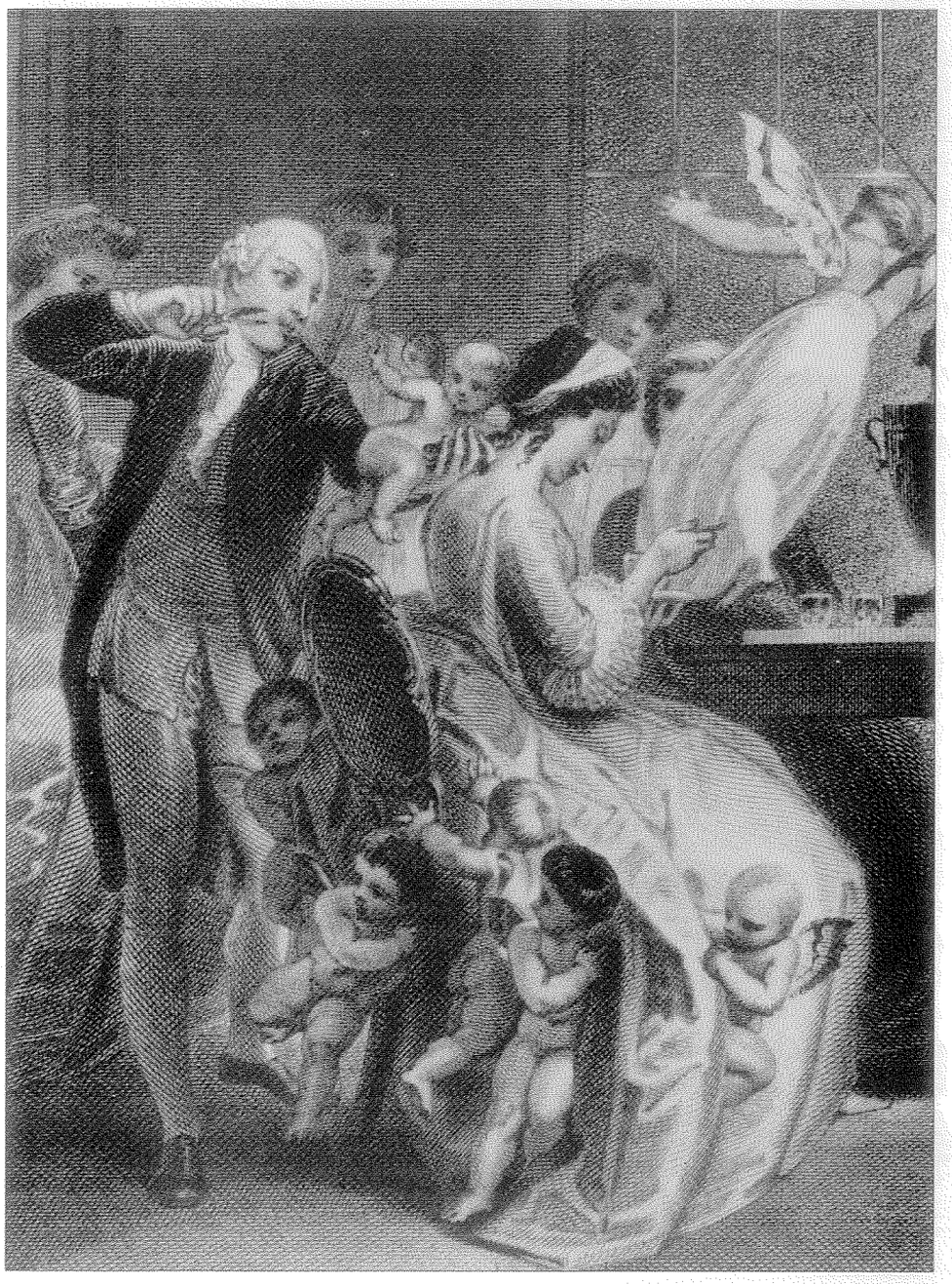


Fig.7 Thomas Stothard, Illustration to Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*, Du Roveray edition, 1798

STELLA BEDDOE

FAIRY WRITING AND WRITERS

FAIRIES have always eluded capture, in fact and in fiction. The time of the fairies was already set in the distant past as early as the 14th century, as Chaucer's Wife of Bath explains in *The Canterbury Tales*:

> *In th'olde dayes of Kyng Arthour ...*
> *Al was this land fulfild 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 ...*

They are described as an older race which had taken to the hills (specifically the Celtic heartlands of the British Isles) or had fled the country. Bishop Corbet, in the *Fairies Farewel* (1647), suggests that they '... were of the old profession ...' (i.e. Catholics), who had fled the country on the advent of the new Puritans, a view echoed much later by Kipling in *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906) as the explanation for 'The Dymchurch Flit'. John Aubrey, one of the earliest of the antiquarian folklorists, is nearer the mark, however, when he notes with shrewd insight in *Remaines of Gentilisme and Judaisme* (1686), which chronicles popular beliefs in England at the time of the Civil War: '... 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 frighted away Robin-goodfellow and the Fayries.'

Medieval French prose romances, such as the 15th-century *Huon of Bordeaux*, mark the first appearance in literature of Oberon, King of the Fairies. He is described in Lord Berners's translation of 1534 as 'of heyght but of iii fote and crokyd shulderyd, but yet he hath an aungelyke vysage ...', an early mention both of diminutive stature (although Gervase of Tilbury's *Otia Imperialia*, completed in 1211, mentions Portunes, the first of the diminutive fairies, only half an inch tall) and of its cause: the ill wishes of an offended fairy at his birth. Oberon's name derives, however, from the French translation of Alberic, the dwarf of Teutonic legend, so he was probably always small.

Shakespeare is known to have used *Huon of Bordeaux* as a source for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The *Dream*, Mercutio's Queen Mab speech from *Romeo and Juliet* (both among his earliest works, dating from the mid-1590s) and *The Tempest*, probably his last play, of around 1610, made use of most of the earlier fairy literature and contemporary folkloric beliefs and provided an endless source of inspiration for the writers and artists who followed. Thomas De Quincey wrote of the *Dream* in his 'Essay on Shakespeare' in the seventh edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1838–9): '... in no other exhibition of this dreamy population of the moonlight forests and forest lawns are the circumstancial proprieties of fairy life so exquisitely imagined, sustained or expressed ...'. In 1845 J.O. Halliwell-Phillipps (1820–1889), the literary folklorist, devoted an entire volume to *Illustrations of the Fairy Mythology of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'*.

Mercutio describes Mab, the fairies' midwife, as small and delicate as an insect, coming by night to inspire human dreams:

> *In shape no bigger than an agate-stone*
> *On the fore-finger of an alderman,*
> *Drawn with a team of little atomies*
> *Athwart mens' noses as they lie asleep ...*
> *Her waggon-spokes made of long spinners' legs;*
> *The cover of the wings of grasshoppers ...*
> *Her waggoner, a small grey-coated gnat ...*
> *Her chariot is an empty hazel-nut*
> *Made by the joiner squirrel or old grub ...*

The fairies who appear in the *Dream* are also conceived as tiny airy beings who share Queen Mab's role as a fertility spirit in blessing the marriages that are celebrated during the course of the play. Their minute size is emphasised: '... all their elves for fear / Creep into acorn-cups and hide them there'. It is implied that a snake skin is 'Weed wide enough to wrap a fairy in', and Titania imperiously commands her tiny servants to perform tasks suited to their stature. She instructs some to kill the pests that live in rose buds, to kill bats for their wings 'To make my small elves coats', to light tapers from the hairs on the thighs of bumble-bees, and to pluck the wings from butterflies to use as fans. Similar descriptions of miniature husbandry can be found in the works of Shakespeare's contemporaries such as the anonymous author of *The Wisdome of Doctor Dodypol*, published in 1600, the same year as the *Dream*:

> *'Twas I that led you through the painted meades*
> *Where the light Fairies daunst upon the flowers*
> *Hanging on each leafe an orient pearle*
> *Which strooke together with the silken winde*
> *Of their loose mantels made a silver chime ...*

Fairies are famed for their charming sound effects, which recommend them so highly to the theatre. The 'silver chime' puts one in mind of the note recorded in John Aubrey's *Miscellanies* (1696): 'Anno 1670. Not far from Cirencester was an apparition. Being demanded whether a good spirit or a bad, returned no answer, but disappeared with a curious perfume, and a most melodious twang. M.W. Lilly believes it was a fairie.'

The other type of supernatural sprite featured in the *Dream* is Puck, or Robin Goodfellow, a brownie or hob-goblin well known to the country people of Shakespeare's day as a lone spirit who was associated with mischievous pranks and helpful tasks performed in the house. His exploits are recorded in Reginald Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584). Antiquarians soon linked Puck with Lar, the household god of the Romans. Scot describes such beings as 'jocund and facetious spirits' who are said to '... sport themselves in the night by tumbling and fooling with Servants and shepherds in Country houses, pinching them black and blew ...'.

The Tempest is the last of Shakespeare's fairy plays. Prospero alludes to those who make the 'sour green ringlets' (fairy rings) in the grass. Ariel, his attendant spirit, suggests forming such a circle for dancing when he sings: 'Come unto these yellow sands, / And then take hands ...'. In Ariel, however, Shakespeare has moved on from the nature sprites of the *Dream* to create a personification of the air itself, a sylph, for which he was almost certainly indebted to the writings of Paracelsus. While held in thrall by Prospero and at his command, Ariel conjures up a violent storm:

> *... Sometimes I'd divide*
> *And burn in many places; on the topmast,*
> *The yards, and the boresprit, would I flame*
> *distinctly ....*

He also has the capacity to move with amazing speed and outdoes even Puck's boast to orbit the earth in forty minutes. In practical terms, such feats as Ariel's flight could only be effected on stage with the technical innovations in stage machinery introduced from Italy by Inigo Jones, creator of elaborate court masques for James I.

King James's *Daemonologie* (1597), written in Scotland, where fairy belief was still strong, was a refutation of Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft*. The King wrote, 'The Phairie ... was one of the sortes of illusion that was rifest in the time of Papistrie'. Attempts were made to account for fairy beliefs, notably by Francis Bacon and Robert Burton (1577–1640), who devoted a long 'Digression on the nature of Spirits, Bad Angels or Divels' in his *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), in which he lists as earth spirits: 'those lares, genii, faunes, satyrs, wood-nymphs, foliots, fayries, Robin Goodfellows, Trulli etc'. He was one of the first to note that other writers have equated such spirits with the gods of Babylon, ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome, a path that future folklorists and anthropologists were to explore in the 19th century.

Among Burton's extensive collection of books and manuscripts, now in the Bodleian Library, were several unique fairy items, such as *The History of Tom Thumb, His Life and Death* (1630), which was to become one of the most popular stories of all time. In the days of King Arthur, the Queen of the Fairies attends the birth of a boy who is no bigger than his father's thumb.

One of the most celebrated fairy poems of the period was Michael Drayton's *Nimphidia, the Court of Fayrie* (1627), a burlesque, loosely based on Arthurian romance and featuring the illicit love of the fairy knight, Pigwiggen, for Oberon's Queen Mab. Pigwiggen's preparations for his battle with Oberon are described:

... A little Cockle-shell his shield ...
And puts him on a Coate of Male,
Which was of a Fishe's scale ...
His Rapier was a Hornet's sting,
It was a very dangerous thing ...
His Helmet was a Beetle's head,
Most horrible and full of dread ...
Himselfe he on an Earewig set ...

Such conceits as Drayton's and the descriptions of miniature beings in *Tom Thumb* were a potent source of inspiration for the artists and illustrators of the 19th century and beyond (see cat.72).

Robert Herrick wrote a series of fairy poems, published in *Hesperides* in 1648, which contain further ingenious elaborations on the miniature. The three linked Oberon poems, however, carry some darker messages. The fairy king proceeds from 'The Fair Temple; or Oberon's Chapel' – a mild satire on Catholic ritual – to consume the feast in 'Oberon's Diet'. Gorged and slightly tipsy he proceeds to join Queen Mab in the bedchamber of 'Oberon's Palace', a magical and erotic evocation. The room is hung with snake skins and the eyes from peacocks' tails and is lit by glow-worms and the reflections from fish-scales. Mab herself lies wrapped in sheets made from a caul, behind a curtain of cobweb hung with tears 'Dropt from the eyes of ravished girls / Or writhing brides ...', for fairyland is the realm of sexual fantasy and secret desires. Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle (1624?–1674), though a lesser writer, also touches, in her *Poems and Fancies* (1653), on the psychological aspects of fairy belief:

Who knows, but in the Braine may dwel
Little small Fairies, who can tell? ...
And the place where memory doth lye in
Is the great magazine of Oberon King.

Milton refers to Faery Mab and the fairies of folk tradition in *L'Allegro*, written in the 1630s, and again in *Paradise Lost*, completed in the 1660s, where he likens the fallen angels, as they build Pandaemonium, to 'Faery elves'. It was a popular belief that the fallen angels, ejected from Heaven, had fallen short of Hell and had become the fairy host.

The next significant reference to fairies in literature occurs in *The Rape of the Lock* (1714), one of the best known works by the most rational of the Augustan poets, Alexander Pope (fig.7). This is the first time that fairies are described as winged beings. They are also drenched in iridescent rainbow colours, long before stage lighting could create such effects. Pope calls them elemental 'sylphs', and certainly they behave like capricious fairies as they attend the toilet of Belinda whose hoop (the supporting structure for her dress) it takes fifty of them to lift (Canto II, 59–67):

Some to the Sun their Insect-Wings unfold,
Waft on the Breeze, or sink in Clouds of Gold ...
Loose to the Wind their airy Garments flew,
Thin glitt'ring Textures of the filmy Dew;
Dipt in the richest Tincture of the Skies,
Where light disports in ever-mingling Dies,
While ev'ry Beam new transient Colours flings,
Colours that change whene'er they wave their Wings.

In the early 18th century, when indigenous fairies were held by many to have fled abroad, Britain was invaded by foreign spirits, some of the earliest of these being French *fées*. Many were the protagonists of sophisticated fairy tales, elegantly retold by members of the French court. *The Arabian Nights* had arrived in France in the late 17th century to take their place alongside the Italian collections, such as Giovan Francesco Straparola's *Le piacevole notti* (1550) and Giambattista Basile's *Pentamerone* (1635) as well as classical mythology and indigenous folk stories. The *Nights* provide characters and plots for some of the best loved of all fairy tales, including *Puss in Boots*, *Cinderella*, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Sleeping Beauty*.

The first of the new collections, *Histoires, ou contes du temps passé, avec des Moralitez*, also known as *Tales of Mother Goose*, was published in 1697 by the scholar and courtier Charles Perrault, but under the name of his son Pierre. It is interesting to note the reluctance of several figures of the establishment to admit their authorship of fairy tales; John Ruskin wrote *The King of the Golden River* in 1841 and only published it, anonymously, ten years later, while W.M. Thackeray and Charles Dodgson both used pseudonyms to publish fairy stories for children. Though disguised as his son, Perrault could not resist making ironic asides, like the disparaging comments on Sleeping Beauty's old-fashioned attire after her century asleep, or noting the intention of an ogress to eat her grandchildren with a 'sauce Robert', and he ends each tale with a trite morality intended to amuse a sophisticated adult audience.

Most of the French fairy-tale compilations, however, were made by noblewomen. The *Contes des fées* of Marie-Catherine, Baronne d'Aulnoy became available in English twenty years before Robert Samber's 1729 translation of Perrault. She was followed by the Comtesse de Murat, Marie-Jeanne L'Héritier, Mme de Villeneuve and Mme Leprince de Beaumont. The last named writer published a standard version of *Beauty and the Beast* in her anthology for young people, the *Magasin des enfants* (1756), while working as a governess in England. French authors were responsible both for introducing the Fairy Godmother into the personae of fairyland and for the moralising tone which was to have such a stifling effect on fairy tales of the early 19th century.

The French Revolution and the rise of Napoleon prompted strong anti-French feeling in Britain. Romanticism, the next great cultural movement, came from Germany. Some of the seeds of the movement were actually sown in England, notably by Bishop Thomas Percy (1729–1811), whose *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) gathered together many of the early fairy ballads and who, in 1770, translated from the French Paul Henri Mallet's work *Northern Antiquities: or a Description of the Manners, Customs ... of the Ancient Danes*, the treatise which first stirred Europeans to the romance of Norse mythology. Mallet's work inspired Benjamin Thorpe's *Northern Mythology* (1851–2), which Burne-Jones introduced to William Morris at Oxford. Morris's passion for the Icelandic sagas led to expeditions to Iceland and his great translations: *Sigurd the Volsung* was published in 1876, the year that Wagner's first complete production of *The Ring* was presented at Bayreuth, based on the same sources. Most importantly, Percy issued a prophetic challenge in the *Reliques* regarding research into fairy beliefs:

> *It will afford entertainment to a contemplative mind to trace these whimsical opinions up to their origin. Whoever considers how early ... they have prevailed in these nations, will not readily assent to the hypothesis of those who fetch them from the East so late as the Croisades. Whereas it is well known that our Saxon ancestors, long before they left the German forests believed the existence of a kind of diminutive Demon, or middle species between men and spirits ....*

Sir Walter Scott, who was deeply influenced by the *Reliques*, reissued the challenge in his notes to *The Lady of the Lake* (1810), proposing that '... a work of great interest might be compiled upon the origin of popular fiction and the transmission of similar tales from age to age, and from century to century'.

A number of 19th-century antiquarian scholars spent their working lives seeking the origins of mythological beliefs worldwide, resulting in such mighty works as Thomas Keightley's *The Fairy Mythology* (1828) and J.G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890). Such epic quests were fictionalised by George Meredith in *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (1857), describing the dyspeptic Hippias Feverel who 'forsook his prospects at the Bar' in order to compile 'his ponderous work on the Fairy Mythology of Europe', and by George Eliot in *Middlemarch* (1872), in Casaubon's unrealised ambition to write a 'Key to all Mythologies'.

In Germany, Christoph Martin Wieland's translations of 22 of Shakespeare's plays, published in the 1760s, gave impetus to the Romantic movement; another translator of Shakespeare, August Wilhelm von Schlegel (1767–1845), was one of its greatest exponents. In his famous lecture series given at the universities of Jena and Vienna, he scorned classicism and the teachings of the Enlightenment and promoted the Arthurian legends, the *Nibelungenlied* and the works of Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarch and Cervantes. Eventually he turned his attention to Oriental languages and was made Professor of Indology at Bonn in 1818. His ideas had a profound influence on Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834), who studied for a year in Göttingen and frequently wintered in Germany. M.G. Lewis, author of the celebrated Gothick novel *The Monk* (1795), had studied in Weimar and was an early patron of Sir Walter Scott, who forged his own links with German writers: he noted the potential for developing the traditional ballad forms revealed by writers such as Gottfried August Berger, and corresponded fervently with the brothers Grimm.

Coleridge translated Friedrich Schiller's play *Wallenstein* (1798–9), which contains a passage of poignant regret for the passing of the fairies:

> *The old fable-existences are no more*
> *The fascinating race has emigrated ...*
> *The fair humanities of old religions*
> *That had their haunt in dale or piny mountain ...*
> *Or chasms and watery depths, – all these have vanished*
> *They live no longer in the age of reason ...*

Coleridge himself composed a number of early fairy poems: *The Song of the Pixies* (1793) is imbued with the folklore of Devonshire, but early editions of *The Aeolian Harp* (1795), a more substantial work in which the poet attempts to reconcile the imagination with everyday life, contain explicitly fairy lines,

> *Such a soft floating witchery of sound*
> *As twilight Elfins make, when they at eve*
> *Voyage on gentle gales from Fairy-Land ...*

which were omitted from later editions in favour of a more abstract evocation. Among Shelley's juvenilia is the poem *Queen Mab* in which the Fairy Queen appears in a vision to Ianthe as an emanation of the ether. Keats, in *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, creates a powerful fairy being cast in the medieval mould.

The true heir to the fairy tradition in Britain, by virtue of his research and scholarship as much as his passion for the Celtic heritage and gifts as a poet, was Sir Walter Scott. He was one of the first to appreciate and collect early fairy stories which had survived in ballad form (because metrical verse is easy to memorise). *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, the fruit of his labours, was published in 1801–2, containing stories of fairy agency such as *True Thomas* (Thomas the Rhymer, who meets the Queen of Elfland and visits that country) and *Young Tam Lin*. It was followed by *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805) and *The Lady of the Lake* (1810), in which the fairy ballad 'Alice Brand', written in a declamatory style, includes a vivid account of a Fairy Rade, or ritual procession, redolent of the Middle Ages and flooded with unearthly light:

> *'Tis merry, 'tis merry in Fairy-land,*
> *When fairy birds are singing,*
> *When the court doth ride by their monarch's side,*
> *With bit and bridle ringing.*
>
> *And gaily shines the Fairy-land –*
> *But all is glistening show,*
> *Like the idle gleam that December's beam*
> *Can dart on ice and snow.*
>
> *And fading, like that varied gleam,*
> *Is our inconstant shape,*
> *Who now like knight and lady seem,*
> *And now like dwarf and ape.*

These publications established Scott's fame and brought the romance of Scottish history and folklore to a wide audience.

Minstrelsy is most important, however, for Scott's extended essay on 'The Fairies of Popular Superstition', later included in his *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (1830; see fig.8). He traces the etymology of fairy names (elves having evolved from the dwarves of the Icelandic sagas, fairies from the Persian *peris*). He quotes from Gervase of Tilbury, from Thomas Heywood's *Hierarchie of the Blessed Angels* (1635), from Richard Bovet's *Pandaemonium, or the Devil's Cloister* (1684), from John Aubrey and from John Brand, whose *Observations on Popular Antiquities* (1777), edited and enlarged by Sir Henry Ellis in 1813, laid the foundations for a science of folklore. He includes many reports of close encounters with the fairies, such as that of the Fairy Boy of Leith who drummed the elves to France or Holland every Thursday night. He also relates the curious tale of Robert Kirk, the Gaelic scholar and minister of Aberfoyle who was abducted by the fairies, recalled in *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies*, written in 1691 but not published until 1815. He described them thus: '[They] are said to be of a middle nature betwixt man and Angel ... intelligent Studious Spirits, and light changeable bodies ... somewhat of the nature of a condens'd cloud, and best seen in twilight.'

Scott was generous in his support of others working in the field, notably the Scottish writer James Hogg (1770–1835), known as the Ettrick Shepherd, a gatherer of fairy legends, and also of the Irish antiquary Thomas Crofton Croker (1798–1854), author of *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland* (1825; illustrated edition 1828), whom Scott described, in 1826, as 'little as a dwarf, keen-eyed as a hawk, and of easy, prepossessing manner'. Croker failed to acknowledge contributions from another Irishman, Thomas Keightley (1789–1872), who, though annoyingly brash in manner, was a far greater scholar. In his *Fairy Mythology* (1828, revised and enlarged in 1850), Keightley was the first to take account of the oral tradition, discriminating between genuine legends and composed songs. He claimed to read twenty languages or dialects and he culled tales from throughout Europe and beyond. He proposed that the myths of Persia and India had travelled the trade routes via Syria and Egypt centuries before the *Arabian Nights*, contrary to the beliefs of the brothers Grimm. He included their *Deutsche Mythologie* in later editions, observing, 'The labours of MM Grimm in this

department of philosophy can never be too highly praised'. Scott exchanged enthusiastic letters with Jakob Grimm in 1814–5, thanking him for translating his work and expressing his eagerness to see the brothers' newly published *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1812); Jakob Grimm sent him a copy.

Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm's *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, a selection of which were translated by Edgar Taylor into English in 1823 under the title *German Popular Stories*, with a second series appearing in 1826, are perhaps the most famous product of German Romantic nationalism. The idea of collecting folk tales was suggested to them by the poet Clemens Brentano, a member of Schlegel's circle, who had already published a collection of folk songs, *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (1806). The Grimms' stories were not gathered from country peasants, as was once believed, but from older women among the Grimms' circle of bourgeois acquaintance in Hesse-Kassel. Old women are, of course, the traditional story-tellers: 'gossips' and 'old wives' (Chaucer's Wife of Bath, for instance), the 'Mother Bunch' or 'Mother Goose' of Perrault and the French collectors. Goethe's mother was a famous story-teller in her day, and Goethe acknowledged that he inherited from her his love 'of spinning fantasies'.

The Grimms' tales arrived in Britain just in time to counter the moral offensive mounted by Mrs Sarah Trimmer, founder of the magazine *The Guardian of Education*, whose object was to 'preserve' the young and innocent from the dangers ... of infantine and juvenile literature'. She took particular exception to Cinderella, less for the absurdities of the supernatural agents than for '... some of the worst passions that can enter the human breast ... such as envy, jealousy, a dislike to mothers-in-law and

Fig.8 George Cruikshank, Illustration to Sir Walter Scott's *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, 1830

half-sisters, vanity, a love of dress etc., etc.'. She was, of course, responding to the innate subversion of fairy tales. Though long since purged of the worst of their brutality and salaciousness (the rape and impregnation of Sleeping Beauty, or Cinderella's murder of her stepmother, for instance, in their Italian originals) and of their crude vulgarities by their noble French interpreters, their power depends on the human passions they relate and the exciting unpredictability of the supernatural and of fairy interference.

The success of the Grimms' tales in England in 1823 was due in part to the inspired illustrations by George Cruikshank (see fig.25, 26, 27, pp.56–7) which so pleased the brothers that they planned that he should decorate further German editions. Cruikshank went on to illustrate several of the early works of Charles Dickens. By 1847, however, Cruikshank had committed himself to the temperance movement and become a fanatical crusader for total abstinence from liquor. He planned, and began to publish, his *Fairy Library* in 1853, beginning with *Hop-o'-my-Thumb* and *Cinderella* retold as temperance tracts. Dickens believed passionately that fairy stories, particularly the *Arabian Nights*, had saved his soul and nurtured his imagination while he toiled, as a youth, in the blacking warehouse. '[They] kept alive my fancy, and my hope of something beyond that place and time.' He echoed Coleridge's view, expressed in a letter of 1797: '... from my early reading of Faery Tales, & Genii &c&c – my mind had been habituated *to the Vast* ... I know no other way of giving the mind a love of "the Great" & "the Whole".' Dickens condemned Cruikshank's endeavours in 'Frauds on the Fairies', the opening article in *Household Words* of 1 October 1853. Having noted '... the intrusion of a Whole Hog of unwieldy dimensions into the fairy flower garden,' he went on to state: 'In a utilitarian age ... it is a matter of grave importance that Fairy tales should be respected .... A nation without fancy, without some romance, never did, never can, never will, hold a great place under the sun.'

Much of the power of Dickens's greatest novels derives from their fairy-tale plots, albeit clothed in social realism. Thackeray's daughter Anne Thackeray Ritchie made explicit the fact that the structure of many of the greatest novels depends on the plots of the classic fairy tales in her *Five Old Friends and a Young Prince* (1868), published in the United States as *Fairy Tales for Grown Folks* (n.d.), which includes modern retellings of 'The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood' and 'Beauty and the Beast'. She remarks: 'Fairy stories are everywhere and every day .... All these histories are the histories of human nature which does not seem to change very much in a thousand years'.

Dickens also created the fairy godmother Grandmarina, who rides in with a coach and four (peacocks) at the finale of *The Magic Fishbone* to reward the resourceful Princess Alicia for her fortitude, and *The Chimes, A Goblin Story of Some Bells ...*, a Christmas book of 1845, in which the bells are personified and allegorised as a swarm of tiny elves who ring in the New Year.

By this time, Ruskin had written *The King of the Golden River ... a Legend of Stiria*, a Germanic tale of virtue rewarded; the eponymous hero, a golden dwarf about a foot and a half high, is eventually transformed into a rainbow. Thackeray's tongue-in-cheek fairy story, *The Rose and the Ring*, published as a Christmas book in 1855, introduces the world-weary Fairy Blackstick who has tired of bestowing the usual fairy gifts and instead awards her godchildren 'a little misfortune', over which they eventually triumph.

In 1863 Charles Kingsley published *The Water-Babies*, in which Tom, the chimney-sweep, escapes the horrors of real life to join the underwater fairies in their marine world. Kingsley, in common with his fellow writers and contemporaries Lewis Carroll and George MacDonald, was a clergyman who struggled with religious doubt; he was also keenly interested in natural history and an enthusiastic subscriber to Darwin's theory of evolution. In telling Tom's story, Kingsley was almost certainly trying to come to terms with the death of his brother Herbert, who had drowned as a child. He denies that Tom had died after falling into the stream but suggests: 'The fairies had washed him, you see, in the swift river, so thoroughly, that not only his dirt, but his whole husk and shell had been washed quite off him, and the pretty little real Tom was washed out of the inside of it and swam away ...'.

This poignant motif is not new: Scott records a verse from Thomas Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess* which records how the fairies often dipped their 'stolen children' in a particular stream or fountain '... so to make them free, / From dying flesh and dull mortality'. It is also the theme of W.B. Yeats's haunting poem *The Stolen Child* (1886), with its authentic note of fairy seduction:

... Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than
you can understand.

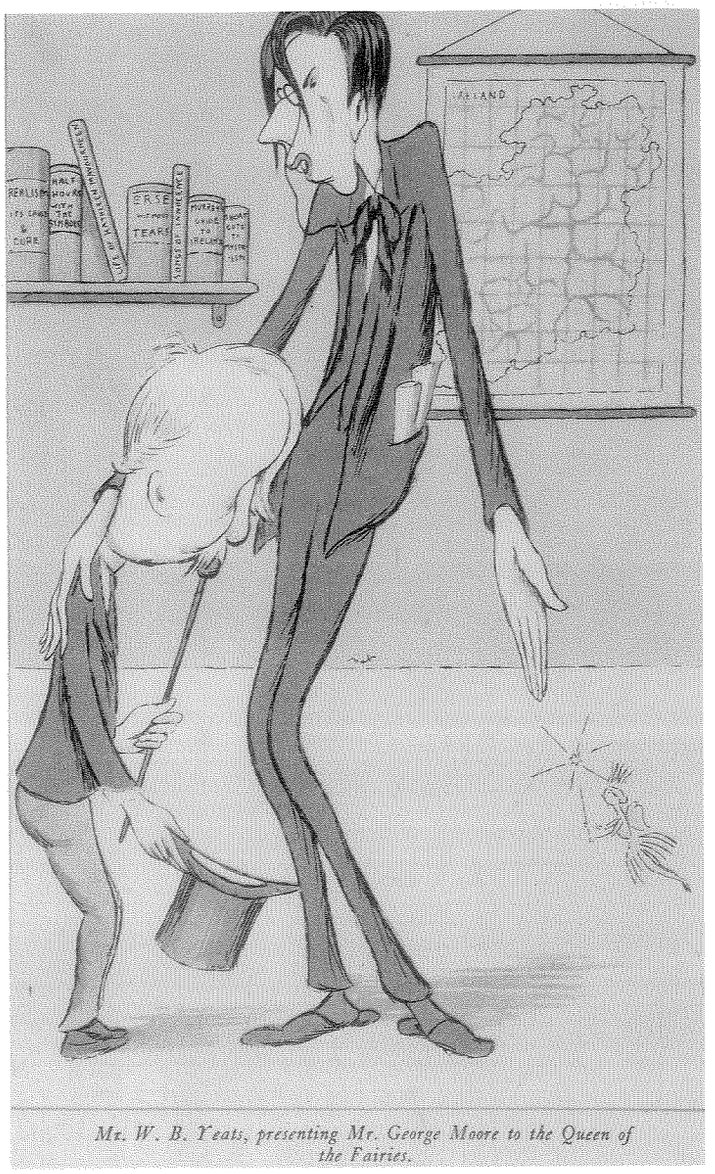
Alice in Wonderland was written in 1863 and shown in manuscript by Carroll to George MacDonald, a family friend, before its publication in 1865. Carroll had thought of entitling it *Alice in Elfland*, despite the absence of fairies, although it meets many of the other requirements of a land of Faerie. The 1860s saw an outpouring of fairy fiction, often serialised in the new magazines and much of it written by women. Christina Rossetti's best known poem, *Goblin Market*, was published in 1862, a dark and disturbing tale of which the underlying theme is sexual awakening and corruption, brought about by the consumption of addictive forbidden fruit sold to two sisters by the goblins. Jean Ingelow, a friend of Ruskin and Christina Rossetti, who was considered a serious contender to succeed Tennyson as Poet Laureate, published *Mopsa the Fairy* in 1869, a work heavily influenced by *Alice*, particularly in its suspension of time, its arbitrary shifts in viewpoint and sudden changes in the size of the protagonists, suggesting a drug-induced hallucination. *Mopsa* contains many gobbets of genuine fairy lore and occasional vivid descriptions. The air-fairies or fairy bats '... spread out long filmy wings ... till Jack and Mopsa seemed to be enclosed in a perfect network of the rays of shooting stars ...'.

Juliana Horatia Ewing's *Amelia and the Dwarfs* was serialised in *Aunt Judy's Magazine* in 1870. The story is grounded in folklore, beginning with the observation that the narrator's godmother's great-great-grandmother had seen a Fairy Rade on Roodmas Eve. The obnoxious Amelia is abducted by tiny men dressed in green with tall pointed hats and long tips to their shoes, who put a changeling corn-stock in her place. She has to mend her ways before she is allowed home.

The evil powers of subterranean goblin miners and the influence of old women is explored in George MacDonald's Gothick tale *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872). In the summer of 1842 the young MacDonald had catalogued the library of a manse in the far north of Scotland, as yet unidentified but possibly Thurso Castle in Caithness, home to the Sinclair family. Here MacDonald discovered Spenser and Blake and the German Romantics, who influenced his work more than Scottish folk tales. The figure who recurs most often in his work is that of the beautiful and tender grandmother, who is discovered at the top of a tower in a star-spangled chamber, where she burns a fire of incorruptible red roses with therapeutic properties and spins cobwebs by moonlight; she is a fairy of the highest order.

Silvie and Bruno, Lewis Carroll's late attempt at a real fairy tale, was published in *Aunt Judy's Magazine* between 1889 and 1893. It is exceedingly long, confused and self-indulgent, and the characterisation of the two child / fairy

Fig.9 Max Beerbohm, 'Mr. W.B. Yeats presenting Mr. George Moore to the Queen of the Fairies', in *The Poets' Corner*, London, 1904



Mr. W. B. Yeats, presenting Mr. George Moore to the Queen of the Fairies.

protagonists is cloyingly sentimental. Carroll believed that one stood the best chance of seeing fairies on a hot day, while in a sleepy, trance-like state. In *Silvie and Bruno* one such encounter takes place in Kensington Gardens, the eponymous site of Thomas Tickell's fairy poem of 1722, but by this date a surprisingly urban location for such a sighting. It was, however, to be the setting for J.M. Barrie's prose version of *Peter Pan*, launched upon the world as a play in 1904.

In general, 19th-century writers used fairies for their own ends, and rarely as straightforward entertainment for children. MacDonald stated: 'I do not write for children, but for the childlike, whether of five, or fifty or seventy-five'. Fairy stories could ease personal grief and psychological anxieties or provide a means of expressing hidden desires. Fairies could sound a clarion call for Coleridge, Dickens or Ruskin in defence of the imagination against the forces of repression and censorship, for, as Ruskin stated in his Slade lecture, 'Fairyland', of 1893, 'A man can't always *do* as he likes, but he can always *fancy* what he likes'. Fairies and fairy tales often signal tributes to women, both as the subjects of the stories, saluting their power to enchant and seduce, and as tellers, the wise elders of the community and guardians of folk memory.

Fairies could also be used to make religious or political comment. W.B. Yeats, a keen collector of folk legends and author of *Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland* (1892), and a credulous dabbler in spiritualism and the occult, was also a shrewd political operator, quick to use fairies, in which he believed (see fig.9), as ammunition in the cause of Irish nationalism: 'The personages of English fairy literature are merely ... mortals beautifully masquerading. Nobody ever believed in such fairies. They are romantic bubbles from Provence ...'. Sir Walter Scott, a century before, had similarly defended Scottish fairies: 'While the fays of South Britain received such attractive and poetical embellishments [at the hands of Shakespeare, Drayton etc] those of Scotland, who possessed no such advantage, retained more of their ancient and appropriate character ...'.

G.K. Chesterton, in 'The Ethics of Elfland', a chapter of *Orthodoxy* (1908), takes issue with Yeats, who '... reads into Elfland all the righteous insurrection of his own race' and mounts a robust defence of fairy tales: 'Fairyland is nothing but the sunny country of common sense'. He adds, 'Fairies prefer people of the yokel type like myself'. By this time, it would seem, fairies had feet of clay.